



A Step by Step Guide on Completing a Thesis or Capstone in The MSPWTC Program

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University of Houston-Downtown

How to Read This Document

You can read this document in two ways:

1. You can start at the front cover and read paragraph by paragraph until you get to the back cover. When you encounter how-to information that differs between **thesis** and **capstone**, you'll see color variations enabling you to focus on either the thesis or capstone project.
2. Or you can start with the timeline charts, Figure 1 (page 11) and Figure 2 (page 13). At each juncture, you can click on the sequence number of each step to be linked to explanatory text about it.

Regardless of how you approach your thesis or capstone, this document - produced by students in the Spring 2011 MSPWTC ENG 5340 Project Management class - includes the most important pieces of information regarding the thesis or capstone. Information in this document was gathered by researching other project guides and interviewing students and faculty in the MSPWTC program. Please note that this is an unofficial guide and not a university document.

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Introduction

Being students in the MSPWTC program, we had a lot of questions regarding the thesis or capstone that are required for completing the master's program. We were given the opportunity in ENG 5340 Project Management to investigate thesis or capstone guidelines, requirements, and processes.

The following are some questions we had before our investigation:

- The GAC is the same committee that reviews my thesis or capstone, right?
- How do I start my thesis or capstone project?
- Do I have to be enrolled in specific courses to get my thesis or capstone completed?

We hope that most, if not all, of your questions are answered in this project guide. Of course, if you have more questions regarding the thesis or capstone, please see the graduate coordinator or other faculty members. They are great resources and there to help you through the program.

Acknowledgements

This guide was created by students for students to explain the process and requirements involved in completing a MSPWTC thesis or capstone. It would have been impossible for us, as students, to have this much insight into these two projects without using resources outside our ENG 5340 Project Management classroom. Much of the information you read in this document is from the core of the MSPWTC program, the faculty and staff who mentor and teach us. Their knowledge was captured to produce this guide.

This is a page of thanks dedicated to:

Dr. Moosally	Dr. Jennings
Dr. Duncan	Dr. Schmadeka

Sincerely,	
Danielle West	Gloria Bello
Joyce Mullett	Felicia Bates

Difference Between Thesis and Capstone:

Generally, a thesis is written for an academic audience—a contribution to an academic field of study related to Professional Writing and Technical Communication. While a **thesis** is aimed at primarily an academic audience, a **capstone** project is aimed at two audiences: a client who has established a need for a particular type of document and the project committee who evaluates the rationale report that accompanies the deliverable. This builds a connection between the academic components of the program and the application of that knowledge to a real-world context.

Ideally, you will decide whether to do a thesis or a capstone prior to the semester in which you take ENG 6390 Directed Research. It is required that you have completed 15 credit hours before enrolling in ENG 6390 Directed Research. In order to make the right choice, you need to consider your long-term goals of your degree, as well as your areas of interest based on your experience in the program and the workplace.

Your Thesis:

Your thesis is a scholarly document that questions or otherwise contributes to an existing body of knowledge. Your thesis analyzes an existing concept, phenomenon, or text(s) in light of current theory and research.

The thesis typically includes:

- An introduction describing the purpose, scope, and significance of the topic
- A section situating the topic in the context of the literature in the field
- A section explaining the research method and rationale
- A section developing results of the research method
- A conclusion that sums up the importance of the project

After completing 15 credit hours, you are ready to begin your thesis; this is a two-semester process. You begin with three hours of ENG 6390 Directed Research to propose and gain approval of your topic. In the following semester, you must complete ENG 6391 Thesis to develop and defend your paper. In order for you to earn credit for ENG 6391, the completed thesis must be approved by your project committee after the defense.

Typically a thesis does not exceed 100 pages, and it should demonstrate your ability to analyze, interpret, and synthesize information; illustrate methodologies and procedures; and exhibit your ability to defend the completed project.

Your Capstone:

Your capstone requires execution of a project in which the final product is a potential deliverable for a work-place audience accompanied by a rationale report. Example deliverables include a training manual, a set of public relations materials, a website (design and content), or a usability assessment. The rationale report should document how the deliverable reflects the scholarly principles supporting the execution of the deliverable.

Like the thesis, you must have completed 15 credit hours in the program in order to begin your capstone. Once you fulfill this requirement, you must complete three hours of ENG 6390 Directed Research to propose and gain approval of your project. In the following semester, you must complete three hours of ENG 6392 Capstone Project to develop and defend your project.

Both the deliverable and the rationale report must be defended before your project committee. In order for you to earn credit for ENG 6392, the completed project must be approved by your project committee after the defense.

Course Descriptions

ENG 6390 - Directed Research

Prerequisite: Fifteen hours and graduate standing or departmental approval. Supports and guides student research for thesis or capstone project. Students enrolled during this semester intend to propose and gain approval for a thesis or capstone project.

Note: In addition to the courses discussed in this document, ENG 6380 Field Experience (internship) is available to take the place of Eng 6390 Directed Research. Prerequisite: Fifteen hours and graduate standing or departmental approval. Provides industry experience for students. Writing or design projects developed in the course may be tested and used for the capstone project or portfolio.

The scope of this document does not include the internship course option above; please see the graduate coordinator for more details.

ENG 6391 - Thesis

Prerequisite: Eighteen hours, ENG 6390 Directed Research, and graduate standing or departmental approval. Provides direction and support for students during the semester when they intend to complete the thesis. No credit is awarded until the thesis is approved by the project committee and the student has passed their defense on the thesis, and submitted a graduate portfolio. This course may be repeated until the thesis is approved.

ENG 6392 Capstone Project

Prerequisite: Eighteen hours, ENG 6390 Directed Research or 6380 Field Experience (Internship), and graduate standing or departmental approval. Provides direction and support for students during the semester when they intend to complete the capstone. No credit is awarded until the capstone is approved by the project committee and the student has passed their defense on the capstone, and submitted a graduate portfolio. This course may be repeated until the capstone is approved.

