

# The Honors/Independent Research Capstone in Psychological Sciences

4976(H)W and 4977(H)W

## *Introduction:*

The two-semester Honors Research Capstone fulfills capstone requirements for the major in Psychological Sciences and provides undergraduates with the opportunity to conduct independent research with a faculty mentor. Both semesters are required to fulfill the capstone and must be taken in sequence during an academic year (fall-spring). Students are eligible for the capstone if:

- 1) The student has an MU GPA at least 3.50 on the day that 4976HW begins in the fall.
- 2) A Faculty Mentor agrees to advise the student on an independent research project. If the mentor is not in the Psychological Sciences department, the project must encompass an area of research appropriate for inclusion in a psychological journal.
- 3) The student has completed the research methods sequence (3010-3020) prior to the first day that 4976HW begins. Also, the student must plan to graduate during the calendar year during which they take the capstone (that May or the following Dec.).

Students who meet these requirements and choose to take the honor's capstone sequence will graduate as Departmental Honor Scholars. If a student's GPA falls below 3.50 during the capstone year, the student may still fulfill their capstone requirements with the course sequence but will not receive Departmental Honors in Psychological Sciences.

**NOTE:** *students who are interested in the program, but do not have the required 3.5 GPA (but have everything else!) can participate in the EXACT SAME PROGRAM, it is just called the "Independent Research Capstone" and they will not graduate with departmental honors. Everything else about the program is exactly the same.*

## *About Faculty Mentors*

Students and Mentors conduct independent research, and therefore Students and Mentors must independently locate each other and negotiate the details of the independent research project. Because most faculty members enjoy working with Honor Scholars, it is not typically very difficult to locate a mentor to work with. The Director of the Honors Capstone (Nicole Campione-Barr) can assist students in locating mentors during registration for the fall semester if difficulty does arise.

## *Assignments and Expectations*

Honor Scholars are expected to conduct an independent research project with a faculty advisor and to produce the documents outlined below. Faculty advisors will individually mentor their students and no specific restrictions or requirements are set for the independent research project beyond the documents below. Faculty advisors may assign additional writing and/or assignments. Grading of required assignments below can be done by either the Faculty Advisor or the 4976/4977 instructor according to the preferences of the mentor. At the time the Faculty Mentor agrees to advise the student, a mentoring contract should be signed indicating grading preferences.

*Required assignment for Fall Semester: 4976HW*

**MPA Submission Abstract** (500 words) Description of research project following MPA criteria.

**Introduction & Method Sections of Empirical Paper** (3000-4000 words) The independent research project will be described in a APA-format paper with sections (e.g., Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, References,

etc.). In the fall semester we will turn in the Introduction and Method sections. Each section must have at least one draft (reviewed by mentor) prior to turning in the revised final version.

*Required assignments for Spring Semester: 4977HW*

**Results & Discussion Sections of Empirical Paper** (2000-3000 words; for a total 6000 word paper) The independent research project will be described in a APA-format paper with sections (e.g., Abstract, Introduction, Method, Results, Discussion, References, etc.). In the spring semester, the Results and Discussion sections will be turned in, along with a complete final version of the paper with abstract, tables/figures, and references. Each section must have at least one draft prior to the revised final version.

**Poster** Prepared according to MPA guidelines; presented at the MPA conference in mid-April. Enrolled students will also be required to present their poster at the MU Undergraduate Research and Creative Achievements Forum in mid-April.

## FAQ's

### *Why Honors Capstone?*

Students who are interested in a post-baccalaureate program that requires them to conduct research – which is true of many PhD programs – will gain the most advantages from the Honors Capstone year. You will have actual experience with state-of-the-art research and will have conducted every phase of a research product, which will in turn demonstrate to any graduate program that you know what research is like, and you know that you want to conduct research.

Most importantly, you will have spent a year working with a faculty advisor in a research context. MU faculty members have national reputations for their scholarship. Your mentor will write you a letter of recommendation for graduate programs that will stand out from other letters because of your mentor's reputation and the depth of experience your mentor has working with you.

Your Honors Capstone experience will enhance your vita or resume. You will be able to include "Honor Scholar, Department of Psychological Sciences" in your honors and awards section, and you will have at least one item for a "Scholarly Work" section because we require you to present a poster of your independent research project. You will also do "directed research" with a faculty mentor, and that goes in your "Scholarly Work" section, too.

In addition, at the weekend of your graduation...

- 1) ...you will be awarded the Honors Medal from Arts and Sciences
- 2) ...you will be awarded an Honor cord from the Psych department

And we require you to join the honor society Psi Chi, which also confers an honor cord. Finally, you and your parents will be invited to attend a special reception hosted by the Psych Department on graduation weekend.

### I'm eligible and interested... How do I get myself into the Program?

**Step 1. Locate possible mentors.** The BEST outcome for you is to find a mentor who is doing research that interests you and is somewhat related to what you want to do after you graduate. A great outcome is doing research that interests you OR is somewhat related to what you want to do when you graduate. For example, if you want to go to a clinical graduate program and become a child therapist, the BEST outcome is to work in a clinical child psych lab. And a great outcome would be to end up working with any clinical

professor or any of the child development professors (those are two different areas in our department). However, just doing research with any mentor is a great experience.

How do you find these researchers? Start online at the Psych Department website: <https://psychology.missouri.edu/people> Identify faculty that are doing research that sounds interesting to you. Some of the professors have very informative websites, and others not so helpful. If you suspect a professor might be a good fit for you but you cannot tell from their website, you can usually find some of their recent publications by typing their name into Google Scholar. Make a list of the researchers that seem to fit your interests and goals, and rank them if you can. Try to find at least 3.

Another way to identify mentors is to think back to classes you have taken and enjoyed. You might enjoy working with that professor. Did you do any undergraduate research assistant courses (2950 and 4950)?

Keep in mind that you are also welcome to ask faculty outside of Psychology to serve as your mentor! In recent years, faculty from Architectural Studies, Educational, School & Counseling Psychology, Human Development & Family Studies, School of Health Professions, Sociology, and Social Work have all served as mentors. As long as they agree to help mentor you through a project that has a psychologically-related topic, we can make it work. If they have questions about the program, they are welcome to contact Dr. Campione-Barr at [campionebarrn@missouri.edu](mailto:campionebarrn@missouri.edu)

**Step 2. Find out if the faculty you are interested in are accepting students.** A list is kept by Dr. Campione-Barr of Psychology faculty who do not want to be mentors, and those who are looking for students. You can save yourself some time (and possibly rejection) by checking first to see if any of the faculty on your list *are* or *are not* interested in taking students. This list is posted on the capstone website: <https://psychology.missouri.edu/undergrad/honors-or-independent-research-capstone-program>

**Step 3. Contact the faculty by email.** The email should be VERY brief, and should state why you are contacting them (i.e., because you are interested in their research on X and you want to do the honors capstone). Don't write them your life story in this email... if the professor wants a student to work with, they'll give you a chance to tell them all about yourself later.

**Step 4. When you agree to work together, have your mentor sign a mentoring contract.** The contracts are available on the capstone website: <https://psychology.missouri.edu/undergrad/honors-or-independent-research-capstone-program> .

**Step 5. Give your signed contract to Dr. Campione-Barr, and she will give you a permission number to enroll in 4976HW (email the form to [campionebarrn@missouri.edu](mailto:campionebarrn@missouri.edu) or put form in mailbox in 217 McAlester mail room).**