

University Honors Capstone Project Handbook

*A resource for faculty-mentors and Honors students
to guide them through the capstone project experience.*



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Welcome to University Honors! We are glad to have you, and we are here to help! To follow is an overview of the Honors capstone project what it entails, and the support that Honors provides. If you have any questions, please feel free to email University Honors at honors@ucr.edu. Please take note that the portions that are highlighted are new for the 2026-27 year.

Goal of the Capstone Project:

The University Honors capstone project enables an undergraduate student to explore, develop, and complete an original project in collaboration with a faculty-mentor. Through this experience, a University Honors student contributes to the advancement of knowledge, consistent with the role of a research university. Under the direction of the faculty-mentor, each University Honors student will participate in one of three types of University Honors capstone projects. A student may:

- 1.) Conduct **research**, i.e. a scientific experiment, a policy analysis, a literature review, an archival project, or case study. [Click here for a research sample.](#)
- 2.) Engage in **creative activity**, in which they create an original work. Possibilities include a collection of poetry, novel, musical composition, dance performance, sculpture, painting, film, children's book, or play. [Click here for a creative sample.](#)
- 3.) Conduct an analysis of meaningful **experiential learning**, for example, a study-abroad experience or internship. The experience should become an example, not the focus, of the project, a lens into wider issues, not simply an exploration of personal growth. This type of project should involve research beyond the experience itself, for example, archival information, observational data, literature reviews, and/or interviews. A student choosing this pathway must outline a project with their faculty-mentor prior to the start of the experiential activity. Deadline to receive approval is Week 5 of when you are enrolled in HNPG150. [Click here for an experiential learning sample.](#)

Expectations of the Faculty-Mentor:

Any full-time faculty member with one of the following titles: *Assistant/Associate/Full Professor; Assistant/Associate/Full Professor of Teaching; Assistant/Associate/Full Professor of Practice; Assistant/Associate/Full Clinical Professor; or Cooperative Extension Specialist* is eligible to serve as a faculty-mentor. The faculty-mentor serves a crucial role in the exploration, development, and completion of a student's capstone project. Students who fulfill this requirement graduate with University Honors distinction. Once faculty-mentors sign a mentor agreement with an Honors student, they will be invited to join the Canvas course, "University Honors Faculty-Mentors and Instructors," which will provide general information and additional guidance if needed.

Below are suggestions that reflect a positive mentor-mentee relationship:

1. Become familiar with the University Honors Capstone Project Handbook.
2. Mentor up to three University Honors students during a given academic year.
3. Meet with the mentee at least bi-weekly to monitor progress and advise mentee on research/creative activity (i.e. capstone project content, editing, troubleshooting, discipline-specific formatting and citation conventions).
4. Guide the development of mentee ideas into a realistic capstone project.
5. Establish a timeline with the mentee for conducting and completing the capstone project.
6. Communicate with mentee about the methodologies/approaches needed to develop the idea.
7. Determine if project requires IRB approval and take the lead in drafting and submitting the application. We generally discourage University Honors students from pursuing projects requiring [Institutional Review Board \(IRB\)](#) approval, given the length of the approval process. As such, all projects using human subjects must receive

IRB approval by the last day in June of the mentee's third year. If approval is not obtained by this deadline, the faculty-mentor will work with the mentee to pivot to a non-IRB project and receive approval from the Honors Faculty Director by the last day in August of the mentee's third year. In absence of either approval or pivot, students will not be able to proceed with the capstone and it may lead to discontinuation from Honors.

8. If applicable, introduce mentee to other personnel on research/creative project, establish clear reporting lines between the student and other personnel, and explain the culture of the research group or creative collaboration.

9. Inform mentee of the unpredictable nature of research/ creative activity; the need for individual initiative, accountability, and adaptability; and the prospect that capstone project may not achieve expected results.

10. Provide quarterly progress reports regarding the mentee's research/creative activity to the Faculty Director of University Honors. Progress report forms will be provided through the mentee's enrollment in HNPG198H (Spring of third year); and HNPG199H (typically Fall, Winter, and Spring of the mentee's fourth year, pending graduation quarter).

11. If necessary, assist mentee in applying for [University Honors Funding or Scholarships](#) or other funding as needed to support their research/creative activity.

12. Provide feedback on drafts of the abstract, prospectus, and all project components.

13. Assist mentee with required oral presentation or poster presentation of capstone project, help mentee identify venue for same (e.g., Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity Symposium; discipline-specific conference; classroom setting; lab meeting; community event; etc.), attend mentee's oral / poster presentation or identify another faculty member to attend.

