

AHS CAPSTONE

Fall 2010

Assignments

Prelude

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.
- Mark Twain

Creativity. Quality. Flexibility. These are the watchwords of the AHS Capstone Project. Throughout this semester you will become the architect of your own visions, the dreamer and creator of new works. Your course leader and mentor, mighty allies in this quest, will offer project experience, disciplinary expertise, and fresh perspectives on your methods and results... but you stand alone at the helm.

This document lays out the assignments that will get us there and back again, but everything is subject to modification based upon your goals and the goals of this course. If you have any ideas about ways to make this experience more valuable to you without sacrificing the quality of your product, you need to raise your suggestions as early as possible and we'll make it so (as best we can).

Style and Format for Written Assignments

Concision in style, precision in thought, decision in life.
- Victor Hugo

All writing assignments should be delivered in an electronic format acceptable to your mentor, your instructor, and any peer editors with whom you will share this work. Typically, this has been MS Word. Do not use LaTeX or pdf, as they make electronic editing of your document more difficult.

Regardless of software used, your written work should use the following settings:

- 12 point font, spacing 2, margins 1 inch all around
- Times New Roman font (or other professional font by prior agreement)
- Page numbers in top corner or bottom center
- Your name and an identification of the assignment (e.g., "Project proposal") on every page (for example, in the header)

- Always use a file name that includes your last name and the identification of the assignment, for example, if your last name is “Obama,” obama_proposal.doc

All assignments must be emailed to your course leader on or before listed assignment deadlines. Some assignments must also be emailed to peers, your mentor, or your reader as specified on the semester schedule below. If your work is not email-able, it is your responsibility to make sure the recipients get it by the deadline.

Assignment One: Personal Goals

I am always doing what I cannot do yet, in order to learn how to do it.
- Vincent Van Gogh

Deadline: End of class, Tuesday September 7, emailed to course leader
Revision: End of class, Tuesday October 26, emailed to course leader
Length: One email
Grading: Self-graded (or course leader), 10% of grade, end of semester

The AHS Capstone Project offers you the opportunity to create something new and beautiful, a creative piece, a study, a community service, or so many other possibilities. But it is also an opportunity for you to achieve your own goals. If this project is going to succeed, it must become yours. You have to make it meaningful for you, and you need to orient this project towards the outcomes that matter most to you. Goals can take many forms... do you want to:

- Improve your communication skills? Writing, drawing, public speaking...
- Fill in a hole in your education by doing extra reading or exploration?
- Submit your work to a professional organization?
- Find a way to make this project relevant for your future career?
- Make professional connections this semester through your project?
- Change the world in some way? Direct your work towards meeting a social need?
- Educate others throughout the course of this project?

On the first day of class we will collectively discuss some possible outcomes for this course, things you might be interested in learning or doing over the course of the semester. You will then have the chance, via email, to lay out several specific personal goals that will customize and add meaning to your Capstone project. On October 26 you can revise these goals in light of your early experiences.

At the end of the semester you will have the chance to return to these goals and assess how well you did. You will be invited to grade yourself, or you can submit a qualitative assessment to your course leader, who can then compute a grade.

This goal-setting activity is actually one of the most important aspects of this Capstone. Take control of your learning, set lofty goals, and don't stop until you achieve them.

Assignment Two: Proposal

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.
- Eleanor Roosevelt

Draft deadline: 9:00 PM, Monday September 20 (email to course leader and peer reviewers)

Final deadline: 6:00 PM, Thursday September 23 (email to course leader and mentor)

Length: Usually around five to seven pages

Grading: 10% of your grade, determined by mentor and course leader

The proposal must be organized according to the letter bullets below. Please include each section, labeled by the letter and title below. Thoroughly (and with specific details) answer all questions in each section, with at least a decent-sized paragraph per lettered section.

A. Project goals

Throughout this semester you will carry out a project that includes a research component and the production of a deliverable. Please answer the fundamental question: **What are the goals of this project?**

The "goals" section should address **all** of the following:

- Describe the significance of the final deliverable
- Discuss the questions you plan to answer and/or the problems you will confront throughout this project, and tell us what you expect to discover
- Define your intended audience and describe the impact(s) that your project will have upon this audience
- Relate these goals to your Personal Goals assignment: how will you make this project meaningful to you?

Please include a set of **essential** goals that you must achieve, as well as one or more **ambitious** goals that you will hopefully achieve.

We understand that this project is only just beginning. These goals are subject to change, but at this point give your best guess about the questions you will pose, the answers you might uncover, and the deliverable(s) that you will produce.