Roles and Expectations

Your Role as a MSPWTC Candidate

You are the project manager! This is your project, so you control every aspect of it, from the topic you choose, to deciding your committee chair. You are the initiator of every interaction. Keeping a calendar of important meetings and deadlines will be a requirement and a huge help in making sure that your project goes smoothly. Many of the steps you must take are located in the middle of the timeline charts on pages 11 and 13 because you must reach out to entities both within and outside of the MSPWTC program.

MSPWTC Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC)

The GAC is a committee that consists of MSPWTC faculty that review your proposal (that you will complete in ENG 6390 Directed Research) and determines whether or not your project is appropriate. The committee can reject or approve your proposal and ask for revisions. When reviewing your proposal, the GAC will offer advice on how you should proceed with your project; this advice is separate from that of your project committee. After your proposal is approved, the GAC will no longer take part in your project. The chair of the GAC is always the current graduate coordinator.

Committee Chair

As the project manager, you choose your committee chair. You must choose a professor from the MSPWTC program to be your committee chair; there are some exceptions, but they need to be approved by the graduate coordinator and the GAC. Requesting your committee chair is part of the MSPWTC Thesis Proposal Form or MSPWTC Capstone Project Proposal Form that will be submitted to, and approved by, the graduate coordinator and the GAC.

Your committee chair will be your comrade and your mentor throughout the whole project. He or she will guide you through the entire process of writing and presenting your project. Make sure you choose someone who you get along with; it is better to choose a professor that you work well with than one who is fluent in the topic of your thesis or capstone. Of course, the ideal committee chair will have both of these qualities. The committee chair will also manage the committee and facilitate the oral defense. Most importantly, he or she should be available to you for regular consultations through the entire project.

This includes:

- Prompt feedback on drafts
- Strong advice on methodology and structure
- Enthusiastic encouragement

Roles and Expectations (cont.)

Project Committee

There are three members in the project committee: the committee chair, the second reader, and the third reader. The committee chair and the second reader are chosen by you and approved by the graduate coordinator and the GAC, and the third reader is chosen and approved by the graduate coordinator alone. The third reader will not be chosen by the graduate coordinator until you are in the last semester of your project.

Your committee chair will inform the other two members of your project committee of how you are doing and pass along your drafts for their review. They will be present during your defense and conduct a final analysis of your project. They will approve your project, approve it with revision requests, or reject your project.

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS).

You must have approval from this committee to carry out any research involving people, even simple questionnaires.

MSPWTC Graduate Coordinator

The graduate coordinator is the chair of the GAC. Most of your forms and approvals will be reviewed by the graduate coordinator.

Choosing a Topic:

Choose a topic as soon as possible. It is highly recommended that you start thinking about a topic when you enter the program—make notes along the way, even if you do not yet know if you want to do a thesis or capstone. Think about interesting topics you have encountered in your classes or determine whether there are problems or gaps in the Professional Writing and Technical Communication field. Talk to faculty who work in areas of interest to you.

If you decide to write a **thesis**, think of research questions that you have: What is not yet known about the Professional Writing and Technical Communication field? What is an area of controversy in the literature you have used during your first 15 credit hours? Is there a way to get evidence to support one controversy or another? Is there a literacy problem or lack of reading material on a determined subject?

Capstones are more about products. You need to find out what is needed by a particular organization or agency and determine what kind of product would fulfill this need. A capstone project may be a solution for a particular workplace.

Planning Your Timeline

During your first 15 hours in the MSPWTC program

Identify a topic for your thesis or capstone project. Discuss your proposed topic to potential members of your project committee or with the MSPWTC Graduate Coordinator.

It may seem early, but it's during your first 15 hours that you should investigate the requirements and deadlines for submitting the forms associated with getting your thesis or capstone approved and completed.

Such forms include the following:

- MSPWTC Thesis Proposal Form
- MSPWTC Capstone Project Proposal Form
- Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CHPS) Form
- Thesis or Capstone Binding Request Form
- Workplace Release Form

Planning Your Timeline (cont.)

Gaining Approval of Your Thesis or Capstone Project After You've Completed 15 Credit Hours

