

# MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY

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## HONORS SCHOOL

### **Thesis/Capstone Requirements and Procedures**

**REVISED SPRING 2022**

**HO 296 Thesis/Capstone Preparation (1 credit)  
HO 396 Thesis/Capstone Proposal (2 credits)  
HO 496 Thesis/ Capstone Completion (2 credits)**

## **I. THE HONORS RESEARCH THESIS AND CREATIVE CAPSTONE**

### **A. WHY WRITE AN HONORS THESIS OR DO A CAPSTONE PROJECT? <sup>1</sup>**

#### **Pursue Your Academic Passion**

An alum of MU's Honors School commented that the honors thesis should be called the "Honors Student's Passion Project". The honors thesis and creative capstone offers students the opportunity to own their education, ask unique questions, solve problems, and contribute to larger bodies of research or study. The Honors School encourages students to explore topics both within and outside their major and minor areas of study, as long as students meet four criteria:

- The student is passionate about the selected topic
- The student has college coursework in the selected area of study
- The student has a full-time professor with whom to work independently
- The project must be "do-able" given the time, materials, and other necessary resources available to them

#### **Develop Transferable Skills**

Regardless of your career path, the process of developing and crafting a feasible research/capstone project will hone skills that will serve you well in almost any future job. Writing an honors thesis/capstone demonstrates your ability to:

- ask challenging questions
- acquire the investigative skills needed to find answers
- navigate libraries, laboratories, archives, databases, and other research venues
- be flexible throughout comprehensive projects as your thesis/capstone is sure to twist and turn
- master the art of time management
- hone your analytic and argumentation skills
- organize a lengthy piece of writing or project
- orally communicate and present your work to potential clients and peers

#### **Work Closely with Faculty Mentors**

Your honors thesis/capstone offers the opportunity to work one-on-one with at least one, and sometimes two, faculty mentors. These faculty can enrich your intellectual development and possibly serve as invaluable references for graduate school and employment.

#### **Explore Future Professions**

An honors thesis/capstone will allow you to learn more about a particular field of interest. Learning through your thesis/capstone might help you decide whether (or not) to pursue that field in graduate school or in your future career.

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<sup>1</sup> Information on "Why write an honors thesis?" is borrowed and adapted from The Writing Center at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill <https://writingcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/honors-theses/>

## **B. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A RESEARCH THESIS AND CAPSTONE PROJECT?**

Both a research thesis and capstone project offer students the ability to envision, plan, and construct their own honors experience. Both can also vary widely in form, content, and process. Both demand a high level of scholarship, intellectual engagement, careful documentation, long-range planning, and time commitment. Honors students engaging in such work must place their project within a scholarly context in the field or craft, and reflect on the vision, process, and goals involved in shaping the thesis/capstone experience.

### **Research Thesis**

The honors research thesis is a substantial investigation of original thinking that offers students the opportunity to develop a carefully defined research question that can be answered by conducting empirical research. Students who conduct a research thesis answer a specific research question by conducting quantitative, qualitative, laboratory, experimental, and/or analytic research.

The structure and process of conducting an honors research thesis mirrors the research process using a positivistic model that students might encounter in conducting research in a graduate program. Such a model includes the construction of a unique research question, theoretical framework, literature review, and methodology, as well as the collection, analysis, and discussion of data.

NOTE: Students who will be including human subjects in their research will need to apply for and receive Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval.

### **Creative Capstone**

The Honors School encourages creative capstone projects that allow students to present their completed work in a form other than the standard written thesis model.<sup>2</sup> An honors capstone project consists of a combination of scholarship and creative work where the primary outcome can be a non-written or written creative endeavor that is grounded in scholarly research.

