

Capstone Handbook

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MORGRIDGE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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1. Introduction: What is a Capstone Project?

The Capstone Project is an academic study that offers an opportunity to explore a particular issue in much greater depth than is feasible in a class paper, and to argue your own perspective on that issue.

LIS 4901 Capstone (4 credit hours) is an alternative to the Practicum. Either the Capstone OR the Practicum is required for fulfillment of MLIS degree requirements.

Your project should be more than a synthesis of work already done on a particular topic; from your readings and data collection, you need to that justify the particular inquiry you undertake.

Please note that, while we anticipate that most Capstone Projects will result in a paper, you and your Faculty Supervisor may determine that a different format is most appropriate for your project.

This means that you are expected to:

- a) look critically at how others have defined the issue/problem;
- b) decide from your critical assessment of their attempts how *you* can best define the issue/problem; and
- c) evaluate the evidence other researchers may have already presented on the issue/problem to see whether a convincing analysis and answer have already been found.

You then need to:

- a) define the further questions that need to be addressed and decide which of these questions you can feasibly address in a small-scale study;
- d) define how you can gather data that will allow you to address those questions, again bearing in mind your limitations (time, access). You will need to justify your approach as the most appropriate one in the circumstances;
- e) define how you are going to analyze your material/data in order to be able to address your research questions, and justify this approach to analysis;
- f) conduct data collection and analysis; NOTE: Projects that involve data collection from human subjects will require an IRB approval. All IRB approvals MUST be received prior to beginning data collection.
- g) draw from your analysis the significant conclusions in answer to your research questions and relate your discussion of these back to your original “problem” or “question” (steps a to c above);
- h) discuss the limitations of your study in order to define its validity and use your discussion of limitations to explore your original approach to the “problem” further (e.g. specifying further research which could be undertaken);
- i) use your conclusions to specify some kind of output, e.g. scholarly, policy, or operational recommendations; and
- j) present your results in a form suitable to the topic and present your work to your Faculty Supervisor and Second Faculty Reader through a session open to the public. For the presentation, the most suitable form will be determined in consultation with your Faculty Supervisor. Examples of possible forms include a paper or report, poster, or website.

The key to a satisfactory project is the logical progression from introduction to conclusion; from research questions to investigation and to the conclusions which address the research questions in some significant way. That logic needs to be made clear to your readers.

While you cannot undertake sustained empirical research in the capstone setting, you should undertake some form of data collection and analysis which enables you to explore the question you identify in a way you judge to be appropriate. The study, then, is an opportunity, for you to make your contribution to Library and Information Science. It requires commitment, self-discipline, stamina and time spent identifying and collecting published research but it is also a challenging, stimulating and satisfying project.

2. The Details: What Do I Need to Do?

You must be approved to take LIS 4901 before you are able to register for the course. That means you will need to conduct a reasonable literature search and possibly several meetings with your Faculty Supervisor to develop a reasonable project and proposal. You **must** meet with and receive approval from your Faculty Supervisor and Second Reader at least the quarter before you intend to register for Capstone.

Institutional Review Board Approval. In addition, if your project involves the collection of data from human subjects, you will need to receive any relevant DU Institutional Review Board (IRB) approvals prior to beginning data collection. There are several steps involved in this approval process. Consult the DU Office of Research and Sponsored Programs compliance information at <http://www.du.edu/orsp/irb.html>. You will need your Faculty Supervisor's approval as one component of this process.

Topic:

The first step to the Capstone is identifying your topic. The topic is intended to reflect your overall interests, and be representative of your cumulative MLIS graduate experience. In addition, the Capstone should serve as a launch pad for your professional career.

Length of Paper:

The expected length of your paper is 20-25 pages, so the topic should be narrow enough that your research can be covered in the allotted number of pages. Identifying an alternative to the research paper format is an issue you will need to discuss with your faculty supervisor.