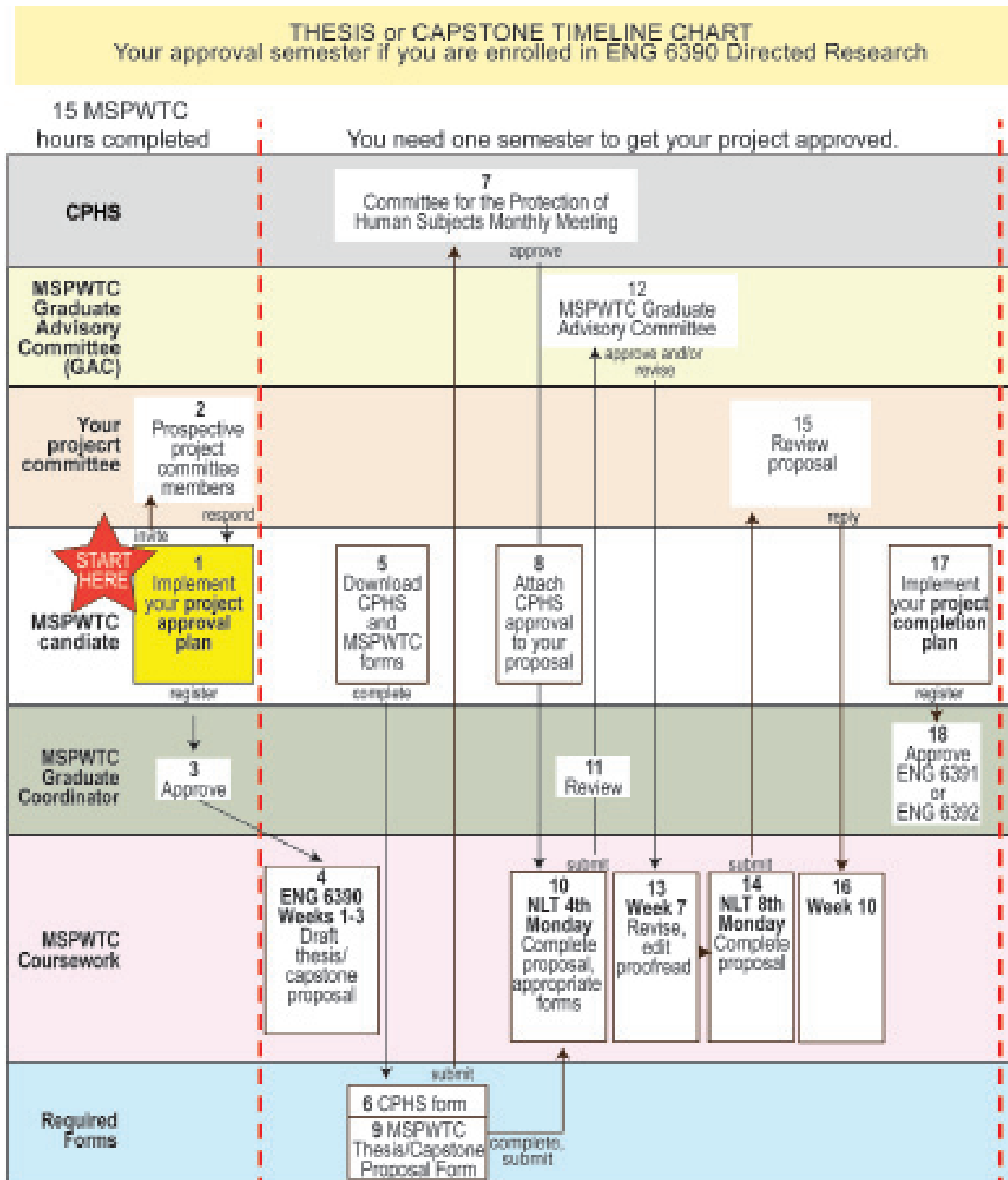
Complete the steps below to gain approval for your thesis or capstone.

1. You need one semester to get your project approved. Make a plan that includes registering for ENG 6390 Directed Research, acquiring and completing appropriate forms, gaining approval of the relevant committees, as well as assigning deadline dates for the semester.
2. Invite faculty members to be your project committee chair and second reader. The third committee member will be assigned by the graduate coordinator in the completion semester.
3. Secure graduate coordinator approval for ENG 6390 Directed Research
4. Weeks 1 - 3: Use this time to develop your thesis or capstone proposal.
5. Download the appropriate MSPWTC thesis or capstone proposal form and the CPHS form (if appropriate for your project)
6. Complete the eight-page CPHS form (if necessary for your project). Submit it to the CPHS to meet their schedule.
7. The CPHS meets monthly and will approve or deny your proposal.
8. Include the CPHS approval of your research with your thesis or capstone proposal.
9. Complete the MSPWTC thesis or capstone proposal form, including all attachments.
10. No later than the 4th Monday: Submit your project proposal to the graduate coordinator.
11. The graduate coordinator reviews your proposal and forwards it to the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC).
12. The GAC approves your proposal and/or recommends revisions.
13. Week 7: Make revisions recommended by the GAC. Edit and proofread your proposal.
14. No later than the 8th Monday: Submit your proposal to your thesis or capstone committee.
15. Your project committee reviews your proposal.
16. Week 10: Expect official approval of your proposal from your approved committee.
17. You need one semester to complete your thesis or capstone. Make a plan that includes registering for ENG 9391 Thesis or ENG 6392 Capstone Project.
18. Secure graduate coordinator approval for ENG 6391 or ENG 6392.

Planning Your Timeline (cont.)

Figure 1: Approval Semester

Seven entities play a role in your endeavor. On the timeline chart, the activities of each entity in the project approval process are shown in a horizontal band of color. Numbers indicates the sequence of steps you must take, and arrows show which entity is recipient of an action.



http://www.uhd.edu/academic/colleges/humanities/english/mspwtc/eng_6390.html

Planning Your Timeline (cont.)

