The Honors Capstone Handbook offers students, faculty mentors, Departmental Honors Advisors, and academic advisors clear guidelines and advice for the successful completion of Honors capstone projects. Because a traditional long essay—or thesis—is just one of many possible capstone options, the handbook uses the broader term “capstone” to describe this final Honors project.

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Forms (available on the Honors website)
  Honors Graduation Checklist
  Honors Capstone Proposal
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What is the Purpose of an Honors Capstone Project?

As educational experiences designed to cap off the Honors curriculum, Honors capstone projects both showcase the value of an Honors education and act as springboards to the future. Honors students completing capstone projects learn far more than academic skills or new information: they develop as creative, critical, and engaged thinkers who can research independently, communicate and collaborate across disciplines, and articulate the impact of their ideas upon their communities. These skills will continue to shape their work on every future project they undertake. The capstone may be the first long-term project in a career of research and/or creative production, or it may allow students to practice other important professional skills, including both humility in response to success and resilience in the face of unexpected difficulties. Capstones need not be perfect; they just need to teach students how to become better thinkers, problem-solvers, and professionals.

Because these projects are designed to be both personally and professionally valuable to students, their topics vary according to a student’s major(s) and interests. Honors students begin the program with a dare to ask questions, seek answers, and share knowledge, and the Honors capstone is the ultimate “Dare to Know.” Having completed this project, Honors students leave USU as developing researchers or creative practitioners in their fields and skillful advocates for the value of their own work, qualities that distinguish them from their peers as they apply for jobs, graduate programs, fellowships, internships, or volunteer opportunities.

What Do Honors Students Value in the Capstone?

Honors students find the process of completing a capstone project to be both challenging and valuable. Our recent graduates can perhaps articulate most clearly the value of an Honors capstone experience:

Kira Anjewierden (General Music): My capstone “means more to me than any other assignment or project I have ever completed. It … helped me to reflect on and process years of thoughts and emotions regarding classes, coursework, field experiences, and interpersonal relationships.”

Jesse Fleri (Conservation and Restoration Ecology): “I came to college with little to no understanding of what I really wanted from my next four years; I will be leaving USU knowing exactly where I want to end up.”

Thomas Hill (Mathematics): “This summer I will be working for the National Security Agency as an applied research mathematician. I will be using the same research skills I have developed during my capstone, now with applications in encryption and signal analysis.”

Ashley Houston (Animal, Dairy, and Veterinary Sciences): “Perhaps my greatest reward is the relationships I have made with my mentor and Departmental Honors Advisor.”

Bailey Livingston (Management): “I now have a deeper understanding of how different forces in the world … create the society and social norms we experience every day.”

Morgan Sanford (English): “I want to continue asking questions, researching, and writing for the rest of my life. This document will be the writing sample that I use in my graduate school applications and it is, quite honestly, the reason I decided to go.”

Hyrum Tennant (Civil and Environmental Engineering): “The most valuable part of completing a capstone project is the experience you gain solving problems. If you are a good problem solver, it doesn’t really matter what you do in the future; you will always be able to come up with the solutions to any problem.”

Elizabeth Wynn (Psychology): “The challenges and setbacks, as well as the triumphs, of my capstone experience, have prepared me for my future pursuits in academia and a career.”

Who? Every Honors graduate completes a capstone, which is the final building block in the Honors curriculum.

What? Regardless of subject matter, the Honors capstone project demonstrates an Honors student’s ability to take responsibility for their educational experience by thinking independently, managing a long-term project, and communicating their ideas with others. The capstone requirement to collaborate with a mentoring professor guarantees every Honors student an intellectual, professional, and personal guide on the path to their post-graduation future. The capstone is an exciting opportunity to grow and prepare for the next steps, and students earn a total of **5 Honors points** (one for the proposal, one for the work plan, and three for the capstone itself) when they complete the capstone process.

Where? The foundational research or creative work of a capstone project can take place anywhere: in the field or at the library, on an internship or in the community, at USU or abroad. Students can also choose specific pathways to Honors graduation that shape where, how, and with whom they work. All Honors students qualify for the Undergraduate Research transcript designation. Those who study abroad and master a language can become Global Engagement Scholars, while those whose work clearly engages with and serves the community can earn the Community-Engaged Scholar designation. These transcript designations help to demonstrate where and how students engaged in their capstone work.

When? Students usually begin planning for capstones a year before they complete them (typically 3-4 semesters before graduation) by taking HONR 3900 (a pass/fail capstone preparation course) and submitting an Honors capstone proposal (the final assignment of HONR 3900, which earns 1 Honors point upon approval). They can also earn Honors points by completing Honors Mentoring Agreements for preliminary capstone research at any point, although the substantial research and writing required for the capstone itself cannot be part of any Honors Mentoring Agreement, in keeping with USU’s Academic Honesty/Integrity policy. Students typically take HONR 4900 or another approved Honors capstone course (e.g., ENGR Senior Design) in their final term of working on the capstone (which may or may not be the graduation term). **Students should enroll in their capstone course in the final term, since faculty mentors submit final grades for capstones at the end of that course.**

Why? Capstones are required for Honors graduation because, as student testimonials suggest, these projects define the undergraduate experience and shape each student’s future. Honors capstones offer professional training, opportunities to shape graduate school essays and publications, and evidence of independent initiative. Capstone mentors provide students with detailed recommendation letters, reliable advice about how to structure and complete their projects, connections to other professionals in their fields, and insight into the pursuit of professional goals.

