

2018

University Honors Program Honors Thesis/ Capstone Handbook 2018-2019

University Honors Program, Georgia Southern University

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University Honors Program

Honors Thesis/Capstone

Handbook



2018-2019

Overview

The culminating experience of the University Honors Program curriculum, the Honors Thesis or Capstone, is a substantial project that requires a student to delve deeply into his or her field of study. While the student is assisted by a faculty mentor, the project should be completed independently.

Typically, students choose a question or an issue to explore more deeply. In most fields, this is a research project. In some creative arts, the project revolves around an exhibition or portfolio of work. In pre-professional fields, the thesis may be a traditional research report or it could be an applied project in the discipline.

Completing a thesis or capstone project will give students an advantage as they apply for graduate school, professional school and employment. This accomplishment will show search committees and employers that the honors graduate possesses the research skills, level of commitment, and ability to complete long-term projects.

The length and scope of Honors Theses vary widely by discipline. Yet, they all share a common characteristic: they seek to explore ideas and problems in creative and original ways. They are more than just long term-papers. Students should create products that would be recognized by leaders in the field as noteworthy accomplishments.

Role of the Student

This is to be a student-generated and -developed project. Students will work under the guidance of a faculty mentor, but the project should demonstrate the student's ability within the discipline as well the student's originality.

Students should take careful note of the required deadlines and understand the time involved in developing a thesis. Students are responsible for meeting all deadlines concerning the Honors Thesis/Capstone Project and need to plan for every step in the process. In some colleges and departments, students will be required to participate in thesis seminars which will help them plan and develop their projects.

Students should seek a faculty mentor who they can work with and who they think will best guide them to completion of the project. These faculty mentors work with students outside their mentor's typical course load and so their time must be respected. Students should work with their faculty mentors to develop a timeline that the students are comfortable working in and where faculty mentors have enough time to read and respond to drafts and installments.

Students might find *How to Write a B.A. Thesis: A Practical Guide from your First Ideas to your Finished Paper* by Charles Lipson helpful in this process.

Role of the Faculty Mentor

The faculty mentor plays a crucial role in helping guide a student through the process of completing an Honors Thesis. The mentor should begin by helping the student define a solid topic for the project—in most cases this involves the selection of a research question that is interesting and weighty but that can be grappled with in the time-frame available. It is okay to start with a broad issue; the goal is to choose an aspect of that broad theme that will be the focus of the project. After the question for the project is clearly defined, the faculty mentor will help the student learn how to find out about previous work on the topic and appropriate approaches to the question. Finally, the mentor will meet regularly with the student to discuss the progress of the research as it is unfolding, helping the student through the process of completing a solid piece of work. In some colleges and departments, thesis seminars will supplement the role of the faculty mentor.

To distinguish Honors Scholars from non-honors graduates, faculty mentors should demand a high level of work from student that approximates the level of work expected from Masters-level students. Where colleges or departments have developed specific guidelines for honors theses, mentors should consult them. Otherwise, the University Honors Program completely relies on the expertise and judgment of faculty to ensure high quality performance from honors students.

The faculty mentor verifies the quality of the research project at three stages. First, the faculty mentor must sign the student's Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal form to indicate acceptance of the parameters of the project. Second, faculty mentors sign the cover page of the completed final version of the hard copy of the Honors Thesis. Finally, verify the electronic submission of the final version of the thesis in the Digital Commons at Henderson Library. At this stage, mentors also score the final thesis utilizing the Honors Thesis Rubric (the scores will be entered into a google form for which a link will be provided). This review of the thesis is part of the University Honors Program's assessment plan and data is only reported at the aggregate level (see the "Assessment" section below for more details).

More details about the faculty mentor role will be found in the [University Honors Program Faculty Handbook](#).

Proposal Format

At least two semesters prior to graduation (see specific deadlines below), students must submit an [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#). The form must be fully completed and it should be attached to a narrative proposal. While the exact format of the proposal varies by discipline, proposals typically address the following topics:

What is the topic, issue or question that the project will address?

Why is this an important question to answer or issue to explore?

What do we already know about this topic? What is the existing research on it?

How do you propose to answer the question or approach the topic? What methodology will you use?

What do you expect to find? Do you have any hypotheses?

