Honors Capstone Information for Faculty Advisors

Working with Students on the Project, What to Expect, Policies, and Procedures
What are HNR 440 and HNR 445?
HNR 440 is the honors capstone independent study that is counted as a business elective, and HNR 445 is the equivalent counted as an A&S elective (these courses were formerly known as ID 440/445). This is a semester long independent project carried out by senior honors students under the supervision of a faculty advisor. The intent of the project is to encourage research and discovery of a specific topic or area of interest, and introduce students to an in-depth, rigorous research process that they are unlikely to experience from many other courses.

Who can serve as a capstone advisor?
Any full-time faculty member at Bentley is allowed to serve as a capstone advisor. Each full-time faculty member is allowed to supervise a maximum of 2 students in any semester. In certain rare circumstances, PhD students or staff may supervise capstone projects, but this should be approved in advance with the Honors Program. Part-time and non-Bentley faculty are not eligible to supervise capstone projects.

What is the topic of the capstone?
Students are free to choose their own topics in consultation with a faculty advisor. The topic need not be within the student’s major, and can be within either a business (HNR 440) or A&S (HNR 445) field. Students should meet with the advisor to discuss potential topics. Some students will have a good idea of what topic they would like to pursue, however other students may not. In this case, feel free to suggest possible topics that you think may be interesting and accessible to the student. Ideally, the topic of the project should be aligned in some areas of knowledge or expertise you have as an advisor, but this is not a requirement. If you do not feel you can provide adequate guidance in a particular topic area, you should encourage exploration of topics you are more familiar with, or encourage the student to seek out an advisor with more specific knowledge in their area of interest.

How substantial is a capstone project?
The capstone is a full semester-long project worth 3 credits. The project is more substantial than a paper that would be assigned as part of a course, and it tends to be more substantial than a typical Directed Study. However, we must also remember that these are undergraduate (and not graduate) students. Their final product is unlikely to be something which could lead to a publishable work. It is important, however, for the student to put in a significant amount of time and effort into the project.

When does a student need to choose their topic and advisor?
Students need to choose their topic, get a faculty advisor, and submit a proposal the semester before their project is to be completed. So any student completing their capstone project in the spring semester would have needed to submit their proposal the prior fall semester, usually by mid-November. Students wanting to complete their capstone in the fall semester will have to submit their proposals to the Honors Program in the prior spring semester, usually by mid-April.

Do I have to agree to supervise an honors thesis?
Of course not. The idea is that students will match up with faculty who are willing to supervise and are interested in their topic. If you feel that a student is not pursuing a topic in your area or you will not have time to supervise a project then please feel free to decline. If possible, suggest an alternative advisor to the student. Although there is only one official supervisor, you and/or the student may seek assistance from additional faculty on their areas of expertise that may be helpful.
What is expected of a faculty advisor?
The purpose of the advisor is to periodically meet with the student and answer their questions, help guide them through the process of research and discovery, and lend your expertise. Our experience suggests that the literature review and the methodology sections of the project are most challenging for our students, and so closer guidance from advisors in these areas may be particularly helpful and necessary. In addition, students may find it very helpful to give your feedback and guidance on how to prepare presentation materials for the Honors Conference, as well as help in practicing their presentation skills in preparation for the conference.

How often the two of you meet is up to you, however, establishing firm meeting times is recommended. A good rule of thumb is once every two weeks, but this can vary of course depending on topic as well as other factors. The written proposal requires students to establish a timeline for the project, so a good way of keeping them on track is to require written deliverables at various stages of the project. To minimize procrastination on the students’ part, many advisors also find it useful to have students send an e-mail update every 1-2 weeks with their progress, in addition to face-to-face meetings.

How do projects get approved?
Students are required to write and submit a proposal for the project, which must be approved by the Honors Program. Writing and submitting the proposal is the sole responsibility of the student. The proposal is a document laying out the capstone topic and project plan. A well thought out, well written and organized proposal is a crucial part of a successful outcome of the project.

Students receive instructions from the Honors Program detailing the requirements for the proposal in one of several information sessions offered (they are required to attend at least one of these sessions). During the process of forming the proposal, students are required to meet at least once in person with their advisors to discuss their project and proposal, unless the advisor is on leave or other extenuating circumstances make it impossible to meet. The faculty advisor serves as the first proposal reviewer.

Students submit the proposal for approval to the Honors Program, and are required to CC their advisor on the email. When you receive this email from your student advisee, please ‘reply all’ and acknowledge that you have reviewed and approve of the proposal, and agree to supervise the student. Once submitted to the Honors Program, students may be asked to make revisions and resubmit the proposal to meet Program guidelines. Students are given specific guidelines about what they should include in the written proposal; in brief these include:

- Name and a working title
- A discussion of the significance of the study
- A problem statement
- An initial literature review
- A discussion of methodology which may be used
- An expected timeline for completion

As an optional element of the written proposal, students may also include a formal breakdown of graded components, as long as it is agreed upon by the advisor in advance. An example of a well thought out and organized proposal is attached at the end of this document (more are available on the Blackboard site for students to view).
**Can students work together on a single honors project?**
In general, students are strongly encouraged to work on separate, individual projects. In some instances, it may make sense based on the scope and scale of a topic or project to allow some students to work jointly on a single project. In this case, the students should clearly articulate why it is necessary and beneficial to work together. In addition, it is expected that each student will need to put in MORE time and effort than they would if they were doing an individually based topic. Joint projects should not be an opportunity for students to cut their workload and effort.

