

GUIDELINES

CAPSTONE

All individualized majors are expected to fulfill a capstone requirement. The capstone requirement provides the individualized major with the opportunity to integrate the knowledge s/he has acquired in her/his major courses. This requirement can be fulfilled in one of three ways:

- **by taking the program's capstone course** (INTD 4600W, 3 credits)
Most students in the program fulfill the capstone requirement by taking the capstone course.
- **by completing a thesis project** (6 credits: typically an independent study in the Fall and INTD 4697W in the Spring, all under the supervision of the thesis supervisor)
Students in the Honors Program who plan to fulfill their Honors Scholar requirements in their individualized major must fulfill the capstone requirement by completing a thesis. Other students outside of Honors who are motivated to complete a substantial, independent capstone project are also encouraged to complete a thesis.
- **by completing an approved alternative capstone**
Occasionally a student may identify a departmental senior seminar or other advanced course that provides him/her with the opportunity to integrate the themes of his/her individualized major. Such alternatives must be approved in advance by the director and the student's primary advisor.

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 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 the student's primary advisor.

The Capstone Course (INTD 4600W)

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 (typically a 6-credit sequence including INTD 4697W)

The thesis offers IMJR honors students –as well as other interested IMJR students– the opportunity to pursue an in-depth project of their choosing. Thesis projects may take a variety of forms. Typical is the lengthy written study, the traditional thesis. Other forms are also possible: for example, photo essay, piece of fiction or collection of poetry. Substantial projects, such as a website or a film, would produce a permanent record, but a thesis project

report would also capture a summary of the research, planning, and creative work undertaken. The unifying thread for all thesis projects is that they contribute to the development of knowledge or practice in new ways, involve significant background research, require sustained attention in the implementation of the project, and result in a piece of written work that documents the student's learning process and outcomes.

Expectations:

Disciplines and individual faculty will differ in their expectations regarding methodology, theoretical approaches, and presentation of findings. Nonetheless, the Individualized Major Program has set out some broad expectations of learning outcomes for individualized major thesis writers.

First, the student's research, analysis, and writing on the thesis project should be relevant to the student's individualized major and represent an opportunity for the student to integrate and deepen at least several aspects of study in the major.

Second, a thesis should do more than summarize the existing literature on a particular topic. It must make an original contribution to the field of study. It must present new findings in the form of new data, or new, critical interpretations of existing material. It must reflect a good command of the research methodologies in the relevant discipline(s).

The following learning outcomes are expected:

- The student is able to define a research question and design a substantial research project.
- The student is able to identify appropriate primary and secondary sources relevant to his/her research project. The student is able to collect relevant and reliable data that addresses his/her research question.
- The student is able to analyze the strengths and limitations of different approaches scholars have taken to the research question. The student is able to recognize interpretative conflicts resulting from these different approaches.
- The student is able to select an approach or several approaches appropriate to addressing his/her research question.
- The student is able to develop an argument that is sustained by the available evidence and present that argument in a clear, well-organized manner consistent with disciplinary or interdisciplinary practices.

The question of length is perhaps an inevitable one. While we recognize disciplinary differences, we have noted that the best individualized major theses in the social sciences and humanities have been at least 45 pages and often 60-80 pages. Science theses have typically been somewhat shorter. (If the thesis has been written with publication in a scholarly journal as the objective, then the thesis may be more concise than the typical unpublished thesis. Once again, though, page length will depend on the discipline and the target journal.)

Coursework:

We expect most theses to consist of a six-credit sequence completed over the course of two-three semesters. (*NB: Students intending to complete Honors Scholar requirements in their individualized major must complete a six-credit thesis sequence.*)

In the social sciences and humanities, students will typically enroll in a research seminar, graduate course or independent study with their thesis supervisor during the fall semester. This fall semester course should provide the student with an opportunity to explore the existing scholarship on the theme of his/her thesis. Often the student will use the fall semester to write a research paper that reviews and evaluates that scholarship and begins to explore the specific topic of his/her thesis.

During the spring semester, the student will typically enroll in INTD 4697W Thesis. This course operates as a one-on-one research and writing course for which the thesis supervisor is the instructor. During this semester the student is typically engaged in a close investigation of his/her research question and the writing of the thesis. The student meets regularly with the thesis supervisor who provides feedback and advice on data collection and evidence gathering, analysis, and writing.

In the sciences, students may follow a somewhat different sequence with two or more semesters of data collection and laboratory work (when the student registers for a research course or independent study in his/her thesis supervisor's department) followed by the writing up of results (when the student registers for INTD 4697W Thesis).

Timeline:

Identifying a topic and a thesis supervisor:

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.

(If you are planning a thesis in the sciences you will need to begin the planning process even earlier: in the second semester of your sophomore year and no later than the first semester of your junior year.)

Submitting a proposal:

You will be expected to prepare a written proposal to be submitted to the Individualized Major Program office no later than the last day of classes of the semester *before* you begin your thesis sequence of courses, typically the spring semester of your junior year. You must discuss this proposal with your thesis supervisor. This proposal includes a paragraph that outlines the main questions and issues you plan to explore in your thesis as well as a preliminary bibliography. The form is available on the Individualized Major Program website, on the "Forms" page.

A proposal is just that: a proposal. It helps you define the scope of your research. You should expect to refine your topic as you do your research and discuss your ideas and progress with your thesis supervisor.

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 fall semester. Some well-qualified students may be admitted to a relevant graduate seminar.

- 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 45 pages in length. It is not unusual for theses to be 60-80 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.

We advise you to summarize the answers to these questions in the form of a learning agreement with your supervisor.

Human subjects research:

If your project involves human subjects research (for example: interviews or surveys), then your project will need to be reviewed by the Institutional Review Board *before* you begin. You should discuss this with your thesis supervisor and the Individualized Major Program office.

Thesis research and study abroad:

Study abroad has helped shape the theses of individualized major students in a number of ways. It has provided them with ideas for a thesis as well as the opportunity to conduct thesis research. Study abroad programs that include a substantial independent research project and/or an internship can serve as a key part of thesis research. We encourage students to take advantage of such opportunities.

If you plan to conduct thesis research while abroad, you may find it wise to have a UConn faculty supervisor for your thesis research, even if your study abroad program provides formal research opportunities and supervision. It may be difficult to define a feasible project before you arrive at your study abroad site. So you will need to remain in close contact with your UConn supervisor about your plans and the progress you are making to make sure that your research will meet the expectations of a thesis.

Sources and resources for research:

The earlier you begin to consider the sources you plan to use and the resources you will need for your thesis the better. This will allow you to seek the support you will need well in advance. You should consider 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.

Make use of the reference and other guides at the Babbidge Library. Among its many resources are:

- The Honors Thesis Tool Box: <http://classguides.lib.uconn.edu/honorsthesis>

- Tutorials on many topics including “Using Online Databases,” “Using Information Ethically” and “Citing Online and Print Sources:” <http://www.lib.uconn.edu/instruction/tutorialsall.html>.
- Subject specialists (Babbidge reference librarians and their areas of expertise): <http://www.lib.uconn.edu/services/liaison/>

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 on 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 4697W. INTD 4697W 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.