

University of Portland
Department of English

Senior Capstone Handbook

The Capstone Project (also known as Senior Thesis) serves as the culmination of a student's preparation in the study of literature and writing. This project provides students with an opportunity for extended exploration of a topic of interest, usually but not always generated from a course taken in the senior year.

Goals:

- To develop expertise on a focused field of study through extensive research
- To become familiar with literary/cultural criticism as practiced by professional scholars
- To foster the student's ability to develop an extended argument using secondary sources to contextualize, support, or contrast that argument.
- Most importantly, to gain confidence as a reader and interpreter of literature and writer of literary criticism by entering an ongoing critical conversation
- **For creative writers, to understand writing as a craft by completing a body of work that demonstrates awareness and effective use of its genre's formal elements and that has a brief introduction which locates the work in the contemporary literary conversation in its genre.**

Possibilities include:

- Literary research
- Creative writing (poems, short fiction, essays), only for those who already have demonstrated some achievement in one of these forms. Creative projects must include an introduction situating the student's work in the context of contemporary writing in the same genre.
- Research about writing or the teaching of writing
- Linguistic studies
- Other projects that will bring to bear and help refine the skills, learning, and insight acquired in literary courses at the University of Portland
- Project may include slides, videos, web design, public performance, etc., as long as a written paper is also included.

Requirements and Guidelines

Who Needs to Apply?

- Applications are required from **all junior English majors**. In the event that a student will complete the English major in the junior year, the application process must be completed before the start of the student's final English class. Talk to your advisor about this possibility.
- Before beginning the capstone semester, students should have completed at least one 400-level literature course.

When Are Capstone Projects Planned for, Written, Completed?

- Capstone Projects can be completed in either semester of the **senior year**.
- The timeline for the Capstone Project (see below for full information) begins in the previous academic year, so plan accordingly.

- **Applications must be typed.**

How to Generate a Capstone Project Topic?

- Expand scope and increase depth of an already completed paper.
- Follow an interest in an author or subject.
- Build on existing body of imaginative writing developed in a workshop course.
- Pursue a field of research of common interest between student and advisor.
- Discuss an upcoming course with the professor teaching it, and develop an area of interest to pursue.

What does a Capstone Project Look Like?

- Consult samples by former students kept in the English Department Office.
- Check out “ENG 499” in the Library Reserves, where you’ll find more sample capstones, along with a helpful book, *How to Write a B. A. Thesis*, by Charles Lipson.

Process for applying:

- Students are encouraged to apply for specific courses to serve as the basis for their capstone project, in which case the project will substitute for some portion of that class’s coursework.
- Alternatively, if the project is coming out of some previous work with a faculty member, a student may apply for a freestanding 1-credit capstone, not attached to a class.
- Each application must include more than one course from which the thesis could come, and propose more than one professor with whom to work, since not all students will be assigned to their first choices.
- English faculty will evaluate each proposal and assign students to the appropriate courses and faculty members.
- Students will enroll in the course, if applicable, and in one hour of **English 499, Capstone Project**, with the professor. Enrollment in English 499 can only be completed by filling out a **Variable Credit Form** and getting the proper signatures.
- Students will consult with the professor to learn what portion of coursework the capstone project will substitute for.
- The one credit hour devoted to the capstone project will provide the student additional guidance from the professor in the completion of the project.

Honors students write theses that are in essence tutorials with individual professors. See the handbook for **Honors Senior Theses**.

Timeline

Junior Year:

- **November/December:** Read capstone handbook and think about topic possibilities.
- **January:** Consult English Department course offerings for the next year; consult with professors about courses and possible thesis topics.
- **February 15: Deadline to submit Capstone Project Proposal to Department Chair.**
Complete the proposal form (last page of this handbook), as specifically as possible. Priority will be given to projects that show the clearest connection to a course and/or the clearest explanation of a potential topic.
- **Mid-March:** Department responds to proposals and assigns each student to an appropriate course and/or faculty member.
- **Spring-Summer:** Begin to discuss project with thesis advisor; get started reading and brainstorming.

Senior Year:

- Advisor and advisee should have regular meetings during the semester in which credit is being earned for the Capstone Project. Determine specific goals for each meeting to avoid anxiety and procrastination.
- **See Capstone Syllabus for more information on timing and deadlines.**
- **Final week of class:** Submit final draft to advisor.
Final projects must be prepared following *MLA* format: typed, double-spaced (except poems), with 1" margins and 12 point type.
- **April:** Select students will make oral presentations on their capstone projects on Founders' Day.

