

Info Session 1: Q & A from April 8, 2022

Professional Paper

Can you give some examples of professional paper topics? Or examples on how to think about what we might want to write about?

How you start thinking about what you want to write about really depends on what you find to be of interest. You have to find something that will keep you motivated for a whole semester or two. That can be a little bit challenging. Examples of topics and professional papers from previous years can be found on UMN's Digital Conservancy.

- [Human Rights: Professional Papers](#)
- [Public Policy: Professional Papers](#)
- [Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy: Plan A and Plan B Papers](#)

Topic possibilities can be very diverse, it depends on your interest, it depends on what data you might have available to you, what kinds of literature you want to read, etc.

Who is eligible to do a professional paper?

You are eligible as long as your degree program accepts it. Students who are in the MHR, MPP or MS-STEP program have that option. If you are in another degree program, exceptions have been made but it would need to be approved by the Director of Graduate Studies and a case would have to be made why a professional paper is needed instead of the program's capstone requirement.

What is the best time for us to start to connect to faculty for our committee? Should we have our committee before the draft is done or after?

As you're working on developing a topic, it's really useful to talk to somebody who knows something about that topic. Your professional paper supervisor doesn't have to be a Humphrey faculty member, it could be someone elsewhere in the university or possibly even beyond. But you really need to be working with someone as you start figuring out what that research question is, is it enough to keep me going and do I have enough information to address it. As you're turning in the [Paper Topic Approval form](#), you really only need that supervisor yet. The form asks for another committee member but it's as the paper evolves where it may be a better time to find the second committee member.

You definitely want to have the paper supervisor before you have a draft. The drafts actually don't get done until about March. You'll have a whole committee by then, and people to give you advice about things, what you should be reading and how your data should be analyzed, etc.

Is there requirement for the committee size?

You have one paper supervisor. It could be two co-supervisors, but usually it's only one supervisor and one committee member. Sometimes people add a third or, very rarely, even a fourth committee member to get additional expertise on their committees. That does make scheduling harder and it usually makes more work for the students.

If we're interested in recruiting an adjunct faculty (for the paper committee) who wouldn't be teaching this next semester, would we need to speak with the DGS, or how would we figure out the funding piece for the advisor to be paid or compensated?

Unfortunately, that kind of advisor would not be compensated. Paper supervisors are not compensated unless they're already being paid by the university for their job. Most of us do the professional paper supervising on top of whatever else we're already doing, and hopefully we aren't doing too many per person. We have a number of community experts who have occasionally been willing to take the time and volunteer that time to work with a student doing a professional paper. It's a pretty big ask. You'd want to talk it over with that person. It might make more sense to have a paper supervisor who was being paid, who is somewhere on the University of Minnesota faculty payroll already and then have that adjunct faculty be a committee member. There would be fewer expectations for them, maybe reading the draft a couple times or meeting with the student two or three times to give advice, rather than much more substantial commitments.

What structure exists to ensure paper supervisors have an incentive to do a quality job, considering they aren't paid and this is both a big ask for them and a significant requirement for graduating Humphrey students?

Faculty consider supervising student papers to be part of their jobs. This is something that we are paid for that's part of being a faculty member. When I talked about an adjunct professor, that is someone who's paid only during the semester they're teaching for the course(s). I, as a faculty member, advise on a whole variety of different types of student papers and projects. Many of us also supervise Ph.D. dissertations and those are going year-round. Even when we're not paid, we consider responding to student questions as part of our job, so I would say most faculty are really committed to doing this kind of work.

Can you provide more information about the Plan B paper? How is that different from other types of paper?

MPP used to do Plan B papers, but then we transitioned to doing professional papers. If you're seeing anything that says Plan B, it's just really out of date. A plan B paper is supervised by the graduate school rather than by the Humphrey school, and I mean in the broader sense. Some degree programs require them, but the Humphrey school does not require a plan B anymore. Plan B papers tend to be bigger (40 to 50 pages), and we wanted to have something more manageable for our students to complete in a semester. Our goal is about 30 pages of text on average for professional paper.

Are there alternatives to PA 8082 if timing conflicts with work?

At the moment, the only alternatives to PA 8082 in spring would be to do an independent study with your paper supervisor, if that person agrees. And if you can get the waiver from your DGS.

What is the typical length of the professional paper?

I would say they average around 30 pages. Some, with permission of committee members, go longer but they tend to be between 25 and 35 pages of text plus whatever else, bibliography, figures, tables, etc. It's not a huge paper, but we aim for them to be really well written.

Capstone

Does your capstone need to align with your concentration?

Not necessarily. All of the capstone projects from all sections are announced at the September Capstone Info Session. Students have the opportunity to review all projects and rank the three they are most interested in. These projects often have topics that cross degree programs, and the teams often contain students from multiple degree programs.

What is the typical capstone team size?

There is an average of 3-5 projects per capstone section with an average team size of 3-5 people.

How is a faculty advisor chosen for a student-initiated capstone?

Student-initiated projects must be placed in one of the existing capstone sections. Once you submit your form with information on the project idea and client, that is shared with all of the faculty who will be teaching capstone. A faculty will need to have the appropriate expertise to advise and mentor that project and agree to host it in their section for the project to proceed.

A student-initiated capstone project must have a team involved. If there are several students who develop the project together, they can form their own team. If an individual student is forming the project, then that project can be listed for ranking along with the projects gathered by the capstone faculty.

How does HHH plan to accommodate a larger first year MPP class size? Will there be more projects (than usual) in order to keep those team sizes manageable?

When planning for the spring capstones, we look at what the incoming second year class sizes are and potentially how many students we might have and plan the number of capstone sections from there. We're planning have more sections this year than we did last year. A couple of the current spring sections were fairly small, so there will also probably be more projects per section. The team sizes will still be in that three to five person range and we will add projects or sections, if needed.

Could you provide more detail on what the capstone project is more generally? What are the intended outcomes of the capstone?

One of the main characteristics of the capstone project is working in a team and working with an outside client. Depending on who that client is and what they need, that will determine what your deliverable is. Mostly it's some type of report. So it requires some sort of research, some sort of analysis and then a final deliverable.

Do MPP students get preference for policy capstones? And do MURP students get preference for planning capstones? Or is it just based on the ranking?

The capstone faculty collectively discuss and create the teams for each of the capstone projects. They take into consideration the ranking preferences of the students but also the skills and background needed to make a successful team for a specific project. The ranking form that students complete also includes questions about experience, background, skill levels in various areas, etc.

Where can we find past examples of past capstone projects or topics?

Here is the [list of capstone projects and descriptions from Spring 2021](#). Once the projects for spring 2022 are complete, I'll update this list.

You can also find past capstone final projects on the UMN's Digital Conservancy.

[Student Capstone Papers, Projects, and Presentations](#)