



THE HONORS CAPSTONE YEARS: AFTER CANDIDACY

During your first two years, you participate in the Honors experience largely through the enriched academic environment of honors coursework for general education requirements and through other shared resources and opportunities. Once you are a candidate for SMBHC Scholar, you seek out the independent experiences that push you beyond the familiar challenges of the classroom. To this end, you frequently work alone rather than share the experience of learning; for a lot of time, you struggle without a clear guideline for moving forward, much less succeeding. Believe us, it's going to be great! During your last two years with the SMBHC, the years after you have applied for Candidacy, your honors experience assumes the shape you give it through your choices for your time, intelligence, and gifts. To put this another way, there is no single profile for an SMBHC Scholar. Your last two years, including your thesis, will be shaped by you.

Once you become a Candidate, the SMBHC supports you as you use our resources and challenges to become the Citizen Scholar you want to be, even if you do not yet know who that person is. Our expectations and support for your efforts will help you figure that out. We hope you will wrap the CAC requirement around your own wishes for the world. We hope you will continue to use Honors coursework and occasions to exercise your ability to see and think, and now also to imagine yourself among those carrying on the important conversations of the day. We expect you to plan and undertake the Honors Capstone—a scholarly, professional, and/or personal experience that will provide an immersive experience in the challenges and rewards of your major field and a final proof of your academic abilities.

The hallmark of these years, the Honors Capstone, is a structured, extended experience in your major field, culminating in an honors thesis. It is a means by which you develop your own scholarly or professional interests at an honors level. Because this advanced, independent work sets you apart from other university students, the Honors Capstone will benefit you as you apply for graduate/professional school or enter your chosen career. The thesis is not just a line on your résumé; it should be a talking point in your first job interview or your interview for med school. The Capstone work that leads up to it may be the avenue by which you pinpoint your dream graduate school, and get them to take your application seriously.

While there is an “end” for your Capstone in writing the honors thesis, there is no set starting point. Your Application for Candidacy is a sign of your intent to continue beyond two years, but no course or hurdle kicks off the Capstone stage of your Honors experience. You might discover to your surprise that the lectures from one of your core curriculum courses provide far more thoughtful pleasure than the prospect unfolding through your chosen major, or you find yourself holding deep conversations with a professor whose work you barely begin to

understand. If, during your first two years, something so galvanizes you that you cannot walk away, stop and go deeper. Construct your Capstone around that moment.

If that intensity does not happen during your first two years, don't be too concerned. There is a reason we posit the Honors Capstone as a Candidacy experience. You are just now moving beyond the rich but somewhat safe environment of the classroom or the course lab section. The key now is to recognize that you must take charge of your own development, not wait for honors classes (or any external challenge) to determine your direction or achievement. What you can and must do is this:

- seek a messy and meaningful involvement with the world,
- remain open to the questions you feel compelled to ask based on what you witness, and
- develop a discipline derived from caring so deeply about the answers that you no longer count the hours spent waiting and working toward them.

In other words, in these Capstone years, we expect you to move your challenges beyond the classroom and to keep your eyes open to the complexity and depth you encounter in the world beyond those walls. Here's how the SMBHC helps:

- Through our **Honors Fellowships**, we will support transformative study abroad experiences. Go to some place you expect will change and challenge you, and be prepared to be a different person when you return (and get your parents ready for it also!). Our fellowships also are available for unpaid internships or extended research experiences. Beyond the classroom, away from campus, out in the world – get out there and look around. We will help pay for it.
- Take an **honors experiential learning course**. It will not give you answers, but it will put you in wonderful company while you learn to ask the questions. And it will take you mentally (sometimes physically) into unstable territory.
- Risk the discomfort of deep conversations – We give you professors and staff who will listen and query and share their own disconcerting insights. The connection to professors from your honors coursework is not the common experience for undergraduates. Make the most of it. Take an **Honors Conversations** course with a faculty member or community leader who will ask you to think about what you never thought to think about before.
- We call it **Community Action Challenge** for a reason. CAC challenges you to move beyond your own comfort, and urges you to respond to a challenge in the community. During your Capstone years, why not give it a shape that looks like you, not like one of 800 other students? For two years, you have been generous in your service. If you also have basically been doing whatever work was put before you by an organization or friend, consider stepping back. What community issue really gets under your skin? What skills or talents do you have that might make a difference in changing that situation? Go after it. The SMBHC continues to welcome the extraordinary efforts of all honors students who serve the community; we eagerly await the outlier, the one who finds his or her own avenue for transforming a community.
- Suppose your Capstone is going to require an interview with a non-profit in California or Bolivia, or some minor equipment your research supervisor cannot supply. Ask us for

research funds. We have funds to support you as you pursue your Capstone work. Do you find that you have forged some coherence or maybe even managed a step forward in what we know about situation? Go risk talking about it in public. We have **conference funds** to help pay for you to present your work at conferences in your field.

These SMBHC resources are available to honors students at earlier stages of their studies, but they characterize the individuality and flexibility we believe must mark your post-Candidacy years, and they are meant to support the courage and creativity that Citizen Scholars will call on as they shape themselves, their fields, and their world.

