

THESIS OR CAPSTONE: WHAT TO CONSIDER

A GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS

CAPSTONE PROJECT GUIDE

A capstone project is a six-credit, independent project that will be performed under the close supervision of the capstone advisor. Project possibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Developing a new educational tool
- Developing or implementing a nutrition program
- Evaluating a new assessment tool, or education practice in nutrition
- Outcome based assessment of a nutrition intervention
- Approved research project
- Curriculum revision

A capstone project progresses in three stages as determined by the student and the advisor:

- Preliminary: Choose advisor, submit one-page outline of project/research to Master's Program Director
- Stage 1: Project development, submit IRB paperwork if necessary, develop all materials needed to implement your project
- Stage 2: Project work such as evaluation of an educational tool, implementing a new nutrition assessment, evaluating a nutrition intervention
- Stage 3: Write-up, presentation of results (open to the public), obtain final approval from you committee

For each credit of capstone in which the student is enrolled, the faculty anticipates the student will spend at least three hours per week working on this project.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A THESIS AND A CAPSTONE?

In many ways a thesis and a capstone are similar. They both follow a similar basic format and represent a scholarly effort of high quality. However, practice-based programs can use a capstone project to emphasize preparation of the student for professional practice. In contrast, a thesis is an academic-focused research project with broader applicability. Both projects should clearly state a problem or issue to be addressed. Both projects involve a review of the existing literature, collection of data or conduction of a project, analysis of results, and statement of conclusion. The primary difference lies in the scope and the focus of the project.

1. A **thesis** should answer a question that contributes to new knowledge in the field of nutrition and dietetics and is applicable beyond the single setting.
2. A **capstone** answers a question of practical importance such as developing a test or education method, evaluating an intervention, curriculum, or protocol within a particular agency or practice setting.



The following table illustrates some of the differences between a thesis and a capstone project.

	Thesis	Capstone
Primary Mentor	Graduate Faculty member at OHSU	GPHN Faculty or practitioner in nutrition and dietetics
Committee	At least two members of OHSU's Graduate Faculty and one additional Faculty member expert	One or two additional members. If advisor is not GPHN Faculty, then a GPHN Faculty member must be on the committee.
Proposal	Formal thesis proposal defense completed before the initiation of the project	Outline of project, approved by the Master's Program Director, required before initiation of project; formal proposal not required
Introduction	Brief introduction of the problem Specific aims and hypotheses (2-3)	Brief introduction of the problem Clear statement of the problem to be addressed
Background	Literature review of previous work on this topic	Literature review of previous work on this topic
Methods	Study design, settings, data sources (including population, measures and data collection procedures), analysis techniques	Description of the approach, settings, data and information available or collected, define the process of analysis
Results	Tables, figures and written text of results	Tables, figures and written text of results
Discussion	Discuss relevance to previous literature, contribution to body of knowledge and limitations	Critically evaluate if the project met the goals, discuss solution of the problem, make recommendations
Final written product	Thesis electronically filed in the OHSU library and two bound copies: one for the primary mentor and one for the GPHN	A practice group newsletter article, short report for publication, or other written deliverable
Seminar	Public seminar with formal oral defense examination	Public seminar



SHOULD I DO A THESIS OR A CAPSTONE?

Some factors to consider in making your decision include your plans for practice after graduation and your interests within the field of nutrition and dietetics. Students who may consider a terminal degree (doctoral program) or working in the field of nutrition research would benefit from completing a thesis project. Even if you have ever thought about a potential future degree or research career, the thesis option would give you a better understanding of the complete research process. If you have plans to work in a specific clinical or community setting and are interested in enhancing your nutrition practice skills, a capstone might be a great option for you. It will allow you to take some additional elective courses and provide you with an experience geared toward solving problems of practical importance to the field. If you are unsure about which option to select, schedule a meeting to discuss with a faculty member in the GPHN.