14. Complete University Honors Capstone Project Rubric (rubric appended), upon mentee's completion of capstone project, which will be provided to you as an online form. Rubric will be used to evaluate capstone project, not to assign a grade for HNPG 199H.

15. Attend the University Honors Cording Ceremony (Spring quarter).

16. Agree to archive mentee's research/creative activity in [eScholarship](#), no later than three years after capstone project's submission.

17. Contact University Honors staff for issues or concerns related to the mentee or their capstone project.

Expectations of the University Honors Student:

Completion of the University Honors capstone project involves effort beyond ordinary coursework. The responsibility for developing and completing the project rests with the student, in collaboration with their faculty-mentor. Throughout the capstone project experience, the student must demonstrate initiative, dedication, and determination. They must be willing to invest the time and intellect to produce an original project consistent with the ideals of University Honors.

Each student will be responsible for securing a faculty-mentor by the time they have completed HNPG 149 (typically the end of fall quarter of their 3rd year). In consultation with their faculty-mentor, the student should utilize the resources provided in HNPG150 to develop their capstone project. The student should also consult with [the Honors Faculty Director, the Honors Faculty Fellows, and](#) their designated Honors Counselor, as needed, for guidance. If a student experiences challenges with their capstone project that are not being addressed by their faculty-mentor, or if a student is experiencing challenges with their faculty-mentor, it is the student's responsibility to contact their designated Honors Counselor immediately.

It is important to understand that, consistent with the nature of an open-ended, intellectual activity, not every project in research, creative activity, or experiential activity will lead to clear-cut conclusions or expected results.

One of the many roles of the faculty-mentor is to guide the student through the process of handling a failed experiment, a null hypothesis, inconclusive results, or any other obstacle related to the research, creative activity, or experiential learning. “Unsuccessful” research can still be developed into a capstone project, as it “still contributes to the student’s knowledge of the particular topic.

As indicated above, each University Honors student will participate in one of three general types of University Honors capstone projects: Research, Creative Activity, or Experiential Learning. Regardless of the type of capstone project a student may pursue, the student should discuss with their faculty-mentor whether their project requires Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. IRB works within federal regulations to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research conducted under the auspices of the University of California, Riverside. The student and faculty-mentor should work collaboratively to seek IRB approval, if relevant. However, it is the mentor’s responsibility to submit the IRB application on behalf of the student. Please note that the IRB approval process can take several months, if not more, to complete.

Please note, we generally discourage University Honors students from pursuing projects requiring IRB approval, given the length of the approval process. As such, all projects using human subjects must receive IRB approval by the last day in June of the student’s third year. If approval is not obtained by this deadline, students are required to work with their faculty-mentor to pivot to a non-IRB project and receive approval from the Honors Faculty Director by the last day in August of the student’s third year. In absence of either approval or pivot, students will not be able to proceed with the capstone and it may lead to discontinuation from Honors

Support provided by University Honors:

University Honors prepares students to conduct research, engage in a creative activity, or participate in an experiential activity at a level worthy of University Honors distinction. The outcome of this distinctive work will be the completion of a capstone project. University Honors staff:

1. Assists each student as they develop their capstone project by:
 - a. Providing Honors coursework, Honors counseling, and Honors events that give students resources and opportunities for interacting with faculty members and selecting a faculty-mentor. A faculty-mentor must be selected by the completion of HNPG 149.
 - b. Requiring students to submit an abstract (Capstone Project Proposal Form), prospectus, and timeline related to their proposed capstone project in the mandatory HNPG 150 course winter quarter of the third year.
 - c. Exposing each student to the process of discovery in HNPG 150 and how to respond to difficulties during the discovery process.
 - d. Requiring each student to enroll in one unit of HNPG 198H during spring quarter of the third year and one unit of HNPG199H each successive quarter typically starting in the spring quarter of their fourth year until completion of the capstone project.
2. Trains each student, in HNPG 150, to optimize appropriate research materials and resources, including, but not limited to:
 - a. Navigating databases.
 - b. Accessing Intercampus Library Loans.
 - c. Reviewing special collections.
 - d. Developing bibliographic management tools.
 - e. Utilizing proper source citations based on their discipline-specific style-guide.
 - f. Distinguishing reputable and current academic sources.
 - g. Contacting appropriate scholars as primary resources.
 - h. Identifying, and applying for, research grants, scholarships, and other funding sources.
3. Refers each student to the Writing Support Program, in the Academic Resource Center, as needed, to write and review the capstone project.
4. Communicates with the faculty-mentor to foster a team effort in assisting the student with the capstone project.