What is your timeline for this project? Amount of time to research? Drafting? Final draft?

Does your project require funding? Where will you apply to get it? What is your back up plan if you do not get it?

Finally, it should include a bibliography or list of works cited that is relevant to the topic. Answering the above questions and providing the information required by the specific discipline typically results in a proposal that ranges from 3 to 20 pages in length. Students should consult with their mentors about appropriate length.

Proposed research that uses human or animal subjects must be submitted for Institutional Review Board or Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee approval. For more information, see the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs [website](#). The faculty mentor should provide the student with assistance in navigating the process for seeking approval from these committees.

Honors Undergraduate Research Fund

The Honors Undergraduate Research Fund provides financial support for student-faculty collaborative projects. Student working on Honors Theses/Capstone Projects who require equipment, supplies or travel to complete the project should apply for funding as early in the process as is possible. While all graduating students are expected to present at the Honors Research Symposium, they are encouraged to also seek out other presentation opportunities at regional, national and international professional conferences. Support for travel to these conferences is available from this fund. To apply, please complete this [application](#).

Thesis Submission

Submission of a completed Honors Thesis/Capstone Project is required for honors graduation. An electronic and hard copy of the thesis/capstone project should be submitted following the guidelines and format listed below:

Hard Copy

- A full hard copy of the thesis should be printed on 8 ½ x 11 paper on a quality printer.
- Pages should be printed single-sided only and it must be unbound and unstapled.
- If color is used in charts, graphs, or images, those pages should be printed on a color printer.
- The hard copy must include an original signature from the faculty mentor (see sample below).
- It must be submitted to the Honors Office by 5:00pm on the deadline (see the “Deadlines” section for exact dates).

Electronic Copy

- The electronic copy should be in one Word or pdf file following the format described below.
- Submission of the file will take place at the Digital Commons at Georgia Southern following this link <http://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/honors-theses/>.
- Submission of the electronic copy will require the faculty mentor’s verification so it should be done in advance of the deadline.
- Once the faculty member verifies the submission, it will be available for viewing through the internet at the Digital Commons at Georgia Southern. As such, you will be required to add some keywords to allow for your thesis to be more easily found for scholarly research.

Thesis Format

Specific guidelines:

Page numbering

- Must be consistent using *either* the top right corner or bottom of page
- Must be consecutive
- Title page should not be numbered—all other pages should include a number

Margins

- Left: 1.5 inches
- Right: 1 inch
- Top: 1 inch
- Bottom: 1 inch

All pages including graphs and charts must follow these guidelines.

Type

- 12 point font using Times New Roman, Arial or other standard font
- Proof-read carefully

Ordering

1. Title page (see following sample) with original signatures
 - a. Abstract can be no more than 250 words and should be single-spaced, the rest of the work should be double-spaced
2. Acknowledgements
3. Body of Text
4. Works Cited or Bibliography
5. Appendices (if needed)

Citation

- Use the citation style set by Department or Faculty Mentor appropriate for field of study

This formatting is necessary so that we can make bound copies of completed theses for the Honors office and for the student's department or college.

Sample Title Page

Title

An Honors Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Honors in
Department Name.

By
Student's Name

Under the mentorship of *Professor Name*

ABSTRACT

Here is where the text of the abstract should appear and it should be no longer than 250 words.

Thesis Mentor: _____

Dr. Professor Name

Honors Director: _____

Dr. Steven Engel

April 2019
Department Name
University Honors Program
Georgia Southern University

Presentation

Successful completion of the Honors Thesis or Capstone Project requires a public presentation at the Honors Research Symposium. Students will have ten minutes to summarize the findings or results of their projects to a broad audience of faculty, students and friends of the Honors Program. Because the audience at the symposium comes from many disciplinary backgrounds, the presentation should seek to explain the results and significance of the findings in an accessible manner to this educated non-specialist audience.

Students should prepare for the symposium by practicing their presentations. Jargon should be avoided where possible and all visual information when using slides (if applicable) should be clear and concise. Because there is a conference format to the event, professional attire is expected. An Honors Research Symposium Proposal form is due in advance of the event.