Completing Your Thesis or Capstone Project

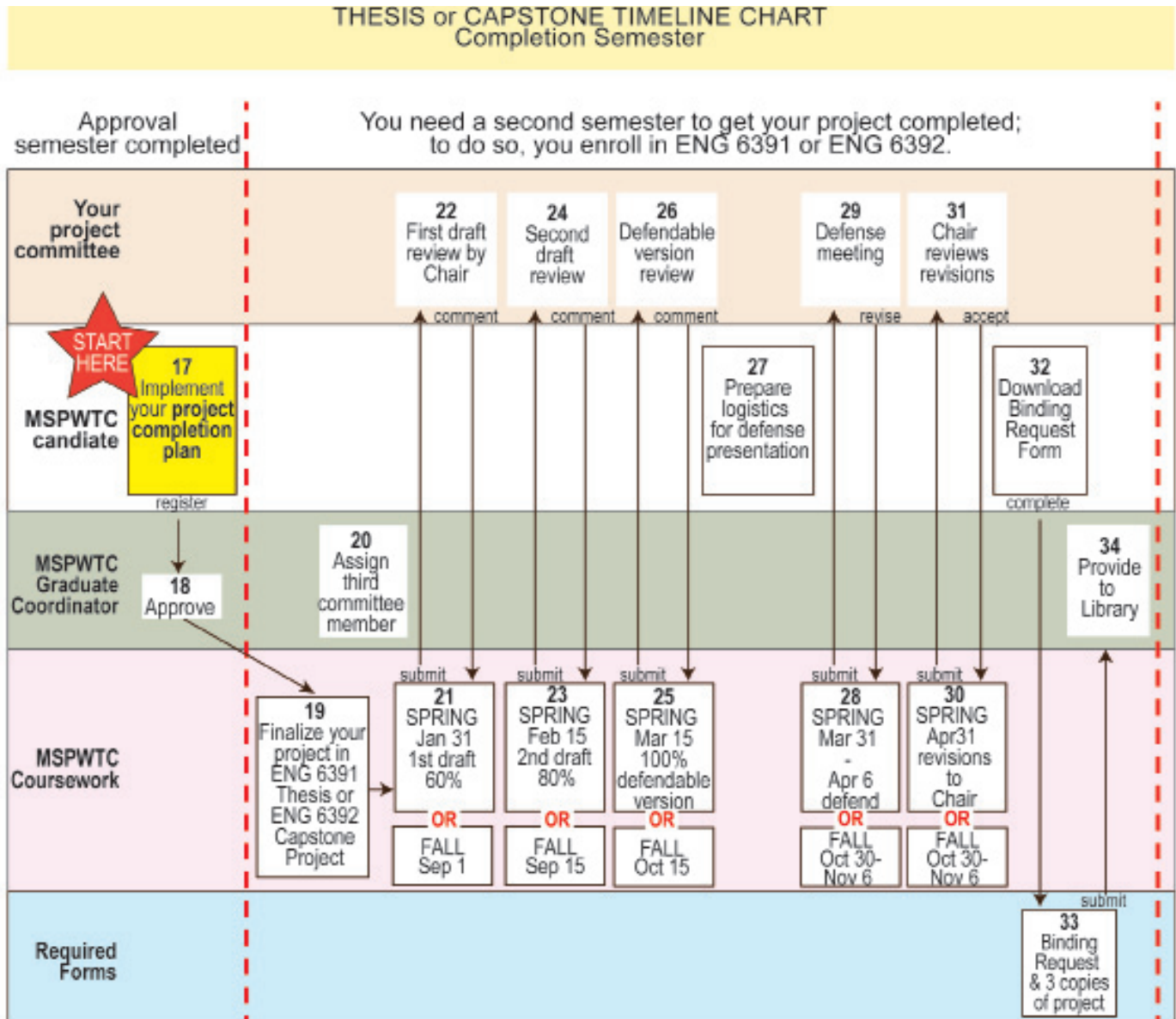
Reiterating the final two steps from of your approval semester on the previous page, follow the steps below to complete your thesis or capstone.

17. You need one semester to get your project completed. Make a plan that includes registering for the appropriate coursework and researching the logistics of your defense presentation.
18. Secure graduate coordinator approval for ENG 6391 Thesis or ENG 6392 Capstone Project.
19. Draft your thesis or capstone to meet the deadlines required by ENG 6391 or ENG 6392.
20. Verify that a third committee member has been named.
21. Submit a 60% complete draft to your project committee in accordance with the schedule requirements of a Spring or Fall semester.
22. Your committee chair reviews your draft and provides comments.
23. Incorporate the committee chair's comments and submit a 80% complete to your committee in accordance with the schedule requirements of a Spring or Fall semester.
24. Your committee reviews your draft and provides comments.
25. Incorporate the committee chair's comments and submit a complete, defensible project to your committee in accordance with the schedule requirements of a Spring or Fall semester.
26. Your committee reviews your project and provides comments.
27. Confirm all logistical requirements for your defense presentation.
28. Defend your project in accordance with the schedule requirements of a Spring or Fall semester.
29. Your committee hears your defense and either passes it, passes it with revisions, or rejects it.
30. You submit your revised final project to your committee chair.
31. The chair reviews the revisions and denies or accepts them.
32. Download the Binding Request Form.
33. Submit the Binding Request Form with three copies of your project to the graduate coordinator. (Follow the Binding Requirements section.)
34. The graduate coordinator reviews the package and provides it to the library.

Planning Your Timeline (cont.)

Figure 2: Completion Semester

Seven entities play a role in your endeavor. On the timeline chart, the activities of each entity in the project completion process are shown in a horizontal band of color. Numbers indicates the sequence of steps you must take, and arrows show which entity is recipient of an action.



http://www.uhd.edu/academic/colleges/humanities/english/mspwtc/eng_6391_6392.html

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (written in ENG 6390 Directed Research)

The purpose of writing a thesis or capstone proposal is to demonstrate to the Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC) that you have not only identified a topic of interest for your thesis or capstone but also have an organized plan for completing it. Your proposal helps the GAC understand your proposed topic, so it is important that your proposal provides the necessary information in order for them to accept it. Your proposal will be completed in ENG 6390 Directed Research, and this proposal is required in order to get your project approved. To successfully complete a proposal, you must address specific sections as identified in either the MSPWTC Thesis Proposal Form or the MSPWTC Capstone Project Proposal Form, depending on which project you choose to complete.

Reasons why students are asked to revise their thesis or capstone proposal include the following:

- Insufficiently focused thesis or capstone topic (e.g., too big to be feasible)
- Vague description of deliverables (if completing a capstone project)
- Lack of grounding in MSPWTC practices and research or lack of articulation of this grounding
- Poorly written proposals, lacking the section requirements as identified in the proposal form

Required Sections in the Proposal Forms

The required sections for the thesis or capstone proposal vary slightly. Below are the required sections that must appear in either the MSPWTC Thesis Proposal Form or the MSPWTC Capstone Project Proposal Form.