Creative projects include but are not limited to:

- learning units, curriculum, professional development workshops
- interactive or other new media, digital film, website designs, print media
- music recitals or curated art exhibits
- production of original art such as painting, photography, sculpture, musical or literary composition
- dance or theatrical performances
- screenplays or works of fiction
- computer games or other computerized projects
- business analyses and case studies

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<sup>2</sup> Information on the capstone project is borrowed and adapted from both James Madison University <https://www.jmu.edu/honors/handbook/creative-projects.shtml> and Barrett Honors College at Arizona State University: <https://barretthonors.asu.edu/thesis/guidebook>

NOTE: In addition to producing the creative project, capstone projects involve writing, both in the initial proposal through HO 396 and through a reflective/contextual essay in HO 496.

### C. WHAT SEQUENCE OF COURSES DO STUDENTS NEED TO TAKE FOR SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THE THESIS/CAPSTONE?

To graduate from the Monmouth University (MU) Honors School, students must complete an honors capstone project, conducted over three semesters of coursework (HO 296, HO 296, and HO 496). Drawing on extensive coursework in any area of interest in which MU offers faculty expertise, students will demonstrate the capacity to 1) organize and conduct advanced undergraduate-level research, **or** 2) design and implement an advanced undergraduate-level project in pursuit of solving an important problem or creating new knowledge in a particular field of study. The Honors School thesis/capstone project is intended to challenge students to draw on their intellectual passions, expand on what they have learned in class, and create a unique and innovative project to showcase as they move forward in their careers.

#### A. Overview of Research Thesis/Capstone Project Courses

To successfully complete the thesis/capstone project, the normal progression for honors students is:

1. *HO 296 Thesis/Capstone Preparation* (1 credit) (required for students entering in and after fall 2021; optional but highly recommended for students who entered prior to fall 2021)

HO 296 runs as a seminar class where students meet together in the classroom once per week with the professor. Students should register for HO 296 as they would any of their other courses. During the semester, students will explore possible research areas or scholarly endeavors, learn to identify relevant scholarly sources, write a literature review, identify possible faculty mentors, consider appropriate research methodologies, and learn about the remaining thesis/capstone process that they will undertake in HO 396 and HO 496.

To register for HO 296, honors students must have completed at least 30 credits and must have a minimum overall GPA of 3.3.

Students entering MU in fall 2021 and beyond must receive a B or higher in HO 296 in order to register for HO 396. Students who received a B- or lower should request permission from the Honors School Dean to retake HO 296.

2. *HO 396 Honors Thesis/Capstone Proposal* (2 credits) (required for all honors students)

HO 396 is the course in which students formally develop their project proposals under the direction of at least one professor (first reader) and possible additional professor (second reader) with expertise in the student's area(s) of interest related to the anticipated project.

HO 396 runs as an independent study, so students must pace themselves, arrange regular meetings with their reader(s), and keep track of their progress. HO 396 involves the student writing an introduction, a theory section (if relevant), a literature review drawing on at least 25 scholarly sources, and a detailed and comprehensive methods section that maps out how they will conduct their research (for a research thesis) or complete their project (for a creative capstone project). See Section F below for details.

To register for HO 396, honors students must have completed at least 60 credits and must have a minimum overall GPA of 3.3, as well as have received a B or higher in HO 296 (for those entering MU during fall 2021 and beyond).

Students must receive a B or higher in HO 396 in order to register for HO 496. Students who have earned an HO 396 grade of B- or below should request permission from the Honors School Dean to retake HO 396.

3. *HO 496 Thesis/Capstone Completion* (2 credits) (required for all honors students)

Completion of the thesis/project starts after successfully completed (B or above) HO 496 under the direction of the faculty reader(s), culminating with students presenting at the Honors School Research Conference.

Similar to HO 396, HO 496 runs as an independent study, so students must pace themselves, arrange regular meetings with their reader(s), and keep track of their progress. The contents and structure of the work students complete in HO 496 depends on whether students are conducting research theses or completing creative capstone projects (see Section H below for details).

To register for HO 496, honors students must have completed HO 396 with a grade of B or higher, must have a minimum overall GPA of 3.3, and must request and receive permission of the Honors School Dean.