Finding Pathways for the Honors Capstone

The Honors Capstone requires students, under faculty supervision, to undertake projects appropriate to their disciplines, and put into practice the theory and methodologies professionals in the field understand and practice themselves. Depending on your wishes as well as the expectations of your major, you might find yourself conducting bench science or intensely reading William Faulkner (is there another way to read Faulkner?). You might seek out an internship or create a portfolio, or prepare a senior show for your Capstone event. You might decide to demonstrate that English or history majors can do something besides teach, and art/music majors can do something besides lose themselves in their studios. Such efforts can position you just a little ahead of the crowd in the job market, and the Capstone energy supports those efforts as well as more traditional academic research.

In any and all cases, the honors thesis that caps your honors experience will take you further into the methodologies and questions of your major than most students are able to do through shared classrooms alone. Whatever its shape, the Capstone is the capstone of your academic experience. Your thesis testifies to that academic realm, but should not limit the design for your work. Figure out what problem or question or activity in your field is the one you want to lose/find yourself in; the thesis will give you ample opportunity to explore the discourse of the field and learn what insights over time contextualize the question and drive it forward. The thesis is your chance to add your voice to that discourse, on whatever terms are appropriate to the Capstone you are pursuing (subject to what your director tells you, of course!).

You have to be ready for this advanced work, which is why the Capstone must be in your major field (or your minor, if you have adequate training in it and seek the Dean's permission). Beyond that, the range is pretty much still to be determined. Show us what you can add. Consider the following examples:

- Undertake traditional research in a library or archive and write a near-graduate level paper that contributes to the academic discourse on the subject.
- Seek an internship or unpaid volunteer experience that gives a real-world basis for testing theoretical solutions, resulting in a handbook or critique of use to experts in the field.
- Tackle an unsolved problem through a senior design course; write up the twists and turns in your decisions, why you made them, and what you would do differently if you could.
- Write a policy to address an unmet or insufficiently managed public concern, and explain why other efforts have fallen short but this one will work.
- Prepare for student teaching (or a MS Teacher Corps application) by devising a

semester's worth of lesson plans for teaching fractions or *Macbeth* or how to balance a family budget, and show your academic mentors that you have mastered current theories of education and classroom management.

- Write that collection of short stories you hope will make you famous, and force yourself to name your models, your strengths and those weaknesses you cringe to expose.
- Do whatever capstone is required or encouraged by your major or minor, e.g., International Studies, ISS, various engineering programs, the accountancy alternate route. Someone in the field has already figured out a design to encourage a rigorous experience in the field. The Honors thesis-writing may or may not require an additional course, but a departmental capstone is a fine core experience for your Honors Capstone.
- Figure out what experience in your field you are eager to undergo, and do it; write a thesis that captures the risks and potential of the work so that your mentors and peers understand why it matters.

Incorporating the Capstone into Honors Coursework and Requirements

Your Capstone will contribute to the honors hours you earn as you reach or exceed our minimum 29 honors hours. How many of those honors hours are earned through the Capstone, when the coursework occurs, and how the work shows up on your transcript – that varies not just by discipline but by individual timelines and goals.

Some elements are common in all Capstone experiences:

- There is an accepted curricular structure to accommodate academic growth outside the classroom. Most majors and minors have appropriate coursework and, if they do not, the SMBHC has HON numbers that “float.”
- Your Capstone work (including the thesis) can receive a maximum of 9 honors hours.
- You are expected to be enrolled in a thesis-writing class during the semester in which you defend the thesis. A departmental course or an HON course will accommodate this work.
- When you are using a course as a home for Capstone work, **you and your advisor should discuss grading criteria and how frequently you will meet.** Be sure you are clear about the work required of you each time and by the end of the semester. If you are in a course, you are earning a grade even if this doesn't look like a classroom to you.
- You will have to tell us your Capstone Plan for conducting and completing the coursework; otherwise, we cannot tell how to award the honors credit or how to support you during your Capstone.

For more on the curricular structure, go to the Honors website to find a list of the courses “Commonly Used” for the Capstone. **Usually, but not always, a course taken for your Capstone work will also count toward your major.** Check the Academic Catalogue or talk with your department chair if you have concerns about using the Honors Capstone to satisfy requirements in your major. Ask especially about fulfilling the major's electives at the 300- or 400-level. Often, that is where the Honors Capstone can contribute to your major as well as your honors hours. **The academic coursework that houses your Capstone will receive honors credit whatever the departmental designation.** You should not use HON courses if departmental courses are available. The form for your Capstone Plan, submitted before you

begin your Capstone project, will give us the information we need in order to award honors credit for a departmental course, or to enroll you in the HON coursework for the thesis.

The Honors Thesis

Your Capstone culminates in your Honors thesis. Regardless of the nature of the Capstone core work, the thesis is an academic product, written according to the academic standards of your major. As such, the thesis always involves research. The amount of research, how much is required, and when it is conducted will vary by field and by the individual Capstone efforts. Even when the Capstone core experience has followed a nontraditional path (e.g., an internship, a series of lesson plans, a recital), the thesis requires a lesser but still appropriate degree of traditional academic research. Some of this research may occur while you are wrestling with the work itself, in the effort to perform that work at the highest and most current level. Some of it might occur during the thesis-writing semester(s) as you become an active participant in the professional discourse about your topic. The honors theses housed in the on-line Repository or in room 315 will provide examples of the range of approaches available to you for your thesis. Use the past theses to settle your nerves and whet your appetite.

