Checklist

Semester before starting capstone

• Meet with your academic advisor to determine when you will be ready for your capstone (meeting should occur at the beginning of your 2nd year in the program, if full-time). Typically, capstones occur during your second year during the last semester before graduation.

• Attend the Capstone/Internship Orientation meeting in 4th week of semester prior to your planned capstone. This orientation will occur in Fall of each year to accommodate Spring capstone participants.

• Determine a capstone topic
  • Review MHA/MPH competencies.
  • Talk with your academic advisor
  • Approach your internship supervisor if you want to do the capstone at your internship site
  • Approach your potential site supervisor if you plan to do the capstone at some other site
  • Confirm that the capstone site has an existing Affiliation Agreement or Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Maryland and that your faculty advisor has submitted the Routing Form for Institutional Cooperative Academic Agreements for required signatures.

• Secure your capstone (two weeks before end of prior semester)
  o Meet with your advisor to finalize your capstone topic and make sure you have everything ready to start the capstone during the following semester
  o Schedule a meeting with your site mentor no later than the first week in the capstone semester to identify your capstone tasks and obtain information to write a detailed first draft of your Capstone Work Plan.

Capstone Semester Steps

• Submit the Capstone Work Plan approved by your site mentor to your faculty advisor during the first two weeks of semester.

• Send a “Monthly Update Email” to your faculty advisor on the 1st day of the month each month during your capstone.

• Prepare the “Final report” which is due to your faculty advisor before the last week of classes. You should review the report with your site mentor and faculty advisor before the final submission.

• Prepare your Power Point presentation for HLSA Research Day which takes place during the last week of classes of each semester. Submit the presentation to your advisor one week before HLSA Research Day.

• Invite your site mentor to the HLSA Research Day.
GENERAL INFORMATION

All Masters (MHA/MPH) students are required to complete a field-based capstone project (HLSA 786 Masters Project, 3 credits) or a thesis (HLSA 799, 6 credits) in addition to their internship requirement. The Capstone project or thesis should be done in consultation with your academic advisor, and should be completed as a culminating experience in the last 2 semesters of your MHA/MPH degree.

**MHA/MPH with Capstone Option:**
The purpose of the capstone project is to provide the student with a culminating experience where they apply the knowledge and skills learned in the MHA/MPH program to a specific public health issue or problem. Examples of projects include program planning, implementation, or evaluation; public policy analysis, applied research and health management, quality improvement programs, operations problems, and other topics that related to health policy, equity and management. Several examples of projects are listed on the SPH webpage under the GRADUATE section (www.sph.umd.edu/hlsa).

**Relationship between Capstone and Internship:**
The capstone project may be completed independently or in conjunction with the internship. The student and the capstone committee (made up of your advisor and your site preceptor) must agree upon the project topic and scope. If a student is conducting the project at his/her workplace, the project must be outside the framework of regular employment duties and responsibilities. Any student who wants to complete his/her internship and capstone at the same location or on a similar topic must clearly state in their project proposal how the two experiences are distinctly different. The capstone project should more ‘academic’ than the internship.

COURSE REGISTRATION

**Registration for HLSA 786:**
Students who choose to complete an MHA/MPH capstone must register for 3 credits of HLSA 786 in their advisor’s section the semester in which they start the project.

If the MHA/MPH project (HLSA 786) is not completed in the semester for which the student registered, an incomplete will be issued and grade assigned once it is complete.

CAPSTONE PROPOSAL

After selecting a project topic, the student will prepare a written proposal that details: 1) the aims of the project and 2) how the project will be carried out. The content of the proposal should be discussed with the site supervisor/mentor prior to submitting the written document to the advisor by email. The advisor may request edits prior to accepting the proposal. **(After the proposal is accepted the student**
and the advisor may conduct a 30 minute conference call with the capstone site supervisor to review the work plan if the advisor and student deem it necessary).

