Capstone Experience

PRO 498 and PRO 499
Guidelines

Department of Professional Studies

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Appendix A UAH IRB Decision Tree
I. Interdisciplinary Studies in the Bachelor in Professional Studies Program

The Bachelor of Arts or Science in Professional Studies (BPS) program is offered through the College of Professional and Continuing Studies. The BPS is a tailored interdisciplinary degree program where students learn how to integrate information presented from multiple disciplines into one well-informed concept focusing on a specific theme, question or problem.

Students, along with their BPS academic advisor, develop a plan of study that includes a required Professional Studies Interdisciplinary Core coupled with concentration courses that are carefully selected from two or more academic disciplines. This plan of study culminates in a final, individualized, and interdisciplinary capstone research project/thesis directed by a BPS faculty member.

II. What is the Capstone Experience?

The Capstone Experience in the BPS program takes place in the final two semesters of study before graduation, and is a thesis that demonstrates your ability to apply the knowledge and skills you’ve gained from your range of courses to your own personal or professional context. It is the final research project/thesis of the BPS major and bridges the disciplines that were chosen for your course of study.

The series of Professional Studies (PRO) courses develops your critical thinking and analysis skills while helping you learn how to synthesize information you’ve learned into one well-informed concept focused on a specific theme, question, or problem of the your choosing.

PRO 498, “Inquiry and Learning,” is the first semester of a two-semester progression toward completing the capstone experience. In this course, you will choose an interdisciplinary focus related to your approved concentration area, perform foundational research, and formulate a research proposal and prospectus, both of which must be approved by BPS faculty and the dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Studies before work on the thesis can be continued.

In PRO 499, “Capstone Experience: Research Project/Thesis,” you will complete your capstone experience by producing a final thesis that demonstrates your understanding of integrating and reporting key research from multiple disciplines and developing your own conclusions in your specific interdisciplinary focus.

III. Thesis Requirements

The information contained in this section of the handbook is subject to change; at the start of PRO 498: Inquiry and Learning, your instructor will provide you with details and requirements relevant to your specific thesis. In general, your thesis must:

- Integrate the knowledge and skills gained from your interdisciplinary areas of study using inquiry-based learning methods.
- Be an original product, not a replication of an existing study or project/thesis.
- Be meaningful and relevant to your specific personal, professional, or academic goals.
- Achieve a minimum grade of “C” or better.
Required elements of the thesis:

- Approved Proposal (see Section V for guidelines).
- Prospectus (see Section V for guidelines).
- A minimum length of 25 pages, which will include your works cited.
- Use of MLA or APA formatting, depending on the topic.
- An abstract.
- A short autobiographical statement no longer than three to four sentences.

Alternative project

Under special circumstances, an alternative research project may be considered in lieu of a written thesis. The project must have approval from your instructor and the Dean of Professional and Continuing Studies.

- Examples of alternative project include a documentary, a community project, an ethnographic study, or other academically appropriate project.
- Minimum 10 page scholarly introduction explaining the methodology used and insights gained from completing this project, as well as a bibliography of sources consulted for the project.

IV. Choosing a Topic

Choosing a topic for your thesis can be a daunting task. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

- Start with what you know. Consider expanding upon a topic that you have actively been researching and develop it further into your thesis.
- Your thesis should not be a descriptive report; rather, it should answer a question or address a problem.
- Focus your topic so that the project is not too large, but do not narrow it so much that you will have a difficult time writing the required number of pages.
- Make it something that is interesting to you. Think about how your research can inform what you do in your personal or professional life.
- Bring your ideas to your instructor for feedback; this can often expand your perspective on a subject and open doors that you have not yet thought of.
- Your topic should be original and not a reproduction of a previous study.

The following are broad examples of some research areas. These are provided to demonstrate the types of topics related to interdisciplinary research. You will develop your own original topic and have it approved by your thesis instructor prior to beginning the research process. Remember that the topic you choose for your thesis must be focused and concise.

