

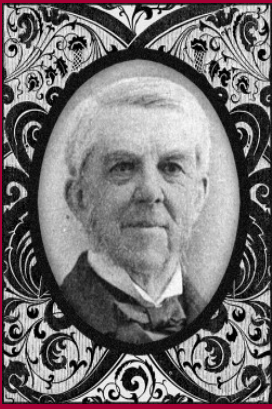


CHAPMAN
UNIVERSITY



University Honors Program Capstone Handbook

Updated August 25, 2025



*"Man's mind
stretched to a new
idea never goes
back to its original
dimensions."*

*~Oliver Wendell
Holmes*

DEAR HONORS STUDENT:

Your senior Honors capstone project should reflect your learning and abilities. You will select the subject matter of your capstone in consultation with the Honors Program Director. It should be something that matters to you, something you know well or want to know better, and something that allows you to develop (as well as demonstrate) your ability to analytically and critically analyze as well as synthesize a broad range of material.

The process of designing and completing a senior capstone project is not trivial. It is recommended, therefore, that you begin thinking about your capstone project in your junior year or early in your senior year in order to give yourself time to plan, develop, and complete your project.

A key element in the successful completion of your work is your senior capstone faculty mentor. Your mentor will assist you in defining the scope of your work and the direction of its development. The Honors Capstone Seminar (HON 498) will serve as a conversation community in which you will be able to present and discuss your work as it progresses. At the end of the spring semester, you will present your work at the University Honors Conference before Honors instructors, peers, and invited guests. At your conference presentation you will be able to demonstrate your skills in communicating effectively and in using information and ideas analytically and critically.

Guidelines for Crafting an Honors Interdisciplinary Capstone Project

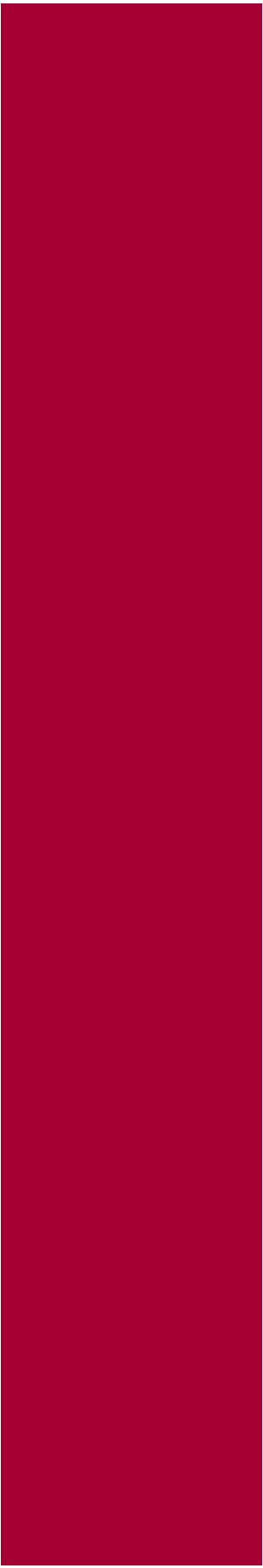
Your Honors Capstone will culminate in two products:

- 1) A 20–30-page (5,000 – 7,500 words) research paper, and
- 2) A presentation of your capstone research at the University Honors Conference on the first Saturday in May of your graduating year.

Your senior Honors Capstone Project cannot be the same as the senior project of your major. However, you can expand upon a capstone project you are completing in your major or another program or pursue a line of inquiry within an ongoing program of research or creative activity. Please consult with the Honors Program Director and/or your Honors Capstone Course Instructor for guidance.

Important questions to consider as you formulate your Capstone Project topic include:

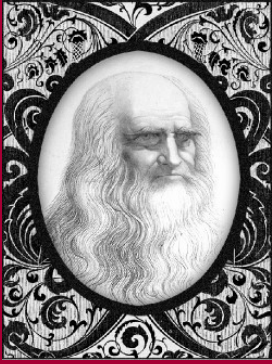
- What is the subject matter of your Honors senior interdisciplinary project?
 - Is the project interdisciplinary in focus such that it draws on multiple disciplinary insights and/or perspectives?
- "Idea of dominance:" What is the clear and recognizable idea which can serve as a central focus for your work?

