The Honors Capstone Project

All students in the Honors program must complete the honors capstone project to complete the honors minor. The honors capstone project is the culmination of the Honors experience. Honors students will work with a faculty mentor to design and carry out the project. Students can complete a research thesis, online portfolio, experiential-based project, creative/performative project or an innovation project.

All projects should be conceptualized as a project that cannot be completed within the confines of one class or one semester. This means that the project should be sufficiently broad in scope and in-depth in analysis. Students can select one of five options for the Honors capstone project.

Ultimately, we encourage students to make use of the honors education they have experienced. We encourage students to be open and imaginative, and pursue new paths and desires as much as possible. For some students, the honors project is a great opportunity to dig deep into a specific area of their major. For others, the honors project may be a great opportunity for an intellectual adventure. Ultimately, deciding on what might be an appropriate project comes down to deciding on the kind of honors experience that the student values.

We strongly encourage students to think about the broader impacts of their projects. The Honors capstone project should be one that reaches beyond the university. We want students to strive to identify and reach an audience that could be impacted by the project. The final form the project takes is as significant of a choice as the topic itself.

While the form of the project may differ, all projects share these objectives:

- Students will demonstrate **creativity** in the conceptualization and design of the project
- Students will **evaluate and integrate evidence** and approaches from multiple disciplines
- Students will demonstrate the **initiative and dedication** required to conceive and see a project through to completion
- Students will develop greater **self-awareness** through critical reflection
- Students will achieve and demonstrate **competence** in the necessary skills
- Students will **disseminate** the results of their project

Students who complete all honors coursework, but do not complete the project will receive a milestone statement on their transcript.

**Coursework for the Capstone:** Students must complete at least 4 credits to complete the capstone.

*HON 491: Honors Project Introduction.* 1 Credit.

Students must complete this one-credit online course prior to taking HON 489. It is recommended that this course be taken before the spring of the student’s third year but that is not required. Students may complete the course at their own pace.
In this course students will learn about the four tracks for the Honors Capstone, the requirements for each and identify a project advisor.

**HON 489: Honors Project Proposal.** 2 Credits.

This course will prepare students for the completion of their honors capstone project. Working with the project advisor, students will complete a proposal for the honors capstone project that includes a timeline for completion. As part of the proposal, students will select one of the five tracks for the capstone. Student proposals will be evaluated by the project advisor and will be graded on a pass/no pass basis.

**XXX 493/494: Departmental research or independent study.** 1 Credit. Substitutions may apply.

Students are required to take at least one credit for research or independent study in the department of the project advisor. The project advisor should be the instructor of record for the credit. The Honors project requires more than one credit of work, so students are encouraged to take more than one credit. The faculty member directing the project makes the decision concerning registration for such credits.

**Honors Capstone Project Tracks**

**Research Thesis:**
The research thesis is an extended analysis based on an original research question. Working with a thesis advisor, students will explore the relevant literature of a subject and develop a research question based on the scholarly conversation. Students then collect and analyze evidence in the pursuit of an answer to the question. The student should produce an original interpretation of the evidence that contributes to the field of study.

The research thesis is most common in the sciences and the humanities. The form of the thesis will vary according to discipline. Theses in the humanities are based on written interpretations of primary source evidence. In the sciences, students may write an empirical thesis, in which they conduct original research based on their scientific question. They may also write a theoretical thesis, in which they analyze a new problem or seek a new way to solve an existing problem.

For an Honors research thesis students should aim to communicate the value of their work to non-specialists. This focus on audience separates the Honors research thesis from a thesis done in the major. Even if there is one disciplinary approach to the thesis topic, students will identify and examine the interdisciplinary connections of the results.

In addition, as with all other forms, critical reflection must be included as part of the project. For the critical reflection, students analyze the research process as it is happening. The Honors program puts an emphasis on process, and the Honors capstone project is no exception. The pursuit of the answer to a question, the layers of knowledge uncovered, the unsettling of the truths students thought they knew are as valuable as the final product produced. This reflection is an opportunity to analyze and think about how the impact of the research process. Critical reflection is overseen by the thesis advisor. The student and the advisor decide upon the exact
form of the reflection. However, the reflection should be completed throughout the research process. It is an ongoing reflection, not something that is completed when the project is done.

Online Portfolio:
The online portfolio is certainly open to all majors, but students in business and journalism might find this project form particularly appealing.

