MESSAGE FROM DEAN BUSS

Thank You!

Being a mentor is hard work. I know. I’ve been lucky to have mentored a number of students through this process over the years.

I also know that being a capstone mentor can be incredibly gratifying and rewarding.

Whether you have signed on for a semester or a yearlong project, I wanted to provide you with some information about expectations and requirements for the Honors College Capstone.

The capstone is meant to serve as a culminating experience for students where they can demonstrate an advanced understanding of an issue or topic, the appropriate research skills for investigating that topic, and advanced communication skills for sharing their knowledge with an audience through written documentation and/or public presentation.

I have tried to include helpful information in this handbook for both you and your student mentee. On the next page, I have included a set of Frequently Asked Questions with some responses. You might also find the sample calendars helpful at the end of this document.

Again, thank you for mentoring a student at NKU. I hope you will gain much from this experience.

Best,

Jim

PS: Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions! My email is bussj1@nku.edu and my office phone is 859-572-5946.
Frequently Asked Questions by Faculty

1) What does an honors capstone look like?

For capstone students, their final products range from papers to performances to gallery shows to reflective student teaching experiences. In other words, capstone projects come in all shapes and sizes. They often serve as a bridge from their undergraduate careers to graduate school, professional school, or the workplace. The key to a really good capstone is producing the highest quality of work in the time allotted. For honors capstone students, that means engaging in the equivalent of about 120-150 hours of work per semester. For some students, this will require you to serve as taskmaster in order to make sure that the work gets done, but more often than not, you will actually need to reign in a student so that the project doesn’t consume all of their time. As I tell students, “the best capstone is a finished capstone.” We rely on your expertise to help your mentee understand what is possible in the time available for the capstone project.

2) What did I sign up for?

Capstone mentors have several responsibilities. First, you should feel free to require meetings with your mentee. Some students meet with their mentors once per week, others less regularly. Still others practically live in the same labs side-by-side over the course of a semester. As the mentor, you establish the expectations. If you need, the Honors College can help reinforce those requirements by reaching out to a student who fails to attend regular meetings. Second, you will be assigned as the instructor for the honors capstone/thesis course. The Honors College will require students to submit periodic updates, but you submit the final grade for the capstone project. Thus, students should really be following your instructions. Third, capstone mentors no longer need to worry about collecting forms or making sure that students fulfill the other requirements of the Honors College. Students will concurrently enroll in a zero-credit section of HNR 490 during their final semester of the capstone. Faculty and staff from the Honors College use this “course” as a means of collecting required documentation and artifacts from the students. This should allow you to mentor the students on the project itself and not worry about the external requirements or forms from the college.

3) What version of the Honors College capstone am I mentoring?

As you will see in this document, honors students can complete the capstone in a variety of methods and means. We have done this to be more accommodating to students from majors and departments across campus. When a student either files an Intent to Complete the honors capstone form or enrolls in an honors or departmental capstone course, it signifies the pathway. The Honors College will email you the specific pathway of your mentee at the beginning of each semester in order to remind you (and us) of the pathway. The pathway should also be outlined in the Intent to Complete form or the honors capstone proposal.

As you have questions, we will continue to add them to this FAQ page in the future, so please ask!

The next several pages are identical to those found in the student version of this handbook, so that both you and your mentee have the same information. However, students do not have access to the sample calendars at the end of the faculty version of this handbook.
HONORS CAPSTONE HANDBOOK

The Honors Capstone project is the culminating event for any NKU honors experience, whether a student is completing an honors minor, engaged in a departmental honors track, or working in any of our honors programs. It is more than a term paper or an independent study or report. “The honors thesis [or capstone] 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” (definition of honors thesis by the National Collegiate Honors Council). The Honors College hopes that the capstone project can aid students showcase the talents and strengths that they have developed over the course of their academic careers at NKU.

