This handbook is a work in progress, so be sure to consult your adviser and the NQSC graduate coordinator about capstone project specifics.

*Last updated 03/20/14.
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CAPSTONE PROJECT CHECKLIST – STUDENT

Prior to beginning the first semester of your capstone project:

- Select topic
- Select faculty adviser
- Complete plan of study form with the NQSC graduate coordinator
- Submit appointment of chair form to NQSC graduate coordinator and Norcross Graduate School (due before registering for capstone project hours)

During the proposal semester of your capstone project:

- Identify committee members (at least two must be faculty members in NQSC) and submit appointment of committee form to NQSC graduate coordinator and Norcross Graduate School (due at least two weeks before proposal defense)
- Write proposal
- Schedule proposal defense with all committee members. The proposal cannot be defended in the same semester as the final project defense.

The proposal defense will result in one of three decisions:

(a) The proposed project meets the standards (no changes or minor changes)
(b) Approval to proceed once specified changes are submitted and approved by the supervisor and other members of the committee
(c) Proposal rejected

- Submit capstone proposal defense form to the NQSC graduate program coordinator
- Submit IRB application

After your proposal is approved:

- Begin work on the capstone project. Students need to work closely with their capstone project adviser and submit continuing drafts of the project for approval. The project cannot be defended until the capstone project adviser has reviewed all portions and agreed that it meets the capstone requirements

During the project defense semester of your capstone project:

- Schedule capstone project defense. Ask the department administrator to schedule the room.
- Schedule a room for the defense
- Submit capstone project materials to committee and NQSC graduate coordinator at least one-week prior to defense
- Defend project
- Make committee’s corrections to project
- Format project according to NQSC and Norcross Graduate School standards
- Deposit bound and electronic copy of the capstone project to Norcross Graduate School for format check and approval (deadlines: Spring--April 15; Summer--July 15; Fall--November 15). The review checklist must be included indicating that you have read and adhered to the format guidelines
- Submit closure report to IRB. Provide copy of the report to adviser
- Make graduate school corrections and resubmit for final approval
- Submit at least three paper copies capstone project to Norcross Graduate School for binding. These must be on bonded paper (at least 25% cotton). If the project has a technology focus, the technology component must be appropriately archived.
- Provide bound copies of the capstone project to all committee members. If the project is technology focused, provide committee members a copy of the production.
CAPSTONE PROJECT CHECKLIST – ADVISER

Throughout the capstone process:
The student and faculty adviser should meet frequently to ensure the student stays on track. The adviser is the student’s mentor through the capstone process and professional development.

Prior to the beginning of the student’s first semester of capstone project work:
❑ The appointment of adviser form needs to be submitted to the graduate school prior to enrolling in hours
❑ The capstone registration approval form needs to be submitted prior to registration.

During the student’s proposal semester:
❑ The appointment of committee form needs to be submitted to graduate school and NQSC graduate coordinator two weeks prior to the proposal defense
❑ Proposal defense form needs to be submitted to graduate coordinator
❑ At the end of the semester, the professor enters an “IN” as the grade
❑ Student should apply for graduation

During the student’s capstone project defense semester:
❑ The scheduling of the capstone form needs to be turned into the graduate school two weeks prior to defense
❑ The defense announcement needs to be posted in the department two weeks prior to the defense
❑ The Norcross defense evaluation needs to be turned in within 24 hours of the defense
❑ The NQSC capstone evaluation needs to be completed and turned in the graduate coordinator
❑ Official signature pages will need to be signed (at least three on at least 25% cotton paper)

After approval of the capstone project by:
❑ The student needs to submit a hard and electronic copy of the capstone to the graduate school by the deposit deadline
❑ After the graduate student has completed all edits, the student needs to submit three hard copies on bond paper (at least 25%) to the graduate school. If the student wants personal copies, they can submit extra copies and $10 per copy.
After the professor has received final notification from the graduate school, he/she submit a “CR” for the project and a change of grade form for the prior semester(s) changing the “IN” to a “CR.”

- The department gets a hardbound copy of the capstone.
- The student should provide an electronic copy of the final capstone to the committee members. Some committee members would also like a hard copy.
THE CAPSTONE PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The capstone project is the culminating experience for NQSC graduate students. This project provides students the opportunity to integrate the knowledge and skills acquired through their coursework and apply these principles and ideas to a particular strategic communication problem or a situation similar to that found in the professional workplace. The project must:

• represent high standards of scholarly and theoretical inquiry
• demonstrate technical mastery
• demonstrate research proficiency
• have important implications for the student’s specialty track.

Although the topics will be determined by a student’s interest, the purpose of the project is to develop and test messages that address a communication problem. Students will need to build on the skills they learned during their coursework to analyze their target audience, design messages aimed at the audience, develop the campaign materials, and analyze if the campaign messages achieved the intended effect. This project will be a valuable addition to a professional portfolio and suitable for submission to academic conferences.

Components:
All capstone projects must include these four components, related to the different areas of study in the Strategic Communication M.A. program:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Production</th>
<th>Implications</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessing whether a campaign, tactic, or creative work achieves its intended effect</td>
<td>Developing original campaign materials and demonstrating technological proficiency</td>
<td>Explaining how the campaign or tactics enhance the understanding of and practice of strategic communication</td>
<td>Understanding and explaining why some messages are more effective than others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Goals:

a. To identify and apply theories principles of communication and message design for the purpose of solving problems
b. To assess audience needs and design materials to meet those needs
c. To develop professional quality campaign messages
d. To implement a rigorous evaluation plan
e. To demonstrate proficiency in message design and production
f. To produce a professional quality final manuscript or creative project
There are four types of projects that students can complete for their capstone projects. All capstone projects must include all four required components (theory, research, production, implications), but different components are emphasized depending on the type of project.