Timeline for the Capstone Project:

The capstone project typically takes place during the student's final two years at UCR. Some students may initiate their projects earlier, in consultation with their faculty-mentor. A capstone project begins with the development of a original creative activity or experiential learning to explore, or a research question or hypothesis to pursue.

University Honors Counselors encourage students (as early as their first year) to consider their general areas of interest and then to think of a specific issue, topic, question, problem, or hypothesis related to that general area of interest. Honors coursework guides students through the capstone process, through the required classes outlined below:

Year 1, Fall quarter: HNPG 16/17/18 ("Ignition Seminars"). Small seminars taught by professors across campus to expose students to interdisciplinary thinking in an effort to help students begin thinking about ideas for their capstone project.

Year 2, Fall quarter: HNPG 002W ("Principles of Civic Engagement"). A Writing Across the Curriculum course taught by Honors Faculty Director Begoña Echeverria exploring contemporary issues at the regional, national and international level. Guest Speakers also share opportunities for academic and professional development, internships, community engagement, overseas study and financial resources.

Year 3, Fall quarter: HNPG149; Winter quarter: HNPG 150 ("Research & Creative Activity Across the Disciplines"); Spring quarter: HNPG 198H. All courses in the third year are overseen by the Honors Faculty Director and Honors Faculty Fellows to provide students the tools and resources to develop, solidify and pursue their capstone projects.

Year 4, all quarters: HNPG199H. Students focus on conducting their research, creative activity, or experiential activity and completing their capstone project. Involvement of the faculty-mentor is crucial during this period. The faculty-mentor should be available to meet regularly (bi-weekly, recommended) with the student; to offer information, support, and guidance throughout the research process and the writing process; to assist the student with overcoming obstacles and challenges; to proactively communicate with the student and their University Honors Counselor regarding any concerns; to offer suggestions pertaining to the format of the content; to review drafts of the project and offer constructive feedback; to generally encourage the student throughout the entire process; and to provide quarterly progress reports to the Faculty Director of University Honors.

A student's capstone project is due no later than 12:00 p.m., on the Thursday of Week 6, of their quarter of graduation (usually spring quarter). Please note that for successful capstone submission, a student's capstone will require approval from both the student's faculty-mentor and the Honors Faculty Director. At the time of the student's capstone submission, the faculty-mentor will receive a link to the Capstone Evaluation Rubric (included below). While this will not be used to determine the student's capstone grade, it will be used to determine whether or not the student receives high or highest distinction.

Capstone Project Submission Process and Formatting:

1. Requirements for written capstone

For most students, the written capstone must be a minimum of 4000 words for the body of the work. This excludes the capstone title page, abstract, acknowledgments, table of contents, references/works cited, charts, tables, and graphs. Students engaged in a creative activity, especially those in the humanities and fine arts, must provide a minimum of 1500 words describing the research and/or motivation behind the project in addition to the original work. Given the variety of research, creative activities, and experiential activities that exist, the student, together with their faculty-mentor, will determine the appropriate content and format of the final project. In general, the format should be consistent with the discipline-specific style guide. The student will be required to submit their capstone project electronically during their final quarter in HNPG 199H. University Honors will obtain the Faculty Director's signature on behalf of the student. With the faculty-mentor's approval, a student's capstone project will be archived in eScholarship, the University of California's open-access institutional repository. If copyright, publishing, or any other issues arise that prevent the student's work from being archived in eScholarship, the

faculty-mentor must request an embargo in writing to the University Honors Faculty Director, Dr.Begona Echeverria, at honorsdirector@ucr.edu.

2. Requirements for the oral presentation

The student will also be required to make a 15-minute oral presentation or poster of their project at the Undergraduate Research & Creative Activities Symposium., or other appropriate venue, such as: a discipline-specific conference; classroom; a lab meeting; a research-group meeting; a performance space; an exhibition gallery; or an appropriate community setting. The faculty-mentor or another UCR faculty member is required to attend their mentee's presentation, poster or presentation to evaluate it. The student must obtain from their faculty-mentor an e-mail verifying the faculty-mentor's review and approval of the student's capstone project and oral presentation, poster, performance, or exhibit. The student will then submit their capstone project and their faculty-mentor's approval in HNPG 199H, via eLearn. Oral presentations, presented as either a power point presentation or poster, will be required to use either a University Honors template or to place a University Honors logo onto their presentation (both will be provided on the HNPG199H platform).