Other Forms:

If you, your Faculty Supervisor, and the Second Reader agree that a paper is not the most suitable format for your Capstone Project, the expectations of that final product must be developed in collaboration with your Supervisor and Reader and must be approved by them.

3. Faculty Supervisor and Second Faculty Reader

Faculty Supervisor

On the basis of your initial idea, you will identify an advisor from the DU LIS faculty who has some knowledge of the area in which you wish to work. Bear in mind that your Capstone supervisor will not necessarily be an expert on the *specific* question you wish to investigate; that expert in fact will be you. Students should make contact with their potential supervisor no later than the previous quarter.

The purpose of starting work on the Capstone project early is to read and study so as to arrive in the quarter of registration with a more focused topic and plan.

It is very important that you keep in touch with your supervisor. Each Capstone supervisor will notify you of a required meeting schedule.

Supervisors typically discuss issues such as the scope of the project, the academic suitability of your project, methodologies and resources to use, and sources of information or assistance, and the presentation of your work. In addition, they may comment on preliminary plans and drafts. If you encounter problems or are unsure about the way ahead, talk things over with your supervisor.

Your supervisor cannot offer any supervision which might be interpreted as substantially contributing to the project itself. For example, you should not expect your supervisor to revise a final draft of your study. Nor can she or he tell you in advance whether your draft paper will definitely pass or not.

Use your supervisor wisely. As far as possible, prepare for meetings by identifying beforehand what it is that you wish to discuss or feel you need help with. If you are asking your supervisor to give her or his opinion on your progress, please give her or him enough time (preferably at least a week) to read your work.

Second Reader

The role of the Second Reader is to evaluate the Capstone Project proposal and completed project. Your Faculty Supervisor is the ultimate decision-maker for you but you will need to have Second Reader approval. You should identify a Second Reader before you submit your proposal form. The Second Reader must be a permanent member of the DU LIS faculty. In rare cases there may be justification for a Third Reader outside the LIS Faculty.

Proposal Form and Approvals: Your Faculty Supervisor and Second Reader will schedule a meeting with you to discuss your proposal and suggest any necessary revisions. After the revisions have been made, you must complete a Capstone Project Proposal Form which includes a 2-3 paragraph tentative thesis topic and research design, and the signature of your advisor and Second Reader. Your advisor's signature indicates approval of the Project. Once you have completed the form, you will be given the CRN for registering for the Capstone. The form is found in **Appendix A**.

Deadlines

Deadlines for each part of the Capstone are listed below. Dates must be met by each student. **There will be no exceptions made on deadlines. Failure to do so will result in a lower grade or failure of the course.**

Quarter before	Student should be reading and taking notes for her or his Capstone topic; make initial contact with potential supervisor and with second faculty reader. Apply for IRB approval if pertinent. Set date for public presentation. Schedule room for public presentation.
Prior to term registration deadlines	Proposal Form for LIS 4901 must be approved by the Faculty Supervisor and Second Reader. CRN given to student. Planned schedule of meetings with advisor must be identified.
All quarter	The student is responsible for working independently and meeting with advisor according to the predetermined schedule.
Fifth week of quarter	Turn in a complete first draft to your supervisor.
Eighth week of quarter	Present your project to your Faculty Supervisor and Second Faculty Reader and in a public setting.
Tenth week of quarter	Submit final version to your supervisor.

4. How should the Capstone Paper and Presentation be Organized?

Most papers will be organized in the following way:

1. Title page
2. Abstract
3. Contents page
4. Introduction
5. Body: subheadings or sections dependent upon topic
6. Conclusions and recommendations
7. Bibliography
8. Appendices (optional)

Title Page

Your title page should give the title of your study, your name, the words “Library and Information Science Program: Capstone Project”, the submission date, and name of the faculty member who has supervised your work and the name of your Second Reader.