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- Why are you pursuing this subject matter?
 - What disciplinary perspectives would be helpful in this work?
 - Which disciplinary perspective is primary?
 - Do these perspectives form a more comprehensive perspective from which to view your subject matter? If so, how? If not, why not?
 - The Honors Capstone Project should be framed in such a manner that its interdisciplinarity is disclosed.
 - What effect (critical, expansive, relevance/application, and/or coherence) does it have upon your study to view it from a more comprehensive perspective?

We hope that this guide provides you with a good start to a successful Honors Capstone Project.

Warmest regards,

Tara Gruenewald, PhD, MPH
Director, University Honors Program



*"Obstacles
cannot crush me.
Every obstacle
yields to stern
resolve. He who is
fixed to a star
does not change
his mind."*

~ Leonardo da Vinci

THE HONORS PROJECT AT A GLANCE

The senior capstone project...

- is a mentored independent research or creative project in your final year of undergraduate studies at Chapman University.
- requires a public presentation to Honors guests, faculty, and students at an on-campus conference usually held on the first Saturday in May.

It should display a high level of intellectual ability and creativity on a specific question or topic. It should demonstrate general abilities valued in any college graduate:

- Ability to communicate effectively in speech and writing;
- Ability to think critically and constructively;
- Ability to locate and evaluate information;
- Ability to recognize and respond to ethical issues;
- Ability to place one's work in the broad context of human effort.

You select its subject matter in consultation with the Honors Program director.

You will receive direction through the Honors Capstone Seminar (HON 498), which is designed as a "research workshop" – a conversation community where students discuss their ongoing research with each other. It should be noted that the final requirements for any particular Honors Capstone Seminar are in the syllabus of that particular HON 498 course.

CAPSTONE DESIGN

Your Honors Capstone cannot be the same as the senior capstone for your major. However, your Honors Capstone can be an interdisciplinary expansion of an ongoing program of research or creative activity. You may also choose to engage in an interdisciplinary exploration of a new topic (maybe something you haven't had the time to explore but always wanted to). Please consult with the Honors Director if you are unsure whether your proposed project is sufficiently distinct from another capstone project for a major or minor or are uncertain of whether it meets the criterion of an interdisciplinary project.

The capstone project can take many forms:

- Traditional research thesis on a specific topic;
- A laboratory project or experiment in the sciences;
- A problem-solving project that applies theories to an issue;
- An original design for a model, prototype, or other programmatic area;
- Have a different idea? Consult with the Honors Director.



*"Not knowing
when the dawn
will come, I open
every door."*

~Emily Dickinson

FINDING A FOCUS

Junior Year: A Time to Plan

It's important to begin generating ideas for your project in your junior year. The more time the project has to develop, the more mature your work will be. Being aware of deadlines associated with your research is also important. For example, you may need to apply months in advance to have research approved by CU's Institutional Review Board.

Where do you find ideas? Consider your past classes, outside reading, hobbies, places you have visited, or independent research you have already performed.

Once you have discovered a topic, it is equally important to define its scope and feasibility. For example, beginning with the idea of researching the economic effects of monocrop production in the Third World, you may want to focus on a particular country. Then, after initial research, you may find a specific group of coffee growers who interest you because their approach toward the market has proven to be more effective than others. The better you define your topic, the better able you will be to describe, discuss, research, and analyze it.

When defining your problem, you could address unresolved problems and present helpful provisional responses. So, look for controversies that surround your topic and for gaps in responses to them. Research the major authors in the field, identify the research methods used within relevant disciplines, and consult with knowledgeable CU faculty.

Remember also that you are welcome to use your literary, artistic, or musical interests to create an original piece, such as a composition, performance, film, or exhibition. Your project should place your work within its historical and contemporary contexts, with discussion about its evolution and its importance to the development of your art.

