

The Honors Capstone: Guidelines

Every UHP student who entered the program in Fall 2003 and after is required to complete an Honors Capstone project. What is a Capstone? In architectural terms, it is the coping stone or copestone, the stone that finishes off a wall. In more general terms, it is a high point or crowning achievement.

In academic (and hence UHP) terms, a Capstone is a culminating experience, a project that demonstrates a student has developed an integrated understanding of their major field of study and can apply the tools and modes of inquiry of that field, thereby generating new knowledge.

UHP students come from every college and hence represent a wide diversity of disciplines, each of which has its own unique modes of inquiry and means of presenting new knowledge. Therefore, we cannot define a single means for completing the Honors Capstone. Some departments already have a Capstone or Capstone-like experience, required of all majors. In that case, UHP students will need to define what it is about their departmental capstone that makes it different from those of non-UHP students in their department.

Irreducible criteria for the Honors Capstone

- (1) It must occur at or very near the end of your undergraduate experience (the ideal timing would be spring semester of the junior year and fall semester of the senior year, even more ideally involving research during the intervening summer). But for some students, they may have worked on a project starting early in their time at NC State and the Capstone will derive from that project.
- (2) It should be the equivalent of a two-semester, six-credit hour project. Note that the key points here are the significance and longevity of the effort. It would be possible for an intensive summer or single-semester experience to be an equivalent effort in terms of significance, but not in terms of longevity. This is not to say that summer or single-semester experiences cannot serve as Capstones, just that additional justification will be necessary in a Capstone proposal. [For students graduating in Spring 2007 or Summer 2007, we will be flexible on the longevity criterion and will readily accept single-semester or summer experiences.]
- (3) It must result in a presentation appropriate for your discipline (i.e., if the standard is for poster presentation, you do a poster presentation; if it is a written thesis, you do a thesis, etc.)
- (4) You must present your project at one of the three annual undergraduate research symposia sponsored by NC State, at a national, regional, or international meeting, or other appropriate public venue (this is negotiable).
- (5) It must be supervised by an NC State faculty member or someone approved by an NC State faculty member.
- (6) The Capstone Project proposal must be approved in advance by the Director of the UHP and the relevant departmental or college official. [Students graduating in Spring 2007 and

Summer 2007 do not require advance approval, but are urged to submit the newly available Capstone proposals as soon as possible.]

Some examples of what Honors Capstones might look like

- A traditional Honors thesis. A student identifies a faculty mentor (with or without a thesis committee) to develop a thesis topic, engages in significant research related to that topic, prepares a written thesis, and submits to an oral defense of that thesis. Course registrations could be HON 498 and HON 499; or similar courses in the student's major. A department may already require a senior thesis for its majors, but that may involve only a one-semester course registration. A UHP student would engage in a more significant project, perhaps registering in the departmental thesis course one semester and a UHP course in the other.
- A departmental Honors culminating research or other experience (e.g., ALS 498H and ALS 499H in the CALS Honors Program).
- An expanded senior design project. Many UHP students are required by their major to complete a senior design project. This could be submitted as an Honors Capstone, with documentation (developed in consultation with a faculty mentor) justifying how this senior design project satisfies the spirit of an Honors Capstone. Generally, the course registrations for this option would be those used for senior design projects in the department; if that project is only one-semester, a student will need to expand the project to include a second semester, which would involve HON registration.
- Involvement in a major course-design and implementation effort.
- A significant, high-level service-learning experience.
- An expanded Study Abroad experience. A thesis or similar document could be developed from a prolonged Study Abroad experience, and may or may not involve HON registration.
- An expanded HON 397 experience. You may have entered an HON 397 experience as a one-semester endeavor and it turned into a major project that could be presented as a Capstone.
- An advanced plan of study, perhaps involving independent study in the discipline (guided problem sets, tutorials on significant questions in a discipline) and advanced courses (500 level and above).
- An educational portfolio, in effect a retrospective reflection on your entire undergraduate career, compiling evidence of your development as a student over the years, and tying it all together with a substantive reflection paper on your undergraduate experience.
- Propose your own Capstone!

Some key points:

- If non-HON courses are used to satisfy your Capstone hours and those courses do not already exist as H-sections (e.g., ALS 498H), you should file an Honors Contract for that course. That Honors Contract will give you the opportunity to indicate how this particular experience will be a Capstone experience.
- What is most important is the completion of a Capstone project, not the Capstone hours. Your particular circumstance may make it difficult or impossible to register for a total of

six Capstone hours. That will be acceptable, if justified in your Capstone proposal. However, we do advise that it can be useful for you to have courses on your transcript that reflect your Honors Capstone experience.

- Your Capstone must have a faculty mentor in a discipline related to the subject matter of the Capstone. Others can serve as your Capstone supervisor, if approved by a faculty member in the discipline of the Capstone.

Procedures (fully applicable for students graduating in Fall 2007 and beyond; students graduating prior to that—see the note below):

- (1) A minimum of 3 (and ideally 4) semesters prior to your intended graduation, you should schedule a Capstone Consultation session with your UHP advisor (refer to the “Contact Us” section to identify your UHP adviser—each adviser is assigned a group of students by alphabet groups; you are welcome, however, to meet with any of the advisers). This session will involve a review of your standing with respect to your UHP program requirements and a discussion of your initial plans for your Capstone.
- (2) You should then identify a faculty member who will supervise your UHP Capstone project. You may already have this person identified by the time of your Capstone Consultation.
- (3) You and your Capstone supervisor will develop your Capstone proposal and submit it to the UHP. The deadlines for the submission of proposals for given semesters will be published on the UHP web site; the deadline will generally be the mid-point of the semester prior to the one in which you propose to start the project.
- (4) You will be notified of the approval of your Capstone proposal. This will be by the end of the semester prior to the start of your Capstone project.
- (5) The progress of your Capstone project and registration for appropriate courses will be entirely the responsibility of you and your Capstone supervisor.
- (6) You will submit your final Capstone project (approved by your supervisor and whatever other means you indicated in your proposal) by the date you established in your Capstone proposal (this date must be no later than 2 weeks prior to commencement).

Exceptions to the foregoing

Students graduating in Spring 2007 and Summer 2007 will be granted special exceptions for their Capstones, but those exceptions will not establish precedents for future Capstones. Please communicate with your UHP advisor by e-mail or meet in person to discuss how you will satisfy your Capstone requirement. Students planning to graduate in Fall 2007 may also require special consideration, but there should be sufficient time for them to follow the standard procedures outlined above.