Thesis Proposal Form

- Purpose and scope
- Statement of the proposed method and rationale, with references to academic sources as necessary
- Timeline for completion of thesis, including proposed schedule for meeting with advisor(s), deadlines for completion of research and chapters/sections, projected defense date
- Consideration of any potential obstacles and the feasibility of the proposed thesis
- Evidence that necessary workplace approvals have been granted (attach as appendix)
- Evidence that necessary human subject research approval has been requested or granted (attach as appendix)
- Preliminary list of resources that you will use, with annotations describing their relevance to your project

Capstone Project Proposal Form

- Purpose and scope of project (including description of intended audience and deliverable)
- Statement of the proposed method for achieving the desired deliverable, with references to academic sources and other resources as necessary
- Summary of your background/experience/knowledge that qualifies you for this project
- Timeline for completion of capstone, including proposed schedule for meeting with advisor(s), deadlines for completion of research and chapters/sections, projected defense date
- Consideration of any potential obstacles and the feasibility of the proposed capstone
- Evidence that necessary workplace approvals have been granted (attach as appendix)
- Evidence that necessary human subject research approval has been requested or granted (attach as appendix)
- Preliminary list of resources that you will use, with annotations describing their relevance to your project

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (cont.)

Description of Required Sections

Below are descriptions for successfully completing each required section in the proposal form. The descriptions are inclusive of both the thesis and capstone; however, wherever the description pertains specifically to either the thesis or capstone project, it is indicated.

Purpose

The purpose statement should tell the GAC what you plan to discuss for your project.

This statement should be

- Specific
- Clear
- Goal-oriented

If completing a **thesis**, the statement also needs to state the significance of your paper.

Example:

Ineffective purpose statement: I propose to discuss problems in the workplace.

Critique: The statement is too vague, and there is no clear expectation as to what the reader (the GAC) will learn. Be more specific by stating the “problems” as well as the goal of your thesis paper.

Effective purpose statement: I propose to discuss the impact of negative employee-supervisor workplace relations on productivity improvement efforts in the workplace.

Critique: The statement specifies the problem the paper will address (employee-supervisor relations) and what the reader will gain or learn (how to improve productivity in the workplace).

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (cont.)

Purpose (cont.)

If completing a **capstone**, the statement also needs to state what you plan to present as a deliverable for your project. You should mention the intended audience for your deliverable, and mention why the deliverable justifies the intended audience. You should ask yourself: Why this deliverable as opposed to another? Is there a need for this deliverable and why? Why this audience? What will this project help the intended audience to do? What is the significance of this project? Answering these questions will help the GAC understand the rationale behind your topic.

Example:

Ineffective purpose statement: I propose to create a brochure for Westmont Hospital.

Critique: The statement is too vague, and there is no clear explanation of the intended audience (**who** the brochure is for, not just the **place** the brochure is for). Be more specific by stating the direct intended audience and what the audience will gain from the deliverable.

Effective purpose statement: I propose to create a brochure for Westmont Hospital that targets patients with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). The deliverable will give COPD patients options for treatment to help cure the disease. Currently, COPD patients at Westmont Hospital are ill-informed as to their treatment options, and this brochure will give them treatment options in the next step of their diagnosis.

Critique: The statement specifies a current problem (patients are ill-informed) and what the intended audience will gain from the deliverable (treatment options).

Scope

This term describes the limits or boundaries of what you plan to do with your topic by identifying the thesis or capstone's major objectives. Your scope section should answer the following questions: What subject matter will you use to support your identified purpose? What sub-topics will you discuss, and how are they related to each other and the overall thesis or capstone? Which aspects of your topic will not be addressed?

Your scope should be specific and reachable within the amount of time you are in the graduate program, so understand that you work within a clearly defined scope.

If completing a **thesis**, for example, a paper on style guide efficacy could be limited to addressing only style guides produced in 2011 for corporations with 50 employees or fewer. However, you also would not want to write on a topic so narrow that you can produce only a 10-page thesis. That document would be too shallow and short for a master's thesis document.

If completing a **capstone**, for example, you would not want to plan to write a book as a deliverable for your topic. That is way too much work for a master's capstone. You also would not want to write on a very narrow topic that would produce only a 5-page rationale report (as accompanied with your deliverable). That document would be too shallow and short for a master's capstone.

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (cont.)

Scope (cont.)

Identifying the scope of your thesis or capstone in the proposal tells the GAC the extent of your research and allows you to recognize deviations in your plan after you have started your project. As you write, your scope may change from what you initially identified in your proposal. It is always best to inform members of your committee.

Statement of Proposed Method

This section should include methods you will use to gather the information that you will include in your thesis or capstone. Examples of methods include interviews, surveys, or library/database research. Please refer to the Researching Your Topic section of this guide for further help in conducting research. The methods you select (interviews, surveys, or library/database research) depend on what your topic is. The sooner you have identified your topic, the sooner you can identify your methods for completing it.

As you identify which methods you will choose for your paper, keep in mind that methods/academic sources/practices acquired in the MSPWTC program are preferred. Your thesis or capstone should demonstrate that this master's program has helped you to complete it.

In this section, state the methods by which you will complete your thesis or capstone, and justify why each method is needed to complete it. The GAC wants your rationale, so if your method is to conduct an interview or survey, tell the GAC who you plan to interview or survey, how the survey is constructed, and why you choose to do so. If you choose to conduct library/database research, tell them what type of information you choose to research and why you choose it. Further down in the proposal, the GAC will ask you to list specific resources that you will use in your thesis or capstone, along with a justification for each one.

If completing a **thesis**, ask yourself: How will this method further the claims in my thesis?

If completing a **capstone**, remember, the rationale report, the paper that accompanies your deliverable, should explain your rationale behind selecting certain methods/theories/research, etc. for the deliverable. Ask yourself: How will this method aid in the intended audience's understanding of the topic?