Other ways to get ideas for your projects include speaking with other students and getting a feel for what their interests are, meeting with faculty to discuss their research interests, and attending undergraduate poster sessions and research days. You never know when inspiration will strike, so write down your ideas. An "idea" diary allows you to record and digest thoughts, inspirations, and conversations. It also allows you to track what really interests you, recurring themes of which you may not even be aware.

Still stuck? Stop by the Honors office for a look at past project titles.



*"If I have seen
farther than
others, it is
because I was
standing on the
shoulders of
giants."*

~Isaac Newton

THE HONORS CAPSTONE CLASS

The Honors Capstone Seminar (HON 498) is a 3-credit class offered both fall and spring semesters. It is designed like a "writers' workshop" to provide a supportive environment for the discussion of ideas, plans, and research strategies. It is the place to refine your project through suggestions and feedback from fellow Honors students.

All senior projects are presented during spring semester of each year, even if you take the Honors Capstone Seminar in fall. The Honors on-campus conference, usually held on the first Saturday in May, is designed to showcase senior projects. Fellow Honors students, professors, friends and family members are invited to attend.

Students must take the Honors Capstone Seminar in their final year at Chapman University. Those students who take the capstone course in the fall semester of their final year at Chapman will receive an "SP" – which stands for "satisfactory progress" – at the end of the fall semester and will be assigned a letter grade after completing their research, their research paper, and presentation at the annual University Honors conference in the spring semester. The registrar has informed us that graduate schools understand the meaning of a SP grade, so it does not affect applications to them

Those students who take the Honors Capstone Seminar in the spring semester of their final year at Chapman must complete all the work required for the capstone in that semester and will receive a letter grade after presenting at the annual Honors University conference at the end of that semester.

Students for whom the fall semester will be their final semester at Chapman University have to complete all the work for the Honors Capstone that semester, including the completion of the research paper upon which their Honors Capstone is based and a public presentation at a venue approved by the Honors Director (e.g., on-campus or external research conference). They will be given a letter grade at the end of the fall semester.

mentor: a trusted friend, counselor or teacher, usually a more experienced person who gives advice and serves as an example. Mentors can enhance your education and help you build academic networks.

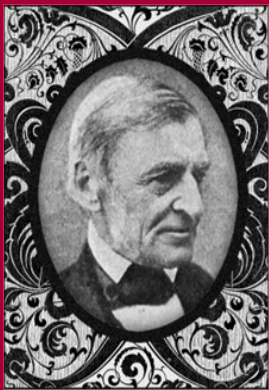
SELECTING A MENTOR

When you have a direction for your project, you will need to identify a CU faculty member willing to serve as your Honors Capstone Faculty Mentor. The role that your faculty mentor plays in the development of your project will vary by project but will likely include guidance in the refinement of the scope of your project questions or products, support in your advancing synthesis and integration of relevant source material in your developing capstone paper, appropriate methodologies for empirical or creative projects, and guidance and feedback on drafts of your capstone paper and presentation.

You need to advise your mentor that he or she is expected to attend the Honors conference — to act as a commentator on your presentation and to assist in the evaluation of it. The evaluation of the presentation will inform the capstone presentation portion of your Honors 498 Capstone Seminar grade. The conference is usually held on the first Saturday in May. Date and time will be provided by the beginning of the academic year. Your mentor should receive a copy of your presentation at least two weeks before the conference, to become familiar with the material and to be prepared to ask questions and engage you in conversation following the presentation.

Your mentor will also be expected to participate in the evaluation of your final capstone paper due in mid-April utilizing a standardized evaluation form. A member of the Honors faculty will provide a second evaluation of your final capstone paper. These two evaluations will inform the evaluation score that comprises the capstone paper portion of your Honors 498 Capstone Seminar grade.

Your mentor will invest time and effort into your project and will be one of your greatest resources. It is important to remember that your mentor will make these investments within the context of many other responsibilities and activities in the academy and as a scholar. Your efforts to diligently advance your independent research or creative activity and your drafts of your developing capstone paper and presentation, as well as to regularly communicate your progress, will facilitate your mentor's ability to provide guidance and feedback.