Capstone projects come in a variety of styles, approaches, disciplines, and formats. Ultimately, however, they all share a common set of characteristics:

- They focus on a significant issue or subject that extends from a student’s field of study or area of academic interest.
- They reflect outstanding scholarship.
- They are shaped through interaction with a full-time NKU faculty mentor who holds expertise in the area of study.
- They include a written component that is appropriate to the professional standards of the field being studied and which must be submitted to the Honors College to earn the distinction of University Honors Scholar status from the university.
- They include a public presentation of the project and its findings.

The groundwork for many of the skills required to complete a successful capstone project are laid in the HNR 101+102, HNR 100+200, or HNR 200 first year experiences.
PATHWAYS FOR THE HONORS CAPSTONE

HONORS CAPSTONE OPTIONS (HNR COURSE PATHWAYS)

The Honors Capstone/Thesis Option #1
Students begin with a one-credit course (HNR 491) where they develop a research question, conduct preliminary research, and identify a faculty mentor with whom to work. Students then enroll in honors capstone/thesis courses with their individual faculty mentors in subsequent semesters. All honors students will enroll in a zero-hour honors capstone/thesis course during their final semester of the honors capstone/thesis that is used to help the Honors College track honors thesis work across campus. The course is pass/fail and students are required to deposit capstone/thesis with the Honors College and complete their public presentation of their capstone/thesis work in order to pass the course and fulfill requirements for graduation with honors scholar status from the Honors College.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>HNR 491 (1 credit)/Proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>HNR 497 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
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The Honors Capstone/Thesis Option #2
Students begin with a three-credit course during their junior or senior year via the Honors College where they develop a research question, conduct preliminary research, and identify a faculty mentor with whom to work. Students then enroll in honors capstone/thesis courses with their individual faculty mentors in a subsequent semester. All honors students will enroll in a zero-hour honors capstone/thesis course during their final semester of the honors capstone/thesis that is used to help the Honors College track honors thesis work across campus. The course is pass/fail and students are required to deposit capstone/thesis with the Honors College and complete their public presentation of their capstone/thesis work in order to pass the course and fulfill requirements for graduation with honors scholar status from the Honors College.

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>HNR 491 (3 credits)/Proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>HNR 497 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
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The Honors Capstone/Thesis Option #3
For students who will be working with a mentor for two semesters, but choose or are required to have HNR credit instead of departmental credit.

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)/Proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>HNR 497 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
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</table>
**HONORS DEPARTMENTAL CAPSTONE PATHWAYS**

The Honors Departmental Capstone Option #1
Students submit and intent to enroll in a departmental honors course during the semester prior to starting their project. They then enroll in two departmental capstone or research courses in place of the HNR courses. All honors students will enroll in a zero-hour honors capstone/thesis course during their final semester of the honors capstone/thesis that is used to help the Honors College track honors thesis work across campus. The course is pass/fail and students are required to deposit capstone/thesis with the Honors College and complete their public presentation of their capstone/thesis work in order to pass the course and fulfill requirements for graduation with honors scholar status from the Honors College.

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<th>Course 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>Departmental Course</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>Departmental Course</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Honors Departmental Capstone Option #2
Students begin by taking a capstone course within their department and then extend that course into a semester-long research project with the Honors College. During the junior year, the students submit an intent to complete a departmental/college option with the Honors College. Students then complete an additional semester of research under the guidance of a faculty mentor through the Honors College. All honors students will enroll in a zero-hour honors capstone/thesis course during their final semester of the honors capstone/thesis that is used to help the Honors College track honors thesis work across campus. The course is pass/fail and students are required to deposit capstone/thesis with the Honors College and complete their public presentation of their capstone/thesis work in order to pass the course and fulfill requirements for graduation with honors scholar status from the Honors College.

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>Departmental Capstone Course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>HNR 497 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
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The Honors Departmental Capstone Option #2b
For students generally following the model above, but for scheduling reasons will take HNR during semester 2 and the departmental course during semester 3. This often applies to SOTA students, but might also apply to others.

