WWU HONORS COLLEGE SENIOR PROJECT GUIDELINES

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1. OVERVIEW:

The following document has been prepared to assist students with everything from the formulation to the completion of an Honors Senior Project.

The first question students generally have about the Senior Project is simply, what is it? There's no simple answer. It may be wise for you to think about it in two distinct but complimentary ways. First, it should serve as a sort of "capstone" experience, synthesizing what you have done in your entire education, including but not limited to your work in the major and in Honors. Second, it should be a clearly focused effort, resulting in:

- a tangible product that approaches professional-level original work in your major, minor, or an allied area.
- a presentation for a general audience.
- publication on CEDAR (unless an exemption is approved).

Honors encourages students to think about what they might do for a senior experience rather than what they must do. Sample legitimate projects include an article-length research paper, a podcast, a staged performance, a painting, an exhibit, a website design and launch, and a molecular model. In the recent past students have done translations of works in different languages-- Punjabi, French, Chinese and German—as well as illustrations for a book, a musical album (the student wrote all the music and lyrics, and did all the performances and the technical production), adaptations and installations of computer programs, paintings (by a history major), and preparations of liturgies.

The Senior Project must be 2-8 credits. You are awarded these credits through HNRS 490, which consists of 1-4 credits, repeatable over 1-3 quarters (a credit represents 30 hours of work). Students and advisors should consult to determine the total number of credits for any project. If approved by Honors, students entering WWU prior to Fall 2023 may use departmental research or capstone credits instead of HNRS 490 for some credit towards a Senior Project.

2. GETTING STARTED I—FINDING AN ADVISOR:

The first step in the process is to find an advisor: someone who will supervise the project and act as your mentor. Generally, this will be someone in your major, but there are often exceptions. For example, a student in the College of Business and Economics once worked with a faculty member from the Physics Department who knew a language (Punjabi) the student needed to learn for business purposes. As long as they have a good justification, students are encouraged to pursue unconventional projects, make connections across disciplines, and choose advisors accordingly.

In most cases, your advisor will be someone with whom you have worked a good deal, usually in your major, and consequently someone familiar with your progress through the university. You should approach your prospective advisor as early as possible, preferably not later than the second quarter of the junior year. Many students begin even earlier, and it is common for students in the natural sciences, for example, to be engaged in Senior Project work as early as the sophomore year, for example in a laboratory research group.

The project demands a commitment from your faculty advisor. Honors recommends that you provide your advisor with the guidelines for faculty supervisors--available in the Honors Office and on the Honors website under Curriculum, Capstone Project--to let that person know about the process of definition, work, and completion of the Senior Project.

The preferred faculty advisor for a Senior Project is a tenured or tenure-track faculty member: that is, those individuals with the word "Professor" in their title. Please request approval if you wish to work with a faculty member with the word "Instructor" in their title. You can find people's titles in their department's faculty listings.

3. GETTING STARTED II—DEFINING THE PROJECT:

Ultimately, the Senior Project, the timing of its beginning and completion, the shape of the final product, and the amount of work required are negotiated between you and your advisor. As noted above, there are no formulas or models that you must follow. The project should, however, satisfy the following criteria:

- It must be an appropriate exercise in an academic discipline.
- Projects must include your original work.
- The project must be worth the amount of credit you will receive, either in Honors or through your major department.

Further, you and your advisor must agree that the project is something you can reasonably accomplish. It would be unreasonable, for example, to expect a geology major to spend six months at a remote site, or to demand that a theater major spend two quarters in New York with a theater company. (On the other hand, if you do have the resources to complete remote or distant work and wish to do so,

Honors encourages this. Students have undertaken projects involving field work everywhere from eastern Washington to China to the South Pacific.)

Beyond these requirements, you and your advisor are free to work out a project that meets your joint standards and needs. In defining the project, you and your advisor should establish a set of expectations:

- What shape will the final product take?
- What work will you do and on what schedule?
- When may you expect faculty feedback, in what form, and to what degree?
- Will the project require special resources—equipment, travel funds, collection access, etc.— and if so, how will you acquire these?

You and your advisor should think about possible difficulties that may arise from a particular project. Honors may be able to assist in overcoming some of the problems that arise—for example, you might ask about modest support for travel or the purchase of specialized equipment—but you should avoid projects that will present difficulties you can't control.

That said, part of completing a long-term project is working with unanticipated difficulties. Expectations set by you and your advisor are subject to revision by mutual agreement. Above all, Honors encourages you to think of these projects broadly, innovatively, and flexibly.

Once you and your advisor have defined and established a schedule for the project, you will draft a preliminary project description that outlines the process and anticipated final product, then send your advisor an e-form for approval. The e-form initiates the process for you to register for HNRS 490: Senior Capstone Project. You can find it on the Honors web page under Curriculum, Capstone Project.

The preliminary project description is a prospectus, not a contract. It should represent the best estimate of what you hope to accomplish in the given period of time. It is possible, even likely, that your project will change before its completion.

4. STAYING ON SCHEDULE:

The amount and frequency of contact between the student and the advisor will vary, depending on the nature of the project. In the sciences, where most students work on year-long or multiyear research undertakings directly with faculty, there may be regular communication between the student and the advisor, perhaps on a daily basis. On other projects, contact may be less frequent—a suggested *minimum* baseline is 4 meetings per term. **It is the student's responsibility to establish and maintain regular communication with the faculty advisor.** The student may also discuss their progress with Honors, and during their final quarter will receive prompts from Honors for the steps to complete the project, but the primary relationship is between the student and advisor.

5. PUBLIC PRESENTATION:

All projects must be presented and defended in a public forum, scheduled through Honors. You should expect to answer questions about the formulation of your project, the process of its completion, and its methods and conclusions. Because Honors is interdisciplinary, the presentation should be accessible to a general audience outside your discipline. A benefit of the presentation is the opportunity for you to develop skills for communicating professional content to a non-expert public audience.

The public presentation may draw a large audience, and it is entirely appropriate to invite faculty, friends, family members, and people from the local community. Honors especially encourages you to invite your parents, and they attend frequently; their presence always adds to the occasion.

After the presentation, the advisor or Honors may ask for revisions of the project, if appropriate for the discipline. The student must submit a final copy of the Senior Project to the advisor for approval by re-circulating and updating the project e-form with the original student-advisor agreement.

6. PUBLICATION:

When you re-circulate your project e-form to your advisor with your completed project, you will also include a project abstract. Abstracts should be no more than 500 words (two typewritten pages—some abstracts will be shorter) and should be free of jargon or highly specialized disciplinary vocabulary.

Completed projects are published on CEDAR, Wilson Library's electronic archive, where they are available to the public. If for any reason the Senior Project should not be published (for example the project is under consideration for publication, or contains proprietary material), Honors will approve an alternate arrangement.

7. QUESTIONS:
Still have questions? Check the Honors capstone webpage: Senior Capstone Project | WWU Honors College | Western Washington University

Questions remaining after that? Ask the Capstone Coordinator! (Contact information is available on the capstone webpage.)