*"Nothing great
was ever achieved
without
enthusiasm."*

*~Ralph Waldo
Emerson*

APPROVAL PROCESS FOR YOUR PROJECT

At the back of this booklet, you will find an overview of the information that you need to provide in the Honors Capstone Initiation Form (see Appendix A) and a template for a letter you can share with your proposed Capstone faculty mentor (see Appendix B). The Honors Capstone Initiation Form is completed online. Your portion of the form requires provision of demographic information, a brief description of your proposed capstone project, and provision of information for your proposed faculty mentor. The form also requires you to confirm that your proposed faculty mentor has agreed to serve in this role. Upon your submission of this information, the completed form will be forwarded to your proposed faculty mentor to obtain their agreement to serve in this role. Do NOT submit your Honors Capstone Initiation Form without first discussing the proposed project with your proposed mentor and obtaining their agreement to serve in the faculty mentor role.

Once your proposed faculty mentor provides their agreement to serve as a mentor for your Honors Capstone Project, the Honors Capstone Initiation Form will forward to the Honors Director for final approval. You and your faculty mentor will receive confirmation of the approval of your Honors Capstone Project.

If you are taking the Honors Capstone Seminar in fall, please consult the course syllabus for the due date of the Honors Capstone Initiation Form. Those taking the seminar in spring are encouraged to identify their capstone project topic and submit their Honors Capstone Initiation Form in the first half of fall semester to have sufficient time to complete their project the following spring.

PRESENTING YOUR WORK

The University Honors Conference is designed to showcase your capstone work and allows you to share your knowledge with the university community. Interested faculty and peers will be in the audience, and we encourage you to invite friends and family.

At your presentation, a moderator will introduce you and then time your talk, limiting you to approximately 25 minutes. After your presentation, you will have 10-15 minutes for responses from your commentators and to entertain questions from the audience. Detailed instructions regarding presentation logistics will be provided in advance of the conference in April. Your Honors Capstone Seminar course will also provide guidance and practice preparation for your conference presentation.



*"To think and to
be fully alive are
the same."*

~Helen Arendt

RESOURCES

Center for Undergraduate Excellence

The [Center for Undergraduate Excellence \(CUE\)](#) is the perfect place to find support for research and creativity activity throughout your years at Chapman. The [CUE website](#) provides information on professional development resources, research grant and conference travel funding, and other resources available to students. The CUE Student Scholar Symposium, held each fall and spring semester, showcases research and creative activity from all disciplines across campus. We encourage students to consider presenting their Honors Capstone project in a poster or oral presentation.

Funding a Project

CUE sponsors [Undergraduate Scholarly/Creative Grants](#) to support costs related to carrying out a research or creative project, including the purchase of research equipment or materials, copyright fees and other costs associated with creative productions, and non-material project expenses, such as research participant remuneration (please see the CUE website for details). Grants typically do not exceed \$1,000. Grant applications are submitted in fall for interterm/spring awards and in spring for summer/fall awards.

The Honors Program also provides a limited number of Interdisciplinary/Collaborative Grants to support interdisciplinary research and creative projects that involve student and faculty collaboration. Please see the Honors Program website for additional information.

Travel grants to support the presentation of student research and creativity activity that is accepted for presentation at a professional conference is available through multiple sources on campus. Please consult the [CUE Travel Grant Overview](#) for more information and for the link to the [CU Universal Travel Grant Application](#).

Institutional Review Board

Faculty, staff, and students conducting research involving human participants are required to submit their research protocol for review by [CU's Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#). Please consult the [IRB website](#) for more information on activities that meet the definition of research with human participants and timelines for different forms of review. Should your research require IRB review and approval, please keep in mind that the IRB application and review process can take considerable time (weeks to months). Researchers must also complete training on the protection of human research participants through the [Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative \(CITI\)](#) program prior to IRB application submission.

APPENDIX A : CAPSTONE INITIATION FORM

[The Honors Capstone Initiation Form is completed online.](#) Below we provide the information that you will be asked to provide in the form to aid in your preparation and completion of the form.