How? While this question might initially seem overwhelming, the HONR 3900 course and this handbook—along with Honors faculty, staff, and peers—help students to break down the capstone process, gain confidence, and create projects they are proud to call their own. Our goal is not just to dare students to complete capstone projects, but to prepare them to meet that challenge successfully. Honors also supports capstone work financially: students can apply for up to $500 per term to support research, service, and creative work and up to $1000 one time for approved study abroad.
Required Parts of Every Honors Capstone

Honors capstones allow students to make and share research and creative discoveries with the help of faculty mentors. To that end, all Honors capstones include the following parts:

Research and Creative Work

Research and creative work require students to ask questions, seek knowledge and understanding, and share ideas with others. Honors capstone projects allow for curiosity and discovery through a range of activities, including lab work, field research, creative projects, professional apprenticeships, archival investigation, and close reading of literature. Students and faculty mentors work together to determine the final product that best meets discipline-specific norms and expectations (e.g., co-authored (or individual) publications, engineering or other discipline-specific data-analysis reports, business plans with professional analysis, argumentative thesis writing, and performances or other creative productions with thoughtful process analysis). Students then communicate their findings publicly through events such as poster sessions, conferences or research/creative symposia, and capstone project defenses. To help students understand the place of their own research and creative work within their disciplines, they typically create annotated bibliographies or literature reviews with the help of their faculty mentors; students should format all citations correctly, according to the accepted standards of their disciplines. This work is begun during the writing of the Honors capstone proposal and then typically polished, extended, and included in the capstone itself. Students whose research involves animals or human subjects (e.g., work with laboratory animals or human subjects and/or distribution of surveys) often need approval from the Institutional Review Board and/or the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee. Mentors and students should work together early and consult these websites for more information:

IRB Basics: Getting Started
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee Information

Faculty Mentoring

All Honors students create a capstone committee that includes a primary faculty mentor and at least one additional faculty member who must both approve the final project. The second committee member is often the Departmental Honors Advisor in the student’s or the primary mentor’s home department, but if the DHA is a student’s primary faculty mentor, another faculty member must also serve on the committee. Students may add a third member in a field related to the project’s topic, if they so choose. The role of primary faculty mentors is crucial: they work closely with students, helping them to focus and refine their capstones, develop realistic timelines and work plans, understand and address research and writing challenges, and revise, polish, and present their final products. The nature of this role demands that all primary Honors capstone mentors be full-time USU faculty members with a terminal degree or appropriate credentials in the major field (appropriate degrees or credentials may vary by field). Visiting or part-time instructors may serve as capstone committee members, provided they are available for the duration of the project; graduate students may not serve on an Honors capstone committee. The responsibilities of each person on the committee are laid out on pages 9-13 of this handbook.
Honors Capstone Proposal

Prior to enrolling in an Honors capstone course (typically HONR 4900 or ENGR Senior Design) in the term of capstone completion, students should enroll in HONR 3900, a one-credit (or auditable) class that supports them as they begin thinking about capstone projects. The course requires students to read past proposals, capstones, and reflections on the process, define their own projects, start forming a committee, and complete (with mentor help) and submit an Honors capstone proposal. Students who choose to work with a professor on an existing research project may quote and cite briefly from that mentor's research proposal in their own Honors capstone proposals, but they must very clearly define their own roles in such projects and distinguish their words and roles from those of the mentor. Please carefully follow the guidelines on the proposal form. In addition, if a student's major or minor requires all students to complete a non-Honors senior capstone course, Honors students may use that work as a starting point for an Honors project that deepens and extends the regular capstone experience in the major. With the help of their mentor, who may or may not be the instructor of that departmental capstone course, Honors students must articulate clearly and specifically in their Honors capstone proposals how their Honors projects will extend substantially beyond the work of the regular capstone experience in the major.

Honors Work Plan

The work plan adds detail and specifics to the general timeline that students submit with their capstone proposals and is thus due as soon as possible after earning Honors approval of the proposal (by early in the term before capstone completion and graduation). Work plans should include specific dates for completion of each part of the research, every submission of a draft to specific committee members, all planned mentor meetings or progress updates, the public presentation or defense, the submission of the final draft to the committee, and final delivery to Honors.

Final Product

All capstones involve research, in the broadest sense, and thus ask students not only to seek knowledge but also to communicate that knowledge to others. The final product, in whatever form(s), must be high quality work that makes both student and mentor proud. Students and faculty should allow plenty of time for multiple drafts, rehearsals, tests, revisions, etc. Future students and faculty will examine this work as a model, and Honors therefore approves only Honors capstone proposals and projects that clearly demonstrate the value and possibilities of such projects.

Just as the pursuit of knowledge may involve various types of work (laboratory, library, field, creative, analytical, or experiential), the resulting final product and public communication can take various forms. Final products should meet discipline-specific norms and expectations (e.g., co-authored (or individual) publications, engineering or other discipline-specific data-analysis reports, business plans with professional analysis, argumentative thesis writing, and performances or other creative productions with thoughtful process analysis). Public presentation of the work often occurs at events such as poster sessions, conferences or research/creative symposia, and capstone project defenses. In some cases (particularly with creative work), the final product is primarily the public presentation of the project (a show, performance, or organized event).

Length, Content, and Word Count: Students and faculty should consider the role of writing itself in the research/creative work as they determine the appropriate final product(s) for each project. Honors capstones that include material in addition to writing (experiential or field data, laboratory results, mathematical calculations, performances, photographs, art) must also include analytical
process-oriented writing (typically at least 5,000 words). Such word counts are guides: any discipline-appropriate body of work (including professional portfolios of artistic documentation, scientific diagrams, comparative charts, mechanical plans, or mathematical work) may be acceptable if the mentor and committee agree that the project represents substantial work in the field and serves the student’s present and future goals. In capstones taking the form of a thesis analyzing textual or archival materials, writing itself is the primary final product; these projects are typically the length of a publishable manuscript (about 10,000 words). Because academic standards vary across disciplines, mentors and students should discuss expectations as they design Honors capstone proposals. Suggested minimum word counts typically do not include bibliography, supplementary material, or appendices, unless that material is central to project documentation.

Capstones in the Major, Group Projects, and Honors (ENGR and some other majors): If a student’s major or minor requires its own non-Honors senior capstone experience, Honors students must clearly indicate within the final product itself and articulate in their reflection how their Honors capstone project exceeds and builds upon the requirements of the standard major’s capstone. Students who complete a capstone paper for a course in the major can either 1) complete a separate Honors capstone on a different topic, or 2) identify an aspect of their capstone in the major that they would like to explore in substantially more depth and greater detail. DHAs and other faculty mentors can help students to meet Honors requirements, in addition to the requirements for all students in the major.

Students completing group capstone projects in engineering or other fields cannot simply submit the group project re-formatted for Honors. Instead, they must do one of the following: 1) take the lead organizational and writing roles on a project and clearly define how those roles went beyond the requirements of the major, or 2) identify a part of the project that they would like to explore further and complete the additional work for that exploration alongside the group project (submitting both). Again, DHAs and other faculty mentors can help students to organize/expand projects in these ways.