B. Form and size of final disciplinary deliverable

What will you produce by the end of this project? Here are only a few possible examples:

- A paper? How long?
- A work of art? Rough dimensions and form? What type of artist's notes?
- A performance? Length, location? Will there be program notes?

- An event for an organization you're interning with? What kind of event? How will you document it for your mentor and course leader to evaluate?
- A hot tub time machine? How large? What water temperature?

Please include a set of **essential** deliverables that you must deliver, as well as one or more **ambitious** deliverables that you will hopefully deliver.

Your deliverable description must also include metrics, i.e., more than one way to tell whether you've met your goal (size/length? scope? an expert's quality assessment?).

C. Methodology

What do you think will be the **appropriate methods that you will use to execute this project**? (For example, research, interviews, writing, revising, composition, musical or other performances, painting, photography, editing, presentations, teaching, survey writing, data analysis, practice sessions in front of an audience...).

List all methods that apply but offer several sentences of details for each, elaborating upon the specific tasks that you plan to carry out.

D. Budget

Regardless of the nature of your project, Olin requires that you must pay at least the first \$150 of costs -- think of this as basically a textbook fee.

If your project will cost you \$150 or less, just say "I do not need funding for this project."

If you require more than \$150 of funding, please submit a budget proposal that:

- Itemizes each cost, *including the first \$150 that you will pay*. Use the best cost estimate you can and give proof where possible (e.g., printout from Amazon web site showing cost).
- Justifies each expense.
- Fallback plan – what can you do if you do not receive full funding?

NOTE: the AHS Capstone budget is limited and we cannot guarantee funding for all projects. We cannot guarantee funding for any projects, actually. We can guarantee this: the printer in AC 413 will crash if you attempt to print more than four pages.

E. Qualifications and education

Please answer the following three questions:

- What are your qualifications to undertake this project? In particular, describe your experience (coursework, other) and familiarity with both the skills and content embedded in your project.
- Where are you least qualified, and in what ways will you educate yourself throughout the course of this project?
- Who will be your mentor, how is s/he qualified for this project, how do you know that person, and has s/he agreed to serve as the mentor?

F. Initial source list

This project will draw upon the works of others. In this proposal you must locate at least three written *scholarly sources*¹ that will help you carry out or contextualize your project. Have more than three? Great! Please answer the following:

- Include the title and citation information for each source (date, author, type of source...).
- In one sentence per source, tell the reader what it is. Be brief!
- In one or two sentences per source, justify what you hope to learn from each source and how it is relevant to your project.
- Relate your use of sources to your overall project vision and to your personal goals. What excites you about the works/ideas/experiences of others? How can you make this context interesting and meaningful to you? You only need to answer this question once, not once per source.

You may use additional non-written and/or non-scholarly sources in your project, but right now we just need at least three written scholarly sources. If you list more than three, Rob will reward you in an innovative and capricious manner.

Special note for those doing “creative arts” projects (music, art, dance, creative writing, etc.): you will also do scholarly reading and writing. This work is integral to the AHS Capstone program.

G. Ethical considerations

What ethical issues will you need to be aware of and how will you address these? Here are a few possibilities for you to consider:

- Are you bringing any biases to the project?
- How might people use, interpret, or respond to your project (either while you are working on it or after it is finished)?
- Is there any potential for unintended rickrolling? Explain and justify.
- Consider plagiarism issues. Similarly, are there any specific intellectual property or copyright issues related to your project?
- Some projects involve research with human subjects if data will be gathered from talking to, surveying, or observing real people. Who are your potential research subjects, if any? How will you present yourself and the project to potential research subjects?

H. Concerns/questions

- Do you anticipate any major challenges? If so, how might you address them?
- Do you have any project-related questions for your course leader or mentor? Be specific -- we want to help!

¹ Wondering what a “scholarly source” is? See the document that your course leader will send you, called “Journals and News Articles Definitions.” This document explains what “scholarly source” means. For further clarification, ask your course leader and/or Dee Magnoni, Olin’s librarian, who created this document.

I. Plan of work

Create a time schedule for this semester, coordinated with the deadlines on the syllabus. Think about the best order for undertaking the “methods” in the methodology section above. How much time is needed for each? Can you perform some tasks in parallel?

Create milestones to help you complete the final deliverables on time. Hand in this customized calendar with your proposal. Include the main course deadlines, the tasks specific to your project, and the following general milestones (as relevant):

- When do you want to finish your background reading and research? (this applies to all projects)
- When will you start creating your Disciplinary Deliverable?
- What customized deadlines do you need? For instance, for a sketch, an outline, a draft of a composition or a paper?
- Include the due dates of all assignments in the syllabus (Progress Report, Disciplinary Deliverable, Revision, Project Assessment, and Final Presentation)
- Did you leave time to achieve all of your Personal Goals?