Timeline of Completion

This section requires you to create your own timeline for completing your thesis or capstone. It should be as detailed as possible, taking into account semester breaks, holidays, and advisor availability. This timeline should work in junction with the schedule for either ENG 6391 Thesis or 6392 Capstone, depending on which path you choose to take. In ENG 6391 or ENG 6392, you will start and complete your thesis or capstone and then defend it. You must work around the set schedule in the class to create your own schedule, which must show the dates you plan to meet with your committee chair (or other members), complete research and chapters/sections of your thesis or capstone, and defend your thesis or capstone.

A sample schedule for the class is shown on the following page. The dates in red are dates that cannot be changed due to the requirements for both ENG 6391 and ENG 6392 and are the same regardless if you are completing either a thesis or capstone. Refer to the Completion Semester Timeline for a comprehensive view of the semester. When creating your calendar, it is recommended that you choose a specific day of the week you intend to meet with your chair and make revisions, that way, you create a routine.

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (cont.)

Figure 3: ENG 6391 Thesis or ENG 6392 Capstone Sample Timeline

Dates change depending if you are enrolled in the course in either the Fall or Spring semester, but the tasks for either semester are the same.

Semester		Task
Fall	Spring	
August 17	January 13	Meet with chair. Take notes on any suggestions/ revisions to be made.
August 24	January 20	Complete revisions. Continue working on paper.
September 1	January 31	1st draft. Send to committee chair only. Minimum content: 60%
September 7	February 10	Meet with chair. Take notes on any suggestions/ revisions to be made. Complete revisions. Continue working on paper.
September 15	February 15	2nd draft. Send to full committee. Minimum content: 80%
September 28	February 24	Meet with chair. Take notes on any suggestions/ revisions to be made.
October 5	March 7	Complete revisions. Continue working on paper.
October 15	March 15	Defendable version. Send to full committee. Content: 100%
October 20	March 19	Talk with chair about defense.
October 30 through November 6	March 31 through April 6	Defense dates
November 30	April 30	All revisions required following the defense. Send to committee chair only and any interested committee members.

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (cont.)

Potential Obstacles and Feasibility

In this section, state any obstacles you may encounter. Are there certain time constraints? Is there doubt as to the scope of your project? Do you foresee problems in research? Do you foresee your project not getting workplace approval (if needed)? Are you unsure if human subjects may be involved or if you need to complete a form for the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects to review (if applicable)?

Workplace Approval

This section addresses proprietary information in the workplace. Some companies have internal policies and procedures that govern their information. If your thesis or capstone will use information that belongs to an employer, that is proprietary information. You should obtain and supply written workplace approval if you are an employee or intern at a company and using company material (proprietary material) in your thesis or capstone.

There is no specific format that your employer should follow (memo, letter, etc.); however, their documentation should include the following and should be attached as an appendix to your proposal form:

- Your name
- The semester you are in
- The nature of the proprietary information
- The scope of information that you are permitted to use in your thesis or capstone

It is also a good idea (optional) to state how you got the approval. Who did you speak with? How long did the process take? Were there any obstacles in getting approval?

This section does not assume that you are employed; it is asking you to note that if your thesis or capstone relies on workplace information and they require approval for using their work (e.g., for you to use their data, speak with their employees, or release internal documents to the public), then you must provide evidence that you have complied with the requirements of that workplace. If you are not employed, simply put “Not Applicable” or a sentence stating that no workplace approval is necessary. If you are employed but are not using proprietary information, do the same.

Human Subject Research Approval

If you choose to use human subjects for your thesis or capstone, you must get proper approval. If you propose to engage in research activities (interviews, surveys, etc.) involving the use of human subjects, you must have approval prior to the initiation of the project from the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). The CPHS is responsible for safeguarding the rights and welfare of persons participating in research projects. All information and forms on this topic are available on the UHD web page owned by the CPHS. Please refer to this page to ensure that your thesis or capstone meets the guidelines for protecting human subjects.

Your completed approval request form to the CPHS should be attached as an appendix to your proposal (make a copy), and if you already have approval from the CPHS, you should also attach that confirmation.

Creating and Revising Your Proposal (cont.)

Preliminary List of Resources

Courses in the MSPWTC program will help you identify potential sources you will use in your thesis or capstone rationale report; this is why it is important that you identify a thesis or capstone topic early in your MSPWTC coursework. Most MSPWTC courses allow you to explore a topic of your choice as a requirement for successfully completing the course. As you choose this topic for the course, consider your thesis or capstone; try to pick a topic that you can later use in your thesis or capstone rationale report. As you write the paper for the course, make note of sources that you can use later. Theory textbooks required for a course provide good material to include in your thesis or capstone rationale report.

It will be beneficial for you to develop an annotated bibliography as you proceed through the courses in the program. You should expand your bibliography from course to course, then, when you write this section in your proposal, you don't have to start from scratch. Your annotated bibliography should cite the source as well as describe its relevance to your paper. Do not solely list the source; this will result in your proposal being rejected. Your annotation should be approximately 100-150 words. For formatting requirements and other tips on creating an annotated bibliography, please refer to the Cornell University Library: How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography or ask members of your committee.

Summary of Background/Experience/Knowledge (Capstone Only)

State any previous experience that you have with the subject matter you will discuss in your capstone. What makes you a qualified individual in the topic you chose? What are your interests? What have you witnessed?

Researching Your Topic

Researching your topic is one of the most important steps to writing a good thesis or capstone. It is important that your topic is not too broad. You want to narrow your topic down and learn everything you can. Talk to someone (like a professor or author) who knows about the topic you are researching. They can give you advice on how to conduct your research and the best places to start looking for materials about your topic.

You can also use the following sources:

- UHD Library (in person and online)
- MSPWTC professors
- Online sources (Google Scholar, online periodicals, etc.)
- Journal articles
- Books (in the field of study you are researching and text books)
- Primary research – such as interviews, surveys, and observations (this is important for a **Capstone** project)

Basically, you need to know everything there is to know about the topic you are writing about, from what has been published, to what questions still remain unanswered about the topic. After consulting with faculty members, email any authors you are reading to learn more about your topic. In most cases they will reply and send you down another avenue of research that will benefit you and your project.

