# Honors Capstone Handbook

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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.

The Honors Capstone project demonstrates proficiency in the Honors domains of learning: Cross-disciplinary Reasoning, Idea Exchange, Trans-disciplinary Application, and Project management/Product Creation. For operational definitions of these terms, see Appendix E.

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 all four honors domains of learning
- Include a written component appropriate to professional standards in the field, which must be submitted to the Honors Program 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 Program.
- Include a presentation component 15-17 minutes in length followed by three- five minutes of interactive discussion at the Conference of Honors
- Include a 100-200 word abstract of the project which must be submitted to the Honors Program by the end of finals week of the semester of completion
- The final documentation must be submitted to Honors before the faculty mentor submits the grade to myNKU.

Students should begin considering possible capstone projects early in their Honors studies. In HNR 101, students should attend the Conference of Honors and 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. To begin the Capstone process, students submit a pre-proposal. (See Appendix B.). Upon submission to the Honors Director, guidance will be given on finalizing a topic and mentor. There are three major pathways and the appropriate one will be chosen
based on discussion with the Honors Director. See Appendix A for a checklist of items and a timeline to complete the Honors Capstone.
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 the Conference of Honors 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. Students should schedule their presentation at a time when the faculty mentor can attend. If the faculty mentor cannot attend the presentation, they should designate an alternate to attend the presentation and assign a grade.

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 you 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 on the pre-proposal form 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 Director 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

Step 1. Capstone Pre-proposal
The pre-proposal is an indication that you are considering beginning your capstone project in the following semester. It is a way of jotting down some ideas and getting help in focusing the scope of your project and finding the appropriate faculty mentor. A Capstone pre-proposal must be completed and submitted to the Honors Director prior to the finalized, formal proposal. The Capstone pre-proposal template can be found in Appendix B. The pre-proposal is due during midterm. (See the honors calendar for the actual date.)

Step 2. 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. 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 Program Director by the last day of classes prior to the first semester of Capstone work.

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

- **Cover Sheet** - See Appendix C 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 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.

• Honors- The student should articulate in the proposal the relevance and significance of the project to their Honors experience. Students should address how the four domains of honors learning will be demonstrated, how each domain will enhance the project, and how their honors coursework lead to the proposal. This aspect of the proposal is essential for assessment purposes.

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 http://rgsrs.nku.edu/research/rgc/irb/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 Program.

Midterm Progress Report
During the midterm of each semester, each student will receive a midterm progress report form from the Honors Program asking for an assessment of the student’s progress. (See Appendix F.) Students should complete this form in conjunction with their Capstone mentors who will sign it before returning it to the Honors Director. If any concerns or issues arise during this meeting, the Honors Director is available for assistance or guidance. Topics of this meeting may include:

- Expectations for the Capstone project
- Discussion of changes in direction or questions concerning the project
- Concerns or unresolved issues that need to be addressed
- How the domains of honors learning are being addressed

Conference of Honors
Students must deliver an oral presentation at the Conference of Honors. This is the opportunity to tell others about the topic, motivations, and methods. It is a time to communicate the significance of your project to an audience that may be outside your discipline, perhaps outside of the University. The presentation must be 15-17 minutes in duration, leaving 3-5 minutes for discussion following the presentation. See the template in Appendix D for an example of a successful presentation. We recommend that you practice your presentation several times before the Conference of Honors, at least once with your mentor.

The student must practice the presentation in the venue of the Conference of Honors. Practice times are scheduled in the space each semester. They are reserved on a first come, first served basis. Students will receive a schedule request form from the Honors Program for practice
times and presentation times. Times should be selected that are acceptable to the student and the mentor.

Computer, technical, or media equipment needs are to be specified to the Honors Program in advance of the conference of Honors on the schedule request form.

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 Director by the last day of finals week. Mentors will not assign final grades until the documentation and the Honors Director has received abstract.