Organization Studies and Leadership Studies:

- The Impact of Climate Change on Organizations
- Gender Politics Within Organizations
- Best Practices for Workforce Morale and Satisfaction
- Employee Motivation and Productivity
- Organizational Ethics
Leadership Styles and Gender
The Ethics of Leadership
Leadership and the Impact of Technology
Bullying in the Workforce

Science, Technology, and Society:

Cybersecurity and the Rights to Privacy
The Ethics of Robotic Automation
The Ethics of Interplanetary Travel/Colonization
How Genetic Modification of Plants and Animals Impacts Farming and Consumers
Technology and the Rural Health Crisis
The Ethics of the Modification of DNA to Eradicate Diseases

V. The Proposal and the Prospectus: Their Differences and Project Requirements

Prior to beginning your thesis, you will submit both a proposal of your research topic and then a prospectus that will guide your research. Here are the differences between the two documents:

Proposal

The proposal is a brief document written in a persuasive tone that is submitted to a panel including the Dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Studies, your thesis instructor, and your academic advisor and must be approved before you can continue the research process. Throughout your degree program, you have carefully chosen coursework to provide you with the educational foundation you need to achieve your personal and/or professional goals. The proposal will provide an overview of your proposed research and demonstrate how your thesis will relate to those particular goals. Elements of the proposal are as follows:

- 2 – 3 pages in length.
- Title of your thesis.
- Introduction to the topic and some background information (1 – 2 paragraphs).
- Your research question or problem and the issues that you plan to address.
- Literature review to demonstrate your awareness of the current research in your topic area.
- Project timeline.
- List of references.

Prospectus

Once your proposal has been approved, you will work closely with your thesis instructor to develop your prospectus. You may need to revise your prospectus several times in the early stages of your research, but once it is complete you will use it as a guideline throughout your thesis development process to keep you focused and on track. Elements of the prospectus are as follows:

- 5 – 8 pages in length.
- Research question or problem.
- Literature Review.
Annotated bibliography (20 – 30 primary and secondary sources).

The significance of your research – why is it important?

Methodology – How will you collect your data and how do you plan to use it in your research?

Research timeline.

Conclusion.

VI. Timeline

The initial work on your thesis begins during the first week of class in PRO 498 and will include the following:

- Writing the thesis proposal and submitting for approval.
- Performing the literature search.
- Developing the annotated bibliography
  - Include at least 20 – 30 sources (types of sources required will be determined by your thesis instructor).
- Writing the prospectus

Final work on your thesis takes place in PRO 499:

- Students will schedule a regular weekly meeting with their capstone professor to discuss the progress of their thesis. Meetings can be face-to-face, via email or Skype or via telephone.
- Work with the instructor to develop a timeline in the form of a contract to ensure the thesis is completed in a timely manner.
- A final presentation of the completed thesis will be made to the dean, the professor, and the academic advisor.
  - You must be prepared to answer questions after the presentation. The presentation is part of completion of the course, and you must be able to converse knowledgeably about your thesis—the subject matter and the methodology used in the research process. The presentation will be given a pass/fail grade while the thesis itself will be given a letter grade.
  - A minimum grade of “C” is required to pass PRO 499.

VII. Institutional Review Board

If your thesis involves human subjects, then your research must be approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB follows guidelines established by the Federal Government to assure the safety of human subjects involved in research.

UAH has an established plan in place for the IRB process. Most IRB applications come from fields such as psychology and sociology with a small percentage coming from areas such as business, communication arts and political science.

To determine if a thesis requires IRB review, the chart “Do I Need Approval” is included as Appendix B. This chart includes a checklist of the types of research that would require IRB approval and if it is found that the research must go through the review process, forms can be found on the UAH website (www.uah.edu/IRB).
VIII. Interdisciplinary Research Process

In PRO 320: Interdisciplinary Perspectives and Critical Thinking, you learned about the purpose and process of interdisciplinary research. In PRO 325: Interdisciplinary Research and Application, you evaluated scholarly works using Dr. Allen Repko’s Integrated Model of the Interdisciplinary Research Process (IRP) and learned how to identify pieces that were written using an interdisciplinary approach as opposed to those using a disciplinary approach. The IRP is an easy to follow, but not formulaic, decision-making process that makes integration and the goal of producing a more comprehensive understanding achievable, allowing for greater flexibility and reflexivity, and it distinguishes interdisciplinary research from disciplinary methods. The following is Dr. Repko’s IRP which should be used as a framework in your thesis development.