All HO 496 students will present their thesis/capstone at either the fall or spring Honors School Research Conference. If students want their work to be considered for the Freed Award (see Section I below), they will need to receive an A in HO 496, submit their final thesis/capstone to the Honors School upon completion, and apply for consideration.

B. Important Notes

*Note 1:* Education and Medical Laboratory Science majors, as well as students in BA+MA programs should complete HO 296 in their sophomore year, and HO 396 and HO 496 during their junior year, leaving senior year for student teaching, lab work, and/or graduate-level classes.

*Note 2:* Students who are not enrolled in the Honors School may be able to take HO 296, 396, and 496 for free elective credits. Such students must request permission of the Honors School Dean and have academic qualifications comparable to those of current Honors School students entering each course.

*Note 3:* Students are strongly encouraged to submit an abstract of their papers/projects to any number of undergraduate conferences, including the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), the Northeast Regional Honors Council (NRHC), and/or the National Conferences on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) so that they can present their research at those academic meetings. To learn more and find the deadlines, please visit their webpages and/or contact the Honors School staff:

- National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC): <https://www.nchchonors.org/>
- Northeast Regional Honors Council Sociological Society (NRHC): <http://nrhchonors.org/2020-conference/>
- NCUR: [National Conferences on Undergraduate Research](#)

*Note 4:* With the support of their first or second readers, students may choose to submit their work to scholarly journals. The number and variety of scholarly venues are immense, and students should consult with their first reader to determine if the quality of a thesis/ project rises to the level of publication and if so, the possible venues to which to submit a revised or expanded version of the research thesis/capstone project.

*Note 5:* For students whose conference proposals or journal articles are accepted, a waiver of 1-2 upper-level Honors credits may be available. Consult the Honors School office for more details.

## **D. HO 396 AND HO 496 STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

### **A. Application Process**

- *Weeks 1-3:* Students should review the HO 396 or HO 496 application eform from Etrieve and meet with their first reader, second reader (if applicable) and the Honors School Dean to discuss their proposed thesis or capstone project.
- *Week 4:* By the end of week 4, students should have filled out the HO 396 or HO 496 eform and forwarded it to the Honors School for signatures and processing with the final review and approval from the Honors School Dean.

### **B. Meetings with the Readers, Advisor, and Dean**

#### **1. First Reader**

Students should meet with their first reader at least every other week, and schedule additional meetings as needed. Many students have found meeting more often with their first reader very helpful.

2. Meetings with the Second Reader

Students who have second readers should meet with their second reader at least three times during the semester, adding additional meetings as needed.

3. Meeting with the Honors School Dean

Students should meet with the Honors School Dean as needed to help support their progress throughout the honors thesis/capstone process. If students do not know what they want to study, which professors they want to work with, or any other challenges, they need to meet with the dean early and often!

C. IRB/IACUC Approval

When applicable, students must secure approval of the

- [IACUC](#) for any research involving vertebrate laboratory animals
- [IRB](#) for any research involving human subjects

D. Hardware/Software Connection Needs

Students requiring any new hardware or software to be connected to the university network must contact the Helpdesk/Information Management.

E. Midterm Draft Submission

Students must submit a midterm draft of their proposal (for HO 396) or final thesis/project (for HO 496) during Week 9 of the semester to their reader(s) and the Honors Dean.

F. Final Draft Submission

Students must submit the final draft of their proposal (for HO 396) or final thesis/project (for HO 496) during Week 13 of the semester to their reader(s) and the Honors Dean.

**NOTE 1:** Students should format the midterm and final drafts following a current professional format in the discipline or department most closely related to the thesis/capstone. The student should confirm with their first reader which professional document format should be used.