(A) Extended research project:
A research focused project will address a specific strategic communication problem or question. Students will collect, analyze and interpret data. The capstone components must include a proposed research question, project design and methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and implication of findings. 
Component emphasis: Research

(B) Production focused project
In a production focused project, students will work with a client to develop original campaign materials such as videos, audio, websites, and/or print materials. While all capstone projects involve some sort of production element, the expectations for technical sophistication and aesthetic distinction are higher in a production focused project. The campaign materials should be grounded in solid research and must address a specific client need. Students must develop a plan to test the effectiveness of their production materials.
Component emphasis: Production

(C) Development and implementation of a training seminar
Students will design and develop a plan to implement a strategic communication training program. Management, fiscal, and ethical factors must be addressed. Students will develop instructions, procedures, and manuals for the program.
Component emphasis: Implications

(D) Analysis of existing campaign
The analysis campaign requires students to select an existing strategic communication campaign and conduct an in-depth analysis and critique of the existing rhetorical strategies and production components. Students will also be required to develop new media pieces that enhance the campaign.
Component emphasis: Theory

Specific expectations for each type of project are outlined in subsequent sections of this handbook.
Finding A Topic

Some students enter the MA in Strategic Communication program with a well-defined topic. Others do not have a project topic or want to use their first year of the program to develop a topic. Whatever your situation, your topic should be something in which you are really interested. The project is a long process. When you pick a topic of great interest, you are more likely to be motivated and complete your project.

If you do not have a topic, meet with a faculty member to discuss various options. You can enroll in an independent study to do background reading or pilot work on a study that you might want to use for your project.

If working with a client, the client must be a non-profit organization (5013c), a low-profit limited liability organization with charitable or educational goals (L3C) or an organization that works for the betterment of the community. In exceptional circumstances, students can work with a for-profit organization, but the organization must provide reasonable compensation to the student. The capstone committee must approve all clients.

Selecting An Adviser*

* Adapted from Karen Foss’ academic relationship guide

Finding the right advisor is an important step in successfully completing your capstone project. A good advisor will mentor you through the campaign development process and provide you the assistance you need to succeed in graduate school. This relationship is very important, so give a lot of thought to selecting an adviser.

All faculty in the School of Communication can serve on a capstone project committee, but only those faculty members with terminal degrees can be advisers. Additionally, a faculty member must have served on a committee before he/she can advise a student.

Once you identify potential advisors, get to know them. Introduce yourself and describe your academic interests; make sure they share these interests. Don’t ask a faculty member to be your advisor too early. Relationships take time to develop, so you should wait until the end of your second semester of graduate school to select an adviser.

The type of relationship that each student needs with an advisor will differ. You may prefer to be given strong direction, to have frequent contact, and to be “checked up on.” Others are more independent. Consider what kinds of feedback you prefer and how you like to interact, and make sure that your style and your adviser’s style are compatible.

Once you’ve determined those faculty members with whom you would like to work, check to make sure they are available and interested in working with you on your capstone project. Faculty may have commitments that prevent them from working with you.
TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR ADVISER*  
*Adapted from Foss and Foss’ handout Asserting Agency to Create an Effective Relationship With Your Adviser

Completing your capstone project successfully is much easier if you have an effective interpersonal relationship with your advisor. These are some things you can do in terms of communication that will have a positive impact on the relationship you have with your advisor.

1. **Ask Nicely**
   
   If you have an established relationship with a potential adviser, you should have a sense of how to approach the discussion about working together on your project. This will be a lot of work for your adviser as well, so your request should be polite and thoughtful.

2. **Articulate Needs**
   
   There are a number of areas where you should articulate your needs to your advisor, and it’s perfectly appropriate for you to do so. For example, you should:
   
   - Hold an extended conversation to work out the plan for your capstone project.
   - Discuss your advising relationship— work out together how often you will meet, how quickly your advisor will provide feedback on submissions, how you both will keep track of decisions, and expectations your advisor has for your behavior.
   - Ask your adviser basic questions about the proposal and defense processes (deadlines, expectations, etc.). Ask your advisor to supply you with samples of good proposals and capstone projects.

3. **Present yourself in the best light**
   
   Advisors find very rough drafts frustrating and irritating. Show your respect for your advisor’s time by giving him/her polished products whenever possible. Keep appointments and be on time. Respect the ground rules you and your advisor have established for the relationship.

4. **Accept Feedback**
   
   Be attentive to the suggestions of your advisor. Disconnect your ego or self-esteem from the feedback. Your advisor is trying to help you be successful, and her feedback isn’t a commentary on your worth. Ask questions when you don’t understand something, and ask for examples if the feedback is vague.

5. **Show Appreciation**
   
   The advising relationship is a reciprocal one. Just as you want to get needs met and have certain outcomes as a result of that relationship, so does your advisor. Advisors want to feel that they aren’t giving and giving with nothing coming to them in return.

   One way to show your appreciation is to do your best to follow your advisor’s advice and guidelines. Another way is to express your appreciation explicitly to your advisor periodically. Thank you cards and notes are lasting tokens of appreciation.
SELECTING A COMMITTEE

By the end of the second or third semester of study (including summer), a student will have selected a capstone project adviser (committee chair) and a committee. The committee will be comprised of a minimum of three members:

• the committee chair (who must be a NQSC graduate faculty member),
• a second member of the NQSC graduate faculty,
• a third member who may be a member of the NQSC faculty, a HPU faculty member, or an individual who works professionally in the student’s area of concentration.

