

GUIDELINES FOR CAPSTONE PAPER PROJECT

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Introduction: This document is intended to help students understand what a capstone paper is, to assist them in preparing the write a capstone paper. It is also intended to help faculty who direct capstone projects.

Definition: As defined by the Department of Politics & Government, through POL 495 students utilize the theories and research skills gained from their coursework to address a substantive problem encountered during their Professional Practice experience. A capstone paper completed by graduate students in the ACED track should meet the following requirements: (1) students demonstrate an ability to select an important substantive question about some aspect of community development from their field experience; (2) students use relevant theoretical and applied literature from Political Science and related disciplines to frame the issue they have selected in a larger context; (3) students make use of the knowledge and experience they have gained from their previous coursework to analyze and/or interpret existing data, collect new information, and assemble their observations, whether quantitative or qualitative, in a manner sufficient to answer the research question they have posed; and (4) students situate their findings in the context of previous theory and research so as to assess the larger significance of those findings. Accordingly, students who choose to write the capstone paper should expect to use their internship/Peace Corp experience to inform and frame their paper while linking it to literatures appropriate to the project. (NOTE: While the Department expects the papers to be applied to the students' internship experiences, this does not imply that the research must be quantitative. Both quantitative and qualitative methods might be used depending upon which (or both) are appropriate to the project. Additionally, normative research is appropriate if it derives from students' internship work.)

Procedures: Students who choose the capstone option should fulfill each of the procedures outlined in this section. This outline also provides target dates for the completion of the project.

1. Students should choose the capstone option no later than the end of the Fall semester of graduate school. In contrast to the thesis, students choosing the capstone option must complete a three-credit-hour elective during the summer session before the internship or Peace Corps service. Therefore, generally, the scale of a capstone project is less than the scale of a thesis while still making a substantive contribution to the discipline.
2. Students should identify the faculty person they wish to direct their capstone paper by mid-Spring.
3. Students should work with their project directors to develop a research proposal during their first Spring and Summer in residence. Given that the research will take place during an internship to which students will likely not have been assigned during this period, the proposal can be relatively generic. The proposal is MANDATORY, however, and must be approved by the faculty person directing the project BEFORE research

can begin. Accordingly, it should be completed and approved before the student leaves campus to take an internship or departs for Peace Corps. Students whose capstone projects include research involving human subjects (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups, etc.) should request assistance from the faculty project director in completing paperwork for consideration by Illinois State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This paperwork must be approved before research begins.

Note: If the research is to be conducted during Peace Corps service, Peace Corps requires that the Country Director approve all projects once the student starts service.

4. Students should contact their faculty project director at least twice per semester while on their internship to keep the faculty person updated on their research progress.
5. Faculty agreeing to direct capstone projects agree to respond to student requests for help, attention to drafts and other matters in a prompt and professional manner.
6. Students must register for POL 495 (3 credits) no later than the spring semester of their second year. If the work is not complete by the end of the spring semester, an Incomplete grade is appropriate.
7. Students must get the approval of their faculty project director before the paper is accepted.
8. Final papers are expected to be between 50 and 60 pages long. Variations from this length are acceptable if agreed to by the faculty project director.
9. Students are required to submit their final capstone paper to the Digital Repository at Milner Library to allow others to access this work in the future (<http://ir.library.illinoisstate.edu/>). Be sure to include "Stevenson Center" as one of the keywords. Students are also expected to personally present the completed paper to a meeting of Stevenson Center students. This is not intended to be a thesis defense; rather, it is intended to be an opportunity to share their experiences with newer ACED students. All students are expected to perform this function unless something like an active Peace Corps placement prevents it from being done. In such cases, students may present the paper using alternative technology (e.g., Skype), providing they gain approval from the faculty project director and the Graduate Program Director.
10. In contrast to a thesis, the faculty director will assign a letter grade to the student's performance in POL 495 in accord with the expectations and procedures outlined here.