**NOTE 2:** For both the proposal and final thesis/project, students should include a title/cover page with the following information centered on the page:

Proposal Title  
Student's Name  
HO 396 Thesis/Capstone Proposal OR  
HO 496 Thesis/Capstone Completion  
Honors School  
Monmouth University  
Date  
First Reader's Name, First Reader  
Second Reader's Name, Second Reader

**E. ROLES OF THE HO 396 AND HO 496 READERS AND ADVISOR**

A. The Role of the First Reader

For HO 396 and HO 496, the first reader is the instructor of record who directs the student's work on the proposal and thesis/project. The first reader should be a full-time faculty member knowledgeable in the area of the student's thesis/project. The first reader receives a stipend and is primarily responsible for:

- Collaborating with the student to complete and signing the HO 396/HO 496 application form no later than the first week of the semester
- Meeting with the student at least twice a month to discuss and encourage progress
- Guiding the student in developing the scope of their research and approach
- Recommending to the student pertinent methods, materials, and scholarship
- Reviewing and commenting on the student's draft, submitted in Week 9
- Reviewing and commenting on the student's final version, submitted in Week 13
- Determining and submitting the student's midterm and final grades

B. The Role of the Second Reader

For HO 396 and HO 496, students may choose to ask a second professor to serve as Second Reader. The Second Reader is a professor who has expertise in some aspect of a student's thesis/project.

The second reader receives a stipend and is primarily responsible for

- Reviewing and signing the submitted HO 396/HO 496 application form no later than the second week of the semester
- Meeting with the student at least three times during the semester to discuss and encourage progress
- Reviewing and commenting on the student's draft, submitted in Week 9
- Reviewing and commenting on the student's final version, submitted in Week 13
- Assisting with determining the student's midterm and final grades if requested by the first reader

## F. HO 396: COMPONENTS OF THE THESIS/CAPSTONE PROPOSAL

The completed proposal is an important part of the thesis/project process and acts as a blueprint and foundation for the final project. For both research theses and capstone projects, the proposal should contain the following sections:

### A. Abstract

The abstract should briefly summarize the thesis statement or statement of problem, why that question is important, a brief description of theory and methods, and the major findings and/or conclusions of the study/project. The abstract should be no longer than 2-3 paragraphs in length.

### B. Introduction and Thesis Statement

The introduction and thesis statement identify the area of proposed research and its significance. Its two subsections are:

- Area of proposed research: This subsection states the proposed thesis topic, the main idea or hypothesis, and supporting points or reasons.
- Significance: Students must answer the “big, so what?” question. Why is this research important or relevant? Why should anyone care about the question your work is trying to answer or the problem you are trying to solve? This section should state how the proposed research or project is positioned within, contributes to, and relates to existing scholarship and/or previous work.

### C. Theory Section (optional)

For certain academic disciplines, a solid thesis/capstone is based upon a strong theoretical perspective or perspectives that drive(s) the research question, methodology, analysis, and conclusion. For those disciplines grounded in theory, students should work with their first and/or second reader(s) to select the theory or theories that best help them frame their research question. The theory section should

- Explain the theory/theories you are using
- State why you selected that theory/theories to guide your research
- Explain how your chosen theory/theories connects to your topic

### D. Literature Review

The literature review provides an overview of previously conducted and published scholarly research pertinent to the proposed thesis. This section demonstrates that the student knows the central themes or arguments in a scholarly body and is able to make connections among scholarly sources. This section should:

- Identify patterns/themes/central arguments in the field of scholarship
- Indicate how those themes inform the thesis/capstone main question.
  - Please note that a pattern/theme is not a single source. Rather, a pattern/theme is a recurrent specific argument the student observes in multiple scholarly sources. A body paragraph should state a pattern, present or summarize which sources articulate that pattern, and explain

how the proposed thesis will respond to the pattern by using it in some way.

- A “pattern” consisting of only one source should very much be the exception rather than the rule and is exceptional, making a unique but important argument in the scholarship.
- Include at least 25 scholarly sources.