Assessment

As part of the normal process of program assessment, the University Honors Program reviews completed theses to assess program development and student learning outcome achievement. Each faculty mentor is asked to review completed theses using the Honors Thesis Rubric. In addition, a select number of theses may also be reviewed by the Honors Council or Honors Program staff utilizing the rubric. A select number of presentations at the Honors Research Symposium are reviewed using the Honors Presentation Rubric. Both of these rubrics are provided below. Furthermore, the thesis process and the honors experience is assessed through the student's completion of the Honors Exit Survey (e-mailed directly to students upon submission of the completed thesis). Information gathered as part of these assessment processes are utilized for program development and improvement and results are only reported at the aggregate level.

Deadlines

Deadlines for Fall 2018 Honors Graduates

December 1, 2017: Submission of [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#)

November 1, 2018: Submission of final, formatted copy of Thesis/Capstone Project

November 12, 2018: Submission of Honors Senior Exit Survey (will be e-mailed directly to student)

November 28, 2018: Attendance and participation at the Honors Research Symposium

Deadlines for Spring/Summer 2019 Honors Graduates

May 1, 2018: Submission of [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#)

March 15, 2019: Submission of abstract information for inclusion in Symposium Program

April 1, 2019: Submission of final, formatted copy of Thesis/Capstone Project

April 16, 2019: Submission of Honors Senior Exit Survey (will be e-mailed directly to student)

April 26, 2019: Attendance and presentation at the Honors Research Symposium

May 10, 2019, 3:30pm-6:00pm: Attendance and participation at the Honors Graduation Reception

Deadlines for Fall 2019 Honors Graduates

December 1, 2018: Submission of [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#)

November 1, 2019: Submission of final, formatted copy of Thesis/Capstone Project

Deadlines for Spring/Summer 2020 Honors Graduates

May 1, 2019: Submission of [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#)

April 1, 2018: Submission of final, formatted copy of Thesis/Capstone Project

Deadlines for Fall 2020 Honors Graduates

December 1, 2019: Submission of [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#)

November 1, 2020: Submission of final, formatted copy of Thesis/Capstone Project

Deadlines for Spring/Summer 2021 Honors Graduates

May 1, 2020: Submission of [Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal](#)

April 1, 2021: Submission of final, formatted copy of Thesis/Capstone Project

Assessment Rubrics

Student: _____ Project: _____ Evaluator: _____

HONORS THESIS / CAPSTONE PROJECT RUBRIC

OVERALL SCHOLARLY QUALITY	SLO ASSESSED	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	SCORE
Rationale	SLO #1	no clear rationale or a weak rationale for the project	some rationale presented, begins to motivate the work	provides and discusses a suitable rationale	persuasive and creative rationale	
Complexity/ Framing	SLO #1	frames complex questions as simple ones	invests question with some complexity, may over-simplify or over-extend	reasonable balance between focus and complexity	frames the topic with a full appreciation of its complexity while retaining appropriate focus	
Scholarly Content	SLO #1	author does not demonstrate awareness of appropriate scholarship, may over-rely on too few sources	author demonstrates a reasonable awareness of appropriate scholarship	author demonstrates broad awareness and situates own work within the appropriate scholarship	author does these things and makes contributions to the field, or identifies a new direction for investigation	
Position	SLO #1	does not take a clear or defensible position or draw a clear conclusion	clearly describes, or begins to support/test/extend/critique a position that is in prior scholarship	thoroughly and effectively supports, tests, extends, or critiques a position that is in prior scholarship	develops a clear and defensible position of his/her own, draws a significant conclusion	
Argument	SLO #1	weak, invalid, or no argument, perhaps a simple assertion	some arguments valid and well-supported, some not	main arguments valid, systematic, and well supported	arguments both well supported and genuinely compared to conflicting explanations	
Use of Data/ Use of Evidence	SLO #1	draws on little or no evidence, mostly relies on assertions or opinions, or evidence not clearly presented	some appropriate use of evidence but uneven	feasible evidence appropriately selected and not over-interpreted	fully exploits the richness of the data/evidence/ideas, and is sufficiently persuasive	
Approach/ Methodology	SLO #3	not clear what was done or why, or an inappropriate method	approach is generally appropriate and properly executed	clearly described and justified, well-chosen and appropriate, and well-executed	creative and sophisticated methods	
Insight: Seeing Patterns and Connections	SLO #3	treats related ideas or data as unrelated, or draws weak or simplistic connections	begins to establish connections and perceive implications of the material	brings together related data or ideas in productive ways, thoroughly discusses implications of material	develops insightful connections and patterns that require intellectual creativity	
WRITING STYLE/ QUALITY		LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	
Grammar/Spelling/ Usage	SLO #2	significantly impairs readability	numerous errors	some errors	a few minor errors	
Organization	SLO #2	author does not demonstrate awareness of the scholarly literature, may over-rely on too few sources	structure is of inconsistent quality, may have choppy transitions and/or redundancies or disconnections	structure supports the argument, clearly ordered sections fit together well	structure enhances the argument, strong sections and seamless flow	
Clarity/Style/ Readability (Genre/discipline-specific)	SLO #2	gets in the way of reading for content	style is inconsistent or uneven	good, easy to follow and read for content	exceptional, including elegant style, transparent argument structure	
TOTAL						