It is the student’s responsibility to ask specific committee members if they are willing to service on the committee. Once the committee is selected, the Graduate Capstone Project Committee Form should be submitted to the Coordinator of the NQSC Master’s Program.

Should a student wish to change the members of their graduate committee, they must submit a new Graduate Capstone Project Committee Form. The committee chair, the outgoing committee member, and the incoming committee member must sign the form.

COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Committee Chair

• Is the student’s primary advisor in the process of completing the research to fruition.
• Ensures all protocols are followed by the department, graduate school, and IRB.
• Ensures the student has been informed of all capstone deadlines and milestones.
• Approves the theoretical framework, research plan, production plan
• Reads, evaluates, critiques, and provides guidance for drafts of the project.
• Reviews drafts for honor code violations.
• Works with the committee to provide feedback for drafts and project progress.
• Schedules the defense.
• Chairs the defense.
• Handles all paperwork related to the grading of the defense and any necessary follow-up/corrections.
• Signs off on the formatting checklist the student submits with their initial final draft to the graduate school.
• Ensures the student corrects, changes, or revises any suggestion as a result of the defense before submitting to the graduate office.
• Submits the final grade for the project course once the project has been approved by the graduate school

Committee Members

• Provide ideas and suggestion for research or direction of project.
• Read, evaluate, critique, and provide guidance for drafts of the project as necessary.
• Read and evaluate the final draft.
• Participate in the defense of the project.
• Contribute the knowledge of theoretical, research and/or production procedures as well as ensuring high quality written and production standards
• Review drafts for honor code violations.

**Writing the Proposal**

Your proposal will describe the purposes of the project and the methods for accomplishing them. Writing a proposal is important because it forces you to be explicit about your plans and facilitates feedback from your committee members. Before asking the committee to review and approve your proposal, you must ask the chair of the committee to critique the proposal and then revise the proposal based on the chair’s recommendations.

You proposal should provide *sufficient detail and clarity* concerning the rationale, objectives, and methods for your capstone project. As a general guideline, the text of the full proposal should be between 15-25 pages (excluding appendices). The proposal should be in APA style. Length of each section greatly depends on the particular topic and preferences of the adviser. Regardless of length, clarity and conciseness are strongly encouraged. Part of the capstone project experience is to improve one’s writing skills.

The specifics of the written proposal for different types of capstone projects are outlined in subsequent sections.

**Obtain Committee Approval**

After completing your proposal, you should provide all members a copy and allow them at least one week to review it before your scheduled proposal defense.

The start of the proposal defense includes an approximately 10-minute presentation about the project followed by a Q/A with the committee. Committee members may ask you to improve elements of the plan, and you may have to submit revisions until all committee members approve your proposal.

When the committee approves your proposal, they are essentially declaring that your project and methods for addressing your topic are acceptable, and you now have the “green light” to actually do the study. This “contract” between student and committee ensures that if the student completes the plan as outlined in a satisfactory way, he/she will pass. A student’s ability to successfully defend his/her final capstone is not linked to the outcome of the research analysis but is instead linked to the quality of the process.

With everyone “on the same page,” about the planned direction of the project, students are more likely to meet the committee’s expectations, and committee members are more likely to
approve the capstone project. In addition, students with well-developed proposals often find that many elements of the proposal can be used in the final project with little modification.

**Important note:** The proposal cannot be defended in the same semester as the final project defense.

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**Obtain Human Subject Approval**

Regardless of the type of campaign project you will develop, if you are dealing with humans, you must submit a request for approval to High Point University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB monitors all research projects that use humans and ensures that all participants are informed of their rights. You must obtain human subject approval before starting on the research or evaluation component of the project. If you are using images or recordings in the production component, you will need to collect media release forms from all participants.

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**Start and Organize Your Capstone Project**

Although it may seem obvious, a key step in completing your capstone project is to simply start. There are several barriers that can slow or deter a student from starting the capstone project:

- lack of time
- inexperience with independent course work
- discomfort with unstructured schedules
- feeling overwhelmed by the magnitude of the process
- no clue where to start or how to begin
- stress from personal or family problems
- indecision about a topic
- etc., etc.

The best way to overcome this inertia is to make a commitment and start the process no later than your third semester of graduate work (including summer).

See subsequent sections for specific details about expectations for different types of projects (i.e., research focused, production focused)

**Important note:** Students need to register for four credit hours for the capstone project (COM 5900). These four hours cannot all be completed in the same semester. The hours can be distributed in multiple ways: 2/2; 1/3; 1/1/1/1. If a student has registered for four capstone hours and not completed the project, he/she registers for continuation hours.
PART ONE: PROJECT PROPOSAL

Title page Include the title of the capstone project proposal, your name, degree sought, department, names of the supervisor and committee members, and date.

Abstract The one page abstract should not exceed 300 words.

Rationale Contains a statement of the problem or issues to be addressed in the proposed study.

Literature The review of relevant literature should provide an overview of the field and demonstrate that the student knows the area under investigation. Equally important, this section should provide supporting evidence concerning the rationale, statement of the problem and/or issues to be addressed by the present study.

Objectives This section describes the overall purpose, as well as the specific objectives of the present study. In some cases, the objectives may be formulated as research questions. In other cases, such as an evaluation project, the study may address program objectives and/or underlying assumptions. This section of the proposal often includes the researcher's hypotheses.

Methods Subsections typically include: study design; sample selection criteria, size, and sampling process; data collection procedures and instruments; and a description of data analysis techniques and statistical software programs to be used. Projects in the School of Communication must also include a description of the message production component of the production. Be as detailed as possible, including the identification of concerns.