Reflective Writing

All capstones include a detailed reflection (1000-1500 words) on the process and value of completing the project, submitted with the capstone to the entire committee. This reflection is the last in a series of reflections that define Honors work. Honors students learn throughout the program to articulate the value of their educational experiences and to tell the story of their intellectual development.

Honors capstone reflections are different and distinct from the required writing that comprises the body of the capstone itself. This difference is crucial: the capstone writing analyzes and presents the research or creative work of the project; the reflective writing articulates the value and meaning of the capstone experience. Reflections should articulate the problems, challenges, and triumphs involved in completing the capstone, and they often offer specific advice to future Honors students.

Great capstones achieve all of the following learning outcomes, and their reflections articulate both the method and the value of meeting each outcome:

1. Create a capstone experience for the student’s undergraduate education
2. Add substantially to the student’s overall education and/or future goals
3. Build a positive, meaningful mentor relationship in support of the student’s education and/or future goals
4. Deepen the student’s research experience within the major
5. Require critical thinking about topics in that major  
6. Broaden the student’s experience across disciplines (sometimes in more obvious ways than others, but students should always think broadly about the impact of their work)  
7. Engage the student in the local or global community (again, this engagement might be more (in a service-learning capstone) or less (in a more traditional thesis) obvious, but students should always reflect on the impact their work might have on others)

**Course Credits/Hours of Work**

Honors students should register for Honors capstone credit (typically three credit hours) **in the term that they plan to complete** the project, since their mentors will grade the finished capstone in that term. Most students register for HONR 4900, but they may also enroll in an approved (by committee and Honors Program) independent-study course in their majors, if necessary. Honors recommends registering for three credits to ensure that students complete approximately nine hours of work per week, including meetings, research, planning, project construction, and writing in their completion term. Please remember that most students spend time on research and/or creative work prior to this final semester, and they should therefore discuss the project timeline with their mentors early in the capstone process (i.e., during the proposal stage). Ultimately, the number of credits for the final capstone course is negotiable, depending on each student’s schedule and needs, but the overall amount of work is not. Capstone projects require at least as much time for students to finalize and write as an entire course in their completion term, but the work is focused on the management and completion of one substantial project, often over the course of at least a full year.

**Public Presentation**

All Honors capstone projects must be presented publicly at a conference, campus research symposium, public defense/discussion, performance, show, or other appropriate venue, and students must document that presentation by submitting a signed **Verification of Honors Capstone Public Presentation** form along with their capstone. In special cases of artistic performances, shows, major service projects, or extensive organized events, the public presentation of the project will actually be the final product of the capstone process. In such cases, a detailed professional portfolio of artistic or other relevant documentation can serve as the record of this crucial public presentation. In all cases, faculty mentors should help students to find the most appropriate venue for public presentation of their work and to document its completion. Spring graduates may participate in USU’s **Student Research Symposium** on campus in April, while fall graduates may choose to present at the Fall Research Symposium. Like faculty mentors, the University Honors Program is committed to helping students arrange public presentations, but it is the student’s responsibility to seek this support and guidance. Honors offers financial support of up to $500/term for presentation at off-campus venues; students must **apply** for this funding.

**Digital Commons**

All Honors capstone projects are archived in the Merrill-Cazier Library’s **Digital Commons**, as well as in the University Honors Program’s records. Before graduating, students must submit a signed **Electronic Capstone Approval** form, which either grants permission to publish the project in Digital Commons or requests an embargo or delay of posting in Digital Commons if their research is in the process of publication or is restricted by copyright or patent. The Honors Program must have this form on file before any capstone project can be made available on Digital Commons. Outstanding projects in Digital Commons may be used as examples for future Honors students preparing to complete capstone projects.
Finding a Topic

While it is important for students to find a topic that engages and inspires them to take ownership of their capstone project, topics often grow organically out of mentoring relationships and develop over time. As students imagine possible topics, they should look back at some of the academic questions and ideas that have excited or perplexed them during their time at USU. They should also carefully consider what might help them to take steps toward their long-term personal and professional goals. Students should remember that there is not one perfect capstone waiting to be discovered by each Honors graduate; the journey is often at least as important as the subject matter of the project. They should also be aware that topics can (and often do!) change and develop as students and faculty mentors collaborate. Students do not need to submit a new capstone proposal unless the topic changes enough that the faculty mentor and DHA believe that a new proposal is necessary to define the parameters of what has become a substantially different project than the one initially proposed (See FAQs on p.17).

The following tips might help students to find a topic as they embark on the capstone journey:

- Consider every class assignment, research opportunity, study abroad experience, internship, and co-curricular activity as an Honors “Dare to Know.” Take the dare by getting excited about ideas, developing academic passions, and exploring new interests wherever possible.

- Keep a journal or file of intriguing ideas, which might occur in classes, Book Labs, conversations with peers, professors, or staff, or extracurricular activities. No engaging idea is insignificant, and a pattern of academic excitement just might emerge.

- Build strong relationships with professors in classes and through research and creative work. Then choose a faculty mentor—or a few possible mentors—whose classes or research/creative work have made an impact on you. Discuss with that mentor your own ideas or the possibility of becoming an apprentice on the mentor’s research or creative work.

- Consider final products that might be most useful in moving into a future career, graduate school, or other lifetime goals, and talk to professors about how to create such products.

For students, the most important part of deciding on a capstone idea is talking with people whose ideas and research they admire and respect. Students can explain their own ideas and listen carefully to the responses of their respected mentors. Such conversations can turn thoughts or excitement into concrete research plans. It is normal for students to struggle as they begin to consider capstone ideas, but this struggle can be productive: the very act of exploring interests and ideas with other people through conversation leads to new connections and an ability to describe academic passions more fully and clearly. If students are willing to listen and observe others, opportunities often arise. Choosing a mentor first can even create a place on an existing research project. The role of research apprentice can lay the groundwork for future original research or creative project management. Remember that the capstone is just the first of many future projects that students will almost certainly be called upon to lead, manage, and complete. We recommend that students just get started, following their passions and interests through conversation and research into a project idea.
Building a Mentoring Committee: Members and Responsibilities

Committee Members

Every Honors student’s capstone committee consists of at least two different professors: the student’s primary faculty mentor and a Departmental Honors Advisor (DHA) in the student’s or primary faculty mentor’s home department. If the mentor and DHA are the same, students must add a second faculty member with useful expertise. Any student may add a third faculty member to the committee if they see a need for additional expertise. The Honors Program Executive Director also reads each final capstone to ensure a high level of achievement across the program as a whole.

