HDO MA CAPSTONE GUIDELINES
last revised May 14, 2019

What Is an HDO Capstone Project?

The Capstone Project is your chance to explore what you have learned in HDO to a topic that is understudied or could use a new approach. HDO's coursework, alongside your own original research, will allow you to address an organizational problem in a new way: One that employs liberal arts approaches.

You will work with an academic advisor and a second reader (see below) of your choice to (1) articulate your research question; (2) develop an hypothesis; and (3) decide how best to present your research.

The end result of the Capstone is a research-based report or study that will help your audience understand a workplace problem more effectively using the lens of the humanities and/or social sciences.

The Capstone Project is your opportunity to study a subject in depth through your own design. Its goal is to help you become a competent, articulate researcher.

Examples and templates are available on the [HDO website](). There are other helpful links throughout this document.

How do I identify a topic or problem?

First, let's distinguish the difference between a topic and a problem: A topic is what you are writing about broadly; a problem is the way that topic is complicated by a set a external factors. (In other words, if there's no problem, there's no need to study it!) You will need both a topic and a problem to complete your Capstone Project successfully.

Some students come into the HDO program with a topic or problem in mind; others use course content and conversations with faculty and colleagues to decide on a topic. Regardless of where you sit on this spectrum, you will need to determine and refine your approach to this

subject area by getting to know the topic, exploring previous approaches to the problem, and considering how to explore that problem in a novel way.

Throughout your first two semesters in the program, you will work with your advisor to determine a way to study this topic that is (1) doable in the allotted time-frame and (2) effective and influential in terms of the methodologies used.

It is up to you to decide on a topic. The program director and HDO faculty are available to brainstorm on these issues. Simply set up a meeting time. Members of our External Advisory Board are also available; please contact the director to set up a meeting with an Advisory Board Member.

What type of product should I produce?

This answer depends on your goals. Below are four of the most common options:

- A REPORT or PROPOSAL: Based on primary research, this type of Capstone Project asks, What do we now know about a thing and what should we do about it? Here are some examples.

- LITERATURE SYNTHESIS: Based on secondary research, this project asks, What can we say/how can we categorize this previously under-defined thing? (NOTE: Some professors refer to this as a "literature review." Here are some examples.

- PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE PROJECT. For this type of project, you will complete a fieldwork-based project under the guidance of your academic advisor and a colleague or contact from the organization supporting your project. Here are a few examples.

- MULTIMEDIA: Based on primary or secondary research, how can we use video, audio, or interactive to better understand a phenomenon or solve a problem? Here are a few examples.

What content should be included? How should it be written?

Capstone Projects will include most of the following:

- Title
- Preface/Background on the organization
- Introduction/Overview
- Problem and original approach
- Methods of investigation
- Results/Recommendations
- Bibliography
- Tables and Figures as needed

The choice and ordering of sections and the writing style are determined by the type of product you produce. You also want to review this with your advisor.

Many **academic research reports** should generally follow the "IMRD" format (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion) and be written in a fairly impersonal style and formal tone. Specific questions of style such as the use of first person should be discussed with your capstone advisor.

A **Literature Synthesis** (in-depth exploration, analysis, and conclusions on existing research) will also follow the more academic tone and style, but *may* not have a "Method" or "Results" sections. The specific form of synthesis can be determined in consultation with the advisor. Generally, literature syntheses will have an introduction that lays out the question and why it needs to be answered; the introduction will also provide a thesis statement (or argument) that organizes the subsections that follow. After presenting an organized description of findings from the literature, the paper will close by discussing what has been learned and the implications of the insights. (Some professors refer to this as a "literature review.")

Reports directed to a business audience (recommendation report; research report; consultant report; prospectus; etc.) also provide in-depth analysis of the problem, investigative methods, and recommendations/solutions. However, the style may be less formal and pitched to people who already have some familiarity with the situation. (In this case, a preface/background section may be used to fill in details and personal perspectives needed by academic advisors.) Non-academic reports should use appropriately informative headings.

Both academic and non-academic reports use published sources as well as the writer's experience to build a case for addressing the problem, choosing an investigative approach (or an approach for designing/producing a non-written deliverable), interpreting the results of the

investigation, and looking toward future action. The discussion of the sources may be integrated into the discussion of the problem.

Who is the audience?

Again, this depends on what genre you choose and what the goals of your project are. It is possible to reach more than one audience; speak with your advisor to see what s/he/they feels is best. Here are some key audiences to consider:

- **Academics:** Students might write a Capstone to explore and understand a particular problem. In these cases, the student should write in a style that is more academic in nature. The audience, in this case, would be your advisor(s) and readers like them. This style will provide you the opportunity to conduct in-depth analysis of a topic of interest to you.

- **Professionals:** Many HDO students are writing for an audience of professionals in their career field or their desired career field. You may wish to recommend and/or implement these ideas at work. The audience, then, are the people who will read and benefit from your inquiry. The audience may be people you know and work with; it may be people who review your application to new jobs.