Time Line Develop a reasonable time line for each phase of the project, including: pilot testing of instruments or procedures, design and fabrication, data collection, data analyses and interpretation, and write-up. Specify the anticipated term/year for final defense.

Resources Itemize all costs anticipated. Although capstone project research is not typically funded, the School of Communication may provide some resources. Work this out with your supervisor or committee members in advance.

References For the proposal, this may include a list of references already obtained and cited in the literature review section, as well as a list of articles to be obtained (listed separately). Use APA format for references and proposal style.

Appendices Should contain supporting and descriptive materials, instruments, etc.
PART TWO: FINAL MANUSCRIPT

Advisers will differ in their approaches to guiding a research focused capstone, but the guide below should provide students a general overview of the written components.

I. COVER PAGE

II. SIGNATURE PAGE – See sample in Appendix

III. TITLE PAGE – See sample in Appendix

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT PAGE

[IV-b. Dedication page (optional)]

V. TABLE OF CONTENTS

VI. LIST OF FIGURES

VII. LIST OF TABLES

VIII. ABSTRACT – See sample in Appendix. The abstract should not exceed 300 words.

IX. INTRODUCTION

In 2-3 pages, the introduction briefly summarizes the problem, significance, and purpose of the project. You can organize your intro with:

• **Opening** – Set the stage for the paper and put your topic in perspective.

• **Statement of the Problem** – Briefly explain the context of your problem statement, including a clear and succinct discussion of the conceptual or theoretical framework that undergirds your study.

• **Significance of the Study (Rationale)** – Use a persuasive rationale to justify the reason for your study and explain how this new knowledge will add to the field of knowledge that already exists on this topic.

• **Statement of Purpose** – Write a single sentence that defines the purpose of your study. Support this sentence with several elaborative paragraphs. Present persuasive arguments for why the problem is important enough to study. Explain how the problem relates to business, social or political trends by presenting data that demonstrates the scope and depth of the problem.

X. REVIEW OF LITERATURE & RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The literature review elaborates on the ideas from your introduction. This section:

- Demonstrates your knowledge of the research problem and your understanding of the theoretical and research issues related to your research question(s).

- Shows your ability to critically evaluate, integrate, and synthesize relevant literature information.

- Provides new theoretical insights or develops a new model as the conceptual framework for your research.

- Convinces your reader that your proposed project will make a significant and substantial contribution to the literature and discipline.

Organize your review around ideas, not researchers. A review of literature is not simply a bunch of annotations of research papers; it’s an argument about ideas leading to your study.
Possible structure for a review of literature:

I. The interesting context or topic or theoretical framework
   A. Define/history/importance
   B. Prevalence
   C. Challenges or dilemmas

II. Variable one
   A. Define/history
   B. What do we know about this variable in general? Provide details about the most pertinent studies.
   C. What do we know about this variable in your context? Provide details about the most pertinent studies.

III. Variable two, etc.

IV. What do we know about your variables together (if anything)

V. Summarize the argument. Be sure that the argument leads to your research questions and hypotheses.

Theoretical Framework – The theoretical framework must demonstrate an understanding of existing theories and concepts that are relevant to the topic and that will relate it to the broader implications of your project. Note who the key theorists are in the field who have conducted research on the problem you are investigating and, when necessary, the historical context that underpins the formulation of these theories.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses – Your review of literature should have made a clear argument that justifies your RQ/Hypothesis and explains why you are examining these variables together in this content. If you have multiple Research Questions and Hypotheses, you will want to present each RQ/Hyp after you have created that argument. Thus, you might need to space out your RQ/Hyp.

Make a clear and careful distinction between the dependent and independent variables and be certain they are clear to the reader (but you don’t have to say DV and IV).

XI. DEVELOPMENT OF CAMPAIGN MATERIALS

Provide an overview of the campaign materials you developed and tested in this project. You will likely need to include diagrams, pictures, screen shots, text of audio recordings, and other artifacts so that the reader understands your campaign approach.

You may also need to review key elements of the evaluation you are conducting. If you are assessing how to deliver campaign content (rather than just the effectiveness of various campaign materials), you review the other components as well.

XII. METHOD

The method section describes your basic research plan. It usually begins with a few short introductory paragraphs that restate purpose and research questions. This section should contain sufficient information for the reader to determine whether your methodology was sound.

Population and Sampling – Who are your subjects? How and why did you select them? If available, outline the characteristics of the sample (by gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or other relevant group membership). Detail procedures followed to obtain informed
consent and ensure anonymity and/or confidentiality. When a sample is drawn out of convenience, rationale and limitations must be clearly provided.

**Procedures** – Outline the general procedure for collecting the data, including survey administration procedures, interview, or observation procedures. If appropriate, discuss how you obtained access to your group. Provide a well thought-out rationale for your decision to use the design, methodology, and analyses you selected. Indicate the methodological steps you took to answer every question or to test every hypothesis illustrated in the Questions/Hypotheses section.

Confounding variables should be minimized by various kinds of controls or be estimated and taken into account by randomization processes (Guba, 1961). In the design section:

- Indicate the variables you attempted to control and how you attempted to control them, experimentally or statistically, and
- Indicate the variables you attempted to randomize, and the nature of the randomizing unit (students, grades, schools, etc.).

If your methods are complicated, it may be helpful to create a flowchart describing the procedures. You may also need to include images of your campaign and/or manipulations. Stills from videos, examples of posters, and text from PSAs will help the reader understand your manipulations.