When researching for your topic using the UHD Library, ask librarians for help. They will provide you with information on how to conduct your research, help you with the scope of your topic, and even help you with search phrases so that you can attain better search results. There is also a Library Instruction course that you can take to help you conduct better research; please visit the Library Instruction page for more details. Also, take into consideration your committee chair and the type of research that he or she prefers. It is important to get along with your committee chair to produce the best researched thesis or capstone.

Starting the Writing Process

Start your project by setting a strict schedule to follow; this is also a required task to be completed and submitted with the MSPWTC Thesis Proposal Form or Capstone Project Proposal Form. The schedule should include when you will research and when you will write. It will help you organize the whole of your project and follow the due dates specified in the MSPWTC coursework. It is important that you read as much as you can about your topic before you start writing. The more material you have to work with, the easier it is to get started on your project.

Other tips for starting the writing process:

- Write an outline and go over it with your committee chair
- Try your best to make it a priority over other things going on in your life
- Look at previous projects to get a general idea of how they are formed (Bound MSPWTC thesis or and capstone projects are available in the UHD Library)
- Start writing as soon as you can . . . if you wait too long you'll be in trouble!
- Do not obsess about or fall in love with your writing; there are revisions and you will change what you have previously written
- Expect to write at least 50 pages for a **thesis** project and around 30 pages for a **capstone** project.

Sections Required and Recommended

Content

- Title Page (see template below for specific elements)
- Signature Page, which includes
 - ◊ Title
 - ◊ Author Name
 - ◊ Three signature lines (with original signatures of three committee members)
- Copyright Page (optional)
- Dedication Page (optional)
- Acknowledgements (optional)
- Table of Contents
- Abstract or Executive Summary
- List of Tables (required only if the document contains tables)
- List of Figures (required only if the document contains figures)
- List of Abbreviations (required only if the document contains abbreviations)
- Authorization to copy (unless you copyright it)
- References
- Appendices (optional)
- Author Vita (optional)

The Defense

What is a defense?

A “defense” is a term that simply denotes a discussion of your thesis or capstone before your project committee. This is the final step in the evaluation of your work in the MSPWTC program, and the tradition of “defending” your thesis or capstone serves as a rite of passage from student to a professional. The process may vary slightly from committee to committee in terms of times and details, but essentially, you will discuss your topic, research, and findings. Typically, you will give a 5-10 minute overview of your paper, and that will be followed by a conversation—questions, answers, discussion—with your committee about your research and findings. The question-and-answer format is intended to get clarity about elements of your work and to engage you in the intellectual issues surrounding your thesis or capstone. Your committee chair facilitates the discussion, but other members of your committee may ask questions as well.

Note: The project committee will be familiar with your thesis or capstone because they will have provided you with feedback on your drafts along the way; however, this is a chance to discuss the process it took in completing your project, research, and findings. Since your committee is familiar with your project, your defense will be a discussion, not merely a presentation; keep this in mind.

How should you prepare for the defense?

The best way to prepare for your defense is to meet with your committee chair at least two weeks before your scheduled defense date. During this meeting, ask your chair to review the formalities of the session, how questions will be asked, how long the session is likely to be, and how the session will be chaired. Remember: each committee has its own style of facilitating a defense, so just as they have familiarized themselves with your project, familiarize yourself with the defense process from the committee’s point of view. Also, double check with your chair that all the mechanical steps that accompany your defense are in order, such as having the appropriate forms and materials.

Be open with your committee chair about any problems or weaknesses of your work, which may come up in your defense. Realize that your committee is there to support you—in most cases, their questions are not intended to trip you up or find fault; they are genuinely interested in hearing your perspectives and what you learned and in helping you transition into the post-graduate role of expert in the field. Remember: you are the expert with respect to what’s in your thesis/capstone—no one knows it better than you.

Also, after you write your final draft, distribute it a week before your defense date to committee members, and bring a copy of it to the defense (print it on regular copy paper). Committee members make comments on the distributed copy you supply to them and reference it when asking you questions during your defense; they also give you their marked up copies to guide you should your paper or project need revision.

What is the type of dress?

You should dress comfortably; business casual is recommended. You want to be taken seriously and professionally, so dress accordingly.

What should you bring to your defense?

You should request equipment in advance through your committee chair or other members of your project committee. If your defense includes a PowerPoint presentation, make sure that a projector is provided. PowerPoint presentations are not required; this depends on the type of project and the expectations or needs of the committee. Academically, the culmination of your work is your thesis or capstone, so you shouldn’t distract yourself with creating another deliverable; however, check with your chair and other members of the project committee if they would like one.

The Defense (cont.)

When will you know if your defense has been approved or denied?

After the questions/conversation, the committee will ask you to leave the room for a brief period, and they will discuss your project. When you are called back in, the committee indicates what the next steps may be—whether your project passes, passes with revisions, or fails.

If your project passes . . .

Step 1: Get the document printed according to the requirements in the Thesis and Capstone Formatting Guideline

Step 2: Get the three signatures from your project committee

Step 3: Deliver all copies to the graduate coordinator according to the Binding Requirements Section; the graduate coordinator will send it to the Library.

If your project passes with revisions . . .

Step 1: Make the revisions requested by your project committee

Step 2: Send the revised document to your project committee for a final look

Step 3: Get your chair's approval that your project has "passed"

Step 4: Follow the procedure in "passes."

If your project fails . . .

Step 1: Make the revisions requested by your project committee

Step 2: Make an appointment with the graduate coordinator to discuss your project

Note: Committees usually do not schedule a defense until the document is in good condition; however, reasons a paper or project fails include: the document is incomplete, has gone off on a tangent, is poorly written, or is poorly laid out.