Can you build in any contingency plans (such as slack time that you can shift to a task taking too long) in case you encounter unexpected delays or difficulties?

NOTE: this plan is subject to change based upon what you discover throughout the semester. However, deadlines for syllabus course assignments are firm unless you make prior arrangements with the course leader and mentor. If you need to move deadlines, ask about that now!

Assignment Three: Progress Report

To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk.
- Thomas Edison

Draft deadline: Friday, October 15, 9:00 PM. (Email to course leader and peer reviewers)
Final deadline: Friday, October 22, 6:00 PM. (Email to course leader and mentor)
Length: About six to eight pages.
Grading: 10% of final grade, graded by course leader and mentor

The Progress Report has four sections corresponding to your project's scope, context, current status, and future direction. Write up each section separately.

Section One: Scope of your Deliverable (Goals and Outline/Overview)

At this point you should have a good idea about where your project will go. What, specifically, will you produce? How much can you finish by the Disciplinary Deliverable deadline? How will you organize it? What questions will you address?

Start by **revisiting your statement of goals** from the Proposal. If they are the same, just paste them here. If not, please edit them so the goals reflect your current understanding.

Second, you must produce what we call an "**Outline or Overview**" -- some representation of your finished deliverable, from start to finish. An outline would work great for a paper (as would a concept map), and perhaps a series of sketches or written narrative would work better for an art project. Submit whatever you think will best capture the full scope of your finished project. Go into detail -- this is your chance to articulate a coherent vision of a finished work, something worthy of critique and feedback.

This section should be at least three full double-spaced pages of text, probably more.

Section Two: Context for your Deliverable (Five or more citations)

Regardless of your deliverable, it must contain some form of "citation" somewhere, i.e., references illustrating how you are incorporating, building upon, or reacting to the work of others. For this assignment, produce five or more specific citations that you will insert somewhere into your deliverable. This can take many different forms:

- If you are writing a research paper or report, citations should be footnotes. Include a citable piece of information that will actually appear in your paper -- a quotation, statistics, a paraphrasing of an argument, etc. -- and a footnote to accompany it.
- If you are producing a piece of art, you will also produce an artist's statement, gallery notes, etc. Include five pieces of information that will appear in these notes: a discussion of your influences, an analysis of how your piece of art relates to the works of others, a description of an artistic genre, etc. -- and cite your sources.
- If you are creating a musical composition and/or performance, you will produce detailed Program Notes that provide both stylistic and musicological context. Cite all material pertaining to each of your sources within the body of your Program Notes. Include a Bibliography at the end. You will also analyze your composition(s) and/or performance works so that you can examine, and interact with, the theoretical context underpinning your own creative process.
- If you are giving a presentation or performing community service, excerpt key aspects of your work that are informed by the work of others, and cite them properly.

This assignment is difficult to describe because it will take so many forms for the wide range of projects that we will encounter. Ask questions, do your best, be brave, and keep in mind your personal learning goals about understanding context.

More than five citations would be delightful, delicious, and dreamy. Decadent? Definitely.

Section Three: A First Taste of your Deliverable

Produce a **representative excerpt** (something incomplete, but high quality) of your final piece of work. This can be your first two completed photographs, the first three slides of a presentation, two to three sample pages of text from some section of your paper/story, a section or movement of your composition, etc. If the nature of your deliverable makes this challenging, contact your course leader and mentor and we'll work something out.

Section Four: Looking Forward

If needed (think carefully... are you still on track?), and in light of mentor/course leader feedback you can **revise the Plan of Work** from your proposal, with concrete milestones/deadlines customized for your project.

Also, take this opportunity to pose **questions to your mentor**. Generate at least three specific questions to discuss with your mentor. Think ahead for the final push (four weeks between now and the Disciplinary Deliverable due date): What are you going to do next? What do you need help on? What are you nervous about? Ask specific content questions about the material you are working with. Ask specific questions about the "excerpt" that you produced in part three above. Ask specific questions!

Assignment Four: Disciplinary Deliverable

Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go.
- T. S. Eliot

First deadline: Friday November 19, 6:00 PM, submit to course leader, mentor, and peer reviewers

Final deadline: Tuesday December 14, midnight, submit to course leader, mentor

Length: You tell me!

Grading: First draft 20% of final grade; revision another 20% of final grade; determined by course leader and mentor

The Disciplinary Deliverable is the "fruit of your labors," if you will. It is the primary outcome of this course; the artwork, paper, composition, or other work that results from a semester of glorious toil; the ultimate triumph of the human spirit over the dire forces of adversity.