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
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<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>Departmental Capstone Course (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Honors Departmental Capstone Option #3—Student Teaching/Student Teaching Abroad

For students in teacher education programs who wish to use student teaching abroad and/or domestic student teaching as the foundation of their Honors Capstone. Such students typically enhance, write, and present the leadership project portion of student teaching. Teacher education students may choose to complete a capstone unrelated to student teaching using one of the other options in this document; such capstones should be finished PRIOR TO the student teaching semester.

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>EDU 49x Clinical Experience Course (12 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE SPECIAL PROJECT CAPSTONE PATHWAY

The Honors College Faculty-Sponsored Project

Faculty members can propose yearlong projects that explore a research question and require a team of honors students to participate in that project. The project must include a public presentation in order to qualify as fulfilling the Honors College requirements.

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students sign up for project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)</td>
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NOTE: In all of pathways listed above, Semester 3 can be no later than your last semester as an undergraduate. It may be earlier, however. Count backwards from your intended semester for Semester 3 to determine the appropriate timing for Semester 1.
HONORS CAPSTONE COURSES

HNR 490 (0 credit): No matter the semester or the year, students must enroll in the HNR 490 when they are either enrolled in HNR 497 OR enrolled in the final semester of their capstone project, whether that be their departmental honors capstone course or the second section of HNR 492 on a faculty-led project. Students are required to submit progress reports to the Honors College during this course and file all of the required submission paperwork at the end of the semester. To graduate with honors, students need to complete all of the requirements for the HNR 490 class prior to the end of the semester.

HNR 491 (1-3 credits): This course is intended for honors students who have yet to identify a mentor and need a semester to develop their ideas into a proposal for faculty approval. The class has a standard meeting time and is led by an honors faculty member who workshops students through the process from idea generation to finding a mentor to finalizing a proposal.

HNR 492 (1-3 credits): This course is defined as a research seminar, meaning that students enroll in this course when they are either working one-on-one with their faculty mentor during any semester prior to their final semester of the capstone. This course can also be faculty led research, in the sense that a faculty member develops a specific project that will require multiple honors students to complete.

HNR 497 (1-3 credits): This is the course that students take with their mentor during the final semester of their honors capstone project.

DEPARTMENTAL CAPSTONE COURSES: Students can use either a departmental capstone course or a departmental research/thesis course to fulfill the honors capstone requirements as long as they are enrolled in at least two semesters of mentored capstone work and that they enroll in HNR 490 during the final semester of their departmental capstone.
HONORS CAPSTONE PROPOSAL

For students who plan to work with a mentor on an individual capstone project, students must submit a formal proposal to the Honors College by the end of the semester that precedes their final semester of the capstone project. For example, students who intend to complete their capstone in the spring semester of 2021 must submit the capstone proposal by the end of fall 2020. The proposal should include the following:

**COVER SHEET:** A copy of the cover sheet is included with this handbook. See Appendix A

**INTRODUCTION:** Describe the overall capstone project in layperson terms for an educated audience. In other words, your introduction is meant to provide the Honors College staff with a general sense of your project and how it connects to your degree program or career goals.

**INTENDED RESEARCH QUESTION:** This can be as simple as stating your research question or research questions.

**PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND/OR LITERATURE REVIEW:** This section is meant to situate your proposed project within a broader scholarly conversation. It should reflect some serious initial research into the topic and an explanation of how other scholars have approached the topic in the past.

**METHODOLOGY FOR INVESTIGATING AND ANSWERING YOUR QUESTION:** This section should outline and methods or methodology that you will employ in answering your question. This could be a methods section for lab experimentation. This could be a description of the methods used to create a performance or art gallery show. This could be an explanation of the methodology or methodological approach that you might take to examine evidence (for example, a feminist analysis, an empirical analysis, a data-driven approach, etc.).

**SIGNIFICANCE:** This section should provide a brief explanation of the significance of your project. How will this add to the broader conversation of your field of study? What community connections might the project entail? What practical applications might emerge from the project?

