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INTRODUCTION
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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>HNR 491 (1 credit)/Proposal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)</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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</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
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</thead>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 2</td>
<td>Departmental Course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester 1</td>
<td>Students submit intent form</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<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>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>Departmental Capstone Course (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
</tr>
</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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12 credits)</td>
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</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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Course 1</th>
<th>Course 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<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></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester 3</td>
<td>HNR 492 (1-3 credits)</td>
<td>HNR 490 (0 credits)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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
CAPSTONE PROPOSAL COVER SHEET

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____

Research Compliance Statement

The Faculty Mentor must complete the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Date to Submit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is IRB (human subjects) Clearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is IACUC (animal use) Clearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is Biosafety Clearance required?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Faculty Mentor Signature for Research Compliance:
The Honors College at Northern Kentucky University

Honors Capstone Proposal and Venue Form

An Honors Capstone Title (or short description)

____________________________________________________________________________

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with the distinction of University Honors Scholar from the Honors College at Northern Kentucky University

by

____________________________________________________________________________

Proposed Date(s) and Place(s) of Public Presentation

____________________________________________________________________________

Signatures of Honors Capstone Committee

Capstone Student: X__________________________
(Printed Name and Signature)

Capstone Mentor: X__________________________
(Printed Name and Signature)

Dean of the Honors College: X__________________________
James J. Buss