WWU HONORS COLLEGE SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT ADVISOR GUIDELINES

These guidelines are intended to assist advisors and prospective advisors with Honors Senior Capstone Projects. While this document provides general information about advising a capstone, it won't address every faculty question or concern. Faculty should feel free to talk or correspond with the Honors Director (Kimberly Lynn, lynnk@wwu.edu, X4869) or the Capstone Coordinator (Julie Dugger, duggerj2@wwu.edu) for further information or assistance.

1. OVERVIEW

The capstone project is the final requirement for the Honors Interdisciplinary Studies minor. Students take varied approaches to this requirement, including but not limited to research papers, community service, and creative works, exhibits, and performances. Capstone projects require interdisciplinary communication in that all students complete a presentation to the general public, including people outside the student's field(s) of expertise. Some projects may also be interdisciplinary in their subject matter or methods. All capstone projects include:

- a student-designed plan of independent study conducted in consultation with a faculty member (or alternate approved advisor), resulting in a final product.
- a presentation for a general audience.
- publication on the Western Libraries CEDAR database (or an alternate approved plan).
- small assignments administered by Honors on Canvas (for example, students create posters to advertise their presentations).

In meeting these requirements, the capstone project advances the Honors mission (capstone-centered emphasis added):

- To recruit and foster a diverse scholarly community by providing **an inspiring liberal arts experience that builds on the excellence of Western's undergraduate programs and draws on the expertise of Western's faculty**.
- To promote personal and intellectual growth through a seminar-based curriculum and **independent inquiry in a community that strives to understand why and how we pursue truth, liberty, and happiness.**
- **To instill in our students the desire to extend the values of the Honors College into the communities they join upon their graduation**: intellectually rigorous inquiry, honesty, compassion, and equitable access to opportunities.

Whether it takes the form of an extended work in the student's major field(s) of study, or work in a new field the student wishes to explore before graduation, the capstone is a synthesis of the student's undergraduate education.

2. ROLE OF THE ADVISOR IN THE CAPSTONE

Faculty provide oversight and mentorship for capstone projects. Faculty advisors work with students to set standards for the project, guide students in meeting those standards, and are responsible for following through on their part of the initial agreement with the student. The primary advising relationship is between the faculty advisor and the student. The Honors College plays a secondary supporting role.

More specifically, as an advisor you will:

1. Work with the student to develop a capstone idea and proposal.
2. Sign off on the capstone webform after the student completes the proposal in Step 1, approving the student's proposal as a workable project for the indicated credit load.
3. Advise the student in their work on the capstone, on a schedule to be determined by you and the student. Honors will assume the student is making adequate progress in their HNRS 490 Senior Capstone unless we hear otherwise.
4. Attend the student's final capstone presentation and (briefly and informally) introduce the student. Presentations are hybrid and may be attended online if you can't come in person.
5. Sign off on the capstone webform after the student has submitted their final project, indicating that the project as described on the form is acceptable for publication as student work, and the student has earned their HNRS 490 credits. Advisors have primary oversight over the capstone, and projects are not approved or published without an advisor signature.

3. ROLE OF HONORS IN THE CAPSTONE

Honors will:

1. Answer your questions about capstones. Here's a page where you can start (which includes contact information for the Capstone Coordinator if any unanswered questions arise): Senior Capstone Project | WWU Honors College | Western Washington University
2. Advise students on general capstone requirements. If you're not sure how to answer student questions about requirements, including the presentation and publication, you or your student can ask an Honors advisor.
3. Assist with student outreach. If you're concerned about your student's progress, let us know.
4. Host the student's final presentation, including scheduling a room and running technology for hybrid presentations.
5. Provide capstone institutional structure, interfacing with other offices to make sure the project is registered and the student credited.
6. Consult with students or with you on the CEDAR archive as a capstone publication option: what CEDAR options are available to Honors students and how do students request them?
7. Assist with interdisciplinary capstones as requested. Academic advisors may feel more comfortable advising some aspects of the project than others. Honors can provide additional advising and/or referrals.

4. DEFINING THE PROJECT

As an interdisciplinary college, Honors recognizes that standards and practices for capstone projects will vary, just as they vary for different Western majors. Project standards may also vary based on the student's experience in the field(s) of the project: a student with more experience may in some cases be expected to meet a higher standard than a student with less. Further, standards will vary in accordance with the advisor's expertise: a project in botanical illustration, for instance, may need to meet different standards for an advisor in Biology than for an advisor in Studio Arts. **In sum, advisors have a great deal of discretion over the expectations for the projects they mentor, and are strongly encouraged to work with their students to establish a shared set of expectations at the start of each project.**

Every project must:

- be an appropriate exercise in an academic discipline or disciplines.
- include the student's original and individual work.
- match the amount of credit received (a credit represents 30 hours of work).
- be something the student can reasonably expect to accomplish in the proposed period of study.

In defining the project, the advisor and the student should consider:

- What shape will the final product take?
- What work will be done using what methods, and on what schedule?
- When may the student 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 the student acquire these?

Both the advisor and the student should think about possible challenges that may arise from a particular project, and avoid projects that will present insurmountable difficulties. That said, part of completing a long-term project is working through unanticipated challenges. Many projects change before their completion, and expectations set by students and advisors are subject to revision by mutual agreement. Above all, Honors encourages students and their advisors to think of these projects broadly, innovatively, and flexibly.