Students should choose their faculty mentors carefully. Mentoring an Honors capstone project is a lot of work, but most faculty enjoy working with passionate students who share their academic interests.

Because professors are much more likely to agree to mentor the capstone project of a student who has proven themselves to be curious, passionate, or otherwise engaged with the field, students often find a primary faculty mentor in one of three ways: 1) by explaining their interests to the DHA, whose knowledge of faculty research/creative interests in the department might help to connect students with mentors; 2) researching faculty interests and then finding connections between those interests to their own project ideas; or 3) building several close working relationships with professors over time, demonstrating their ability in classes, research projects, Honors Mentoring Agreements, and departmental clubs or organizations that collaborate with faculty.

When choosing a second (or third) faculty committee member, students can continue to consult with their DHAs, whose understanding of both their disciplines and Honors makes them a great resource in building a committee. Students who have difficulty identifying faculty for these roles should make advising appointments with both their DHAs and the Honors Academic Advisor.

Brief Overview: Responsibilities (*Please see more detailed descriptions of student, faculty mentor, committee member(s), and University Honors Program responsibilities on the following pages.*)

Students are responsible for building a committee that consists of at least two faculty members, completing an Honors capstone proposal, submitting an Honors work plan, meeting all project deadlines, communicating regularly with committee members, arranging and documenting a public presentation, and formatting and submitting the final product according to Honors guidelines.

Faculty mentors are responsible for guiding students in proposing projects and developing work plans, mentoring research/writing processes, and ensuring high-quality work within the discipline.

DHAs ensure that the student is aware of and meeting both Honors requirements and disciplinary standards, and they approve each step in the process. An optional third (or alternative second, if the DHA and mentor are the same) committee member can add another kind of expertise to the project. This committee member shares the review and consultation responsibilities of the DHA but is not responsible for communicating Honors requirements to either the student or the faculty mentor.

The University Honors Program supports students and faculty mentors and ensures that all Honors capstone projects meet minimum program standards and deadlines and thus merit the award of the student’s final capstone Honors points.
Student Responsibilities

COURSES AND ADVISING:
- Enroll in (or audit) HONR 3900, a one-credit pass/fail course that asks students to read sample capstones and proposals, identify topics, find faculty mentors, finalize committee membership, and submit an Honors capstone proposal. Students who cannot complete this course meet with an Honors Advisor a year before capstone completion to schedule the appropriate preparation and training.
- Enroll in HONR 4900 or other Honors-approved capstone course (ENGR Senior Design) in the project completion term. Pass any required non-Honors major capstone courses first.
- Schedule an Honors Graduation Audit with the Honors Academic Advisor by the third week of the term before graduation to assess Honors points and map a path toward graduation with Honors.

PROPOSAL:
- Working with faculty mentor, complete an Honors capstone proposal following required format, including required deadlines and brief annotated bibliography or relevant resources (ENGR or industrial projects). Submit to committee and revise to earn full committee approval with signatures.
- Upload signed, completed proposal to Honors Canvas course; secure final approval from Honors by the beginning of the term before capstone completion/graduation.
- In rare cases, if a project changes in fundamental ways, students may need to submit and secure approval for a new proposal, at the discretion of the faculty mentor. No major project changes may be made after the second week of classes in the student’s final capstone/graduation term.

WORK PLAN:
- Complete and upload an approved, signed work plan, using the proposal timeline as a starting point. Include a detailed list of deadlines for research/creative work, draft submission, updates to DHA/committee, regular (twice/month) meetings with mentor, and public presentation time/place.
- Plan must include key dates, particularly submission of final draft to DHA and any other committee members (one week before the last day of classes), public presentation/defense (by the last day of classes), and final deadline to Honors (one week after the last day of classes).
- Agree upon work plan with mentor and DHA/committee members; upload signed form and plan to Honors early in the term before graduation or as soon as possible following approval of proposal.

PROFESSIONALISM AND DRAFTING:
- Follow the work plan in a timely and professional manner.
- Apply for appropriate research or travel funding to support the project (e.g., Honors Research and/or Study Abroad funding, URCO grants, USUSA support, departmental or college funding).
- Discuss any proposed changes to work plan or deadlines with faculty mentor well in advance of those deadlines; failure to do so might jeopardize Honors graduation.
- Submit to mentor all required drafts of the project and revise as instructed.
- Proofread and edit carefully. Honors and/or STEM writing tutors can help with this work—start early.
- Submit final draft to the DHA/committee one week before the last day of classes. Revise as instructed.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION:
- Arrange for public presentation of the project. Students should decide on the venue and make all arrangements, with mentor/Honors support. Public presentation or defense must be completed and documented by the last day of classes in student’s final completion/graduation term.

FINAL PRODUCT:
- Make all revisions suggested by faculty mentor, DHA, and/or other committee members.
- Submit the final product to Honors no later than one week after the last day of classes (see p. 16).
- The final product should be carefully proofread and formatted, and it must include both a signed an unsigned Honors Capstone Cover Page, a reflection and author bio, Verification of Honors Capstone Public Presentation, and Electronic Capstone Approval (see Honors website).
Faculty Mentor Responsibilities

COURSES:
- Work with students enrolled in HONR 3900 to finalize committee membership and to draft and polish an Honors capstone proposal.
- Serve as faculty mentor and instructor of record for HONR 4900 or other approved Honors capstone course (ENGR Senior Design) in the completion term. If students are required to complete a major capstone course, help them understand how the Honors capstone adds to and extends that work.

PROPOSAL:
- Mentor student in shaping capstone idea and writing the proposal. Ensure that the student follows proposal format, including a basic list of deadlines and brief annotated bibliography or literature review. The proposal should meet your standards for high-quality work in the discipline.
- Remind student of proposal deadlines: submit to Honors by end of HONR 3900 and secure Honors approval early in the term before capstone completion/graduation.
- In rare cases, if a project changes in fundamental ways, students may need to submit and secure approval for a new proposal, at the discretion of the faculty mentor. No major project changes may be made after the second week of classes in the student’s final capstone-completion/graduation term.