3. Other submission & formatting considerations

All specific formatting instructions and templates from University Honors will be provided on the HNPG199H platform. A general overview of the organization of your capstone will also be included in those templates. Please note that in the Acknowledgments section, it is customary and appropriate etiquette to include the following language: "This project was completed in fulfillment of the requirements of University Honors at UC Riverside. Support for this capstone project was provided by University Honors staff and faculty, with special thanks to [indicate applicable staff and faculty]."

Capstone Projects with Shared Authorship and/or Collaboration with Others:

In rare cases, University Honors students work on capstones involving shared authorship and/or collaboration with others, including other University Honors students. These options must be approved in advance by the Faculty Director. For such projects, University Honors students will be required to indicate in the "Acknowledgements" section of the capstone project that the project was completed as a group-project, identify their group members, and explain their individual contribution to the project. If a capstone project results in a paper authored by multiple parties for submission to a publication, the University Honors student will be required to complete the items indicated above and submit a project separate from the paper submitted for publication, which highlights their contribution. If the University Honors student is the first-author of a paper submitted for publication, the paper can also be submitted as the capstone project. Students who have questions or concerns about this matter should contact their designated Honors Counselor.

The University of California and Capstone Project Copyrights:

Per the University of California policy, the copyrights to student works are generally retained by students, and not the university, as outlined at [UC Copyright website](#). University Honors does not own any copyrights to any capstone projects, under any circumstance. Questions about copyrights should be directed to the [Office of Scholarly Communications](#).

University of California's Open Access Policy and eScholarship:

The University of California has an [Open Access Policy](#) for Senate and non-Senate members. When made accessible through eScholarship, a student's capstone project is not being "published". It is, however, being deposited into a digital library, making it accessible to the general public. If a student's capstone project has any prior, pending, or potential publication elsewhere, the faculty-mentor and student should contact the publisher and check if there are any rules/conflicts pertaining to submitting the work to an open access platform.

If the student and/or faculty-mentor and/or any other relevant parties do not wish for the student's capstone project to be uploaded to eScholarship upon submission of the capstone project, the faculty-mentor must request an embargo by writing to the University Honors Faculty Director, Dr.Begona Echeverria, at honorsdirector@ucr.edu. An embargo of the capstone project is permitted for up to three years. During the embargo period, a citation of the student's work may appear on eScholarship, but the work will not be accessible until the embargo ends.

Capstone Evaluation Rubric:

This rubric is not intended to provide a letter grade for the student's capstone or HNPG199H course. It is an evaluative tool to provide Honors and the student with insight into the quality of their capstone and a means to determine a student's possible nomination for "High Distinction" or "Highest Distinction." Capstones must be submitted on time to be eligible for distinction.

Scale: 1 = Unacceptable · 2 = Needs Significant Improvement · 3 = Satisfactory · 4 = Good · 5 = Excellent

#	Capstone Content (30 points)
1	Originality, creativity & innovation — compared to established works in the genre/discipline, at the undergraduate level
2	Superior academic merit — rigor, comprehensive literature review, well-referenced
3	Question clearly identified within an academic framework — goals/objectives/hypothesis clear and effective, context developed
4	Methodology/approach appropriate for topic and discipline — comprehensive, well-developed, clearly contextualized among sources
5	Supporting evidence & body of knowledge — sufficient, well-utilized, contrasting perspectives discussed and synthesized
6	Conclusions & implications — well presented, qualified, significance clearly stated

#	Writing & Format (20 points)
1	No grammar, spelling, punctuation, or discipline-specific formatting errors
2	Organization is clear and effective
3	Sources and citations used correctly throughout
4	Language clearly & effectively communicates ideas — clarity, style, diction, readability appropriate to genre/discipline
#	Capstone Oral Component (5 points)
1	Student gave a polished presentation (talk or poster) (Strongly Disagree → Strongly Agree scale, scored 1–5)
#	Student Relationship with Capstone Project (25 points)
1	Practiced excellent time management — set, reflected on, and adjusted priorities/timelines; goals completed on time or early
2	Able to work independently as needed
3	Able to work collaboratively as needed
4	Was a "self-starter" and consistently demonstrated initiative
5	Identified potential issues, causes & solutions, and handled them professionally
#	Student Relationship with Faculty-Mentor (20 points)
1	Worked toward mutually agreed-upon goals
2	High standards of attendance, punctuality & professionalism
3	Responded thoughtfully to feedback and communications
4	Actively & consistently communicated with faculty-mentor on issues, resolutions & progress