This is a guide to students and faculty involved in the Honors Capstone Project. Please address questions to the Honors Program Director.

**General Description**

The Honors Capstone Project is the capstone to a student’s academic work. It is a two-semester, three-credit research or creative endeavor undertaken during the student’s senior year. It should be in the area or areas of academic training a student has received, and is in addition to capstone for a student’s major. The Honors Capstone Project is the final academic requirement for the “Degree with Honors,” and as such it must represent an original research or creative project of sufficient scope to merit recognition as an Honors Capstone Project, and requiring an investment of the student’s time and effort that is at least equivalent to the extent of investment that would be required of the student in an advanced three-credit honors courses. Honors Capstone Project may be related to the capstone in the major; the two bodies of work may even reference each other. The same work cannot be submitted to satisfy the requirements for both, however.

The student is responsible for designing the content and form of the project in conjunction with committee members of the teaching faculty: a Project Advisor whose scholarly expertise is in the area of work chosen by the student, a Field Examiner who also has methodological expertise in the area of work chosen by the student, and a Faculty Examiner whose area of expertise is typically outside the area of work chosen by the student to ensure that the student can communicate the ideas in the project to others who are not expert in the area. The idea for the Honors Project is first submitted in a formal proposal that must receive approval from the Honors Council. This requires that an honors student register for both HON-498 (1 credit) in the fall semester and HON-499 (2 credits) in the spring semester. For education majors, it is advantageous to start this sequence a semester early.

All three committee members are involved in the evaluation of the project. Students are expected to make a public presentation of their Honors Capstone Project at the Honors Symposium held in the last third of April. A copy of the final version of the project must be submitted to the Honors Program Director.

**Basic Expectations**

Above all, we expect a student’s very best work. The Honors Project should reflect intellectual integrity and seriousness of purpose. It should also reflect a commitment of effort worthy of three credits of advanced work – that is, what a top student would accomplish in a 400-level course. The final product is expected to exhibit a high level of accomplishment.

The formal proposal should present a well thought-out and well-designed project that provides a clear statement and thorough explanation of the character, aim, procedures and significance of the proposed project.

It is expected that a student will pursue the project outlined in his or her proposal. Students should treat the proposal as a binding statement of intent. The Honors Council must therefore approve any significant deviation (i.e., one that changes its character or direction) from the project as proposed.
We also expect the student to make a public presentation of the project at the Honors Symposium. This 20- to 25-minute presentation should offer an articulate, though summary and discussion of the project that exhibits the student’s competence in the relevant area(s).

Preliminary Honors Project Proposal
The Preliminary Honors Project Proposal (the Preproposal) is due in the spring semester of the junior year. Guidelines for the Preproposal are in a separate document. Describe your basic idea for the Honors Project and have a faculty member who agrees to serve as the Project Advisor. Students must have an approved Preliminary Honors Project Proposal before they may register for HON 498. The Preliminary Proposal is designed to act as a draft of the Honors Project Proposal with the expectation that the student will work over the summer months to develop the project in accordance with suggestions and feedback provided by the Honors Council and the Project Advisor. Once a Preliminary Proposal has been approved, the student will not be permitted to submit a new topic for the Honors Project Proposal in the fall.

Honors Project Proposal
The Honors Project Proposal is a formal document that will act as a contract between the student, the Project Advisor, and the Honors Council. This proposal is due in the latter third of September and must be approved by the Honors Council. If a project is not approved, the student will not be able to complete the Honors Degree at St. Bonaventure University.

The proposal itself is described in several sections. Keep in mind that the proposal will be read and discussed by members of the Honor Council and possibly by ad hoc reviewers. The proposal should be able to convey the significance of your work to non-experts in your field of work and satisfy the methodological questions that might be demanded by experts in your field of work. Each of these should be addressed as fully as possible in the proposal:

1. **Title & Author.** Enter the provisional title for the project. It should be concise and precise; that is, it should provide the reader an exact idea of your project in the fewest possible words.

2. **Abstract.** Provide a brief, usually one paragraph, overview of the proposal.

3. **Background and rationale for project.** Review the relevant scholarly literature that sets the context for the work. Begin the narrative so that someone who is not an expert in the area can understand the importance of the work. Include definitions and in-text citations to credit the work of others. This review is targeted to provide a rationale for the work proposed.

4. **Theses/Goals/Hypotheses.** These should follow from and be justified by the preceding background and rationale. In combination with the previous section, it should be clear what is distinctive about this work as compared to the work that has come before it.