**TIME LINE AND PARAMETERS OF FINAL PRODUCT:** All honors students are expected to submit a final product to the Honors College as part of the capstone experience. In this section of the proposal, you and your mentor should agree upon the design and parameters of the final product, the scope of the research that is expected of you as a student, and the grading expectations for the project.

**PROPOSED PRESENTATION VENUE:** Students in the Honors College are required to present their capstone research in a public venue. For the purpose of the proposal, students and mentors should identify at least one possible presentation venue for the capstone project.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** Please include a standard bibliography of sources that were consulted in the initial research for the proposal.

**NOTE:** Faculty mentors might require more information before approving your proposal. The above sections and descriptions are meant as the minimum requirements of the Honors College for submission to the College.
FINAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE CAPSTONE

As part of the HNR 490 course during the final semester of the capstone, students must submit final documentation for completion of the honors capstone. This includes:

COVER SHEET: A cover sheet must be signed by the faculty mentor that confirms that the honors capstone documentation meets the minimum standard for honors capstone work.

ABSTRACT: The cover sheet should be followed by a 100-200 word abstract that provides an overview of the capstone project and its findings.

FINAL DOCUMENTATION: Students are required to deposit a final, clean version of their capstone project with the Honors College that will be available for public view in the Honors College Suite.

Regardless of the type of capstone project, students are expected to produce some written work that describes, analyzes, and documents their research and attempt to answer a research question. This documentation looks different in nearly every discipline.

- In the humanities, research is often presented as a written text that analyzes documents and data to reach a conclusion or explore an avenue of questioning. For honors capstones, these can range from 25-60 pages (or even more), depending on the topic and research involved.
- In the social sciences, the written text might include more data-driven analysis. Thus, the written portion of these projects might range from 20-45 pages or more.
- In the sciences, the bulk of research might involve hands-on lab research and data analysis. Thus the final written portion might only involve 10-20 pages (sometimes more, sometimes less). The quality of the project is often determined by the quality of the research being performed, not the quantity or length of paper submitted.
- Projects in the arts, including music, theater, visual arts, etc. might emphasize the creation of a product (exhibition, play, video, performance) rather than a long paper. Regardless, these types of capstones should also include a written component in the form of a reflection, artist’s statement, or process piece that can be delivered to the Honors College. When possible, the Honors College also requests a documentation of the product or event (recording, photos, portfolio, etc.).
- A pragmatic capstone might involve a product or solution to a problem, whether this is in computer programming, video production, or business marketing. Regardless, these types of capstones should also include a written component in the form of a reflection explaining the process and research that was conducted to answer a question or add knowledge to the field.
Honors students are expected to share the results (or preliminary results) of their capstone projects in a public forum. In the past, students have done so via the campus-wide Celebration of Student Research and Creativity (https://inside.nku.edu/gero/isrca/Celebration.html), traveled to regional and national disciplinary conferences, hosted on- and off-campus public performances or lectures, created gallery exhibition with open houses, and presented to the boards of hospitals, city councils, and membership of non-profit organizations. We encourage students to be creative in proposing presentation venues. In addition, the Honors College has a grant process to help fund student travel and the public presentation of Honors College Capstone projects. You can find that grant application on the Honors College webpage under the Current Students/Scholarships tab: https://nku.edu/honors-college/current/scholarships.html
POST-CAPSTONE PUBLISHING OPTIONS

The Honors College highly recommends that students find public outlets to publish their work in order to share their research and creative activities with a broader audience.