E. Research Methods/Methods of Problem Solving

This section provides an overview of selected research methods. The Methods section should include:

- The research methodology stating the scholarly method(s) and/or research design that the proposed thesis/project will employ. In other words, students must explain how they will be answering their research question, solving the problem their project addresses, or addressing the creative question they are asking.
- The research resources/data/project resources stating the specific scholarly means by which students will conduct their research or carry out their projects. This section may include scholarly databases, peer-reviewed sources, web-based materials, questionnaires or surveys, interviews, policy, or any other related materials/information.

F. Reference Page/Works Cited

The reference page should list all of the works (scholarly and otherwise) that students referenced or relied upon to write their proposal. Students should confer with their first reader to determine the citation style used in the discipline most closely related to their field of study.

G. Appendix (optional)

Students may append to the proposal other materials as appropriate, such as but not limited to drafted portions of the thesis, annotated bibliography entries of non-scholarly/non-peer-reviewed sources found to be pertinent to the thesis, reproductions of materials to be included in a portfolio, documentation that the questionnaire or survey was approved by a review board, or professional correspondence pertaining to the project.

## G. HO 496: COMPONENTS OF THE RESEARCH THESIS/PROJECT COMPLETION

The structure of your final thesis/capstone project will depend on whether students are completing a research thesis or capstone project. This section outlines both types of works.

**NOTE 1: A below applies to BOTH a research thesis and capstone project.**

**NOTE 2: B below applies to ONLY a research thesis.**

**NOTE 3: C below applies to ONLY a capstone project.**

### A. Sections from HO 396 (for both research thesis and capstone project)

1. Students should include all of the sections they included in HO 396
  - Abstract
  - Introduction and Thesis Statement
  - Theory Section
  - Literature Review
  - Research Methods/Methods of Problem Solving
  - References/Works Cited
  - Appendix (optional)
2. Change the wording from present or future tense (e.g., “For this project, I will research....”) to past tense (e.g., “For this project, I researched...”).
3. Students should update any sections in which they made changes during their research/project completion phase. Often times, researchers need to tweak the methods they use or even the question they set out to ask. Final projects should reflect those changes.

### B. Final Sections for RESEARCH THESIS ONLY

#### 1. *Findings/Results*

The findings/results section presents the data and summarizes the student’s observations and findings. This section should contain tables, figures, or other visuals, as well as verbiage that summarizes the main findings and reveals any trends the student has found. Students should avoid interpreting the data in this section; this section is for reporting on what the student found, but not analyzing those findings.

#### 2. *Discussion*

The discussion section is the space for students to offer their interpretations of the findings/results. In this section, students should address the following questions:

- How do your results relate to the objectives of the study?
- How do your results relate to the results of your expected outcome stated in your proposal?
- How do your results relate to the results that might have been expected from background information based on the theory and previous empirical research discussed in the literature review?
- Do your results agree with or argue against the hypothesis?

### 3. *Conclusion*

In the concluding section, students should include

- A brief discussion of what they wanted the reader to have learned, how the study contributes knowledge to the field, and any implications or applications of the study.
- Changes they made in the study or a discussion of the implications of the findings related to any new hypotheses that might now be formulated and tested with further research as a result of the student's work.
- Limitations of the study.
- Suggestions for future research.

### C. Final Sections for CREATIVE CAPSTONE PROJECT ONLY

The final requirements for capstone projects completed in HO 496 are as follows:

#### 1. *Creative Work/Project*

Students should submit their creative work/project to their reader(s) and the Honors School Dean. For example, students can submit a video of a musical recital or theatrical performance; portfolio of high-quality digital images of a painting, sculpture, photography exhibit; a hard copy of a business plan; a learning unit, curriculum or professional development workshop; an active link to a website created by the student.