**Can I require students to begin working prior to the semester of completion?**
Yes! In fact it is suggested and highly encouraged that students begin pre-semester preparations in anticipation of the research that will be conducted during the semester of completion. Part of the pre-semester preparations naturally will come from investigating, writing and polishing the proposal. However, additional preparations for instance, in the form of readings over the winter/summer break is encouraged, and may be somewhat necessary depending on the topic. Keep in mind, however, that communication over breaks could be limited so self-contained work/assignments are probably best.

**What are the capstone project deadlines and student responsibilities?**
Students are required to have an advisor lined up and their proposals approved by the Honors Program the semester prior to completion (prior spring approval must occur no later than near the end of May for fall completion, and prior fall approval must occur no later than near the end of December for spring completion). The student is required to turn in the completed project to the faculty advisor by the first Monday in December (for completion of fall projects) and the first Monday in April (for completion of spring projects). You can then request that the student complete any changes before final grading.

Note that in all cases, students are solely responsible for meeting all requirements, dates, and deadlines. Students are expected to give a formal presentation on their findings, as well as submit a posterboard summary of their research at the Honors Conference held each year in April. The student is expected to turn in a final hard copy version of their paper to the Honors Program before the formal end of the semester. The paper should be delivered to the Honors Program Administrative Assistant, Adrienne Kaplan in hard copy.

**How do students get graded?**
The grade for the course is determined by the faculty advisor and submitted through the normal mechanism on MyBentley. As an advisor, you are responsible for determining and submitting a final grade for the student by the end of the final exam period. There are only two explicit criteria that advisors must consider as part of the grading process; the rest of the grade determination is up to the discretion of the advisor.

**Required Grading Components**
- **Proposal/Topic Meeting**: Meeting in person at least once with the advisor during the preceding semester of completion to discuss their topic ideas and/or proposal is required, and is the sole responsibility of the student to arrange and complete (unless physically impossible). Meeting at least once during this process should constitute at least 1% of the grade (this can be more, however, if the advisor wishes or wants to require more meetings).
Proposal Submission: The timely and complete submission of the student’s proposal to the Honors Program, which includes making any necessary revisions to the proposal by specified deadlines to the Honors Program should be at least 4% of the course grade. Note that this is predetermined prior to the semester in which the capstone takes place, since students will be submitting their proposal the semester prior. Because this is determined through the proposal submission process, this portion of the grade will be communicated to you directly from the Associate Director of the Honors Program. This part of the grade is based purely on students meeting the deadlines and submitting all the necessary information needed for a complete and approved proposal submission (and thus is not graded necessarily on quality of content). A prerequisite for students receiving full credit for the proposal submission is that they are required to attend one of the Capstone information sessions offered prior to writing the proposal.

If advisors wish to make the proposal submission process a larger part of the grade, or to grade the quality of the final submitted proposal, this is up to their discretion, and should be clearly communicated to students and agreed to up front.

Recommended Grading Components
Even the brightest and well-motivated of students can occasionally suffer from procrastination. Thus it is strongly encouraged, but not required that a portion of the grade should be based on whether students are meeting clearly articulated benchmarks and/or submitting specified deliverables on time throughout the semester-long process of research and writing. How this is measured or quantified is up to the discretion of the advisors, and so is open-ended. Grading here could be based on the timeline developed in the proposal, however keep in mind that as we all have experienced in our own research and writing, it is natural to have some setbacks and delays. Thus, you should be somewhat flexible in how you assess this if circumstances warrant, but firm enough to ensure students are not procrastinating.

Other discretionary grading criteria can include larger weights on the required components described above, and can also include (but are not limited to) other criteria deemed appropriate by the advisor such as:

- Quality of meeting discussions
- Revisions of paper drafts
- Quality of the submitted proposal
- Quality of the presentation at the Honors Conference (this one is only an option for spring completion, and of course requires the advisor to be present during the presentation; the Honors Program does not evaluate the presentations)
- Quality of the posterboard to be submitted for display at the Honors Conference
- Graded assignments or summaries, etc.
- Quality of final project

These are only listed for informational purposes, and ultimately determination of the discretionary component of the grade is up to the advisor, and will naturally vary based on the topic and needs of the project, student, and advisor. Note that it is important to communicate clearly in advance what your expectations are of the student whenever possible to ensure a timely, high quality, and successful project outcome.
The Fun Stuff!
Fall and spring Capstone Honors students present their research findings at the annual Spring Honors Conference, which generally takes place in April near the end of the semester. Advisors are encouraged to attend, as students always appreciate having the support of their faculty supervisors at the conference.

After presentations, advisors are invited later in the day to attend a cocktail reception and dinner. During the cocktail hour, posterboard summaries of the student projects will be on display. During dinner following, student projects are further highlighted. Two students will be presented with Best Projects awards, and one faculty advisor will be given a Capstone Advisor of the Year Award (The Honors Program will solicit for these award nominations for the academic year in March and early April).

Compensation
In addition to fame and glory, the faculty supervisor receives a stipend equivalent to that of a Directed Study.

Questions?
Feel free to contact Nathan Carter (Associate Director, Honors Program) in the Mathematics Department, x3171, ncarter@bentley.edu

On behalf of the Honors Program and its students, thank you so much for considering becoming an advisor. Your time and effort is very much appreciated!