5. **Methods.** For the most part, projects fall into either group 1, 2, or 3 below. Provide discipline-specific procedures and processes that support the project. For example:
   1. **Empirical*: Roughly: Science, Business, Education, or Communication
      a. Describe the sample of human participants or nonhuman subjects
      b. Design (Should convey why certain choices were made, such as test conditions, variable, operational definitions…as they relate to the hypotheses under investigation.)
c. Procedures (Should convey how the plan will be executed, including the temporal order.)

d. Analysis (Probably a subsection of procedure detailing the anticipated statistical procedures including: descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, alpha levels, effect size, proportion of variance explained, confidence intervals. Power estimates may be particularly informative at the proposal stage.)

* Empirical studies, unless using publicly-available information, should be reviewed by the appropriate on-campus body that evaluates ethical practices in research, either the IRB for human participants or the IACUC for nonhuman subjects. The Honors Program Director, as the instructor of record for HON-498/499 should be copied on all correspondence between the student and either the IRB or IACUC.

2. Arts (Humanities) or Communication
   a. Describe the purpose, object, or subject of analysis
   b. Identify the critical or theoretical frameworks in use
   c. Discuss anticipated materials and activities related to the analysis; in the case of legal analysis, identify the laws or judicial decisions to be analyzed
   d. Describe the procedures or methods of analysis
   e. Indicate of what particular sources (primary, secondary, or other) are instrumental in the exploration; in the case of legal sources, distinguish “binding” from “persuasive” authority

3. Entrepreneurial
   a. These projects use entrepreneurship as a lens to examine a problem in the world
   b. MGT-330 is critical to complete before undertaking this kind of project
   c. Identify the need or problem to be addressed
   d. Identify concepts or findings from non-business areas that are critical
   e. Identify advisors from the business world who will provide feedback on iterations of the business ideas as they are refined
   f. Identify pitch competitions that will be entered
   g. Describe what the iterative process of revision is expected to be
   h. The goal is the process of testing assumptions, which may or may not result in the launch of a business

6. Possible Components of Final Product. Articulate as specifically as possible what the final product of the honors project will look like. If it will have the form of a written report or paper, provide a prospective table of contents. Otherwise provide an appropriate catalogue of its contents. The final product should be presented according to the accepted style for the discipline in which you are working: Those styles may be articulated by guides such as (but not limited to):
   - ACS Style (American Chemical Society)
   - The Associated Press Stylebook
   - The Chicago Manual of Style
   - Harvard Blue Book (legal citations)
   - MLA Style Manual
   - Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association
Students proposing creative projects are required to submit pertinent samples of their creative work. As appropriate for the field, creative projects should contain something along the lines of a critical essay reflecting on relevant features of their creative work.

The Honors Project Proposal should be a roadmap for two semesters’ of work. It is not a promise to figure out at a future date the relevant background or source materials or the relevant theoretical or methodological approaches. Proposals typically include at least three pages for the background, rationale, and theses/hypotheses/goals. two pages of procedure (typed, double-spaced and following a professional style guide). The most common reason that proposals are returned for revision is that the Honors Council has not been given enough information to determine for the proposed work the connection to existing scholarly work, the new contribution, or what procedures will be employed.

7. Explain how the Project Exhibits Critical Thinking.

The Association of American Colleges and Universities defines critical thinking as a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. Critical thinking attempts to avoid confirmation bias, the tendency to seek only information that is consistent with our beliefs or expectations and ignore information that contradicts our beliefs or expectations.

Science, in particular, looks for ways that an idea under consideration could be wrong, one-sided, not parsimonious, or oversimplified. This complements a confirmatory or positive test strategy. The disconfirmatory approach to critical thinking attempts to address the phenomenon of confirmation bias through falsification of plausible alternative explanations. This rests on the primary logically sound argument used in inference, disconfirmation of the consequent.

In other areas of scholarship, critical thinking may take the form of explicitly evaluating the traditions and assumptions from which one works. This approach to critical thinking attempts to address the phenomenon of confirmation bias through evaluating multiple perspectives on, approaches to, or assumptions about a topic. By putting different texts, methods, and frameworks into conversation, this should yield a new and productive interpretation.

On the Moodle page for your graduating class and for HON-498 and HON-499, two more resources, provided by two members of the Philosophy Department, describe critical thinking.

- Critical Thinking: Broad to Specific, Assessment, Disconfirmation
- Critical Thinking: Evidence and Conclusions

This portion of your proposal that addresses critical thinking should reflect the appropriate approaches described in one or both of the documents above.

8. References. We assume that throughout the proposal, citations will credit the work of others that have contributed to the formulation of the ideas. Such citation in the text and in the reference should be in the style characteristic of the area of scholarship in which you are working. List the sources that were cited in the proposal. Do not list sources that were not cited.
9. **Timeline.** The Honors Capstone Project is a large undertaking. Breaking this process down into smaller goals facilitates successful completion. Describe the components or stages of development of the project and the dates by which you will complete each of those stages across the two semesters of HON-498 and HON-499.