Honors Capstone Handbook

Introduction
The Honors Capstone is the culminating project of the Honors experience. It is more than a term paper or an independent study report. “The honors thesis is advanced level work that focuses on an explicit thesis: a question to be answered, a problem to be solved, an analysis of central issues, and ultimately a position to be explained” (NCHC). Students are able to develop an idea that they care about into a showcase of their talents and strengths resulting in a significant research or creative project. This project is the launch pad for them to explore their dreams, develop their passions, and demonstrate their skills. It is a demonstration of the scholarship and creative activity that earns the distinction of University Honors Scholar, a designation on the diploma and transcript.

Capstone projects come in a variety of styles, from research papers to films, from creations in the visual arts to musical performances, from service projects to global experiences. All capstone projects, whether research-oriented or creative in nature, will have several characteristics in common. The work must:

- 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 mentor who is an expert on your topic
- Include a written component appropriate to professional standards in the field, which must be submitted to the Honors College by the end of finals week of the semester of completion. It is best to submit this to the faculty mentor first, revise, and then submit the final copy to the Honors College
- Include a presentation component at the approved venue
- Include a 100-200 word abstract of the project which must be submitted to the Honors College by the end of finals week of the semester of completion

Students should begin considering possible capstone projects early in their Honors studies. In HNR 101, students should begin thinking of questions and project ideas. It is helpful to keep a folder in which to add ideas, topics, favorite assignments, etc. every semester.
Notes to Faculty Mentors
Honors students are capable of doing outstanding work, but they need support and guidance. Every good honors capstone is an exercise in problem solving. From the proposal that defines the scope of the project through the research or creative methodologies to the structure of the final written documentation, every step in the process involves choices. One of the most important tasks for capstone mentors is to frame the experience in ways that help students recognize the choices, the importance of problem-solving in their work, and the need to make these choices from an informed perspective that reflects an awareness of the views and practices of others present and past (National Collegiate Honors Council - NCHC). Even creative projects have a series of problems the student needs to solve: What is the most effective medium to communicate my vision? What form should it take? What shall I select to exhibit? What styles should I draw on – or reject? Whose earlier work has influenced me and how? (NCHC).

Whether the project is at its core traditional research in the sciences, the humanities, the social sciences or features a creative project, exhibition, or performance, students are required to produce some written work that describes, analyzes, and documents their research or project. Creative projects must include a written description, analysis, or evaluation along with a record of the project such as photographs, sketches, a portfolio, or video. Pragmatic projects such as computer programs, websites, public awareness campaigns, or branding strategy must also include a written analysis and appropriate documentation.

The presentation at an approved venue (conference, Celebration) is a required component of the capstone project and the presentation should count for part of the grade for the project. This presentation allows students the opportunity to discuss the process, to describe and analyze their intellectual or creative journey, and the value of the project besides an honors graduation requirement.

Some additional guidelines from NCHC that the faculty mentor can use to make the capstone project experience beneficial are:

- Be Helpful – help transform vague interest into a doable project
- Be Proactive – have specific tasks due at regularly scheduled meetings
- Be Demanding – insist that the work be of high quality
- Be Collaborative – work with the student at every stage of the process
- Be Supportive – encourage your student throughout the process
Capstone Pathways
Students should choose one of the following options for completing the first semester of their Capstone. Each pathway involves an independent second semester in which the student works one-on-one with their faculty mentor.

1. Working one-on-one with a Mentor Both Semesters
This option is for students who have a firm idea for their capstone project and have a faculty mentor. The proposal must be submitted at the end of the semester before the semester one would like to begin the capstone. The student will work one-on-one with the faculty mentor throughout both semesters. At registration, students should enroll for HNR 491-001. After the proposal is approved and a section is created for the faculty mentor, students who choose this pathway should enroll in HNR 491 with their faculty mentor as the instructor for both semesters.

2. Completing your Honors Capstone in Conjunction with your Major/Disciplinary Capstone.
Some majors require a capstone or senior project as part of their curriculum. Students may develop this project into an Honors Capstone Project. Students should indicate if they plan to combine their Honors Capstone with their major/disciplinary capstone. Students who choose this pathway should enroll in HNR 490, a 0-credit course for their first semester along with their departmental capstone course. Upon approval of the proposal submitted to the Honors Capstone Coordinator at the end of the semester, students will enroll in HNR 491 for their second semester with their individual faculty mentor. The project proposal at this point will be the first half of the final paper and should be included in the final documentation.