A. Drawing on disciplinary insights*
   1. Define the problem
   2. Justify using an interdisciplinary approach
   3. Identify relevant disciplines
   4. Conduct a literature search
   5. Develop adequacy in each relevant discipline
   6. Analyze the problem and evaluate each insight or theory

B. Integrating disciplinary insights
   1. Identify conflicts between insights and their sources
   2. Create common ground between concepts and theories
   3. Construct a more comprehensive understanding
   4. Reflect on, test, and communicate the understanding

*Disciplinary Insights includes insights from disciplines, sub disciplines, interdisciplines and schools of thought.

IX. Salmon Library

UAH’s Salmon Library provides a number of resources and services to assist students with their research. Some of those services are listed below but to see all of the services available to you, please visit the Salmon Library website (www.uah.edu/library) and click “Get Help” in the left side menu.

One on One Research Consultations
This is a consultation where students can ask anything about using the library’s resources in their research. Students can schedule a meeting to discuss things like using the library’s databases, citing information, or designing a research plan. This is a free service that’s available to all UAH students.

Live Chat
For students who have questions while they’re in the middle of their research and can’t get to the library, Live Chat with a librarian is available.

Subject Specialists
Students can contact any of the Subject Librarians to get help with specific resource needs, provide
research suggestions, or to have general questions answered about their research field. For a list of Subject Librarians, visit their website: (http://www.uah.edu/library/research/subject-specialists).

X. Preparing for Graduation

Congratulations on reaching this momentous milestone! Your hard work and dedication has paid off and it is time for you to receive your diploma! Here are the steps to take as you complete your final semesters at UAH:

**Step 1: Prerequisites**

Before you apply to graduate, you must meet the following requirements:

- Have earned at least 98 total semester hours (120 hours are required at completion of your Bachelor in Professional Studies).
- Have verified with your advisor that you have an official, signed program of study on file.
- You have achieved at least an overall 2.0 GPA.
- You have reviewed your unofficial transcript to verify that all information listed in the Current Program section is accurate. If there are any errors, please notify your academic advisor immediately.
- Confirm that your official UAH email account is active or your messages are forwarded to an email account that you check regularly. ALL official UAH correspondence and reminders, including any information regarding graduation, is sent to your UAH email address.
- Ensure that you have no financial holds on your account.

**Step 2: Apply to Graduate**

To submit your application to graduate, go to: www.uah.edu/registrar/commencement/apply-to-graduate. You should submit your application 1 – 3 semesters prior to your expected date of graduation. Application deadlines are below:

**Summer Graduates:** February 1  
Fee: $50 by February 1; $75 February 2 – 15; $100 after February 15

**Fall Graduates:** June 1  
Fee $50 by June 1; $75 June 2 - 15; $100 after June 15

**Spring Graduates:** September 1  
Fee $50 by September 1; $75 September 2- 15; $100 after September 15

**Step 3: Degree Audit**

You will receive an email with your official degree audit results approximately 6 weeks after you have submitted an application. Be sure to review the degree audit results with your academic advisor as soon as possible.
Step 4: Participate in Countdown to Cap and Gown

Countdown to Cap and Gown is a two day event for degree candidates where you can purchase your cap and gown, class ring, verify degree information and visit with departments to receive any final information. This is held every fall and spring semester.

Step 5: Graduation Questionnaire

You will receive an email with instructions on completing your seat reservations and graduation quote questionnaires. You will need to notify the Registrar’s Office if you will NOT be attending the Commencement ceremony.

Step 6: Commencement

The Commencement Marshall instructions, a detailed list of what will occur before, during and after the ceremony will be emailed and sent via postal mail. Please review the instructions carefully!

2 – 3 days prior to the ceremony, take your gown out of its plastic bag and hang it to remove the fold wrinkles.

Arrive at the ceremony no later than one hour prior to the start of the event. Check in is in the Von Braun Center East Hall.

Step 7: Diplomas

You will not receive your diploma at Commencement; it will be mailed to you approximately 6 – 8 weeks after graduation. Please be sure your current mailing address is on file in the Registrar’s Office.

A graduation checklist and complete details regarding Commencement can be found on UAH’s website: www.uah.edu/registrar/commencement.