Honors Capstone Guide for Directors/Mentors

All Honors Students must complete their Honors Capstone to earn their Honors Diploma or Certificate. (They also must earn 12 hours of Honors credit (certificate) or 24 hours Honors credit (diploma) and maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.25 or better.) The Honors Capstone Handbook, written primarily to help Honors Students, has a great deal of information about this process and can also help you as a director/mentor. The Director of Undergraduate Research, and the Honors Dean can also answer any questions you might have. Below is a short primer on what you need to know:

Your primary duties consist of the following:

- Help the student select and narrow the **topic**. Students may help you with *your* research, provided that they have enough independent work to count as their *own* research project or thesis.
- Meet with students regularly. Weekly meetings are not required, and probably not necessary. But it is important that you check their work, guide them through difficulties, and ensure the quality of the work. You will sign it, so make sure it meets your standards before the end of the semester.
- Sign the relevant forms and the thesis at the end of the work and in a timely fashion.

What is the Honors Capstone Project/Thesis?

The Capstone is meant to be the culmination of their undergraduate academic career. It should demonstrate advanced knowledge or skill in their chosen field. (However, it does not have to be in their major field: it can be in a discipline outside their major.) Students may choose to do a more traditional research thesis or a project.

A **thesis** consists of extensive research process that results in a lengthy, well written, and thoroughly researched paper. Think of it as scaled down Master's Thesis or a scaled up final research paper.

A **project** consists of more "hands-on" activities, even though these hands-on activities typically grow from an extensive knowledge base and require a great deal of theoretical background. Examples of projects include: a new computer program; the design of a new piece of equipment or technology; devising, implementing, and evaluating a new clinical or educational practice; a collection of short stories, poetry, or other literary creation; an art installation, musical composition, or direction of a theatrical production; devising a business plan or creating a marketing and advertising campaign.

The **project** still involves a written component, usually shorter than the writing involved in the thesis. Typically your write-up will include most or all of the following:

- An explanation of your project's importance and originality
- A summary of the process of completing your project
- Anything you found especially challenging and how you overcame that challenge
- A self-assessment of your performance or project

What avenues (courses, grants) can students use to complete the Capstone?

Honors Students must have 3 hours of Honors Capstone on their transcripts to go along with the completion of their thesis or project. There are several ways to accomplish this:

Students can use already existing capstone or final research courses in their major. However, they must do more than the non-Honors students in order to earn the Honors Diploma. This can usually be worked out in consultation between the student, the mentor, and someone from Honors (either the Director of Undergraduate Research or the Honors Dean). The student will receive Honors Credit for this course if they earn a passing grade and complete their Capstone.

Students may use RCEUs, Honors Research Grants, REUs, summer research/internship opportunities, or other one-on-one work that they are doing with a research mentor. If there is no course under which a student can perform the work, the student can sign up for HON 499 (Honors Thesis) to get their hours. Again, consult with the Director of Undergraduate Research or the Honors Dean if you are uncertain how to proceed.

Length and Formatting

The Honors College prefers that the length and formatting of the thesis be determined, as much as possible, by the standards of the field. For example, psychology (through the APA) has a very clearly delineated formatting guide for scholarly papers in that field. Students should be learning that format as part of the process of writing their thesis, and so their thesis should be written in that format. Similarly, the standard length of a professional paper or thesis in a particular field should guide the length of the final Honors thesis. Example: most scientific papers tend to be shorter compared to papers in the field of history.

Note that for projects (as stated above), the length of the written component can be shorter than for a thesis.

Should there be no clear formatting standard for the discipline, the suggested format is the Chicago Manual of Style.