Abstract

Your study is a contribution to thinking in your chosen field. For this purpose, a brief summary of your study is required (250 words maximum) which will allow other researchers to get an idea of your approach and your conclusions. The usual structure for an abstract is given below:

Aim

What the study sets out to do

Background

The context and rationale for the project

Procedure

How the study is organized; what it covers

Method

The approach or methodology used in the study

Findings

The key findings of the study

Conclusions

The principle conclusions or recommendations.

Contents Page

The Contents Page provides your reader with a quick guide to what is in your study and how it is organized. It should contain the title of each of your sections or subheadings, along with appropriate page numbers. You should also present a list of figures, tables and appendices.

Introduction

Your Introduction is where you set out in detail what you intend to do in the rest of the study. It is also where you discuss your reasons for undertaking this particular inquiry. The Introduction defines the study. For that reason it is sometimes the last thing you write; it needs to be written based on the knowledge of what you have discovered in your inquiry.

It needs to contain:

- a description of *what* you are going to do
- a justification and description of your methods, i.e. *how* you intend to proceed
- a discussion of *why* it is important.

Subheadings and Sections

The subheadings or sections of your study are where you actually demonstrate your approach to the topic via the professional and scholarly literature and the research design, what you have done in your inquiry, and your findings. **How you organize them is up to you and your Supervising Faculty.**

Try to keep your overall title constantly in mind when you are starting and finishing a section. You need to help your reader see the relevance of each section to your overall question, summarized in your title.

Conclusion

Your Conclusion is where you draw together the results of your inquiry. What have you discovered in the process and why is it significant? Your conclusion is not just as a space in which you repeat what you have already said; talk about the results, but also think about discussing their wider implications.

Formatting of Document

A high level of care in document formatting is essential.

- Your study must be word-processed on 8.5" x 11" paper, and on one side of the page only.
- Your study must be double spaced throughout, except for quotations longer than three lines, which should be should be indented and single-spaced. Appendices should be single-spaced within entries, and 1.5 or double-spaced between entries. You should use 12 point standard font, e.g. Times or Arial.
- Pages must be numbered in the lower center.
- You should have margins of at least 1 inch all round your text.
- You must use the APA Style[®] for formatting citations and references. Guidelines are detailed in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition*. Most references should appear within the text, not in footnotes. If you feel footnotes with additional comments are necessary, then these should appear at the bottom of your page and kept to a minimum.
- Citations *must* be accurate. A bibliographical reference *must* be provided for all citations.
- Accuracy in your use of English is assumed, as is correct spelling. Please use a spell-checker and proof-read your work rigorously.
- Please ensure clear presentation of any tables, figures or diagrams.
- Finally, you *must*:
 - ensure confidentiality where appropriate when referring to informants or subjects of your research,
 - acknowledge any sources or other assistance meticulously.
- The document must be suitably formatted for paper and digital presentation.

Formatting of Public Presentation

During the topic and plan approval stage, you will work with your Faculty Supervisor to develop the structure and format of your public presentation. As a member of the LIS professional and scholarly community, it is important to share your work with others in the field. The structure of the public

presentation will depend upon the particulars of your project. Think of the public presentation as similar to a conference presentation. Any and all Capstone Project students in any given term will present on the same day, which is expected to be in the eighth week of the academic term.

5. Research Prior to Writing

Reading widely and tracking down the relevant literature is only the first step towards writing a good project. As a very rough guideline, you are likely to consult at least 30 books and/or articles in the course of your research. You are expected to have reviewed the relevant articles in the current journals and to have conducted a bibliographical search from either print-based and/or electronic abstracting data-bases. You should not rely on your supervisor to point you to the relevant recent literature on your question.

You are probably best advised to begin this work as soon as you can and certainly well before the start of the quarter. Even though we have great library resources at the University of Denver some key texts may not be immediately available on campus, thus you will probably need to request a number of texts/books and journal articles from interlibrary loans. Do this early on since it takes time.