The Honors thesis is ultimately a demonstration of the “scholar” in “citizen scholar”:

- the thesis (obviously, like the Capstone) must be in your major, unless approved by the Dean of the Honors College;
- if your major requires a thesis (as does International Studies), the SMBHC accepts that thesis as satisfying our honors thesis requirement;
- you should plan on enrolling in an appropriate course for your thesis-writing; you will earn honors credit for this coursework, probably three to six hours depending on the field;
- the length of the thesis will vary from 30 to 100 pages depending on the your major. A student in the sciences, having spent much time in the laboratory, will write a thesis of about 30 pages; a student in the humanities will write one of about 60 to 100 pages;
- if the core of your Capstone experience was a creation of some outcome appropriate to your field (e.g., a collection of short stories, a recital, a semester’s lesson plans), your thesis provides the academic discourse that grounds that work in your understanding of the challenges and potentials of the field at this time;
- the student must defend the thesis before a committee of three people; the thesis advisor, another faculty member from the student’s major department (chosen by the student and the mentor), and another professor designated by the Honor’s Dean; a final copy of the thesis should be provided to the committee members at least two weeks prior to the date for which the defense is scheduled and no later than April 1 to provide them time to read and respond to it before the thesis;
- the thesis must be defended no later than the last day of classes in the semester the student expects to graduate. It is usually written during the student’s last semester on

campus, but may be written whenever the Capstone is complete and the student is ready to write the thesis.

Strategy for Exploring the Honors Capstone Possibilities

Even in your first two years, use your up-coming Capstone to open conversations with your faculty mentors, and to hold deep conversations with your peers. Call on your colleagues and support systems to help you determine what areas and skills you hope will be part of your Citizen Scholar experience. Explore the ways professionals in your field conduct their work and find a mentor who will supervise your own professional efforts. Think what sort of effort in your field would let you indulge in your own particular interests at a high level. When you have an idea in mind, identify faculty members who have similar interests or ongoing research projects in similar areas. Because an Honors thesis will be the end product of your Capstone, use BEAR (the Undergraduate Research Database) and the SMBHC Thesis Database to understand the size and scope of Honors Capstones as well as know who in your department has already supervised Honors Capstone work. Departmental websites have links to faculty pages where you can learn about faculty research interests. Make an appointment to discuss your ideas with them, or to learn more about what challenges drive their own work.

You may find that you have to rethink your idea several times before you have one that is interesting, reasonable, and within the limits of available time and resources. You should also be sure to ask the faculty member about his/her availability to serve as your mentor. Faculty members serving as Capstone advisors will commit 1-2 years to this academic journey. You want to make sure you are working with someone who is willing and able to provide the time and guidance you will need in completing the Capstone. If you have difficulty finding an advisor for your Capstone, talk to your academic advisor, department chair, or SMBHC deans.

In consultation with your major advisors and your faculty mentors, you will determine what your Capstone will be and when you will undertake the work. It occurs when you are ready for it. For example, you may have an internship the summer after your first year or second year. Conversely, you may not be able to take the Capstone course sequence in your major until your fourth year. The Capstone is both field-specific and highly individual. When you have that worked out, you give us your **Capstone Plan**, a form that tells us goals, curricular structure, and timeline for the Capstone. Be sure to get the appropriate signatures; it's to your advantage to have everyone on board and all the details in writing. **The deadline for submission of the Capstone Plan is no later than November 15 of your third year** (assuming an 8-semester track). If you are ready to go earlier, give us your Plan earlier. We would be delighted.

When you construct your Capstone Plan, use the occasion to review and take charge of your entire SMBHC experience. Pay attention to the following in particular:

- Your honors hours: As you enter your Capstone years, be aware of how many honors hours you will earn for your Capstone experience so that you will know how many hours you need to earn through honors coursework. We award a maximum of 9 hours for the Capstone, so you will need at least another 20 in

Honors coursework before you graduate, perhaps more. Notice that meeting the minimum number we require at the end of each year you are with us (See the Year-by-Year breakdown) does not mean that you can “only” do the Capstone during your last two years. You will need to find additional coursework, perhaps among the courses available only to Honors students. If your Capstone will bring you fewer honors hours than the maximum we will award, be sure your Honors coursework is making up that difference so that you reach the 29 hr. minimum.

- Your timeline: You must defend your thesis by the last day of classes in the semester in which you plan to graduate, but we welcome earlier completion of the thesis. With the Plan, you tell us when you will do the work of the Capstone, including defending the thesis. The Capstone is one area in which we follow you.

Your Capstone can change as experiences direct, and your faculty mentors agree; keep us informed and up to date, so that we can support and give credit for the honors path you are creating for yourself. We look forward to seeing how it all shapes up.