WORK PLAN:
- As soon as possible after proposal approval, work with the student to create a more detailed capstone work plan, building on the timeline in the proposal. Include specific deadlines for research/creative work, writing and draft submissions, reports to DHA/committee members, regular (usually at least twice monthly) meetings with faculty mentor, and time/venue for public presentation.
- Ensure that work plan includes all key dates, particularly submission of mentor-approved final draft to committee/DHA (one week before last day of classes), public presentation/defense (completed by the last day of classes), and final Honors deadline (one week after last day of classes).
- Prompt student to seek work plan approval from DHA/committee member(s) and then to upload the plan to the Honors Canvas course early in the term before graduation or soon after proposal approval.

PROJECT OVERSIGHT:
- Communicate with the student about the professional importance of following the work plan.
- Encourage the student to apply for research/travel project funding (e.g., Honors Research and/or Study Abroad funding, URCO grants, USUSA support, departmental or college funding).
- Students may not change deadlines without securing mentor approval well before the deadline they propose to change. If students miss two deadlines or ask for frequent, disruptive changes to the work plan, mentors should notify the Honors Program immediately.
- Require several drafts of the project and give the student prompt, detailed feedback. Final mentor-approved draft is due to committee no later than one week before the last day of classes in final term.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION:
- Discuss with the student possible venues for public presentation and encourage application, as appropriate, for Honors, university, and departmental travel funding. Public presentation or defense must be completed and documented by the last day of classes in the student’s completion/graduation term.

FINAL PRODUCT:
- Ensure that the student has made all of the committee’s required revisions and that the final product represents high-quality Honors work in the discipline. **Insist on proofreading and editing.**
- Communicate with student about final deadlines and requirements: students must submit carefully proofread and formatted final products, reflections, bios, and forms (see p. 16) to Honors no later than one week after the last day of classes in the term of graduation. **Sign only once read/approved.**
Departmental Honors Advisor/Committee Member Responsibilities

Committees may consist of 2-3 faculty members, depending on student and project needs. DHAs from the student’s or mentor’s home department typically serve as a second committee member, although some departments share this work among a select group of Honors faculty. If the mentor is the DHA, the student must add an additional committee member. While secondary committee members should have detailed knowledge of Honors, students and mentors may add tertiary members who bring additional expertise.

COURSES:
- DHAs are responsible for meeting with students enrolled in (or auditing) HONR 3900 and helping them to identify suitable faculty mentors, finalize committee membership, and review capstone project requirements in this handbook and on the Honors website.
- Students enroll in HONR 4900 or another approved course (ENGR Senior Design) for Honors capstone credit in their term of completion/graduation; substitutions require the entire committee’s (and Honors) approval.

PROPOSAL:
- Read proposal promptly once mentor and student complete it; a signature indicates approval, so committee members may offer feedback and should sign only once required changes are made.
- Support student in meeting proposal deadlines: students must upload proposals to the Honors Canvas course and secure Honors approval early in the term before capstone completion/graduation; substitutions require the entire committee’s (and Honors) approval.
- In rare cases, if project changes in fundamental ways, students may need to submit and secure approval for a new proposal, at the discretion of the faculty mentor. No major project changes may be made after the second week of the student’s final term.

WORK PLAN:
- Verify that work plan includes a timeline for regular updates to committee members on project progress and all key dates, particularly submission of mentor-approved final draft to committee (one week before last day of classes), public presentation/defense (by last day of classes), and final deadline to Honors (one week after last day of classes).
- Suggest changes and sign/approve plan; students should upload to the Honors Canvas course soon after proposal approval, as early as possible in the term before capstone completion/graduation.
- DHAs/committee members may choose to require students to submit drafts to them; please build due dates into the work plan.

PROJECT OVERSIGHT:
- Meet with the student as requested and indicated in the work plan. DHAs and committee members are not responsible for initiating meetings.
- DHAs/committee members who require drafts are responsible for returning prompt, detailed feedback, as indicated in the work plan.
- Expect to receive the mentor-approved final draft of project one week before the last day of classes.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION:
- Discuss with the student and mentor venues for public presentation and encourage application for appropriate funding from Honors, USU, and department/college. Public presentation or defense must be completed and documented by the last day of classes in the student’s completion/graduation term.

FINAL PRODUCT:
- Ensure that the student has made all of the committee’s revisions and that the final product represents high-quality Honors work in the discipline. Insist on proofreading and editing.
- Communicate with the student about deadlines and requirements for final product, which must be proofread, formatted, and submitted to Honors with all forms one week after the last day of classes. Sign only once read/approved.
University Honors Program Responsibilities

The Honors Program takes an active role in preparing students for capstone work but does not then oversee each project. Instead, required Honors Program approval ensures that all projects meet Honors standards.

COURSES AND ADVISING:
- Each term, Honors offers HONR 3900, a one-credit (or auditable) pass/fail course that requires students to read completed Honors capstone proposals, projects, and reflections; decide on a topic; find a faculty mentor; finalize committee membership; and submit an Honors capstone proposal.
- Students enroll in either HONR 4900 or another approved course (ENGR Senior Design) for Honors capstone credit in their final completion/graduation term; Honors advises students to take any required non-Honors capstone course in the major before enrolling for Honors capstone credit.
- Hold an Honors Graduation Audit with the student by the third week of the term before graduation to assess Honors points and map a path toward graduation with Honors.

PROPOSAL:
- The Executive Director gives final approval of the Honors capstone proposal; all proposals must be submitted as the final assignment of HONR 3900 and then resubmitted, if necessary, to earn Honors approval by the beginning of the term before capstone completion/graduation (fall or summer).

WORK PLAN:
- Honors archives capstone work plans and shares them with students and faculty.
- Honors staff members ensure that work plans are submitted soon after proposal approval (early in the term before graduation) and notify students and mentors if deadlines are missed.
- Once work plans are submitted, Honors verifies that they include key dates for submission of mentor-approved final draft to the committee (one week before the last day of classes), public presentation or defense (by the last day of classes), and submission of revised final project to Honors (one week after the last day of classes).

PROJECT OVERSIGHT:
- Honors staff members are available for individual consultations to answer questions about the capstone process and to provide support, as requested, to Honors students, faculty mentors, DHAs, and committee members.
- Honors guarantees timely review of applications to the Honors Research and Study Abroad Fund and supports students in applying for other funding.
- Honors staff members communicate with students about upcoming or missed deadlines, as appropriate.

