UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

Capstone Overview for UHP students

In order to successfully complete the requirements for the University Honors Program, all students must complete a two-semester (minimum 6-credit hour or equivalent) Capstone project that results in a public presentation of the work. The project must occur at or very near the end of the undergraduate experience.

The Capstone project is a central component of the Honors curriculum and for many students it is also one of the most rewarding and influential experiences of their undergraduate careers. The information in this handout is intended to let you know more about the Capstone process and your responsibilities as a student.

At any point during their academic career (but particularly within the Junior year), students should consider scheduling a Capstone consultation session with their Honors advisor. This session is not required, but may be helpful to evaluate the initial plans for their Capstone and whether they meet UHP requirements.

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Traditional Capstone Projects

Overview

The goal of the Capstone project is to engage Honors students in a hands-on, participatory learning experience that allows them to see a scholarly project from inception through public defense. The Capstone can range widely from a traditional research project, a creative work, or a service-oriented exercise with a clear scholarly component. The projects may be within any discipline or interdisciplinary but must be connected to the student's major or minor field of study unless approved in advance by the UHP staff. Team projects are also acceptable, but each UHP student's role must be clearly defined and go above and beyond the other, non-UHP group members.

Process

3-4 semesters in advance of the Capstone project
A minimum of 3 (and ideally 4) semesters prior to completing the Capstone project, students should begin to formulate a concept for their Capstone. This will include individual reflection (i.e.

identifying problems of interest to the student), reading widely to get a sense of the disciplinary landscape and issues in the field, and scheduling meetings with various faculty members in the discipline to discuss research possibilities. Unless approved in advance by the UHP, students are required to complete the Capstone project in their major or minor area of study.

It is critical that students identify a faculty member who will serve as their UHP Capstone mentor no later than 3 semesters prior to completing the Capstone project to ensure they will meet the appropriate deadlines for course registrations and the Capstone prospectus.

Depending on the nature of the project (e.g. a community-based extension project), the most appropriate mentor might be an expert in the community or affiliated with another institution. In this case, students must identify two mentors, one of which is an NC State faculty member who is qualified to evaluate and grade the research conducted by the student.

<u>Prior to the start of the Capstone project</u>
After a mentor is identified, the student and his/her Capstone mentor will develop the Capstone prospectus, which the student will submit in hard copy to the UHP main office no later than the twentieth day of class in which the project has begun.   The approved Capstone prospectus will become part of the student's file.

In addition, students will need to register for the courses associated with their Capstone project. The preference of the UHP is that students register for undergraduate research credit hours in their home department so that the student's transcript will represent the discipline of their work. If research credits are not available in the student's home department, the student may register for HON 498/499. Students will not be able to register themselves for these courses, but will be registered by the UHP after completing the HON 498/499 contract. This contract is due no later than the fifth day of the semester in which the student's proposed work has begun.

<u>During the Capstone project</u>
The progress of the Capstone project is entirely the responsibility of the student and his/her Capstone mentor. As part of the research process, it is natural for changes to occur in the scope and direction of the project. Deviation from the prospectus is allowed, however major changes, such as choosing a different topic, require the student to submit a new Capstone prospectus to the UHP.

<u>Completing the Capstone project</u>

Successful completion of the Capstone project requires three components.

1. Students must receive a B- or better for all graded credit hours associated with the Capstone project.

2. All students are required to make a public presentation or defense of their work in a venue appropriate to the project or discipline. Typically, this will take the form of a poster presentation at the Undergraduate Research Symposium or a regional/national disciplinary conference. Please note that the UHP has limited funds available to help support student travel to present their work at academic conferences. <u>In all cases, students are required to inform the UHP in advance of their scheduled public presentation.</u>

3. Students must submit their final Capstone project (approved by their mentor) by the date established in the Capstone prospectus. This should be no later than the last day of classes in the semester in which the project is completed. Students must submit the project electronically to the University Honors Program main email address (university_honors@ncsu.edu). If the final project is not easily converted into an electronic format (e.g. a research poster), students may take a digital photograph of the project. Please ensure that the quality and size of the photograph is such that all vital information can be read.

<div align="center">**Modified Senior Projects as Capstone Projects**</div>

Overview

Combining the UHP Capstone with another senior project requirement is allowed, though the UHP student's modification must clearly be articulated in the Capstone prospectus.

Senior design projects differ in scope and expectation across the various Colleges and departments at NC State. In most fields the project is one-semester, 3-credit project that occurs in the final semester of a student's tenure at NC State. In others, the project is a two-semester, 6-credit project that occurs in the student's final year. In many cases, it is a group project that is assigned to the student within the first few weeks of the semester and the student has no advance knowledge of the particular project assigned to him or her.

For the purposes of the UHP, a student's senior design project may be modified to meet the requirements of the UHP Capstone project. **It is the modification (not the senior project as assigned) that represents the student's UHP Capstone project.** Typically, the modification to a project will either be internal to the project (e.g. the student may try to build additional components or create additional efficiencies) or it will be external to the project (e.g. filing patent paperwork, or conducting an economic analysis).
In all cases, the modification must:
   a) be designed exclusively by or include substantial input from the student;
   b) involve considerable extra effort (e.g. for 3-credit senior design projects, this effort must be roughly equivalent to a 3-credit course);
   c) be independent (i.e. be "owned" solely by the UHP student or a group of UHP students)

Process

<u>2-3 semesters in advance of the Capstone project</u>
Students should complete part one of the Capstone prospectus for senior projects. This paperwork will alert the UHP to the fact that the student wishes to complete their Capstone via the modification. This paperwork is due no later than the 5th day of class two semesters prior to a student's graduation date. May graduates should submit part one by the 5th day of class in the Fall term. For December graduates, part one must be submitted by the 5th day of class in the Spring term.