Disclose possible sources of error to the reader and explain what efforts were made to overcome them or take them into account in your analysis

**Instruments** – Outline the instruments (measures) you used to evaluate the effectiveness of your campaign or to test your approach. If instruments have previously been used, identify previous studies and findings related to reliability and validity. If instruments have not previously been used, explain how you tested their reliability and validity. In the latter case, a pilot study is nearly essential.

Include an appendix with a copy of the instruments used or the interview protocol followed. Also include sample items in the description of the instrument.

For a mailed survey, identify steps taken in administering and following up the survey to obtain a high response rate.

**XIII. RESULTS**

You cannot just write about analysis and numbers and expect readers to understand. Your statistical information should be used to support a reader-friendly narrative.

**A. Description of the data categorization and analysis** – Present evidence that your study successfully set up the conditions for testing your hypotheses or answering your questions. Describe how you analyzed the data. If the results section is complicated or divided into several parts, you may wish to provide an overview of the section.

**B. Presenting the Findings** – Review in prose the hypothesis or the question you asked and the direction of the responses you hypothesized.

1. Provide the answer to your research question or hypothesis
2. Provide the statistical information.
3. Elaborate or qualify the overall conclusion, if necessary.

The general rule in reporting your findings is to give the central findings first and then the more peripheral findings.

**Figures and Tables** – Unless a set of findings can be stated in one or two numbers, a figure or table summarizing the relevant data should accompany results that are sufficiently important to be stressed. Title and label figures/tables clearly and completely. Lead the reader through a table in the text itself – don’t expect the reader to ferret out the information. For detailed information on figures and tables, see the *APA Publication Manual*.

**On Statistics** – Though an indication of the level of statistical significance should accompany every comparison between groups or relationship between variables, inferential statistics are not the heart of your narrative and should be subordinated to the descriptive results. Whenever possible, state a result first and then give its statistical significance. In no case should you ever give the statistical test alone without interpreting it substantively (effect size).

**XIV. DISCUSSION**

Organize the Discussion from the specific to the general: your findings to the literature, to theory, to practice. Discuss everything, but be concise, brief, and specific.

A possible organization for your discussion section is:

A. Opening paragraphs  
B. Address hypotheses/variables  
C. Link results back to your literature review and theoretical framework  
D. Limitations  
E. Future research  
F. Conclusions

Indicate how your research will refine, revise, or extend existing knowledge in the area under investigation. Note that such refinements, revisions, or extensions may have substantive, theoretical, or methodological significance.

Most studies have two potential audiences: practitioners and professional peers. Statements relating the research to both groups are in order. When thinking about the significance of your study, ask yourself the following questions:

- What will results mean to the theoretical framework that framed the study?  
- What suggestions for subsequent research arise from the findings?  
- Will results influence programs, methods, and/or interventions?  
- Will results contribute to the solution of educational problems?  
- Will results influence policy decisions?  
- What will be improved or changed as a result of the proposed research?  
- How will results of the study be implemented, and what innovations will come about?

**XV. REFERENCES**

**XVI. APPENDICES**

Include evaluation measures and copies of materials developed.
# Production Focused Capstone Project Deliverables

## Part One: Project Proposal

### I. Overview of Project (1-2 Pages)

What do you propose to do and why is this an appropriate project for your MA degree? Describe the client and provide a rationale for why this client is appropriate. Your client must be a non-profit (5013c). In certain circumstances, a for-profit company might be considered if they compensate you for the time and product. The capstone committee must approve all clients.

### II. Client Brief (3-5 Pages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Executive summary (1-3 sentences). Overview of project rationale and goals.

(b) Current situation (2-5 paragraphs). What is the company currently doing? What are the main competitors doing? What are the company’s goals?

(c) Proposal (3-5 paragraphs + graphs/tables/images and supporting documents). What do you plan to do? Make the description easy to understand.

(d) Target audience/s (1-3 paragraphs with evidence of why this is the appropriate audience)

(e) Goals (bullet points). What are the key components and measureable outcomes of the project? What are the client’s limitations and plans for sustainability?

(e) Requirements (list and rationale). What technical resources (hardware, software, skill sets) will be required? What type of feedback and communication will be required from the client? Who needs to sign off on this project? Identify the needs and provide a 1-2 sentence rationale for why they are necessary.

(f) Promotion plan (length varies). How will this project be implemented and promoted?

(g) Evaluation. Briefly describe the criteria you will use to evaluate the effectiveness of this project in meeting the client’s goals. What method(s) will be used to evaluate each criteria?

(h) Timeline. Provide a table identifying each step and the dates. This timeline only needs to include milestones relevant to the client (see below for overall project timeline).

(i) Overview of student’s qualifications. Provide a one-paragraph professional biography. Include contact information for student and capstone adviser.

### III. Evaluation Plan & IRB Application (2-4 Pages Plus Assessment Materials)

Provide an in-depth evaluation plan including all assessment materials. These materials will be the ones submitted to IRB.

### IV. Treatment and Style Guide (1-3 Pages)

Provide a mock-up of the production. What do you anticipate this project looking like? Include
specific information about colors, typefaces, layouts, visual treatments, etc. For video projects, you can include scripts, outlines, and/or storyboards.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND DISCIPLINE IMPLICATIONS
Which theory will inform the design of the project? Overview the theory and explain how it applies to the specific project. Justify how this project is important to strategic communication professionals and adds to the discipline’s knowledge.

VI. TIMELINE (1-PAGE)
Identify the steps to the entire capstone project, including tentative defense date and deposit date. Put the timeline in a table.