Adapted from "Senior Thesis Rubric," Hampshire College and "Capstone/Thesis Experience Evaluatory Rubric," Western Kentucky University

Student: _____

Project: _____

Evaluator: _____

Honors Thesis/Capstone Project Presentation Rubric

Content	Student Learning Outcome (SLO) Assessed	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Score
States the purpose	SLO #2	The purpose is not evident.	The purpose is apparent.	The purpose is clear and captures the listener's attention.	The purpose is obvious and is supported with a clear rationale.	
Organizes the content	SLO #2	The content lacks organization; transitions are abrupt and distracting.	The organization of the content is congruent; transitions are evident.	The content is organized logically with fluid transitions to capture and hold the listener's attention throughout the entire presentation.	The content is organized in a clear but creative manner that respects the complexity of the topic.	
Supports ideas	SLO #2	The majority of ideas are unsupported by additional information or explanation.	The speaker provides the basic details necessary for the listener to understand the premise of the presentation.	Important details add to the interest and depth of the presentation; details work to connect the listener to the speech.	Provides a creative and sophisticated analysis of details to support the argument.	
Summarizes the main idea(s).	SLO #2	The speech ends without a summary.	The conclusion summarizes the main ideas.	The conclusion unites the important points of the presentation and encourages future discussion.	Develops insightful connections and patterns that require intellectual creativity.	
Delivery		Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	
Demonstrates awareness of listener's needs.	SLO #2	The presentation is uninteresting.	The presentation is of the wrong style for this audience.	The speaker's word choices, explanations, and enthusiasm are appropriate for the topic and for each point; appropriate aids are incorporated.	The choices of language, examples, and aids work together to heighten the listener's interest and connection to the topic.	
Speaks clearly with appropriate vocabulary and information.	SLO #2	The vocabulary is awkward or inappropriate for the topic, making the speaker difficult to understand.	The vocabulary provides clarity and avoids confusion.	The vocabulary is descriptive and accurate, engaging the listener through imagery.	The vocabulary is academic and jargon-free; crucial words and concepts are clearly explained for a general audience.	
Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools.	SLO #2	Vocal fillers are present throughout the presentation. Speed and volume are inappropriate for the presentation.	The speaker avoids vocal fillers and other difficulties with only minimal problems.	The speaker avoids distracting vocal fillers or physical mannerisms and uses adequate speed and volume throughout the presentation.	The speaker manipulates tone, speed, and volume, using these tools to emphasize important ideas and hold the listener's attention.	
Demonstrates complexity of thought and vocabulary.	SLO #2	Sentence structure and word choice are monotonous and uninteresting.	Sentence structure and word choice are varied to avoid monotony of tone and repetition of ideas.	Variation of sentence structure and word choice works to keep the listener interested and provides multiple examples and descriptions.	Creative use of language to demonstrate the complexity of topic.	
Appears comfortable with audience.	SLO #2	Eye contact with the audience is lacking. Gestures are missing or awkward. The speaker depends heavily on the written speech or notes.	The speaker has some degree of awkwardness but overall presents material in a comfortable manner.	Eye contact, interaction with aids, and physical gestures are natural and fluid.	The speaker is at home in this milieu, and demonstrates it through use of aids, eye contact, and ease of performance.	
Total						

Adapted from "Rubric for Public Speaking," Tusculum College.