- **Public:** Finally, there are cases in which a student would like to create a multimedia product (a website or video game, for example). In this case, the audience would be members of the public interested in your topic. *Note*: If you choose a multimedia project, you are required to submit an research report explaining what tools you used from the program's coursework and your own research to develop the project.

IN ALL CASES, REMEMBER:
The goal of the Capstone Project is to explain and explore the ways that research in the humanities and social/behavioral sciences can more deeply inform human experiences at work.

How long should it be?

Successful Capstone Projects typically run between 30 and 40 pages, double-spaced, with one inch margins and 12 point font. Depending on the project, papers might substantially exceed 40

HDO

pages, but this should be discussed with the advisor and may indicate that you have not sufficiently narrowed your research question. Papers that are substantially shorter than 30 pages are, in all likelihood, not fully developed.

NOTE: If you choose a *multimedia* project, you should write a shorter academic paper (approximately 15 to 20 pages) that explores the underlying reasons and processes behind your project.

How do I find an advisor and a second reader?

Capstone Advisor: At the beginning of your coursework, you will be assigned a preliminary faculty advisor, based on your interests and the characteristics of your proposed capstone program. You may approach another mentor to act as your capstone advisor if you find someone better suited to your project, or someone with whom you feel more comfortable working. The capstone advisor will work with you throughout your coursework, supervising you as you plan and develop your capstone project. The advisor will also lead the evaluation of your capstone deliverable and presentation.

The capstone advisor must be HDO-affiliated faculty.

Second Reader: The second reader should be selected to cover areas that the capstone advisor doesn't. For instance, the capstone advisor may have subject knowledge, while second reader brings understanding of methodology. Alternately, the capstone advisor and second reader may have knowledge of two different disciplines/fields on which the student draws.

The second reader may be a faculty member, an advisory board member,
or a member of your professional environment.
We do not recommend that work supervisors act as second readers.

What if my Capstone Project involves studying people or an organization?

Many of your projects will involve *primary research*, that is, gathering new data through interviews, data analysis, ethnography, etc. When human subjects are involved, you should consult with your advisor and the University's Institutional Review Board as early as possible. The University requires all researchers to gain permission before engaging in human subjects research. This should be considered during the fall semester. Your first-semester Qualitative Research course will provide guidance on human subjects research.

If you will be working with one or more organizations, you should also gain their permission to conduct research. If the organization(s) is concerned about confidentiality, discuss these challenges with your advisor(s) as early in the process as possible. If your project involves sensitive organizational information, you may develop two versions of your project: one for public and another for private consumption. Your advisor and second reader can sign a nondisclosure agreement if necessary.

Explore this folder to review IRB Proposal examples. Be aware that IRB requirements change frequently. Use these examples as guidelines only.

What about the poster?

In addition to the Capstone Project itself, you will create a visual representation of the project and its results through a professional poster. During your graduation weekend, you will present your capstone to the general public by way of a poster session.

This means you must transform your capstone into a poster and prepare a brief and effective oral overview of your project (an elevator speech).

There is a poster template available on the HDO website on the MA Student Resources page. Here are a few featured posters to review. Your poster should offer a succinct overview of the problem addressed in the Capstone; the methodology you used to examine that problem; the results of your research and work; and the implications for future research and progress in addressing the problem.

What is the approval process? How is the Capstone Project graded?

The process of planning, researching, analyzing, and writing your Capstone Project takes considerable time, effort, planning, and communication with advisors. Your progress on your Capstone Project will be reviewed several times during your time as an HDO student. However, the Capstone Project itself is not graded; it is either approved (passed) or not (failed).

At the end of the fall and spring semesters, the teaching faculty conduct a student review to access students' performances in classes and their communication with advisors. After these

meetings, you will receive an email from the director with a brief progress report. During these semesters, it is important to meet with your advisor regularly to develop problem you are interested in exploring. *These meetings and communications are to assist a student in the successful completion of the HDO program and should be taken in the spirit of useful and critical feedback.*

At the end of the spring semester, you are required to present the plan for your Capstone Project. There is a pitch session at the end of the summer semester.

If, at any point during the Spring, Summer, or Capstone-focused Fall, a student's advisor becomes concerned about their progress, they will complete a Capstone Feedback Form detailing the problem. The advisor will also list potential ways to resolve the problem (an additional revision, for example) and results if there is a lack of improvement (failure to pass the Capstone Project, for example). This form will be signed by the director and the student. *This form is to assist a student in the completion of their project and should be taken in the spirit of useful and critical feedback.*

There is an approval form that must be signed by each advisor and second reader. This form must be complete before a student may graduate.

Formatting requirements and suggestions

All Capstone Projects should:
- Include proper citation. Determine with your advisor what that citation style will be.
- Have a Table of Contents (TOC) and clear pagination. Visit this folder for TOC examples.
- Be formatted according to the intended audience and as agreed upon with your advisor.