PUBLIC PRESENTATION:
- Upon request, Honors can assist students in finding appropriate venues for public presentation and funding travel to off-campus presentation locations through the Honors Research Fund. Public presentation or defense must be completed and documented by the last day of classes in the student’s completion/graduation term.

FINAL PRODUCT:
- The Honors Writing Tutor can help students to edit, proofread, and format the final project. Honors staff members ensure that students submit a high-quality project by the deadline (one week after last day of classes) and include with the project the signed Honors Cover Page (indicating that mentor and committee members have read and approved the project), reflection and author bio, Verification of Honors Capstone Public Presentation, and Electronic Capstone Approval (see Honors website).
- The Honors Program Executive Director reads all capstone projects to ensure that they meet or exceed program standards and signs the cover page to indicate final program approval.
Checklist: Steps in the Honors Capstone Process

- **ENROLL IN HONR 3900** at least one year before capstone completion/graduation. Students in some disciplines requiring significant laboratory research, focused fieldwork, or practicum work/student teaching may have to enroll sophomore year in order to complete their capstone projects. Students who cannot enroll must meet with the Honors Academic Advisor at least a year before graduation to create a capstone plan.

- **SUBMIT HONORS CAPSTONE PROPOSAL**, either as the final assignment of HONR 3900 or independently, by the beginning of the term before completion/graduation.

- **COMPLETE ANY NON-HONORS MAJOR CAPSTONE COURSE** by the term before capstone completion/graduation (ask the Honors Academic Advisor and/or DHA about timing). Students ideally complete such courses before HONR 4900, since Honors capstones often build on or expand the work of a major capstone.

- **SUBMIT A DETAILED WORK PLAN** as soon as possible after earning Honors approval for the proposal, early in the term before completion/graduation.

- **COMPLETE AN HONORS GRADUATION AUDIT** with the Honors Academic Advisor by the end of the third week in the term before graduation. The audit identifies remaining Honors requirements, and the advisor helps create a plan for meeting them and graduating with Honors.

- **FOLLOW THE WORK PLAN**, submitting drafts to the mentor with plenty of time for revision.

- **ENROLL IN HONR 4900** or other Honors-approved Honors capstone course (ENGR Senior Design) in the term of project completion. Honors will set up HONR 4900 sections with the faculty mentor as the instructor of record to facilitate end-of-term evaluation.

- **SCHEDULE PUBLIC PRESENTATION OR DEFENSE** (See deadline for completion below.)

- **SUBMIT FINAL, MENTOR-APPROVED DRAFT TO DHA/COMMITTEE MEMBERS** no later than one week before the last day of classes in the student’s completion/graduation term.

- **DEFENSE AND/OR PUBLIC PRESENTATION** completed by the last day of classes in the student’s completion/graduation term and verified with signatures on the Verification of Honors Capstone Public Presentation form.

- **SUBMIT FINAL APPROVED CAPSTONE TO HONORS** by no later than one week after the last day of classes in the student’s completion/graduation term. Details for submission below.
Important Formatting Guidelines

Because disciplines have different standards and conventions, capstone projects do not all look the same. Below is the standard structure of an Honors capstone. Students should organize their projects in this recommended order, unless their faculty mentors decide that another discipline-specific format is more appropriate. All capstones must include REQUIRED sections indicated in BOLD.

1. **Title page (REQUIRED, not paginated)—see template**: Include signature lines for all committee members (mentor, DHA, other committee members) and the University Honors Program Executive Director. Please spell all names and titles correctly.

2. Copyright notice (recommended – not paginated): Honors recommends that students include the copyright page as the first page in any submitted document unless the research is subject to provision of research contracts, patent rights, or other agreements made by the student or faculty mentor with USU. Faculty and students should be aware that all capstone projects submitted to the Merrill-Cazier Library are for public use. Students should include a copyright notice immediately following the title page. This page should not be numbered; center the notice on the page and format it as follows:

   Copyright 2021 Student’s Name
   or
   © 2021 Student’s Name
   All Rights Reserved

3. **Abstract (REQUIRED: begin pagination here with lower-case Roman numerals—e.g., i, ii, iii...)**: The abstract is typically 250-500 words summarizing the project’s research question, methodology, and results/conclusions. An abstract is designed to help readers understand quickly and efficiently what the project does: please include any crucial part of your project (thesis statement, hypothesis, etc., depending on your field). See USU Digital Commons for examples.

4. Dedication/preface (optional – continue Roman pagination): usually very brief, e.g., “For my family.”

5. **Acknowledgements (REQUIRED: continue Roman pagination)**: Students typically thank their faculty mentors, any members of their research teams, their departments and colleges, and anyone else who has supported the project. They often thank organizations that helped fund any part of the project (USUSA, URCO, the University Honors Program, departments or colleges, etc.). They may also add personal acknowledgments (e.g., support from spouse, family, friends), as desired.

6. Table of Contents (recommended – not paginated itself; may be brief for some capstone projects): Indicate major sections of project and beginning page numbers, including chapters and appendices or, at a minimum, Final Written Product, Bibliography, and Reflective Writing sections.

7. List of Tables, Figures, Photos, Definitions, etc. (recommended if project includes such information: not paginated itself): Include page numbers on which tables, figures, or photos appear.

8. **Final Written Product (REQUIRED: begin Arabic (1, 2, 3) pagination)**: Must be completely edited and free of errors. Include word count of this section, if applicable, on the final page (see pp. 5-6 of this handbook for requirements).

9. **Reflective Writing (REQUIRED: continue Arabic pagination): Include word count** and see p. 6 of this handbook for requirements.

10. Endnotes (optional, depending on bibliographic style: continue Arabic pagination): Not necessary if using footnotes or if not including any notes.

11. Bibliography or Works Cited list (highly recommended but guided by discipline: continue Arabic pagination): Typically, at least 15 sources that the paper quotes or uses as background, formatted correctly according to disciplinary conventions.

12. Appendices (optional, depending on project: continue Arabic pagination for cover sheets or any included pages): If project includes non-written materials, please do include those materials, preferably on DVD or in charts/tables, in this section.

13. **Professional Author Bio (REQUIRED: continue Arabic pagination)**: Written in third person, this paragraph includes student’s major/minor, college academic accomplishments, and future plans.
Capstone Submission Instructions

All capstone forms are fillable PDFs that work only when downloaded to a computer and filled/signed in Adobe Acrobat. All students and faculty can download this software without costs by request from USU’s Information Technology Department.

