

Instructions for Completing the Capstone Proposal

Fan Gongxiu Honors College, 2019-2020

Although the Capstone Proposal is technically a component of the Capstone course, honors students are required to submit and receive approval of the proposal 1-2 months *prior to* the beginning of the senior year. Students must receive approval of the project in writing, from the evaluation committee and the College, prior to beginning the Capstone project. Failure to complete the proposal phase early may seriously hinder your ability to complete all the Capstone on time. This might necessitate an extension of the grading period and postponement of graduation until the course is successfully completed. The primary purpose of the Capstone Proposal is to provide the evaluation committee members with enough information to (1) determine if the topic is appropriate, (2) gauge whether the scope is likely to be manageable within the given timeframe, and (3) identify a suitable Capstone Advisor.

The Capstone Proposal should:

- Provide a brief overview of the project in 900-1500 words (3 to 5 pages, longer if you include figures and tables), typed, double-spaced, with 1-inch margins, and using a 12pt font (e.g., Times New Roman).
- Contain at least five (5) sections: introduction, description of the problem, literature review, description of the project, and references. Other sections, such as timeline, budget, etc., could be included in the description of the project section, or in a separate section.
- Be written in the future tense.

Although the Capstone Proposal is not as extensive as a typical research proposal, you might find aspects of this resource informative and useful:

“Writing a research proposal”

<http://libguides.usc.edu/content.php?pid=83009&sid=2319840>

Introduction. The **introduction** sets the stage for what is to come and should provide the background and rationale for the proposed project – what is this about and why is it important? It should *succinctly* contextualize the problem in one to three short paragraphs, and include a brief statement of the problem. Recommended length is <1 page.

Description of the problem. The second section should **describe the specific problem** *your* project will address. Clearly state *your* goals for the project (what you hope to accomplish), describe the product or services you

will provide (e.g., the creation or improvement of an educational tool), and discuss how the project is likely to benefit your profession, institution, or organization. Recommended length is ~1 page.

Literature review. The third section is a brief **review of the relevant literature** pertaining to the proposed problem/project. Carefully select the articles you review to inform and/or support the need for your project, for example:

- Does the literature provide supporting documentation of the existence of the problem you have identified? Your project should not be based solely on your own subjective perceptions, intuition, or opinion.
- Does the literature support the methodology or "solution" you have selected to address the problem? It can be helpful to have a template/model to follow.
- Does the literature point to major gaps that your project can fill? Maybe no one else has done what you propose to do. That's great! Your study will definitely contribute to new knowledge or technology.
- Are there published reports by others who have already done what you propose to do? If so, critique this literature, and discuss how your project can improve / expand / build on it.

You should review a minimum of 5 sources for the proposal (many more will be needed for the final paper). The articles should be fairly current (the majority should have been published within the last 10 years; seminal works in the area of interest may be older), and should come from peer-reviewed journals. Edited texts or textbooks may also be appropriate source material. Web sites should be used with extreme caution. Refer to APA guidelines for how to incorporate in-text citations of the articles you review. Recommended length is ~2 pages. Resource: "The Literature Review": <http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/literaturereview>. If you need guidance on how to conduct a literature search, MSU Libraries has helpful tutorials: <https://www.lib.msu.edu/health/online-tutorials/>.

Description of the project. The fourth section should **describe the proposed methodology and timeline** related to how you will conduct the project from inception through implementation and completion (what are the major steps and when will they occur?). Include how you will assess the outcome (impact of your project), and describe any institutional or other barriers you will need to address (e.g., permission from constituent or administrative bodies). Writing this section **first** will help you determine if the

project is "doable" or needs to be more focused. Recommended length is ~1page.

References. The fifth section provides a **list of the references** cited in your proposal. Only those sources actually cited should be included – this is not a reading list. Use what you learned in our writing course for proper styles.

When writing your proposal, use simple, direct, and unambiguous language. Use of first person pronouns is acceptable. For example:

- The proposed Capstone project addresses the problem of...
- My goals for this project are (1)... (2)... (n)....
- I will address these issues by doing X, Y, and Z.
- I will use [the following methods/strategies] to assess the impact of my project.
- Potential barriers to this project include A, B, and C, and in order to accomplish the stated goals, I will (e.g., need to obtain approval from)....

It might seem impossible to include all of the required information in only 3-5 pages of text, but keep in mind that this is *just* the proposal; the project paper will be much longer. The proposal should be brief and focused; every sentence, every word choice should be intentional and have a specific purpose. You don't have to describe the entire territory, just sketch a map to where you're going.

Another note I want to mention is that we have learned how to write a research proposal in our writing and research methods courses. Go back to check your lecture notes and you will find rich information about how to complete a professional looking proposal.

Remember, this proposal should be enclosed with your *Capstone Proposal From*, signed by you, your advisor(s), committee members, and associate dean of the College, as a single PDF file to be submitted online as well as handed in to the College Teaching Affairs Office.