The online portfolio is more than a collection of work. The development of the online portfolio is an integrative experience through which students establish meaning for their education. Working with an advisor, students will develop objectives. Students then collect artifacts that demonstrate their path to meeting those objectives. As part of this project, students should practice critical reflection as they track their progress. The portfolio is an exercise in design, critical analysis, professionalization and self-awareness, making it one of the more interdisciplinary projects.

Students interested in the online portfolio should begin conceptualizing and collecting artifacts early.

Experiential Project:
The experiential project has two essential components: experiential learning and critical reflection. While this project is not discipline specific, majors such as international studies, education, business, pharmacy, nursing and engineering would be well-suited for this type of project.

There are many experiential learning opportunities that can serve as the basis for this project. Some examples include study abroad, service learning, community outreach, fieldwork, internship and student teaching. Essentially, the experience serves as the student’s primary research. For example, students in education can conduct action research to reflect on and improve their teaching methods while completing their student teaching. Students can utilize their internship experience build a project. This could include areas of future exploration, an analysis of a particular skill, technique, aspect of the field or even a design project; all of these are aimed at building professional competence.

The goal of this type project is to integrate off-campus experiences and the student’s university honors education. Critical reflection is an essential component of this project. It is important to note that critical reflection is not completed at the end of the project. It is an ongoing process in which the student seeks to identify the impact of the experience as an impetus for change. The reflection should be grounded in the methods of the discipline and be based on clearly defined objectives. For example, a student studying abroad would analyze his/her interactions with another culture using the tools and methods aimed at examining cultural interactions.

Creative/Performative Project:
Creative/Performative projects are characteristic of disciplines such as theater, music, creative writing, art and architecture.
While the creation/performance itself comprises much of the work of the thesis, a critical introduction is required for all such projects, be they in theater, music, creative writing, art or architecture.

The critical introduction includes much more than "how I came to this topic" and/or "what I would do next time." Instead, the critical introduction to a performative project demonstrates knowledge of prior work in the discipline and the dialogue about the issues the project confronts.

The Critical Introduction should include:

- An analysis of the ideas and methods of relevant artists, architects, etc.
- A statement of methodology: a discussion of how the student has developed his/her project in relation to the ideas of others in that area.
- A statement of originality: how the student attempted to address the problem through the details of the work itself.
- A critical reflection: Students will critique their own work using the relevant methods in the field.

Innovation Project:
The honors program also encourages students to develop projects that might not fit neatly within any of the above categories but are rooted in a drive for innovation. This could mean students engage in interdisciplinary projects that are team advised. Or, an interdisciplinary team of students works on a single project. Students could work on a design project in an effort to create a new product or idea in response to a specific problem. Students can take advantage of the 3D printing opportunities available at NDSU for product development. It could also mean projects that push students beyond the walls of the university. Students can participate in national innovation challenges and/or pitch competitions, as part of their Honors capstone project.

With innovation projects the critical reflection becomes more important. For example, with design projects, students should be engaged in the design process, testing prototypes and reflecting on failures. Detailing this process in writing will not only elevate the product, but self-reflection will make students aware of the roadblocks to innovation as well as highlight their breakthroughs.

This type of project is open to anyone. In fact, interdisciplinary teams could be particularly effective on a project such as this. An innovation project will be particularly appealing for students in the design fields, engineering and business.

Building on an existing project:
Students can build their Honors capstone project on a project they complete for their major requirements. Students should plan carefully to make sure that the project meets both sets of requirements. As long as the project meets the above requirements for an Honors capstone project, students are encouraged to build on the work they are doing for their major requirements.
**Evaluation:**

All Honors Capstone Projects will be evaluated by the project advisor and a representative from the Honors Council. The representative from the Honors Council will be from the student’s academic college if possible. The Honors Council representative will provide consistency to Honors Projects and ensure that all requirements of the program are met.

The evaluations are *Pass with Distinction*, *Pass*, and *Fail*. Pass with Distinction is granted to projects that receive a rating of superior for every objective. Projects can only pass with ratings of satisfactory or superior for every objective. Projects with any rating of unsatisfactory will receive a fail rating. Projects with three or fewer unsatisfactory ratings can be revised to receive a passing evaluation.

All projects will be evaluated based on these objectives:

- Students will demonstrate **creativity** in the conceptualization and design of the project
- Students will **evaluate and integrate evidence** and approaches from multiple disciplines;
- Students will demonstrate **initiative and dedication** to conceive and see a project through to completion
- Students will develop greater **self-awareness** through critical reflection
- Students will achieve and demonstrate **competence** in the necessary skills
- Students will **disseminate** the results of their project

For each objective the student will receive a rating of superior, satisfactory or unsatisfactory.