**Proposal Contents:**

Section 1: Introduction
- A. Identification of your capstone site project mentor and a description of their specific role in your project
- B. Aims of the project
- C. A description of a theory or formal process that will guide the project
  - a. Example: PDSA Cycle, Andersen health care utilization theory
- D. Significance of the project to health policy, health equity or health services administration
- E. Brief review of relevant literature
- F. Description of MHA/MPH competencies required for the project

Section 2: Methods
- A. A description of the methods that will be used to complete the aims.
- B. Description of the project deliverables
  - a. For example, if you are assisting an organization in improving a process how will your findings be communicated to the organization—a report, a presentation, etc? If you are doing an applied research project how will your findings be communicated?
  - b. The deliverables should be measurable project outcomes that can be used to judge the success of the project
- C. The Project timeline

**Proposal Formatting Guidelines:**
The proposal should be 5-7 double spaced pages in length using 1 inch margins, 12pt Times New Roman or other standard font. The student must use a formal reference style (ie. APA, Chicago, etc.) The proposal must be clearly written and have correct grammar and spelling.

**Human Subjects Research:**
All capstone students must discuss with their advisor IRB review for the project. Any student involved in human subjects research as part of their capstone MUST submit a UMD IRB application, even if their project already has approval from another IRB. The proposal will not be accepted by the advisor until all IRB issues have been settled.

**COMPLETING THE CAPSTONE PROJECT**

In collaboration with your site preceptor, you will work to complete your capstone project and report based upon your approved project proposal.
After the project proposal has been approved (and Human Subjects approval obtained if required), the student may begin work on the project. Before making any substantive changes to that proposal, approval from your advisor is required.

The “Final report” is due to your faculty advisor before the last week of classes. You should provide drafts for review to your site mentor and faculty advisor before the final submission.

Completed MHA/MPH Capstone reports must be defended in-person during the HLSA Research Day. The defense is a 10-minute PowerPoint presentation that summarizes the contents of the report. The reports must include the following:

Chapter 1: Introduction
- Aims of the project
- Significance of the project
- Review of relevant literature
- Relevance to health policy, health equity or health services administration

Chapter 2: Methods
- Description of the project and project deliverables (e.g., program plan, training materials, information system, grant proposal, evaluation report)
- A statement on the relationship of the project to the internship experience (if applicable)
- Methods used in completing the project

Chapter 3: Project Results
- Project findings
- Implications of this project for health services administration
- Next steps required to further the aims of this project
- Challenges and accomplishments
- MHA/MPH competencies addressed in the project

Report Formatting Guidelines:
The report should be about 20 double spaced pages in length using 1 inch margins, 12pt Times New Roman or other standard font. The student must use a formal reference style (ie. APA, Chicago, etc.) The report must be clearly written and have correct grammar and spelling.

DEFENDING THE CAPSTONE PROJECT

Presentation of capstone project:
The presentation and defense of the capstone project must be in-person with the student, faculty, advisor, and other MHA/MPH students present. Each semester, a capstone and internship presentation day (HLSA Research Day) is scheduled to allow for presentations by capstone project students to complete their graduation requirements. Students are expected to submit their Power Point presentation to their advisor and site supervisor a week before the presentation for feedback. You are encouraged to invite your preceptor to the event, and make sure the Director of Graduate Studies and your advisor are aware of your intent to present and submit your report.
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How would you recommend finding a faculty sponsor for the MHA/MPH project or thesis?

Your faculty academic advisor will serve as the chair of your Capstone project or thesis committee.

2. What are some of the pros and cons of choosing a project over a thesis or choosing a thesis over a project? How do you decide which to do? A thesis or a project?

If you plan on conducting research or pursuing a doctorate, a thesis will better prepare you and may provide opportunities for publication that may be attractive to doctoral programs. On the other hand, if you are more interested in practical application of health services administration, health policy, or health equity rather than research, the Capstone project may better suit you.

3. What does the final MHA/MPH project presentation entail? Is it simply a basic overview of the project?

You will be asked to provide an initial, brief presentation, of about 10 minutes, that summarizes the key aspects of your MHA project. You are then questioned by your committee members about scope and content of your research, including its conceptual, methodological and analytic aspects. Your committee will evaluate your integration and application of program competencies as reflected in your project.

4. Can you provide us with some examples of past MHA/MPH projects?

Samples of past capstone projects will be made available. You may wish to attend your colleagues’ MHA/MPH project defenses each semester if you want to learn more about Capstone projects.

5. Is it possible for a student to fail the project and not be able to graduate?

Yes. This is an evaluated activity and if the student does not demonstrate MHA/MPH competency, it is the faculty’s responsibility not to allow them to graduate from the program prior to accomplishing those competency requirements.