#### 2. *Reflective/Contextual Essay*

Students are required to write an essay that reflects on or contextualizes the capstone work. The essay should document in a formal way, the following items:

- Why this project is important within a broad context.
- What problem this project solved or question the project addressed.
- How the project unfolded over time.
- How the student generated ideas and made decisions.
- The actions, meetings, significant roadblocks and progress involved in the project.
- Overall themes, plans, and outcomes based on the original theoretical lens and previous research reviewed.
- Noteworthy moments from the project.

Honors students should consult with their faculty reader(s) to determine the essay's content, length, and organization. In all cases, the essay should demonstrate the student's educational process, mastery of existing applicable scholarship or craft in the field of study, and display thoughtful analysis and intellectual rigor.

**NOTE: Students should write their abstracts, introductions, and conclusions so that their thesis/project is understandable by a general audience. Any educated reader should be able to read the abstract, introduction, and conclusion and be able to understand the topic, approach, and conclusions of the paper/project.**

## **H. PRESENTING THE RESEARCH THESIS/CAPSTONE PROJECT**

All students completing an honors research thesis or capstone project must present their work at either the fall or spring Honors School Research Conference. The Honors School will contact students to register for the conference and submit an abstract.

The presentation should include the student's remarks and presentation (e.g., PowerPoint, Prezi, video, etc.), followed by responding to questions from the audience.

The student's remarks at the Honors School Research Conference are typically limited to 8 minutes with 2 minutes left for questions and answers. In rare cases when a student is unable to attend the Honors School Research Conference, the student will be required to give an extended presentation to a smaller group of faculty and students.

## **I. THE JANE FREED AWARD**

The Jane Freed Award is a competitive and prestigious award that commemorates a generous benefactor of the Honors School. The Jane Freed Award is granted to an Honors School thesis completed during the previous calendar year that the Honors Council deems to be the most outstanding. Generally only 1-2 awards are made per calendar year, with an additional 3-4 Honorable Mentions.

To be considered for the Jane Freed Award, students must:

- Receive an A in HO 496.
- Submit their final drafts in pdf format (if written) and shareable links (if creative video or other multimedia materials).
- Apply for consideration using the Honors School's application process.

In their deliberations, the Honors Council considers several criteria, including:

1. **Originality of Thesis:** Does the thesis go beyond a review of scholarship pertaining to a topic to demonstrate potential for an original contribution to scholarship in the field of study? Originality is the most important criterion.
2. **Depth and Range of Research:** Does the thesis demonstrate an insightful understanding of prior research, research variables, and the need for supporting evidence? In general, students should have completed, through a literature review, research involving at least twenty-five sources.
3. **Clarity of Argument:** Relative to disciplinary standards, is the hypothesis or main idea/question clear, and is the project developed in an organized, logical,

and persuasive manner? Does the author explain the broad importance of the work conducted?

4. **Quality of Presentation:** Is the thesis written in standard English, are all tables/equations/figures free from error, is the document formatted, and are source uses documented in a style appropriate to the discipline?

### **About Jane Freed**

Jane Freed was a proud alumna of Monmouth University, an active member of the Honors Council, a supporter of both the Monmouth University Field Hockey team and the Honors School, and a friend of the University.

In the 1970s, Jane Freed enrolled as an anthropology student at what was then Monmouth College. After graduating Summa Cum Laude in 1981, she continued her association with Monmouth as an assistant to Dr. William Mitchell, the founder of what was then the Honors Program.

Over the years, Jane Freed devoted her energies to the Honors Program, which became the Honors School, helping to increase enrollment, improve physical facilities, and enhance the school itself. Through her generosity, she established distinctive features of honors education at Monmouth that continue to this day, including grants to conduct research and attend conferences. Her grant to support the thesis award named in her honor was among her last efforts on behalf of the Honors School.

Jane Freed passed away on May 3, 2013. She will always be a part of the Honors School and Monmouth University. Her legacy has been embodied in the tree that was planted in her memory near the Great Hall at Shadow Lawn, but also in the seeds she helped plant in the minds of our Honors students.