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, preproposal, proposal, presentation or final documentation, contact:
Belle Zembrodt
Interim Director
zembrodt@nku.edu
859-572-5634

If you have questions about scheduling or due dates, contact:
Brittany Smith
Admissions and Events Coordinator
smithb18@nku.edu
859-572-5400

If you have questions about registration or program certification, contact:
David Kime
Advising Coordinator
kimed@nku.edu
859-572-5602
Appendix A: Checklist and Timeline for Completing the Honors Capstone

Basic Requirements:
• 6 credit hours total over two semesters
• One-on-one independent study mentored by a full time NKU faculty member
• PROJECT—could be research, creative, professional, service, etc.
• Present your project at Conference of Honors
• Turn in final written work and abstract. Length and format of written work determined by faculty mentor based on what is appropriate for your project

Semester Zero (the semester before one officially begins the capstone)
_______ Pre-proposal Form (see Appendix B) completed and submitted to Honors Director by the midpoint of the semester before beginning the capstone project
_______ Finalize Research Topic
_______ Finalize Faculty Mentor
_______ Written Proposal (see Appendix C)
_______ Proposal Approved by Faculty Mentor
_______ Written Proposal signed by mentor to Honors Director by the last day of classes the semester prior to beginning the project

Semester One
_______ Attend Mandatory Capstone Meetings (1st week of both semesters)
_______ Midterm Progress Report sent from Faculty Mentor to Honors Director
_______ Make progress toward and reach goals/benchmarks as stated in proposal (this work is used by your mentor to calculate your grade for semester one)

Semester Two
_______ Attend Mandatory Capstone Meetings (1st week of both semesters)
_______ Midterm Progress Report sent from Faculty Mentor to Honors Director

Finish Project
_______ Presentation at Conference of Honors (2 weeks prior to end of last semester)
_______ Project approved by Faculty Mentor
_______ Written documentation submitted to Honors Director along with a 100-200 word abstract by last day of finals
Appendix B: Capstone Pre-proposal Form

Name: ______________________________________________________

Semester in which Capstone will begin: __________________________

Email address: ________________________________________________

Which Capstone pathway do you intend to follow to complete your project?

Possible Capstone Topics

Possible Methods

Potential Capstone Mentors (mentors must be full-time NKU Faculty):

Have you met with any of these faculty mentors?
Appendix C: 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___

Capstone Pathway: ________________________________________________________

If earning credit through another department, please discuss appropriate registration with Honors Advising Coordinator.

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

Is IRB (human subjects) Clearance required? Yes No If yes, the date you plan to submit:
Is IACUC (animal use) Clearance required? Yes No If yes, the date you plan to submit:
Is Biosafety Clearance required? Yes No If yes, the date you plan to submit:

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

1. Coversheet (Appendix B)

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.

7. Honors
   The student should articulate in the proposal the relevance and significance of the project to their Honors experience. Students should address how the four domains of honors learning will be demonstrated, how each domain will enhance the project, and how their honors coursework lead to the proposal.
Appendix D: Capstone Presentation Template

Note: This template serves as a suggestion of how to organize your ideas when you present your capstone at the Conference of Honors. You may adapt it in any way you choose to suit your needs.

1. Introduction, 1-2 minutes:
   a. Attention-grabbing statement, image, sounds, etc.
   b. I am...
   c. My faculty mentor is...
   d. The title of my presentation is...
   e. Today I will discuss...(list your points in order)

2. Overview, 2 minutes:
   a. My Honors Capstone is... (A study of...a creative interpretation of...an exhibition of...an experiment involving...etc.)

3. Background and motivations, 3 minutes:
   a. The idea and motivation for this project come from... (Courses, personal experiences, passions and hobbies, current events, etc.)

4. Process and methods, 3 minutes:
   a. The process of completing the project included... (Traditional library research, lab work, fieldwork, creative or artistic work, filmmaking, writing, working with a group, working in the community, etc.)

5. Results, 3 minutes:
   a. The final product is... (a paper, a scientific discovery, a work or works of art, a film, a play, a curriculum, a community action plan, etc.)

6. Significance of this work, 2 minutes:
   a. The significance of this project is... (to you, to your area(s) of study, to the Honors community, to NKU, to the larger community and/or the world at large)

7. Conclusion, 1-2 minutes:
   a. This project taught me...
   b. My next step is...
   c. Creative closing statement, image, sounds, etc.

