

GUIDELINES

CAPSTONE

At the end of their individualized major, each student reflects upon their educational achievements and designs a capstone research and writing project to integrate their studies across academic disciplines. This is the capstone. There are two ways of pursuing this capstone requirement. One is the capstone course (INTD 295W) where students are required to write a substantial research paper. The other is to write a thesis (typically a year-long, 6-credit, sequence). The capstone requirement is counted as part of the 36 credits for the major. Normally, the capstone course will not count as part of the 18 credits required from courses in the degree granting school or college.

Note: Double majors or additional degree students may be able to satisfy the capstone requirement with a capstone course or thesis in their other major/degree if that capstone course or thesis allows them to explore the theme of their individualized major. Such substitutions must be approved at the admissions stage and at the final plan of study stage by the director and your primary advisor.

The Capstone Course (INTD 295W)

The capstone course is one important place where we try to reinforce an IMJR's emphasis on interdisciplinary learning through student-centered projects of reflection and integration. The research and writing projects of the capstone course, as well as the oral presentations that students are required to make, are designed to give IMJR students opportunities to consolidate their understanding of their major subjects and clarify what they have achieved from their interdisciplinary course of study. Students must devise an individualized research project that is relevant to and integrates – at least to some extent – their individualized major fields of study and experiential learning. Some students use the exercise as an opportunity to research a problem or theme that they have not yet had a chance to research, while others use the exercise to research some aspects of an intended future profession. The capstone paper must be a minimum of 15 pages in length.

The Thesis (Independent Study and INTD 296W)

The thesis offers honors IMJR students –as well as other interested IMJR students– the opportunity to pursue an in-depth project of their choosing. A thesis is most often a piece of scholarly writing that investigates an unresolved question in the author's field of study. It combines a solid knowledge of the relevant scholarship with an original contribution to the field of study. While most IMJR theses are likely to fit this definition, a thesis can also be a creative performance or exhibit, a music composition, a documentary, or another substantive project.

The thesis is generally a year-long, 6-credit sequence. A student typically enrolls in a 3-credit independent study in their thesis supervisor's department in the fall. In the spring, the student registers for INTD 296W Senior Thesis (3 cr). INTD 296W usually operates

as a one-on-one research and writing course with the thesis supervisor as the instructor. It will be rare for a thesis of good quality to be less than 30 pages in length. It is not unusual for theses to be 50-80 pages in length.

Expectations:

If a thesis investigates an unresolved question, then it does more than summarize the existing literature on a particular topic. Your thesis must **make an original contribution** to the field of study. This is one of the key criteria by which all departments evaluate theses.

Your thesis must be **thoroughly researched**. It must reflect a solid knowledge of the relevant literature. It must present new findings in the form of new data, or new, critical interpretations of existing materials. Your thesis must reflect a good command of the research methodologies in your discipline(s).

Your thesis must provide **accurate documentation of sources**. Each discipline has its own conventions regarding the citation of sources, but all agree that material that is not one's own must be acknowledged. Be sure you understand fully what must be acknowledged and how you must go about citing your sources.

- The Babbidge Library has guides on using information ethically and on citation styles: <http://www.lib.uconn.edu/using/tutorials/instruction/tutorialsall.html>.
- For a pamphlet on "Plagiarism: What It Is and How to Avoid It," see <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets.shtml>. This pamphlet addresses the complex topic of acceptable and unacceptable paraphrasing.

Your thesis **topic must be approved by your thesis advisor** and you **must meet the deadlines for submission of the thesis** established by the advisor and, if relevant, the Honors Program.

Honors students and others writing theses will find the Thesis Guidelines at the Honors Program website <http://www.honors.uconn.edu/academics/index.php?p=34years&s=thesis> a helpful place to start.

