

Honors Capstone Handbook

1. General Information

The two semester Honors capstone experience allows students to explore an independent project under the close supervision of a full time NKU faculty member. The project may take many forms, from a substantial research paper to a significant creative project. The Capstone, regardless of form, should reflect intellectual rigor and a serious pursuit of excellence.

Students should begin considering possible projects early in their Honors studies by consulting with faculty. We recommend moving toward identification of a project topic as early as possible, but no later than the first half of the junior year.

In order to begin the capstone students will decide on a project and secure a faculty project director. With the guidance of the faculty director, the student prepares a Capstone Project Proposal which is approved by both the faculty director and the Honors Program Director prior to registration for the first semester of capstone credit.

As part of the two semester capstone project requirements, students will present the highlights of their capstone work to the University community and invited guests at the Fall or Spring Convocation of Honors.

All capstone projects, whether research oriented or creative in nature will have several characteristics in common. The work will be:

- Original
- Focus on a significant issue or subject that contributes to the student's field of study or interest
- Reflect outstanding scholarship
- Be shaped through interaction with a full time NKU faculty director who is an expert on your topic
- Include a written component appropriate to the project (research paper, lab reports, artist's statement)
- Include a presentation component 13-15 minutes in length followed by five minutes of interactive discussion at the Conference of Honors
- Will become a public document archived by the Honors Program

2. Capstone Process

Overview

- Student considers possible Capstone projects from the beginning of study in the Program
- Student, in consultation with possible project directors, moves toward identification of a project topic no later than first half of junior year
- Student decides on project and secures faculty project director no later than first half of the junior year
- Student writes and submits Capstone Proposal at least one month prior to the semester in which the student plans to begin the capstone. The proposal must be approved by both faculty project director and Honors Program Director prior to registration for first semester of Capstone credit
- Proposal is filed with Honors Program
- Project completed over two semesters (6 credit hours total)
- 13-15 minute oral presentation and followed by 5 minutes of interactive discussion at Conference of Honors
- Final copy of project and abstract submitted to Honors Program and archived.

Students should begin early in their academic career to discuss potential capstone project ideas with faculty. Often the best capstone projects grow out of assignments in courses taken in Honors and/or in the major. Talk with faculty about ideas; they can often help formulate questions that will serve as a beginning point for a meaningful project. All projects should begin with preliminary reading and research on topics. What questions are inspired as a result of this initial work?

Students are responsible for finding their faculty director. In selecting the director, be aware of faculty research interests and areas of expertise. Students should select the individual whose expertise most closely relates to the project interest. Since faculty may direct a maximum of two capstone projects per year students may have to approach more than one faculty member about directing their project.

Once students have secured a faculty director, they must work out a mutually satisfactory proposal that briefly discusses the nature of the project and then outlines a timetable for the two semester project. This document is signed and dated by the student and faculty director and then submitted to the Director of the Honors Program for his review and approval. After the proposal has received the Honors Program Director's approval the student is registered for the first semester of capstone work.

The Capstone Proposal

The Capstone proposal must be submitted and approved by the Honors Program Director one month prior to the start of the semester in which the student plans to begin the capstone. Students are registered for the Capstone once approval has been received from Honors Program Director.

Guidelines for Writing the Honors Capstone Proposal

The purpose of the capstone proposal is to describe the subject, scope, nature and significance of the project the student is contemplating. Before writing the proposal, we recommend reading several articles in peer-reviewed journals and/or other appropriate resources that cover your general topic areas. This review may become part of your proposal bibliography. The proposal is developed with the help of the capstone project director and may be refined during the first semester of capstone work.

The proposal is typically 2-3 pages (double spaced), and includes a bibliography and timeline. All proposals should include:

1. Working project title;
2. Name of Capstone student and NKU email address;
3. Name of project director and NKU email address;
4. An introduction to the project. This should include the subject to be explored, objectives of the project, questions that will drive research or creative project, and methodology (if appropriate);
5. Status of work in the field (explain what other scholars and/or artists have accomplished in the area to date). This is where your preliminary bibliography will prove useful;
6. Working bibliography of at least 2-4 preliminary sources already consulted by student. If the student is doing a creative project, this would include a short list of influential sources to date;
7. Timeline--this is a six credit hour project and needs to reflect three credit hours of work for each semester. Outline student and director's expectation for work to be completed during the two semesters of capstone work. Include the frequency and function of meetings with director. Note that the first semester capstone timeline should be very specific about the frequency and function. The second semester may be more general as student will submit a second semester capstone progress report and timeline due at a time established by the Honors Director;
8. Grading Criteria;

9. Signature and date lines for student, the faculty director and Honors Program Director (type names below the signature lines). Student and Capstone Project Director must both sign the document before you submit it to the Honors Director for his approval.