Once the student and advisor have defined the project and schedule, the student will draft a proposal that describes the project, process, and anticipated final product. The advisor and Honors approve the project through an e-sign form initiated by the student.

5. STAYING ON SCHEDULE

The amount and frequency of contact between the student and the advisor will vary, depending on the nature of the project. A suggested *minimum* baseline is four meetings per term, though most students and advisors meet more frequently. It is the student's responsibility to establish and maintain regular communication with the faculty advisor, but advisors are encouraged to reach out to the student or to Honors if they are concerned about a student's progress. The student may also discuss their project with Honors, and during their final quarter will receive prompts from Honors for the steps to complete the capstone. But, again, the primary relationship is between the student and advisor.

6. PUBLIC PRESENTATION

The Honors College mission asks students to "extend the values of the Honors College into the communities they join upon their graduation." Many Honors seniors have already presented their work at disciplinary conferences, but the capstone presentation adds an opportunity to practice interdisciplinary communication. Students share their understanding with a general audience and develop the skills they'll need to present work in the future. Because this is a presentation for the broader public, the presentation style and content should differ from what students would practice in presenting to professional or specialist audiences in their academic or creative fields.

While students should expect to answer questions about their project process and results, the presentation is not a defense. It is a supportive, shared exploration of the student's work at Western. It is entirely appropriate to invite other students, faculty, friends, family members, departmental connections, and people from the local community. Students should consider

which presentation formats, techniques, and subject matter are best suited to engage and inform a diverse nonexpert audience, and/or advance the project's content.

The advisor attends the presentation and briefly introduces the student.

After the presentation, the advisor or Honors may ask for revisions of the project before it is submitted for publication.

7. PUBLICATION

After the presentation, students upload their final products and accompanying materials to their original capstone webforms, which are then reforwarded to their advisors for a second approval.

Products are not accepted without an advisor's signature! The advisor's signature indicates that the product is acceptable for publication as student work according to the plan laid out on the webform or with reasonable changes to that plan (see Capstone Crediting and Grading below).

Completed projects are published on CEDAR, the Western Libraries' electronic archive, where they are available to the public. If for any reason the Capstone Project should not be published, Honors offers the following alternate options:

- CEDAR Campus-only Access: this option protects students' First North American Serial rights for future publication. Project abstracts will be visible, but the rest of the capstone product can only be accessed with a Western login.
- CEDAR Embargo: abstracts will be visible, but the rest of the capstone product can't be accessed until an embargo period has passed. Embargo options range from 6 months to 3 years.
- An alternate option pre-approved by the student's advisor and Honors. Options may include (but are not limited to):
    - A link to a publication in another venue pre-approved by the advisor and Honors. If the publication is still pending, Honors will publish a placeholder to be determined in consultation with the student.
    - A personal narrative about completing the project, for students whose work is not publishable for proprietary or confidentiality reasons.
    - Documentation of a final product that is not in uploadable form (for example, instructional materials from a workshop or a program and photographs from a live performance).

8. CAPSTONE CREDITING AND GRADING

Capstone projects must be between two and eight credits. Students earn these credits through HNRS 490, which consists of one to four credits, taken over one to three quarters (a credit

represents 30 hours of student work). Students and advisors should consult to determine the total number of credits for any project. If approved by Honors, students entering the Honors College prior to Fall 2023 may substitute one departmental research or capstone credit for one HNRS 490 credit.

Capstones are graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory. Advisors check a box on the capstone webform and sign off at the conclusion of the project to authorize a passing grade. Honors will enter the grade after the advisor signs off.

- If a student is completing a multi-quarter project, the grade for quarters prior to the completion quarter will default to Satisfactory. Honors will send advisors an email prompt at the end of the quarter to give them the option of assigning a K (Incomplete) or U (Unsatisfactory) instead. Advisors may also initiate a K or U themselves by emailing the Capstone Coordinator.

It is largely up to the advisor to determine whether the student's work has met the standards agreed upon in the project proposal. Again, many projects change over the course of their completion, and sometimes the project initially agreed upon by the student and advisor can't be completed. But any changes to the original project should be agreed upon by both student and advisor.

An advisor is under no obligation to sign off on work that does not meet the standards of appropriate student work in the advisor's field(s)—and, in fact, Honors depends on advisors to ensure a passing level of quality in the capstones they mentor. An advisor with concerns about a student's work is strongly encouraged to contact the Honors Director or Capstone Coordinator.

9. COMPENSATION FOR NTT FACULTY ADVISORS

Non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty will be compensated at a flat rate of $540 per Honors student capstone advised, paid at the completion of the project.

This advising stipend is calculated based on an assumed 12 hours of advising work at $45 per hour. Advisors are also asked to attend the student's final presentation of their capstone project (preferably in person, unless there are significant extenuating circumstances).

For exceptional cases where anticipated advising work exceeds 12 hours, advisors should discuss with the Honors Director whether there are funds for additional advisor time. Any exception to the standard compensation requires Director approval before the start of the project.

Generally, a single NTT faculty member would be expected to serve as the primary capstone advisor of **no more than 4 capstone projects per academic year**.

(Compensation policy revised 11/15/2024)