Timeline:

Planning your thesis:

A thesis is typically a year-long project completed during your senior year. But you will need to begin planning your thesis well in advance, no later than the second semester of your junior year. During the fall or spring semester of your junior year, you will need to decide on a research topic and identify a faculty member who can serve as your thesis supervisor. Choose someone whose research interests match your own. Discuss your interests with the faculty member and begin to define the contours of your project. One way to structure this discussion may be to prepare a written proposal (e.g. two-page description, with a discussion of research methods and/or sources). This will help you

delineate a do-able project and will give your faculty supervisor a concrete proposal to which to respond.

During your junior year you should also consider how you will conduct your research and whether your research will require support in the form of lab time, travel funds, or other such arrangements. The Office of Undergraduate Research

(<http://ugradresearch.uconn.edu/>) awards grants for research projects conducted during the summer as well as the academic year. Students in the humanities can also turn to the Humanities Institute (<http://www.humanities.uconn.edu/index.html>) which administers two research awards for undergraduates: undergraduate fellowships and undergraduate student awards. Your thesis supervisor may also have suggestions for how you can obtain the resources you need.

Establishing expectations with your thesis supervisor:

You and your thesis supervisor will need to establish what the specific expectations will be for your thesis. In order to do this, you might ask your thesis supervisor the following questions:

- What are the expectations for a thesis in your department?
Each discipline typically has expectations for a thesis. Your thesis supervisor should be familiar with the thesis expectations in his/her department and these may be an appropriate starting point for a discussion of expectations.
- Are these expectations also appropriate for a thesis in my individualized major?
Because your thesis will be for an interdisciplinary major, the expectations for your thesis (in terms of methodology, presentation, etc) may diverge from those of your thesis supervisor's department. It is important to establish early on how they might diverge, so that both you and the faculty member are clear about the expectations for your thesis.
- What kind of preparatory work would be most appropriate for me, considering my prior course work and my interests?
You may be able to benefit from participation in a departmental methods or thesis seminar during the semester before you begin your own research.
- How should I present my findings? What is the typical length of a thesis?
Different disciplines have different conventions regarding the presentation of research findings. Most combine a review of relevant scholarly literature with a presentation of research findings. Some expect an explicit, detailed discussion of research methodologies. In other fields research methods are implicit. In some fields the written element of the thesis may be relatively short, while in others it may constitute the bulk of the work. It will be rare for a thesis of good quality to be less than 30 pages in length. It is not unusual for theses to be 50-80 pages in length. You should

regard it as a written project that is longer and more detailed than any project you will have done as a term paper.

- What arrangements for supervision should we make?

You may want to meet with your thesis supervisor on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. You may want to establish expectations regarding when and how you will report on the progress of your research and submit drafts of your writing.

The thesis year:

The thesis year is sure to be an intensive year. Researching and writing a thesis always take longer than expected. It is important to make a schedule for yourself, so that you do not fall behind. The exact sequence of research and writing and the amount of time dedicated to each will vary from discipline to discipline and from topic to topic. It is not unusual to focus first on reading the relevant literature, then on data collection or an examination of primary sources, and then turn to writing. You will probably find, like many researchers, that you will switch back and forth between these activities, though your focus will gradually shift. During the first semester, while you are concentrating on the relevant literature, your research methodology, and data collection, you will probably enroll in an independent study and/or thesis seminar in the department of your thesis supervisor. During the second semester, while you focus on writing the thesis, you will enroll in INTD 296W. INTD 296W operates as a one-on-one research and writing course with your thesis supervisor as the instructor.

You will be expected to present your findings in a public forum, either in the department of your thesis supervisor or within the Individualized Major Program. You might also consider presenting your research at the annual Frontiers in Undergraduate Research poster exhibition, usually held in April and sponsored by the Office of Undergraduate Research and the Honors Program (<http://ugradresearch.uconn.edu/frontiers.php>).

Thesis writers also have the opportunity to submit their work for inclusion in UConn's Digital Commons, an electronic repository for materials produced by UConn faculty and students. For further information see <http://digitalcommons.uconn.edu/>.

A final note:

Writing a thesis is demanding. It requires creativity, persistence, and organization. It can be a rewarding experience and provide strong evidence of your abilities to think critically and work independently, skills highly valued by both employers and graduate schools.