The Disciplinary Deliverable will be assessed according to the degree to which it achieves your goals, as described in your proposal or its revisions. Deliverables take very different forms:

- If you produce a primarily written deliverable we expect a polished document of appropriate length for a semester-long project. Your mentor and course leader will certify an appropriate length for this assignment. Note that your course leader may not be able to read the entire deliverable before returning it to you... but your mentor will.
- If your capstone has a substantial performance component, you will need to produce an artifact by which your capstone can be evaluated. This may be a musical performance, a significant, well-prepared talk (in which case you need supporting material such as a PowerPoint presentation, your notes, and handouts), a substantial web site, a manual for someone else engaging in the same activity, etc. Your deliverable should be negotiated with your course leader and mentor at the time of the Proposal submission.

A first submission of your final work is due on Friday, November 19. This deliverable is expected to represent a **complete** and **polished** piece of work from you, though you are allowed to include a description of the future refinements that you would like to conduct. If

you suspect in advance that you cannot complete everything by the deadline, contact your mentor and course leader as early as possible. With their permission you will be allowed to include at the end of your project a description of what you still need to do. Polished submissions = meaningful mentor feedback on all your hard work.

Please make sure that you make the deadline! We need to assess your work over the Thanksgiving recess. Lateness will hurt your project and grade.

Your final work is due the Tuesday of finals week. Then you get to drink some vanilla coke.

Assignment Five: Project Assessment

The unexamined life is not worth living. **- Socrates**

Deadline: Wednesday, December 15, midnight, email to course leader
Length: About four to five pages
Grading: 10% of grade, course leader

This document is a chance to reflect on your Capstone experience. Your audience is the noble course leader, whom you should assume is not a specialist in the field (assume so regardless of this person's expertise).

Address the following questions in any format that you like, and write about a one to three paragraph answer to each one:

- Return to your **Personal Goals** assignment. Did you achieve your goals, and if so, to what degree? Assess your progress on each goal either through a letter grade or qualitatively (for example, excellent, great, good, fair, poor). What is the "lesson" from your ability or inability to set and achieve personal goals during a course -- what can you conclude from this?
- Discuss your **overall experience** in the Capstone. What aspects of the Capstone were most rewarding to you, and why? What aspects were most frustrating, and why? What did you learn about your topic, your work habits, your life?
- Revisit the **project goals** that you first set in your Proposal (and possibly revised in your Progress Report). Did your Disciplinary Deliverable achieve your goals? Reflect on each goal, and discuss which goals were best achieved, which goals left something to be desired, and why.
- Now forget about your goals, and review your **Disciplinary Deliverable** from as objective a viewpoint as you can manage (this is not easy).
 - What is the take-home message of your Disciplinary Deliverable? What does it accomplish overall?
 - What are its greatest strengths? Be specific.
 - What are its failings? Be specific.
 - What would you like to modify or add to this project? Is there any chance you will do so?

- Finally, what **changes** would you suggest that we make to the AHS Capstone Project next semester? This is not a hypothetical question: we hope to continue improving it and we may implement your ideas right away!

Assignment Six: Final Presentation

There is no subject so old that something new cannot be said about it.
- Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Deadline: Last day of class or finals week
Length: 15 minutes plus q/a
Grading: 5% of grade, course leader

All students are required to present their work to an audience of their peers, i.e., fellow students, your heroic course leader, invited guests, and an angry herd of yaks in need of placation after Nick Tatar delivered a righteous beat-down upon their sorry hides. Presentations will take place during the last day of classes and finals week, and we will decide the nature and order of presentations as this exciting day draws near.

Each student will have approximately 15 minutes for their presentation and at least five minutes to answer questions from the audience. You need to teach us about your project... what questions did you ask, how did you answer them, what did you learn, how was it significant. Never forget that your audience consists of non-experts!

Organization and focus are essential in this assignment: please plan in advance what you will say and how to make the best use of your time. To make this educational for all of us, please consider the following rubrics in preparing your presentation (these will be the assessment criteria). The successful presentation will be:

- **Professional:** you should anticipate audience needs; use "well-chosen" language; and show how you are poised and prepared
- **Significant:** you should educate non-disciplinary experts about this discipline; feature complex points and ideas; and end with cohesive and significant lessons learned
- **Structured:** offer reasonable and substantive goals; give us an overview/road map; end with a conclusion
- **Supported and effectively analyzed:** support your assertions with evidence; cite sources
- **Well executed:** speak clearly; use effective A/V support, if applicable; manage time well

Take a bow. You did it. And now, you get to live happily ever after.

The End