<u>At the start of the Senior project semester</u>
Within the first week of the semester in which the senior project is assigned to the student, he or she should notify the faculty or industry mentor that they wish to modify the project to satisfy the requirements of the Honors Capstone project.

After a project is identified, the student and his/her Capstone mentor will develop the Capstone prospectus, which the student will submit to the UHP no later than the twentieth day of class during the semester in which the project has begun. The approved Capstone prospectus will become part of the student's file.

Please note that for some students, the project begins two semesters prior to graduation. For others, it is the semester in which the student will graduate. The second part of the Capstone prospectus is due no later than the 20th day of class during the semester in which the project, itself, has begun. For example, many Engineering students graduating in May will submit part one in Fall and part two after being assigned their senior design project in Spring. Others will submit both parts in the Fall term.

<u>During the Capstone project</u>
The progress of the Capstone project is entirely the responsibility of the student and his/her Capstone mentor. As part of the research process, it is natural for changes to occur in the scope and direction of the project. Deviation from the prospectus is allowed, however major changes, such as choosing a different topic, require the student to submit a new Capstone prospectus to the UHP.

<u>Completing the Capstone project</u>
Successful completion of the Capstone project requires three components.

1. Students must receive a B- or better for all graded credit hours associated with the Capstone project.

2. All students are required to make a public presentation or defense of their work in a venue appropriate to the project or discipline. Typically, this will take the form of a poster presentation at the Undergraduate Research Symposium or a regional/national disciplinary conference. Please note that the UHP has limited funds available to help support student travel to present their work at academic conferences. <u>In all cases, students are required to inform the UHP in advance of their scheduled public presentation.</u>

3. Students must submit their final Capstone project (approved by their mentor) by the date established in the Capstone prospectus. This should be no later than the last day of classes in the semester in which the project is completed. Students must submit the project electronically to the University Honors Program main email address (university_honors@ncsu.edu). If the final project is not easily converted into an electronic format (e.g. a research poster), students may take a digital photograph of the project. Please ensure that the quality and size of the photograph is such that all vital information can be read.

Disciplinary Honors Capstone Projects

Overview

If a student is in a disciplinary Honors program (e.g. CALS Honors, History Honors), the student may use the Capstone or Thesis from that program to satisfy the UHP Capstone requirement.

To do so, the student will need to submit the Honors Capstone Prospectus for disciplinary projects. The prospectus for disciplinary Honors students is minimal and designed simply to alert the UHP to the fact that the student wishes to complete their Capstone via the modification.

Process

2-3 semesters in advance of the Capstone project
Students should complete the Capstone prospectus for disciplinary projects. This paperwork will alert the UHP to the fact that the student wishes to complete their Capstone via the modification. This paperwork is due no later than the 5th day of class two semesters prior to a student's graduation date. May graduates should submit the prospectus by the 20th day of class of the Fall term. For December graduates, the prospectus must be submitted by the 20th day of class in February.

Completing the Capstone project
Successful completion of the Capstone project requires three components.

1. Students must receive a B- or better for all graded credit hours associated with the Capstone project.

2. All students are required to make a public presentation or defense of their work in a venue appropriate to the project or discipline. Typically, this will take the form of a poster presentation at the Undergraduate Research Symposium or a regional/national disciplinary conference. Please note that the UHP has limited funds available to help support student travel to present their work at academic conferences. In all cases, students are required to inform the UHP in advance of their scheduled public presentation.

3. Students must submit their final Capstone project (approved by their mentor) no later than the last day of classes in the semester in which the project is completed. Students must submit the project electronically to the University Honors Program main email address (university_honors@ncsu.edu). If the final project is not easily converted into an electronic format (e.g. a research poster), students may take a digital photograph of the project. Please ensure that the quality and size of the photograph is such that all vital information can be read.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I complete a Capstone project in a field outside my discipline?
Students may conduct a Capstone project in a field outside their discipline if approved in advance by the UHP staff. The main challenge with projects outside a student's major or minor field of study is gaining the critical expertise necessary to complete such a project. For most students, conducting a Capstone project outside of the discipline will require taking basic research methods courses in the discipline prior to beginning the 6-credit hour Capstone project.

How do research credits work?

Students are required to complete a minimum of 6 credit hours (or equivalent) toward their Capstone. A minimum of three credit hours must be on the student's transcript, although the Capstone prospectus should reflect effort equivalent to a full 6 credit hours. All research should be graded (A-F) unless the mentor has communicated directly with the UHP of their preference to grade the experience as S/U.

The UHP assumes that for one credit, a student should expect to spend a total of 3 hours per week on the project. Therefore, if 3 credit hours are on the student's transcript, the prospectus must clearly how the additional 3 credit hours (~130 hours) of effort will be achieved.

The UHP prefers that students register for undergraduate research credit hours in their home department so that the department will receive credit for the student credit hours generated, and so that student's transcript will show the discipline of their work.

Who can serve as a mentor?
All tenure-track NC State faculty (assistant professors, associate professors, and professors) and senior instructors at NCSU are eligible to serve as a faculty mentor.

People holding other types of positions may also serve as a co-mentor. The co-mentor's name, contact information, and resume should be included as an addendum to the Capstone prospectus.

The faculty member will be responsible for the final evaluation and grade of the project.

Can I turn a group project into an Honors Capstone project?
In some areas, like many Engineering disciplines, group projects are common. It is perfectly acceptable for such team-based and modified senior design projects to fulfill UHP requirements, although each UHP student is still required to complete a Capstone prospectus. For those students who wish to develop a stand-alone group research project with a team of UHP students, please contact your UHP advisor for further information.