Students submit their capstones by sending two important email messages to honors@usu.edu.

1. **MESSAGE #1**: Sent by regular email, this message should include **FOUR** separate PDF documents, as described below. Do not submit these documents with the Big File Transfer of your capstone project (message #2).
   - The **Electronic Approval Form** must be completed and sent as a distinct document. Please name this PDF file as follows: “Last name, First name_TERM YEAR_Electronic Approval Form” (Note: change “TERM YEAR” to “SPRING 2021” or appropriate graduation term.)
   - The **Capstone Cover Page** must be delivered as **two distinct files**, labeled “Last name, First name_TERM YEAR_Capstone Cover Blank [or Signed]”:
     - One copy with no signatures for Honors and USU records
     - A second copy with all signatures except that of the Honors Program Executive Director will need electronic signatures from your capstone mentor, DHA, and any additional committee members. Please send the form and ask them to sign electronically with Adobe Acrobat once they approve the project. Students may also request physical signatures, when possible.
   - The **Honors Presentation Verification Form** indicates successful completion of your required public presentation or defense of the capstone project and must be completed and sent as a distinct document. Please name this PDF file as follows: “Last name, First name_TERM YEAR_Presentation Verification Form.”

2. **MESSAGE #2**: Using the Big File Transfer system, please send to honors@usu.edu your complete capstone including all sections (except the cover page, sent in message #1) listed in the “Important Formatting Guidelines” on p. 15 of the Honors Capstone Handbook. Remember that all **bold** sections are required. Please name this PDF file as follows: “Last name, First name_TERM YEAR_Capstone.”

*Please follow the detailed capstone formatting guidelines on p. 15 of the Honors Capstone Handbook and in Canvas. Before you send your completed capstone to USU Honors, confirm that you have followed all formatting instructions and that all required sections are part of your PDF document.*
Frequently Asked Questions

Are students required to complete their Honors capstone projects in their majors?
Designed as the culmination of every Honors student’s undergraduate educational experience, the Honors capstone project usually focuses on some area of interest in the student’s major (or sometimes minor) field, although a related project focused on a passionate interest is acceptable. This choice allows students to develop close professional relationships with faculty in their academic disciplines or an area of particular interest. Because interdisciplinary learning is central to the Honors experience, students may also choose to pursue interdisciplinary projects, provided these projects extend disciplinary knowledge in meaningful ways. Students working in disciplines outside their majors often choose to add the DHA from the faculty mentor’s home department, rather than the DHA from the student’s home department, to the capstone committee.

Can students submit for Honors credit work completed in a major capstone or other course?
USU’s Academic Honesty/Integrity policy emphasizes the academic dishonesty of recycling, with minor additions or changes, a paper already completed and submitted for a grade or Honors in Practice work already submitted for Honors points. A student who proposes to add a different introduction or a longer conclusion, more examples, or illustrations to an existing paper is certainly not proposing anything that can be considered the capstone of an Honors education; such work is therefore unacceptable. However, a capstone project that builds upon and extends a student’s past work in new and deeper ways is indeed the capstone to an undergraduate education. Students often develop capstone ideas from successful Honors Mentoring Agreements (contracts), which students can productively use to test ideas and complete preliminary research in their areas of interest. Similarly, a required non-Honors capstone course in the major often allows a student to complete a chapter, portion, or starting point for an Honors capstone. Students completing group capstone projects in Engineering or other fields may include the group project as part of their Honors capstone, but they must also do one or both of the following: 1) take the lead organizational and writing roles on a project and clearly define how those roles went substantially beyond the requirements of the major, and/or 2) identify a part of the project that they would like to explore further and complete the additional work for that exploration alongside the group project (submitting both).

What if students cannot complete all of the work described in their Honors capstone proposals?
As students work on their capstone projects, they will almost certainly find that the project changes and develops in unexpected ways. Such changes are part of the research and creative processes and should cause no concern, so long as the project continues to grow and progress. As students complete preliminary research and creative work, they often collaborate with their faculty mentors and committee members to narrow or refocus the project as necessary. Similarly, if students discover that essential materials or equipment are unavailable, they can work with their mentors and committee members to modify the project appropriately. It is always acceptable for students to shift the focus of the project if they do so with the help of their mentors and with the agreement of all members of the Honors capstone committee. If students and committee members cannot come to an agreement about how to modify a project, the Honors Program Executive Director can help the group to find a solution. If the project changes in fundamental ways, students may need to submit and secure approval for a new Honors capstone proposal, at the discretion of the faculty mentor; such changes must earn approval of the entire committee, as well as Honors. No substantial project changes may be made after the second week of the student’s final term.

What happens if a student fails to complete the Honors capstone project?
Students graduate with Honors only if they complete their capstone projects, and the Honors Program makes every effort to help students succeed. In extenuating circumstances, if students cannot complete their projects, they should 1) immediately notify the Honors Program and Executive Director of the decision, and 2) understand that they will not earn an “A” in a designated Honors 4900 or other Honors capstone course. Honors will consult with the faculty mentor and the DHA/committee members to determine an alternate assignment (usually a shorter paper) and appropriate grade. If students make this decision early in the semester, they may withdraw from HONR 4900 or other approved Honors capstone course and register for an independent study in their major without penalty. Please consult with Honors staff about this possibility.
Resources and Assistance

Advising: Make an appointment to talk with the Honors Academic Advisor or a peer advisor.

Scholarships: Please see the Honors website for a complete list. Scholarships specifically designed to support students working on capstones include the following:

- **Helen B. Cannon and Lawrence O. Cannon Awards**: These $1500 scholarships are awarded to two outstanding juniors preparing to complete capstones in the coming year. One scholarship goes to a student in the humanities, arts, social sciences, business, or education; the other is awarded to a student in science, technology, engineering, or math. The awards committee reviews capstone plans, achievements in Honors, and future goals. Spring and fall graduates are welcome to apply by FEBRUARY 1.

- **Morse Scholarship**: This $500 scholarship is awarded to an outstanding junior with financial need who is working toward graduation with Honors in the coming year. The awards committee reviews capstone plans, achievements in Honors, and future goals. Apply by FEBRUARY 1.

- **Honors Research/Study Abroad Funds**: Students may apply for up to $500 per term to support research, conference travel, or other scholarly/creative activity and up to $1000 one time to support study abroad. Honors accepts applications on a rolling basis.