PART TWO: FINAL PROJECT

I. FINAL REPORT TO THE CLIENT
1. **Cover page for the proposal.** Indicate that is it a report and what it covers. Include submitted to info, submitted from info, date, and contact information.
2. **A personal letter to the contact person/s.** Thank them for the opportunity to work with them, provide some information about the project and yourself, and indicate what you learned in the process. Make sure your name is typed on the bottom and sign it.
3. **A table of contents and a table of illustrations** (only if the report is longer than 5 pages)
4. **An executive summary** (on its own page, titled EXECUTIVE SUMMARY). Include summary of purpose, key tasks, and key results (approximately 300 words). Often, this is the only thing that gets read, so make it good and clear.
5. **Overview of project** (one paragraph). Describe the general task and your specific focus.
7. **Results.** Present these engagingly and informatively. Use visuals to display the data but be sure that you also add 1-2 sentences to orient the reader. Every visual needs a title.
8. **Recommendations.** Given what you know, what do you recommend your client do?
9. **Contact information.** Provide your name, contact information, and a short biographical statement (a statement of professional and educational accomplishments)
10. **Appendix.** Include any supplemental information that you think is appropriate.

II. EVALUATION REPORT
This is similar to the method and results section of an academic article. Outline the general evaluation procedure and include all assessment materials. Describe your sample group and explain how/why they were chosen. Present your findings. Explain how you analyzed the data.

III. PRODUCTION REPORT
What did you do and how did you do it? What challenges did you face and how were they managed? The production report can be developed in multiple ways, including online blogs.

IV. FINAL PRODUCTION
Include electronic and/or print copies of the professional quality production.
**CAPSTONE PROJECT DEFENSE OVERVIEW**

Part One: Presentation
The capstone project defense is a public meeting. An announcement of your defense will be posted in the Norcross Graduate School and in School of Communication. An electronic announcement of your defense will be sent to all graduate students and faculty in the School of Communication. You can invite people to attend the defense.

Prepare a 12-15-minute for a presentation
- 1-2 minute overview
- 2-minute review of key literature
- 2-3 minute overview of the method, including your analysis steps (factor analysis)
- 3-4 minutes on results. What were the key findings?
- 3-4 minutes on discussion. What are the larger implications of this for the literatures you reviewed? What implications do your results have for professionals? Limitations and future directions

Part Two: Discussion
Your committee will ask questions. This usually takes 45-60 minutes. You don't know what the questions will be, but remember, a defense is an argument. Be prepared to justify your choices as a researcher and communication professional. "I was interested..." is insufficient. Ground your reasons in logic, literature, and research goals.

Part Three: Deliberation
The committee discusses the project and the defense. You will be asked to leave the room while the committee makes a decision and makes recommendations for revisions.

The proposal will be evaluated in four areas:
- Research Plan
- Production Plan
- Strategic Communication Implications
- Theory Application

The committee’s evaluation of the proposal must be at least “good” in the focus area (such as research for a research focused project, production for a production focused project, etc.), and “satisfactory” in all other areas. If any area is deemed “unsatisfactory,” the proposal will have to be revised.

Part Four: Decision
You come back and learn the decision. After, you and your adviser will talk specifics about what to do and how to do it.

Defense will result in one of five decisions:

(1) **Project accepted with no revisions** – Project requires no change or only minor typographical or editorial changes.
(2) **Project accepted with minor revisions noted** – Project requires minor changes in substance and/or major editorial changes or clarifications. Typically, this category implies that no additional analysis or data collection needs to take place. It is more a matter of refinement, clarification or elaboration. The adviser will make notes on the changes requested by the committee, as well as who will take responsibility for examining and approving these changes.

(3) **Project accepted with substantial revisions—resubmit manuscript to committee** – Project requires substantial modifications in at least two sections (such as new analyses or new discussion section); acceptability is questionable. The report of the adviser will provide a list of concerns and modifications required, as well as a time line for completion, and consequences should the student fail to comply. In this case, the revised capstone project must be submitted to the entire examining committee. Normally, the same committee will serve. A decision to defer is permitted only once for each candidate.

(4) **Project accepted with major revisions—resubmission & new defense required** – Project requires major modifications in at least two sections (such as additional data collected and new analyses); acceptability is in doubt. The report of the adviser will provide a list of concerns and modifications required, as well as a time line for completion, and consequences should the student fail to comply. In this case, the revised capstone project must be submitted to the entire examining committee and a subsequent defense scheduled. Normally, the same committee will serve. A decision to defer is permitted only once for each candidate.

(5) **Project not accepted** – The adviser will provide a written report concerning the reasons for rejection by the examining committee. The NQSC graduate coordinator will subsequently advise the student concerning continuing in the degree program.

**DISTINCTION:** A capstone project can earn distinction if it receives scores of “outstanding” in all four evaluation areas and is accepted with no revisions.

**TIPS FOR AN EFFECTIVE DEFENSE:**
- ✔ Dress professionally
- ✔ Practice the presentation
- ✔ Anticipate questions and prepare answers
- ✔ Prepare handouts about key information
- ✔ Ensure that any equipment is working before the presentation
- ✔ Arrange the room so that everyone is comfortable
1. Title
   Is the title reasonably short, descriptive and correctly worded?

2. Statement of the Problem
   Is the need for the campaign adequately established?
   Is the discussion of previous related research adequate?
   Is continuity with previous research made clear and is there evidence of a satisfactory literature search?
   If the project contains a hypothesis or hypotheses, are these clearly stated?
   Are the basic assumptions involved in the solution of the problem clear and defensible?