3. Capstone Proposal Course
Students may enroll in a group capstone course for the first semester. The purpose of this course is to help students create a high quality honors capstone project by sharing their ideas with other students and faculty members to develop their ideas. Students will select a topic, review the literature, identify a focused question or hypothesis, and plan the appropriate methodology and major tasks needed to complete the project. Agreement by a faculty member to mentor the project during the second semester will be evidence that the students have designed an informed, focused, well-conceived project. Students will be co-creators of the course bringing their ideas, background research, analysis and synthesis to the discussions informing their project. The class consists of structured group discussions, peer consultations and one-on-one consultations with the professor. This course emphasizes deep understanding and synthesis of knowledge. Performance in this class will be based on consistent, informed class participation, completed assignments, and the project proposal signed by a faculty mentor. The project proposal at this point will be the first half of the final paper and should be included in the final documentation. Students who choose this pathway should enroll in HNR 491-001 for their first semester and HNR 491 with their faculty mentor as the instructor for their second semester.
Proposal Process

For students working one-on-one with a mentor both semesters, a proposal is due the last day of classes the semester preceding the first semester of capstone work.

The purpose of the capstone proposal is to describe the subject, scope, nature, and significance of the project the student is contemplating. The proposal is developed with the help of the capstone project mentor and may be refined during the first semester of capstone work. The proposal must be submitted to the Honors Capstone Coordinator.

The proposal (typically 2-3 typed, double-spaced pages) includes the following:

- **Cover Sheet**: See Appendix A for the form that should be completed, printed, signed, and submitted with the rest of the proposal.

- **Introduction**: This should include the subject to be explored, objectives of the project, questions that will drive research or creative project, and methodology.

- **Current Status of Work in the Field**: This section should be an explanation of what other scholars and/or artists have accomplished in the topic to date, and this is where your preliminary bibliography will prove useful.

- **Bibliography**: This section should include at least 2-4 preliminary sources already consulted by the student. If the student were proposing a creative project, this would include a short list of influential sources to date.

- **Grading for the First Semester of Work**: The capstone project is a six credit hour project covering two semesters. The portion of the project that must be completed the first semester to earn three credits and receive a grade must be clearly specified. Although the project will not be complete at the end of the first semester, it is preferable to assign a letter grade instead of a grade of “incomplete”. The grade should be given on the quality of work completed thus far.

- **Grading for the Second Semester of Work**: The second semester the student will complete the project, present their work at an approved venue, and turn in the appropriate written documentation including an abstract to the Honors College by the end of finals week. Upon receiving notification that the student has turned in the written documentation to the Honors program, the mentor can then report the grade. Expectations for the scope of the final documentation should be clearly stated. In some
cases, an essay or a journal article would be appropriate. In other cases, an artist’s statement would be more appropriate. This statement should include the inspiration for the project, what was to be achieved, the process, and the outcome. This documentation is not the same thing as the presentation. The percentage of the grade for the presentation should also be clearly stated. The deadline for turning in the final documentation to the mentor for grading should be clearly stated. The final written documentation must be turned into the Honors College by the end of finals week before the mentor assigns the grade for that semester.

**For students completing the Honors Capstone in Conjunction with the Major/Disciplinary Capstone**

The proposal for the second semester is due on the last day of classes. The proposal should include a description of the project, the anticipated venue for the presentation, and the description of the written documentation. See Appendix B for the venue form.

**For students taking the Honors Capstone course**

The proposal for the second semester is due on the last day of classes. The proposal should include a description of the project, the anticipated venue for the presentation, and the description of the written documentation. See Appendix B for the venue form.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB), Animal Use (IACUC), and Biosafety Clearances**

All research conducted on human subjects—whether supported partly or wholly by external funds, University funds, or without funds—must have prior approval by the Institutional Review Board. Similar prior approval is required for projects involving animals and projects with biosafety concerns. It is incumbent on the faculty mentor to determine what, if any, of these approvals are needed for the student’s specific field and project. For more information, go to [https://inside.nku.edu/rgc/research-compliance/irb.html](https://inside.nku.edu/rgc/research-compliance/irb.html)
Registration
The Capstone is a credit-bearing experience in which students earn six credit hours over two semesters. Students usually register for HNR 491. Many majors require a senior project that can count towards the Honors capstone. If the student will receive credit for their Capstone project through another course, HNR 490 is a 0-credit course that will designate their project as an Honors Capstone on their transcript. To qualify as an Honors capstone, the project should go beyond the requirements of the major. For example, one may include an interdisciplinary component, a global perspective, or a civic engagement component. The appropriate registration will be determined after the approval of the proposal.

Mandatory Capstone Student Meetings
There is a mandatory meeting for all Capstone students during the first week of each semester. The date, time, and location of each meeting will be communicated via email from the Honors College.

Progress Reports
Throughout each semester, each student will be asked for an assessment of their progress in written format that has been signed by the mentor. If any concerns or issues arise, the faculty and staff of the Honors College are available for assistance or guidance.