Capstone Requirements Semester by Semester

The proposal must be submitted and approved by the Honors Program Director one month prior to the start of the semester in which the student plans to begin the capstone. Students are registered for capstone once approval has been received from Honors Program Director.

Semester I

First week of the semester: mandatory meeting for all first semester registered capstone students. The meeting date and time are publicized well in advance of meeting through Honors Update and in the Schedule of Classes.

Students meet with faculty director throughout the semester, as agreed to in proposal timeline.

At midterm students will prepare a two-three page (double spaced) mid-term progress report written in consultation with and signed by the faculty director that reflects upon the following:

- What aspects of the project have been completed
- Questions being raised and/or answered by your project
- What needs to be finished to make it an outstanding capstone project
- Any changes in direction from the proposal
- Concerns or issues that need to be addressed in second half of semester

Semester II

First week of the semester: mandatory meeting for all second semester registered capstone students. The meeting date and time are publicized well in advance of meeting through Honors Update and in the Schedule of Classes. At this meeting students submit a progress report, signed and dated by both student and director, that includes the following:

- Project title (to be used in promotional material)
- A two-three page (double spaced) progress report that includes:
 - What you have accomplished in the first semester including significant changes you've made to your original proposal (if applicable);
 - Plan for completing project in the second semester
 - Questions being raised and/or answered by your project
 - A general plan for the presentation component of your capstone; all students will have 13-15 minutes to present the *highlights* of your work to a general audience followed by an open question formulated by you and your director

- Grading criteria
- Working bibliography to date
- Timeline for completing second semester work and faculty director/student meeting schedule
- When you plan to complete all written work;
- Signed and dated by student, faculty director and submitted to Honors director for approval.

At midterm (date and time to be publicized well in advance) there will be a mandatory meeting at which students present a midterm progress report written in consultation with the project director. Student and project director need to discuss/reflect upon:

- what aspects of the project have been completed
- what needs to be finished to make it an outstanding capstone project
- any changes in direction or questions being posed should also be reflected
- concerns or issues that need to be addressed in second half of semester
- signed and dated by student and faculty director
- submitted to Honors Program

Oral Presentation at the Conference of Honors

The task of presenting disciplinary-specific material to a university audience and invited guests from different disciplines is challenging, but it is a tremendous opportunity as well. The presentation should be true to the student's discipline but strive to be understandable for a general audience.

The presentation at the Conference of Honors should run 13-15 minutes and leave at least five minutes for interactive discussion following the presentation. The student, in consultation with the faculty director, will formulate an **open** question for a general audience, to be presented as a transition into discussion following the 13-15 minute presentation. An open question is one without a definitive answer, a question raised by the student research and project, one that can engage a general (not specialized) audience in discussion.

From the experience of numerous successful student presentations in the past we make the following recommendations:

1. The student should review and practice the presentation with his/her director.
2. The student should offer an initial overview of the project with a general audience (non-disciplinary) in mind.
3. The student presents the essence of the project in language appropriate to the discipline but with the occasional specific concept defined or explained.
4. The student's conclusion may refer to the role the project has in the student's own future in the discipline (further research, graduate school, etc.)
5. Visual aids such as handouts, PowerPoint, charts, slides, film clips, often supplement the presentation.

6. Any and all computer, technical, or media equipment needed is specified to the Honors Program well in advance.
7. Any presentation requiring computer assistance will necessitate that the student deliver the material at a time specified by the presentation coordinator to be downloaded.

3. Final Documentation

The format of the final documentation of the project will depend on the discipline. The student will electronically submit the final document, **including a 100-200 word abstract**, through Blackboard in the HNR course for which the student is registered. The responsibility for the project grade is the faculty director's.

4. Grading Policy

The faculty director may weigh any or all of these factors in awarding a grade for the project: the research or preparatory work, the actual written document or exhibit or performance, and the oral presentation. How the student will be graded should be discussed well in advance of the grade submission.

If possible a grade of I for Incomplete will be avoided, so that the student's work is judged at the end of each 3-credit part of the project.

5. How to register –HNR 491-001, 002, 003 and HNR 490

Once your Capstone proposal has been submitted and received approval from the Honors Director, the director will inform the Honors Advisor who will register the student for Capstone credit.

6. Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Institutional Animal Care and Use Policies

For all questions related to research using human or animal subjects, refer to <http://rgc.nku.edu/forms.html#irb>

7. Information for Capstone Directors

While we hope that the information contained in the Capstone Handbook is helpful for both students and capstone directors, the following guidelines are provided specifically for faculty directors. The Capstone project is a culminating multi-semester learning experience. Students are encouraged to think about their capstone from their first semester in the Honors Program and to seek guidance and assistance with clarifying project ideas throughout their coursework. As a student enters into their junior year, they are expected to find an appropriate director with whom to work on their two semester capstone project.

There are four general stages outlined below:

Project development
Research and/or creative production of the capstone
Presentation of the capstone project
Submission of final written component of project

Project Development

During this stage in the capstone process the capstone student should work collaboratively with the capstone project director to identify an appropriate topic and plan. The director should help the student develop project questions of a reasonable scope to be completed in the two semesters. We urge you to work closely with your student advisee to ensure a viable and exemplary Capstone project.

Once a topic and appropriate research and/or creative methodology have been determined, the director and student should develop a reasonable timeline, determining short and long term goals and deadlines for the completions of the various stages of the project. This information should be included in the Capstone Proposal (see **The Capstone Proposal**).

Research and/or Creative production of the Capstone

The faculty director should be available to meet regularly with the student and evaluate the progress of the capstone project, to discuss issues related to the project—particularly problems that may arise—and to provide encouragement and direction when necessary. These meetings should occur on a regular basis (2-3 times a month minimum) with review of the student's work taking place regularly.

The faculty director will assign the final grade for *each* of the two semester's work.

Presentation of the Capstone Work

The presentation at the Conference of Honors is a summation of the project for a general audience. While Capstone faculty directors are urged to help their students prepare for an effective summary presentation, the project itself is the core of the experience. We ask directing faculty to help us stress to students that the presentation is a way of sharing the year-long project with a general audience, and as such, students will need to consider how to best present the highlights of their work. The faculty director should determine and clarify what part of the presentation will constitute the student's final grade.

To more closely replicate Honors instruction we ask that students present a 13-15 minute presentation followed by at least 5 minutes of interactive discussion following the presentation. Please help your advisee formulate the "open" question for a general audience that will facilitate discussion

As a way of recognizing exceptional Capstone presentations, we have 2 Outstanding Capstone awards to be given at the Fall and Spring Conference of Honors. Each of the two recipients and their faculty directors will be recognized.

Earning Course Credit

The Capstone is a credit-bearing experience in which students earn a total of 6 credit hours over two semesters. The faculty director is the only gatekeeper when it comes to guaranteeing that the work done during each of the Capstone semesters is worthy of 3 credit hours. The Honors numbered courses that carry Capstone credit (HNR 490 and HNR 491) are senior-level courses, and grades given for those courses should be honest assessments of student achievement in those courses, or in a departmental independent study course earning Capstone credit. A student should never be in the position of earning a high grade for a project that is then deemed insufficient by the Honors Program.

To that end, your student advisee will approach you at mid-term with a **mid-term progress report** that will ask for signatures from both student and faculty director. After discussion and signatures, it will then be the student's responsibility to return to progress report to the Honors Program.

Assigning Final Grades

The faculty director may weigh any or all of these factors in awarding a grade for the project (as appropriate for each semester): the research or preparatory work, the actual written document or exhibit or performance, and the oral presentation. How the student will be graded each semester should be discussed with the student well in advance of the grade submission.

If possible a grade of I for Incomplete will be avoided, so that the student's work is judged at the end of each 3-credit part of the project.

Honors Program Assistant Director Belle Zembrodt will send a request to you for the student's grade at the end of each semester if your student is signed up for HNR 491-001, 002 or 003. If your student is signed up for an independent study in your department, then you must record the grade. Students registered for independent study with you are also registered for a zero credit HNR 490 course that lets us know the independent study course will be counting toward the capstone. Even though this is a zero credit course, the Honors Program Assistant Director will need to know if the student should receive a P or F for the course. In the second semester of capstone work she will enter the grade when the written documentation, including abstract, has been submitted through the appropriate Honors Blackboard course.

Submission of final written component of project (second semester)

The faculty director will determine the appropriate time to receive the student's written component of the capstone project. This date should be determined at the beginning of the second semester. Once the faculty member has reviewed the work and returned it to the student for any corrections or changes, the student will submit a final clean copy of the written work along with a 100-200 word abstract through the appropriate Blackboard course for archiving.

Instructions for final submission are sent to the student from the Honors Program.

Finally, if you have any questions about the capstone process, please contact Jodi Ferner, Capstone Coordinator, or Dr. Ernest Smith, Honors Program Director.

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