3. Theoretical Framework
   Is the theoretical framework appropriate for the project?
   Is the theory fully explained and sufficiently linked to the project?
   Is the relevant research on the theory cited and integrated?

4. Production Components
   Are the campaign materials developed appropriate for the project and problem?
   Are the materials developed professional?
   Do the campaign materials reflect the student’s authorial voice?
   Do the materials adhere to legal constraints on use of others’ materials?

5. Research Method
   Is the evaluation plan and method logically sound and of publishable quality?
   Are the data collected adequate for the solution of the problem?
   Is any peculiar sampling appropriately accounted for?
   Are the assumptions involved in the procedure made clear?
   Are the necessary assumptions defensible?

6. Analyses and Results
   Are the analyses appropriate for the question and data?
   Is the data appropriately analyzed and presented?

7. Conclusions
   Are the conclusions logical and justified?
   Do the conclusions answer the questions or issues raised in the problem statement?
   Are the implications to strategic communication identified and explained?
   Do the conclusions indicate practical recommendations?
   Do the conclusions provide useful information?

8. Form and Style
   Is the writing accurate, and precise, and clear?
   Are the references adequately and correctly documented with APA style?
   Does the structure of the manuscript follow APA style?
   Does the final document follow the Graduate Committee style requirements?
   Are the technology components suitable for archiving?
Your need to submit three single-sided copies of your final project to the Norcross Graduate School. These copies must meet all the format requirements and be printed on bond paper. These copies will be bound and kept in the library, the graduate school, and the School of Communication. In addition, you need to provide each committee member a bound copy of your project. If you would like to submit extra copies to the graduate school, these copies can be bound these $10 each. (Please consult The Norcross Graduate School capstone project guide. Below is a summary of key format issues but the Graduate School may have additional guidelines).

Organization of Capstone project
- Title page.
- Signature page.
- Dedication page (optional).
- Acknowledgements (optional).
- Abstract.
- Table of contents.
- List of Tables
- List of Figures
- Text.
- References.
- Appendix (includes materials too bulky or distracting for the text).

Title Page Arrangement
- Full title of the capstone project is centered automatically between the margins.
- Full name of the degree program is used.
- Full name of the student is used.
- There is double-spacing between the lines of a long title.
- All words in the full title of the thesis are capitalized.
- Completion month and year correspond to the end of the term.

Signature Page
- Correct name of the department or school is used.
- Name of the student, title of the capstone project, and name of the degree program are consistent with the title page.

Abstract
- The word, ABSTRACT, is centered at the top of the page.
- Full title of the capstone project, in all caps, is centered automatically between the margins.
- Name of the student, title of the capstone project, and name of the degree program are consistent with the title page.
Completion month and year correspond to the end of the term.
Full name of the professor is used.
Word formatting follows the sample. The abstract is double-spaced.
Roman numeral is typed and centered one inch from the bottom edge of the page.

Table of Contents
- Typing is double-spaced.
- All parts of the manuscript are noted.
- List of Tables is included, if used.
- List of Figures is included, if used.
- Appendices are included, if used.

List of Tables
- Each table has a number and title that corresponds to the number and title in the text.
- Each table has a page number that corresponds to page in the text

List of Figures
- Each figure has a number and title that corresponds to the number and title in the text.
- Each figure has a page number that corresponds to page in the text.

Typing
- Typeface is a standard font used consistently. And 11- or 12- points in size.
- Print is laser quality.

Spacing
- Double spacing is used consistently.
- Single spacing is used only for long quotes, tables, and figures.
- Consistent spacing scheme is used.

Margins and Justification
- Left margins are 1.5 inches.
- Top, bottom, and right margins are one inch.
- Left margins are justified.
- Right margins are ragged.
- No page is short because of a table or figure.

Division of words and abbreviations
- All words fit in their entirety on a line. No word is divided.
- Abbreviations are avoided.

Pagination
- Each page, except the title page and approval page, has a typed number.
- No typed number on the title page or approval page.
- Pagination starts on the title page (even though a typed number does not appear).
- Lowercase Roman numerals are used on preliminary pages.
Typed Roman numerals appear after the approval page.
Roman numerals are typed and centered one inch from the bottom edge of the page.
Arabic numerals are used for the remainder of the manuscript.
Arabic numerals are typed flush with a right-hand top margin.
First page of text begins with “1”.

Tables and Figures
- Each table is incorporated at the appropriate place in the text.
- Short tables or figures are placed on a page with some text.
- Short tables and figures cannot be split across multiple pages.
- Table or figure schemes are consistent.
- Label each table beginning with the table number and a description of the contents. The table label appears above the table.
- Label each figure with the figure number and a title. Include a legend. The figure label appears below the figure.

General format
- Adhere to American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for formatting, including headings, tables, figures, citations, and references.
- A running head should be utilized. On right side, five spaces from the page number.
- Statistical symbols should be italicized.
THE NIDO R. QUBEIN SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION
MASTER’S DEGREE IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION
PLAN OF STUDY
(To be completed during the 1st year of study)

Candidate Name: ____________________________________________
Primary Focus: ________________________________________________
Committee Adviser: ____________________________________________
Committee Member: ____________________________________________
Committee Member: ____________________________________________

<table>
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<tr>
<th>COURSE</th>
<th>SEMESTER</th>
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<td>FINAL PROJECT DEFENSE</td>
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</table>

Required courses in italics

Committee Adviser: ____________________________________________ Date: ________
Graduate Director: ____________________________________________ Date: ________
APPOINTMENT OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT ADVISER

It is the students’ responsibility to return this completed form to the Norcross Graduate School prior to registering for the first capstone course. All requested information must be provided.