Presentation
Students must deliver an oral presentation or academic poster at an appropriate venue, such as a Celebration of Student Research and Creative Activity, a conference off campus, or at a venue of their arrangement that includes a public presentation. This is the opportunity to tell others about the topic, motivations, and significance of the project. Students should consult with their mentor to determine what venue is most appropriate for their personal and professional development. The faculty and staff of the Honors College are available to help locate a venue, as well as the Institute for Student Research and Creative Activity. Funding for student travel and other conference costs are available through our Honors College Research Grants at the website: https://www.nku.edu/honors-college/current/scholarships.html
Final Documentation of Capstone Project
The student’s faculty mentor must review the student’s completed project for grading purposes. The student will submit a final, clean copy of the approved written documentation along with a 100-200 word abstract to the Honors Capstone Coordinator by the last day of finals week.

Regardless of the type of capstone project, students are expected to produce some written work that describes, analyzes, and documents their research or project.

- In the humanities, research is typically presented as a written text that analyzes primary documents and the viewpoints of others as it argues its thesis.
- In the social sciences, the written text and analysis of issues remain central, although greater emphasis may be placed on data analysis.
- In the sciences, the heart of the research lies in the proof or explanation of how the answer was reached.
- Projects in drama, art, music, creative writing, may emphasize the creative act (exhibition, play, performance, stories) but it needs to be supplemented by a written description, analysis, or evaluation. This piece might address such as questions as who or what sparked the student’s vision for the project, why the student took that particular approach, why he or she selected the particular works to be performed, or what the student may do differently next time. The final documentation should also include an appropriate record of the project such as photographs, sketches, a portfolio, or audio or video files.
- A pragmatic thesis offers an action plan or a solution to an existing problem. It might include a computer program, an internet website, a public awareness campaign, branding strategy or marketing plan, the assessment of community needs and resources for a non-profit organization, the design and pilot implementation of educational curricula. This would also include a written analysis that contextualizes the project and includes appropriate documentation.
Contact Information
If you have questions about the capstone process, proposal, presentation or final documentation, contact:

Belle Zembrodt
Senior Lecturer
zembrodt@nku.edu
859-572-5634

James Buss
Dean, Honors College
Bussj1@nku.edu
859-572-5946

If you have questions about registration or program certification, contact:

David Kime
Coordinator of Advising
kimed@nku.edu
859-572-5602
Appendix A: Capstone Proposal Coversheet (pg. 1 of 2)

Project Title: __________________________________________________________

Capstone Student (print): ______________________________________________

Capstone Student Signature: ____________________________________________

Capstone Student NKU Email: __________________________________________

Capstone Faculty Mentor (print): ________________________________________

Capstone Faculty Mentor Signature: _____________________________________

Capstone Faculty Mentor NKU Email: _____________________________________

Beginning Capstone (choose one) Fall/Spring 20___

Completing and Presenting Capstone (choose one) Fall/Spring 20_____

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Research Compliance Statement
The Faculty Mentor must complete the following:
For more information, go to http://rgsrs.nku.edu/research/rgc/irb/irb.html

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Faculty Mentor Signature for Research Compliance: __________________________
Appendix A: Capstone Proposal Template (pg. 2 of 2)

1. Coversheet

2. Introduction
   This should include the subject to be explored, objectives of the project, questions that will drive research or creative project, and methodology (if appropriate).

3. Current Status of Work in the Field
   This section should be an explanation of what other scholars and/or artists have accomplished in the area to date, and this is where your preliminary bibliography will prove useful.

4. Bibliography
   This section should include at least 2-4 preliminary sources already consulted by student. If the student were proposing a creative project, this would include a short list of influential sources to date.

5. Grading for the First Semester of Work- The capstone project is a six credit hour project covering two semesters. The portion of the project that must be completed the first semester to earn three credits and receive a grade must be clearly specified. Although the project will not be complete at the end of the first semester, it is preferable to assign a letter grade instead of a grade of “incomplete”. The grade should be given on the quality of work completed thus far.

6. Grading for the Second Semester of Work- The second semester the student will complete the project, present their work at the Conference of Honors, and turn in the appropriate written documentation including an abstract to the Honors Program by the end of finals week. Upon receiving notification that the student has turned in the written documentation to the Honors program, the mentor can then report the grade. Expectations for the scope of the final documentation should be clearly stated. In some cases, an essay or a journal article would be appropriate. In other cases, an artist’s statement would be more appropriate. This statement should include the inspiration for the project, what was to be achieved, the process, and the outcome. This documentation is not the same thing as the presentation. The percentage of the grade for the presentation should also be clearly stated. The deadline for turning in the final documentation to the mentor for grading should be clearly stated. The final written documentation must be turned into the honors program by the end of finals week before the mentor assigns the grade for that semester.