It is unusual for students to get to a defense if his or her chair does not think he or she has a chance to pass. Failure at a defense is most likely the result of poor communication between the student and the committee chair or possibly among committee members—e.g., last-minute changes in drafts or incomplete drafts. It is critical for you to get complete drafts to all committee members well in advance of the defense and stay in regular communication with them.

Binding Requirements

Thesis and Capstone Formatting Guidelines

Thesis: You are required to provide three unbound original versions of your thesis to the UHD library; each must contain a signature page with original signatures. A Thesis/Capstone Binding Request Form must accompany the three originals.

Capstone: You are required to provide three unbound original versions of your capstone rationale paper to the UHD library; each must contain a signature page with original signatures. You must provide three copies of the actual capstone project, presuming all proprietary and privileged information issues have been appropriately addressed. A Thesis/Capstone Binding Request Form must accompany the three originals.

Specific Requirements for the Thesis and the Capstone Rationale Paper

- Formatting
- Printed on acid-free, archival paper
- Printed on a laser printer
- Printed on one side only
- Margins:
 - Top, Bottom, Right: 1”
 - Left: 1.5”
- All text, including page numbers, must be within these margins.
- Any electronic elements should be put on a CD and included in a folder page with the hard copy. The folder page should be of a material that can be bound with the paper copy.

All other formatting choices are left to the discretion of each author, with the understanding that those choices will be consistent within the document itself and will be an appropriate match for the audience, purpose and content of the document.

Costs

The student must pay for the materials and costs associated with providing the three original copies that meet the requirements above. As the university will keep the three copies, binding costs will be paid by the university. If a student wishes to have any additional bound copies for personal use, he or she must handle those arrangements with outside facilities. [See UHD library website for area printers.]

Conclusion

Completing a thesis or capstone demonstrates your ability to apply the knowledge you have acquired in the MSPWTC program. At the end of your work, you should be proud of what you have accomplished! To help you reach your goal, we, the students of the Spring 2011 ENG 5340 Project Management class, decided to produce this guide to help you visualize the steps you should follow to successfully complete your project.

We tried to put ourselves in your shoes in completing this guide because we realize your thesis or capstone requires planning and knowledge of certain entities within the program. Although we acknowledge that you may have additional questions that were not addressed in this document, we are positive that this guide will be of great help for you to succeed and finally graduate from the MSPWTC program.

Forms

Form: Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) Application to Conduct Research Using Human Subjects

Who submits: MSPWTC candidate

Who receives: CPHS; depending upon the nature of your application, it may be referred to a subcommittee of the CPHS.

When due: Approved application must be attached to your thesis or capstone proposal form, which must be submitted no later than the 4th Monday of the semester you are enrolled in ENG 6390 Directed Research.

This applicable form has 8 pages. It requires that your research be clearly thought out, that your questionnaires and consent forms be complete, and that you've given some thought to the impact of your research on the people who will participate in your project.

Even simple surveys require approval of the CPHS.

You may be required to take some applicable training.

You should invest some time in reading the definitions of different categories of applications because the form requests your opinion on which category of review is required for your projects.

Possible complications:

- Schedule: the committee meets monthly and provides their approval or disapproval notice 7-10 days later
- Attachments to the application: you must attach the questionnaires and consent forms you intend to use in your research
- Signatures: your application must include the signature of your faculty sponsor, which could be your committee chair.

Recommendation: Before you're enrolled in ENG 6390 Directed Research, read everything on the CPHS web page, and understand the requirements of the application form.

Where you can find more information:

www.uhd.edu/research/phs/

Forms (cont.)

Form: MSPWTC Thesis Proposal Form

Who submits: MSPWTC candidate

Who receives: MSPWTC Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC) via the MSPWTC graduate coordinator; the GAC will approve your thesis project proposal and/or suggest modifications.

When due: 4th Monday of the semester in which you are enrolled in ENG 6390 Directed Research.

This form consists of three parts. Part A covers information about you. Part B is about selecting members to serve on your project committee. Part C lists the project information you must submit with the form, including appendices to the form.

It requires that your research be clearly thought out and your proposal appropriately documented.

Missing attachments delay consideration of your proposal by the GAC.

Possible complications:

- Schedule: this form, and its attachments, are due at the same time
- Attachments: these are not minor documents, and they require planning and coordination on your part
- Committee membership: a faculty member may decline due to time constraints or work load

Recommendation: Read and understand this form before you want to use it. Its requirements are substantial. In addition, secure membership on your project committee to reduce potential disappointment when you submit the form.

Where you can find more information:

<http://www.uhd.edu/academic/colleges/humanities/english/mspwtc/forms.html>

Forms (cont.)

Form: MSPWTC Capstone Project Proposal Form

Who submits: MSPWTC candidate

Who receives: MSPWTC Graduate Advisory Committee (GAC) via the MSPWTC graduate coordinator; the GAC will approve your proposal and/or suggest modifications.

When due: 4th Monday of the semester in which you are enrolled in ENG 6390 Directed Research.

This form consists of three parts. Part A covers information about you. Part B is about selecting members to serve on your project committee. Part C lists the project information you must submit with the form, including appendices to the form.

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Where you can find more information:

<http://www.uhd.edu/academic/colleges/humanities/english/mspwtc/forms.html>

Forms (cont.)

Form: Thesis/Capstone Binding Request Form

Who submits: MSPWTC candidate

Who receives: MSPSTC Coordinator, who submits form and three copies of your thesis or capstone document to the UHD library for binding.

When due: No later than the last day of the semester in which your degree will be conferred.

Be accurate. This form determines how your document will be catalogued.

Where to find more information:

www.uhd.edu/research/phs/

Links

- [Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects](#)
- [Cornell University Library: How to Prepare an Annotated Bibliography](#)
- [Google Scholar](#)
- [Library Instruction Course](#)
- [MSPWTC main page](#)
- [UHD Library](#)