The successful completion of a capstone project represents a significant amount of work. To further increase the reach of such scholarship beyond the presentation and deposition of the final documentation in the Honors College office, publication in a number of venues may be of interest. The National Collegiate Honors Council’s undergraduate journal UReCA and the Kentucky-wide Journal of Student Research and Creative Activity specifically publish student scholarship, and specific disciplines may also have student-focused journals. NKU has a journal devoted to publishing the fruits of student research: Nýsa, The NKU Journal of Student Research. The journal publishes articles (2000 – 5000 words), reviews (<5000 words), and communications (1000 – 1500 words) from students in any field, and from current students or those within six months after graduation. The scale, structure, and subject matter of a capstone’s final documentation is quite often a very suitable match for submission to Nýsa. For students in the arts, Nýsa is hoping to begin highlighting scholarship in these fields as well, and interested students or faculty mentors should contact the journal to discuss how that could be accomplished with their specific project. Submissions are accepted year-round, and are subject to double-blind peer review from an NKU student and a faculty member both of whom are experts in the field, broadly considered. Upon acceptance, submissions are posted on the web and then gathered into a yearly volume typically released in April. All volumes are also archived in the NKU library’s dspace repository where they can be discovered by anyone searching university library databases.

To learn more about Nýsa, read previous volumes, submit work, or ask questions, please visit nku.edu/nysa or email nysa@nku.edu. Nýsa is also always in need of student and faculty peer reviewers. This can be especially helpful for students earlier in their careers, as reviewers are able to be involved in the evaluation of scholarship of a type and level that they will shortly be producing. Anyone interested in becoming a reviewer can fill out a survey on the Nýsa website.
SAMPLE CALENDARS

SAMPLE CALENDAR FOR SEMESTER ONE:

COURSE SCHEDULE for HNR 491

**Week One:** Introductions

**Week Two:** Conduct Preliminary Research

**Week Three:** Finalize the Capstone Topic and Research Question

**Week Four:** Continued Research

**Week Five:** Communicate with Mentors

**Week Six:** Finalize Mentors

**Week Seven:** Initial Annotated Bibliography

**Week Eight:** Midterm Progress Update Memos

*In the HNR 491 course, the Honors College the following at midterms:* Thesis progress memo, which include a list of source materials, questions for further research, and observations of the research process.

**Week Nine:** Establish Expectations

**Week Ten:** Five-Minute Formal Speech Update

**Week Eleven:** Proposal Draft to Peers and Mentors

**Week Twelve:** Identify Venue for Presentation and Peer Feedback

**Week Thirteen:** Individual Meetings with Dean Buss and Email Mentors about upcoming drafts

**Week Fourteen:** Revised Draft sent to Mentor and Dean Buss by Wednesday

**Week Fifteen:** NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING

**Week Sixteen:** Final Feedback and Discussion of Final Prospectus

FINAL’S WEEK: Deposit Final Proposal with the Honors College
SAMPLE CALENDAR FOR SEMESTER TWO:

Week One: Establish Expectations for Semester and Review Capstone Proposal as Refresher

Week Two: Research* and Individual Meetings with Mentors

Week Three: Research and Individual Meetings with Mentors

The Honors College will periodically require students to meet and submit progress update memos as part of the HNR 490 concurrent zero-credit course. This week is when the first of those updates is due.

Week Four: Draft of Introduction and individual Meetings

Week Five: Research and Individual Meetings with Mentors

Week Six: Research and Individual Meetings with Mentors

HNR 490 progress update.

Week Seven: Research and Individual Meetings with Mentors

Week Eight: Midterm Progress Update Memos

HNR 490 progress update.

Week Nine: Research and Individual Meetings with Mentors

Week Ten: Draft of Final Documentation to Mentor for Initial Review

Week Eleven: Draft to Peers and Mentor (The Honors College can help with Peer Review and setting up peer groups with students completed capstone to help)

Week Twelve: Peer Review and Meetings with Mentors

HNR 490 progress update.

Week Thirteen: Mentor and Peer Feedback

Week Fourteen: Revisions

Week Fifteen: Revised Draft sent to Mentor

Week Sixteen: Final Coversheet Paperwork Signed and Final Feedback Prior to Deposit

FINAL’S WEEK: Deposit Final Documentation with the Honors College

*Please note that research here refers to research and creative activity and could include lab work, library research, creative activities, creative writing, interning, student teaching, gallery exhibition preparation, work toward final product or project, etc.