- **Undergraduate Research and Creative Opportunities (URCO) Grants**: Many Honors students apply for and win URCO grants for their capstone research. URCO deadlines are October 15, February 15 and June 15; more information is available on the Office of Research website.

Community Spaces and Resources: Honors students are invited to relax in our small student lounge (LLC A, Room 112) and to make use of these additional resources:

- **Honors Capstone Archives**: Honors projects completed since 2009 are available through USU Digital Commons. If you are interested in a particular pre-2009 capstone, please contact the Honors staff to make a request.

- **Library Computer and Study Room**: Honors students enjoy exclusive access to the Joyce Kinkead Honors Study Room (334H) on the third floor of the Merrill-Cazier Library. The room features computers and is open during regular library hours. Honors students can contact honors@usu.edu for the access code to the study room. We encourage students working on capstone projects to use this resource.

- **Honors Capstone Support on Canvas**: Honors creates and maintains a Canvas support course for all students working on capstone projects. All students who earn final approval on their Honors capstone proposals are automatically added to this cohort. Students may chat with peers, ask Honors staff specific questions, and find information about upcoming deadlines and opportunities in this course. Honors also holds regular cohort meetings and lunch Q&As for this group.

Writing and Editing: Honors hires a dedicated USU Writing Center Tutor, who holds regular office hours and is trained to help improve student writing at any level, from a paper for an introductory course to an Honors capstone project. The writing tutor can help students learn to proofread and edit effectively; students MUST do this polishing work on their capstone projects and are encouraged to make use of this resource.
Examples of Outstanding Capstones

These projects are available in the Honors Archive or in Digital Commons (2009-present). Please notice that some of these capstone projects have been published (citations and links included).

College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences

Animal, Dairy, and Veterinary Sciences

- Michaela Brubaker, “Fermentation of Prebiotics in Whole Food Powders by Probiotic Lactic-Acid Producing Bacterial Strains to Identify Synbiotic Combinations,” Spring 2019.

Applied Economics


Applied Sciences, Technology, and Education


Landscape Architecture


Nutrition, Dietetics, and Food Sciences


Plants, Soils, and Climate


Caine College of the Arts

Art


Interior Design

Music
- Kirsten Barker, “Pastoralism, Loss, and Nostalgia: Vaughan Williams’s The Lark Ascending as an Elegy for Environmental Disruption,” Spring 2021.

Music Therapy

Theatre Arts

Jon M. Huntsman School of Business

Economics

Management

Management Information Systems

Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services

Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education

Elementary Education
Psychology


College of Engineering

Biological Engineering


Civil and Environmental Engineering


Electrical and Computer Engineering


Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering


College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Anthropology


English

- Shay Larsen, “Graphic Memoir as a Tool for Imaginative Leaping,” Spring 2015
- Cambri McDonald Spear, “Reforming the Performance of Masculinity: Stephen Crane’s Critiques of Riis’s and Roosevelt’s Civic Militarism,” Fall 2014.
History

Journalism and Communication

Political Science

Sociology

Spanish
- Blain Chaise Housley and Brandon Kay Shumway, “Medical Interpretation in Cache Valley Clinics,” Fall 2013.

S. J. and Jessie E. Quinney College of Natural Resources

Watershed Science

Wildland Resources

College of Science

Biology

Biochemistry

**Computer Science**

**Geology**

**Mathematics**

**Mathematics Education**
- Michael Buhler, “Spock, Euler, and Madison” Graph Theory in the Classroom,” Fall 2012.

**Physics**

**Statistics**
Advice from Past Honors Students:

**Gracie Arnold (Marketing)**
“When […] students attempt to complete a capstone project, surrounding themselves with strong professionals and advisors can make all the difference.”

**Nicholas Decker (Landscape Architecture)**
“Seriously consider what you want to study in depth as you write your initial proposal. Professors are an excellent resource at this stage, especially because they understand what it takes to develop a thorough piece of research specific to your field. Spend time with them as a junior and, if possible, before then. Executing a thesis [capstone] project as part of a professor’s research is another excellent way to stay on track.”

**Luke Petersen (Agriculture)**
“Work closely with your supervising professor and try not to put it off until the end of your last semester. No matter how easy your class load might seem your last semester, you don’t have time to procrastinate.”

**Brooke Sorenson (Elementary Education)**
“Start early! Your thesis [capstone] isn’t a project that should be tackled in the last semester of your senior year because it should be something you are interested in or have been thinking about for several semesters. My thesis was the capstone of my education at Utah State, and I wanted to put the time into it that would make it a worthwhile project. When deciding just exactly how to complete my thesis, I found it very helpful to have another reason for completing it other than to fill the Honors requirement for graduation. A big project like this should be useful for something other than to sit on a shelf and never be read. I decided that, from my research, I could write an interesting article and get it published in a scholarly journal (which I did). I also used my research to conduct a good staff development/training meeting at my student-teaching elementary school. Being able to actually use my research for something was much more rewarding than just handing it in.”

**Sam Beirne (Wildlife Science)**
“I would … recommend starting the capstone process early and … writing at each stage of the process. Starting … early produces a more comprehensive and thorough paper. Writing at each stage of the process is a good way to document the project more effectively without trying to remember every detail at the last minute. I also kept a notebook with all of the components of my project for reference.”

**Sara Calicchia (Animal, Dairy, and Veterinary Science)**
“I was told to take extremely detailed notes in my laboratory journal during the laboratory research phase, and I am very thankful for that piece of advice. I had run so many different reactions and there were so many figures and results in the notebook that sifting through the critical parts of the procedure was a large task. After I found the information I needed, the Methods section was basically already written for me.”

**Michelle Pfost (Elementary Education)**
“A piece of advice that I would give future students completing an Honors thesis [capstone] is to make sure to choose a topic that you are passionate about. My first topic was one that I was interested in, but I knew that I wouldn’t be motivated enough to complete it. By doing something that I can actually use in my future career, I was able to complete this project even when being super busy! So, you can do it, and it is possible!”

**Laura Taylor (Interior Design)**
“I would recommend [that] future students … find some support at the peer level so that they are not always relying on support from their faculty advisor alone.”

**Matthew Wright – English**
“Immerse yourself in the project. Extracurricular, unsolicited, non-required research sets you miles ahead of the competition for grad school and job placement.”