Honors students will be asked to provide the following information:

- Name, email address, student ID number, major(s), minors(s)
- Brief description of graduate education and/or professional career plans following graduation
- Proposed capstone project title
- Brief description of the proposed capstone project
- Proposed Faculty Mentor for the Honors Capstone Project (name, position, department, email address and confirmation of agreement to serve in mentor role)
- Signed (electronic) acknowledgement of the Honors Capstone requirements

Upon submission of the Honors Capstone Initiation Form, the information provided will be forwarded to the proposed Faculty Mentor for the project along with a brief overview of capstone requirements.

The Faculty Mentor will be asked to confirm their agreement to serve in the Faculty Mentor role. Upon electronic confirmation of agreement by the Faculty Mentor, the initiation form will be forwarded to the Honors Director for final review and approval. The Honors Director will contact the student and/or faculty mentor with any clarification questions. A letter of approval will be sent to each student and faculty mentor.

APPENDIX B: INITIAL LETTER TO YOUR FACULTY MENTOR

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for considering serving as a Faculty Mentor for an Honors Capstone Project. The purpose of the Honors Capstone is the completion of a significant, focused interdisciplinary research or creative project. This is an opportunity for students to become producers and not merely consumers of knowledge and in doing so to take an important step in their development as scholars.

As a Capstone experience, the project should exhibit the general qualities and characteristics of an accomplished university graduate, including abilities to communicate effectively in speech and writing, to think analytically and critically, to locate and assess information, to recognize and attend to ethical issues, and to contribute new perspectives, knowledge, or creative products to the project's respective fields of focus.

In general, the role of the project mentor is to help the student to describe the project and define the scope of her or his work, to suggest resources that can help him or her accomplish it, and to evaluate the student's performance once the project is completed. **The Honors Program has a few general criteria for the project:**

- **Scope:** It can be a traditional research project on a specific topic or a creative product. In accordance with the interdisciplinary aim of the University Honors Program, the project should incorporate multiple (two or more) disciplinary perspectives. Faculty mentors are not expected to have expertise in all disciplinary perspectives that may be incorporated into the student's research or creative project but instead to support mentees in their journey of knowledge and perspective gathering, critical thinking, analysis, and synthesis, and effective communication in written and oral forms.
- **Capstone Paper:** The project should result in a 20-30-page research paper or equivalent creative product (the student should discuss alternative formats for a creative project with the Honors Director) due in mid-April of the academic year. Students must enroll in the Honors Capstone course in fall or spring semester of this academic year. The Honors Capstone Seminar course serves as a writer's workshop to facilitate the development of components of the capstone paper under the guidance of the capstone course instructor and support from course peers.
- **Capstone Presentation:** Students will also present their capstone project in an approximately 25-minute presentation at the University Honors Conference, held on the first Saturday in May. This conference begins in the morning and ends with lunch and the presentation of Honors stoles to graduating seniors.
- **Conference Role:** We would like you to attend your mentee's presentation and to be part of the approximately 15-minute conversation which follows the oral presentation. Faculty are welcome but not expected to attend the presentations of other students.
- **Evaluation:** We ask that the Faculty Mentor complete a standardized evaluation of the final capstone project paper and presentation. An evaluation will also be completed by a member of the Honors Program faculty.

We appreciate your consideration to mentor a student in their Honors Capstone Project and in so doing to advance the student's development as a scholar and contributor to their fields of developing expertise. Should you agree to serve in this role, your Honors Mentee will complete an online Honors Capstone Initiation Form which will forward to you for provision of your electronic agreement. The Honors Program will send a formal confirmation of approval of the capstone project to you and your student mentee. We will provide a certificate of appreciation at the end of the academic year which can serve as documentation of your mentorship.

Please feel free to connect with me if you have any questions regarding the Honors Capstone requirements or expectations of the capstone Faculty Mentor.

In appreciation,

Tara Gruenewald, PhD, MPH
Director, University Honors Program
Professor, Department of Psychology