**Participating in a group capstone project can be a lot like learning how to drive a car.**

Every student in the post-grad Health Care Administration program is aware of the requirement for a major capstone project at the end the program. From the first day of classes, professors may mention topic areas and suggest ideas “that may make for a great capstone project.” Students are still trying to figure one another out – and are unsure as to whether they will be able to select their capstone teammates or not. The only thing they know is that to graduate, they must achieve a grade of 70% or more on the final applied project while working in a team (teamwork is not a familiar concept for most of our international students).

It is similar to the experience I had growing up in rural southwestern Ontario and getting my driver’s licence. I lived on a farm, and in order to become independent, I knew that I had to get a driver’s licence.

There are many areas where our paths converge:

1. We know it is going to happen. Students are going to complete a team-based capstone project and I needed to get my driver’s licence.
2. It is an exciting, although at times, terrifying experience. Students have not undertaken a major project like this before and I hadn’t driven down the highway before. While they are both scary experiences, they are also things that pull us out of our comfort levels and allow us to flourish as individuals, opening doors to our future.
3. Once you get into the process, you realize it is not totally new. All along the learning journey in the program, faculty have worked with students to build their stills and to complete activities that will help contribute to their group capstone project. Students have developed skills such as teambuilding and project management which help. Similarly, growing up on a farm, I was driving a tractor from the age of 8 (gas and brakes weren’t “pedals” but were on the steering wheel of the tractor. I had those experiences to draw from – and I’d driven down the side of the road hauling wagons of hay (perhaps illegally but it was the 70s). Besides, I had watched my parents and older siblings drive the car.
4. Expect the unexpected and recognize even instructors make mistakes. When I was learning to drive, I took a drivers’ education course in London, and it was above the Second City Comedy Club. There was a long narrow set of stairs up to the classroom (and this was before AODA compliance) and my leg was in a cast for 4 of the day-long classroom sessions. I didn’t expect the extra “pain” of navigating the training, but I managed and was able to succeed. My in-car instructor (J.P.) also pushed the limits of my nerves, driving in the city as a new learner. One session when I was parallel parking, I stopped the car to begin to straighten my wheels and he said – there’ more room, keep going. And, well, there wasn’t. He took responsibility for that. Why do I share this? Well, I want students to keep an open mind and to realize even instructors make mistakes. It’s all along the path of learning.
5. Just breathe. Sometimes when you’re stuck in traffic, or when the “check engine” light comes on, you don’t know what to do. That happens when you’re working through your hands-on projects as well. The most important thing is to remember to breathe and figure out a plan. There are many people who we can reach out to for help.