ENGLISH 499: SENIOR CAPSTONE

SYLLABUS 2015-2016

Capstone Description

The Capstone Project serves as the culmination of a student's preparation in the study of literature and writing. This project provides students with an opportunity for extended exploration of a topic of interest generated from a course taken in the senior year. For most students, the capstone will take the form of an extended research paper. This paper will be significantly longer than other research papers you have written, but more importantly, it will also be more substantive. Your research will make you something of an expert on your chosen topic, and your capstone project will represent your contribution to the critical conversation you have entered.

Please see the Capstone Project Handbook for more details about the proposal process, types of projects that are acceptable, and the full timeline from junior to senior year.

Capstone Requirements and Grading Breakdown

*Note: the following are general guidelines; your faculty advisor may alter or augment them.

- **Participation 5% of grade**

You are required to be in regular communication with your advisor, and meet with him or her several times during the semester. It is your responsibility to initiate contact and set up and attend scheduled meetings.

- **Prospectus 5% of grade**

The first step of the capstone-writing process is the prospectus, because it's important to get your own ideas down on paper before you turn to reading about others' ideas on your topic. The prospectus is a 2-3 page statement including the following:

- a description of your topic/idea, with a brief narrative of how you came to it
- the main question(s) and/or tensions the project will aim to address [for now, it's probably best to hold off on coming up with a specific argument.]
- a description of primary texts to be studied
- possible approaches/areas of research
- a consideration of why the project matters
- a sample close reading: you choose a passage or scene and analyze it in the way you expect you might in the capstone paper itself

Criteria for Assessment

- level of specificity
- level of engagement
- specificity and sharpness of close reading section

- **Annotated Bibliography 10% of grade**

The next step is an annotated bibliography of approximately 10-20 sources. Each entry should include the following:

- full bibliographic citation (MLA format) for each source
- a summary of the author's main argument
- brief statement of other key points, what evidence and/or critical approach the author uses.

The annotated bibliography concludes with a **bibliographic essay**: a one-page summary in which you describe the critical debates and/or consensus you have discovered, and sketch out where your project fits within this context. You might also offer a tentative thesis at this point. It's also important to remember that, later in the writing process, you may come to new questions that will send you back to research; thus, the annotated bibliography may need to be added to at later stages.

Criteria for Assessment

- level of specificity and thoroughness with sources
- level of engagement
- proper MLA format
- focus and sharpness of the final summary statement

- **Working Draft(s) 10% of grade**

The number of drafts you write will depend on your own writing process; however, you need to produce at least one **complete** rough draft before handing in the final draft. Attached to the draft will be a 1-2 page self-analysis describing where the project is, what problems you are having, and what help you need at this stage. Please note that you are also welcome to submit early drafts or sections of the draft to your advisor anytime in advance of the final deadline.

Criteria for Assessment

- complete draft with potential and substance
- specificity and perceptiveness of self-analysis

- **Final Draft 70% of grade**

The final draft, including a bibliography, must be prepared following MLA style guidelines.

Criteria for Assessment

- Complex and interesting thesis, sustained and developed throughout the 20-30 pages
- Use of evidence and analysis of that evidence
- Degree to which secondary sources are integrated yet distinguished from your argument
- Clarity of structure, organization
- Free from grammatical and mechanical errors

Schedule

Note: at any stage, you may—and are encouraged to—turn in a preliminary draft of any of these items, and then revise that draft according to conferences with your advisor. The dates listed below are for final drafts of each item. We also strongly recommend that you meet with your advisor regularly in the early weeks of the semester.

Item due	Due	Fall date	Spring date
Prospectus	by Week 3	F Sept. 18 th	F Jan. 29 th
Annotated Bibliography	by Week 7	F Oct. 16 th	F Feb. 26 th
Working Draft	by Week 11	F Nov. 20 th	F Apr. 1 st
Final Draft	by Week 14	F Dec. 11 th	F Apr. 22 nd

A final note: Incompletes in English 499 are strongly discouraged and will be granted only in the event of a medical or other emergency.

CAPSTONE PROJECT PROPOSAL

The application must be typed. Please use these headings when typing your application. This form (and the whole handbook) is also available on the English Dept. website.

Name: _____

1. First Choice

a. Course _____

Semester offered: Fall or Spring

b. Professor _____

Preliminary description of project and justification for why this is your first choice:

2. Second Choice

a. Course _____

Semester offered: Fall or Spring

b. Professor _____

Preliminary description of project and justification for why this is your first choice:

3. Third Choice

a. Course _____

Semester offered: Fall or Spring

b. Professor _____

Preliminary description of project and justification for why this is your first choice:

Student signature _____

Date _____