Total time: 15-17 minutes.
Appendix E: HonorsDomains of Learning (pg. 1 of 2)

1. Cross-disciplinary Reasoning
   a. Connections Between Disciplines - Independently creates wholes out of multiple parts (synthesizes) or draws conclusions by combining examples, facts, or theories from more than one field of study or perspective.
   b. Evaluate Information and Sources Critically – Chooses, evaluates, and interprets a variety of credible information sources appropriate to the scope of the multidisciplinary question to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis.
   c. Analysis – Organizes and synthesizes evidence to reveal insightful patterns. Conclusions are logical and reflect student’s informed evaluations
   d. Influence of Context and Assumptions - Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position

2. Exchanging Ideas
   a. Diversity of Communities and Cultures - Demonstrates evidence of adjustment in own attitudes and beliefs because of working within and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes others' engagement with diversity.
   b. Student Voice – Issue is stated clearly and described comprehensively and takes into account the complexity of the issue. Acknowledges limits of position and discusses texts to further conversations.
   c. Presentation Skills – Central message is compelling, delivery techniques are polished, and a variety of supporting materials supports the presenter’s credibility on the topic
   d. Fosters Constructive Team Climate - Supports a constructive team climate by doing all of the following:
      i. Treats team members respectfully by being polite and constructive in communication.
      ii. Uses positive vocal or written tone, facial expressions, and/or body language to convey a positive attitude about the team and its work.
      iii. Motivates teammates by expressing confidence about the importance of the task and the team's ability to accomplish it.
      iv. Provides assistance and/or encouragement to team members

3. Trans-disciplinary Applications
   a. Civic Engagement - Connects and extends knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic/field/ discipline to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics and government.
   b. Global and Intercultural Awareness and Skills – Adapts and applies a deep understanding of multiple worldviews, experiences, and power structures and interprets intercultural experiences from the perspectives of more than one worldview.
   c. Transfer - Adapts and applies skills, abilities, theories, or methodologies gained in one situation to new situations to solve difficult problems or explore complex issues in
original ways.
d. Connections to Experience - Meaningfully synthesizes connections among experiences outside of the formal classroom (including life experiences and academic experiences such as internships and travel abroad) to deepen understanding of fields of study and to broaden own points of view.

4. Project Management/Product Creation
   a. Innovative Thinking - Extends a novel or unique idea, question, format, or product to create new knowledge or knowledge that crosses boundaries
   b. Design Process - All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed. Appropriate methodology or theoretical frameworks may be synthesized from across disciplines or from relevant sub disciplines.
   c. Initiative and Independence – Completes required work, generates and pursues opportunities to expand knowledge, skills, and abilities. Educational interests and pursuits exist and flourish outside classroom requirements. Knowledge and/ or experiences are pursued independently.
   d. Reflection - Reviews prior learning (past experiences inside and outside of the classroom) in depth to reveal significantly changed perspectives about educational and life experiences, which provide foundation for expanded knowledge, growth, and maturity over time.
Appendix F: Midterm Progress Reports (pg. 1 of 2)

Midterm Progress Report
Students Presenting at the Conference of Honors

Student (please print): ____________________________________________

Faculty Mentor (please print): ____________________________________________

Project Title: ____________________________________________________________________

The student is on target to present their Capstone project at the Conference of Honors

Yes _____
No _____

The student is on target to complete the written documentation and abstract and submit to the Honors Program by the last day of finals week. Grades will not be assigned until mentors have been notified that all documentation has been received.

Yes _____
No _____

Additional Comments (areas of concern or assistance needed from Honors):
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

Student Signature ____________________________________________

Faculty Mentor Signature ____________________________________________

Please return signed report to HR102.
Appendix F: Midterm Progress Reports (pg. 2 of 2)

Midterm Progress Report First Semester Capstone Students

Student (please print): ____________________________________________

Faculty Mentor (please print): ______________________________________

The student is making satisfactory progress toward fulfilling the first-semester goals agreed upon by both student and faculty mentor in the student’s Honors Capstone Research Proposal:

_____Yes

_____No

If no, what has changed?

The project is incorporating the following Domains of Honors Learning:

Cross-disciplinary reasoning *(Organizes and synthesizes a variety of credible sources to reveal insightful patterns)*

_____Yes _____No

Communication of Ideas *(Issue is stated clearly and described comprehensively)*

_____Yes _____No

Trans-disciplinary application *(Adapts and applies skills, theories, methodologies gained in one situation to new situations and understands impact and/or application outside of the university)*

_____Yes _____No

Project Management/Creation *(All elements of the methodology or theoretical framework are skillfully developed)*

_____Yes _____No

Additional Comments (areas of concern or assistance needed from Honors):

____________________________________

____________________________________

Student Signature

Faculty Mentor Signature

Please return signed report to HR102.