Student’s Name: ____________________________________________

Student’s Email: ____________________________________________

Strategic communication concentration: □ Public Relations □ Health Communication

Proposed year and term of registration for the first capstone course:

Year: _______ Term: □ Fall □ Spring □ Summer

Proposed title of capstone project:

APPROVAL SIGNATURES

Student: ____________________________________________ Date: ________

Capstone Adviser: ____________________________________________ Date: ________

NQSC Graduate Program Director ____________________________________________ Date: ________

High Point University • Norcross Graduate School • High Point, North Carolina • 27262-3598
graduate@highpoint.edu
(336) 841-9198
APPOINTMENT OF THE CAPSTONE PROJECT COMMITTEE

It is the students’ responsibility to return this completed form to the Norcross Graduate School prior scheduling the capstone proposal defense. All requested information must be provided.

Student’s Name: ________________________________________________________________

Student’s Email: ________________________________________________________________

Strategic communication concentration: □ Public Relations □ Health Communication

Year and term of project proposal defense: Year: _______ Term: □ Fall □ Spring □ Summer

Proposed title of capstone project:

APPROVAL SIGNATURES

Student: __________________________________________ Date: __________

Capstone Adviser: ______________________________ Date: __________

Committee Member: ____________________________ Date: __________

Committee Member: ____________________________ Date: __________

NQSC Graduate Program Director _________________________ Date: __________

High Point University • Norcross Graduate School • High Point, North Carolina • 27262-3598
graduate@highpoint.edu
(336) 841-9198
STUDENT NAME:

Semester in which you intend to defend capstone project:  □ Spring 2013  □ Summer 2013  □ Fall 2013

PROPOSED PROJECT
TITLE:

PRIMARY PROJECT FOCUS
☐ Research Project  ☐ Production Report  ☐ Training seminar  ☐ Existing Campaign Evaluation

COMMITTEE EVALUATION OF PROPOSAL COMPONENTS*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Plan</th>
<th>Production Plan</th>
<th>Strat Com Implications</th>
<th>Theory Application</th>
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*Evaluation must be a at least “good” in focus area and at least “satisfactory” in all other areas. No “unsatisfactory” is allowed.

COMMITTEE DECISION:

☐ The project meets the standards for a master’s degree capstone project.

☐ This project idea needs development. If these changes are addressed, this project will meet the standards for a capstone project. (Specific notes are attached)

☐ This project does not meet the standards for a capstone project

The committee has reviewed the attached capstone project and agrees with the above decision

Committee Adviser
Name & Signature: ________________________________

Committee Member
Name & Signature: ________________________________

Committee Member
Name & Signature: ________________________________

STUDENT SIGNATURE: ________________________________  Date: ________________________________

APPROVAL:
NQSC Graduate Coordinator Signature: ________________________________  Date: ________________________________
**CAPSTONE PROJECT DEFENSE SCHEDULE FORM**  
**MASTER OF ARTS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION**  
**THE NIDO R. QUBEIN SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION**

It is the responsibility of the student to complete and deliver this form to the graduate school two weeks prior to the defense of the capstone project.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Student Name:</th>
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<th>Title of capstone project:</th>
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<tr>
<th>Defense Date</th>
<th>Time:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
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</thead>
</table>
**STUDENT NAME:**

**PROJECT TITLE:**

### PRIMARY PROJECT FOCUS
- [ ] Research Project
- [ ] Production Report
- [ ] Training seminar
- [ ] Existing Campaign Evaluation

### COMMITTEE EVALUATION OF FINAL PROJECT*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Production Quality</th>
<th>Strat Com Implications</th>
<th>Theory Application</th>
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<td>Unsatisfactory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Evaluation must be at least “good” in focus area and at least “satisfactory” in all other areas. No “unsatisfactory” is allowed.

### COMMITTEE DECISION:
- [ ] Project accepted with no revisions
- [ ] Project accepted with minor revisions noted
- [ ] Project accepted with substantial revisions—resubmit manuscript to committee
- [ ] Project accepted with major revisions—Resubmission & new defense required
- [ ] Project not accepted

### CAPSTONE PROJECT DISTINCTION:
- [ ] YES
- [ ] NO

The committee has reviewed the capstone project and agrees that the student has presented and defended an acceptable project for the master’s degree. We approve the capstone project.

Committee Adviser
Name & Signature: ________________________________

Committee Member
Name & Signature: ________________________________

Committee Member
Name & Signature: ________________________________

STUDENT SIGNATURE: _____________________________ Date: __________________

APPROVAL:
NQSC Graduate Coordinator Signature: ____________________________ Date: __________________
A Capstone Project
Submitted to Norcross Graduate School of High Point University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the MASTER OF ARTS in Strategic Communication

Full Name of Student
Graduation Month and Year
To Norcross Graduate School:

We, in the Nido R. Qubein School of Communication, are submitting a capstone project written by [Name of student as it appears on the title page] titled [complete title of capstone project as it appears on the title page]. We have examined the final copy of this manuscript for format and content, and we recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Strategic Communication.

________________________________________
Capstone Project Chair

________________________________________
Capstone Project Committee Member

________________________________________
Capstone Project Committee Member

________________________________________
Coordinator of the Strategic Communication MA Program

Accepted for Norcross Graduate School

________________________________________
Dean of Norcross Graduate School
ABSTRACT

FULL TITLE OF CAPSTONE PROJECT

Full Name of Student
Month and Year Project Completed

Master of Arts in Strategic Communication
High Point University

Capstone Project Chair: [Name of Professor]

Abstract begins here (indented and double spaced)