6. Drafting

As you get more familiar with your topic, you will start to formulate your own assessments of the evidence currently available and develop your own arguments. A mere reporting of other scholars' theories obviously does not make a good research paper, however well organized. A Capstone Project must have an argument, that is, a logical progression from a question to an answer.

Your aim, then, is evaluate ideas and evidence, raise new questions, examine these questions systematically and coherently, and draw out well justified conclusions on the basis of what you have found. You are not required to put forward a revolutionary new theory or provide conclusive evidence to support a particular position. Nevertheless, you are expected to a) undertake a carefully considered inquiry using appropriate research tools which will allow you to draw some non-trivial conclusions, and b) indicate the limitations of your inquiry and, where appropriate, how other scholars might research your question more fully than you have.

7. Revising and Proofreading

A Capstone study should have a tight, coherent structure, show in-depth knowledge of the topic and develop logical arguments leading to careful conclusions. You must also follow referencing conventions rigorously. These are set out below. You should be meticulous about clarity of expression and spelling, as well as the presentation of any data.

Most of us are not good at proofreading our own work; ask somebody else to help you proofread your final version.

8. Guidelines for the Use of References

The Morgridge College of Education uses the APA citation style and reference guidelines. Consult with your advisor about the current edition in use.

9. Grading Guidelines

As a general guideline, broad descriptors for grading are given below.

Grade A

A Capstone project awarded an “A” grade should:

- Provide an independent perspective on knowledge and understanding.
- Demonstrate in-depth and balanced discussion of the question addressed (this should be reflected in the references).
- Be consistent in argumentation and analysis, with all stages in the argument supported by carefully evaluated academic evidence.
- Demonstrate a critical stance in relation to knowledge and understanding; in particular, the limitations of claims should be recognized, and there should be evidence that alternative views and approaches have been critically evaluated.
- Show clearly how conclusions are reached.
- Demonstrate that the inquiry itself has been conducted rationally and systematically.
- There should be an absolute minimum of technical errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and referencing.

Grade B

- A question/questions for investigation is/are clearly stated and supported by a rationale.
- The exposition may be orthodox and derived from established academic sources, but a representative coverage of the literature will be provided (this should be reflected in the bibliography).
- The argumentation may lack detail but will provide a coherent basis for addressing the questions for inquiry and will lead to investigation using broadly appropriate methods.
- There should be evidence that research methods have been selected taking into consideration issues of reliability, validity and ethics.
- Despite some digressions and irrelevancies, the inquiry will shed some light on the questions addressed and discussion of findings should link back to the theoretical rationale.
- The limitations of the inquiry will be addressed, leading to specifications for further research and/or development. The study should thus demonstrate some understanding of how to undertake independent investigation.

- There may be some technical weaknesses, e.g. errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation and referencing, but these should not significantly impede the reader.

NOTE: A grade of B- or below will not qualify your Capstone for approval as a degree requirement.

Incomplete

Incompletes will be considered only for students who have special documented circumstances and will be decided by the supervisor and program coordinator on a case-by-case basis. Students who have emergencies during the semester, such as illness or family emergency, should notify their supervisor immediately and not wait until the end of the term.

Appendix A: LIS 4991 Capstone Proposal Approval Form

NOTE: In addition to this form, you will need to provide a proposal that includes the following components:

- a. Introduction
- b. Brief description of related work
- c. Research question(s)
- d. Research method(s)
- e. Description of the final deliverable
- f. Short Reference List
- g. Timeline

Student Name: _____

Student ID: _____ Term of Capstone Registration: _____

Title of Capstone: _____

Student Signature and Date: _____

Faculty Supervisor Signature and Date: _____

Second Reader Signature and Date: _____

Please complete, including all signatures, and return this form to your faculty supervisor before the end of the quarter prior to the quarter in which you wish to register for the Capstone. After all approvals have been collected, your Faculty Supervisor will provide the CRN to you so that you can register for the class.