

TRADITIONAL CAPSTONE PAPER REQUIREMENT

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All M.P.A. students will learn research methods in PSPA 604: Public Program Evaluation Methods. Each student will develop a research design while taking this course which may, with additional work, be deemed an appropriate design for the capstone paper. Alternatively, a student may choose an area of research for the capstone paper based on the content of another course in the program. Based on the topic, each student will select a faculty member as a capstone paper director, who will help in preparing the proposal for the paper and under whose direction the capstone paper will be completed. During the semester in which the capstone paper is to be initiated, the student will register for three semester hours of PSPA 699: Public Sector Research. Once capstone paper research has begun, students must continue to register for 1 semester hour of PSPA 699 each semester until they receive a satisfactory grade on the comprehensive examination.

The student should adhere to these specific dates to submit first drafts, second drafts, and substantively approved capstone papers in order to sit for the comprehensive examination.

	<u>May Graduation</u>	<u>December Graduation</u>
Rough Draft Due:	January 15	August 15
Second Draft Due:	February 15	September 15
Substantive Approval Due:	March 1	October 1

Students who have not met these deadlines, or determine that they will otherwise not be taking the exam after turning in a Request to Sit for Comprehensive Exam, must notify the secretary at the Division of Public Administration no later than 72 hours prior to the first day of examination.

When completed, capstone papers are kept on file at the Division of Public Administration but are not accessible to the general public or student population, unless the author so designates. Without such appropriate authorization, only program faculty and staff have access to capstone papers. Students who wish to allow others access to their papers should complete and sign the "Capstone Paper Access" form (see Appendix G).

A capstone paper:

- reports original research and analysis conducted on the basis of a faculty approved, systematically developed, analytic research design;
- addresses a contemporary policy or management problem defined and developed in concert with an extensive literature search;
- normally involves the analysis of original data gathered from the student's own field research;
- is subject to review and revision until the final product represents work of publishable quality; and
- is **not** a descriptive account of the internship experience.

Any capstone paper research that includes the use of human subjects must go through the N.I.U. Office of Research Compliance (ORC) internal review process. Below is information taken from the ORC website about this process:

Northern Illinois University has the responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects used in research projects conducted at this institution or under the direction of any employee or agent of this institution, whether funded or not, and regardless of the source of funding. In compliance with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the Protection of Human Research Subjects (45 CFR 46, as amended), NIU has established an Institutional Review Board to review all research involving the use of human subjects and to set forth institutional policy regarding such research.

All research projects involving the use of human subjects conducted by NIU faculty, staff, or students - including research conducted for capstone papers - must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This includes all interviews, questionnaires, surveys, observation, educational tests, and secondary analysis of data previously collected, or involving special categories of subjects. [See Section IV for specific reporting/review procedures.] The only two exceptions are for projects that (a) consist solely of random telephone surveys of anonymous adults, or (b) workshop/training types of projects which involve data collection from adults that consists solely of an evaluation or assessment component that poses no risk to participants.

It is the responsibility of the researcher to know and comply with the review procedures of the IRB. Should the researcher be a student matriculating at NIU, the student's academic or dissertation/thesis advisor assumes primary responsibility for the proposed activity. The advisor is to familiarize the student with his/her obligation vis-a-vis the protection of the subject(s) from risks incurred as a result of participating in the research.

Research investigators in consultation with their department chair/director or designee shall make a determination as to whether research will involve human subjects as defined above. When it is not clear whether the research involves human subjects, researchers should seek assistance from the IRB chair or the Assistant to the Dean for Research Compliance in the Graduate School in making this determination.

For all research, except projects under "administrative review," approval must be obtained prior to the start of data collection. The Division strongly recommends that students make arrangements to receive IRB approval for their research at least ten months before their anticipated graduation date. As such, the Division strongly recommends that students begin crafting their research designs during their first year of study so that IRB approval can be secured before the completion of 21 semester hours.

Approval is obtained via the "Institutional Review of Research Involving the Use of Human Subjects" forms, found on the IRB website. The application is to be completed by each student before data collection begins, allowing time for both the Capstone Paper Director and Authorized Departmental Reviewer to review the application. The Authorized Departmental Reviewers are responsible for reviewing research protocols for ethical considerations and scientific merit. Each student, as the primary investigator for his/her research, is responsible for insuring that all research involving human subjects is ultimately submitted to the IRB.

When completing the Description of Study section on the "Institutional Review of Research Involving the Use of Human Subjects" form, students should provide sufficient detail in nontechnical terms so that the IRB may evaluate the risks, if any. Assurance that there is no foreseeable risk to informants or survey respondents, no matter how strong, will not substitute for a thorough description of the research. The form also calls for details regarding informed consent procedures (see the section entitled "Informed Consent Procedures"), and assent for minors (see section entitled Additional Protections for Children and Other Special Populations).

Once the form is completed and appropriate signatures have been obtained, the form, complete with all required attachments (questionnaires, surveys, consent forms, etc.) will be forwarded to the IRB after it has been reviewed by the designated Authorized Departmental Reviewer. The application will then be reviewed by the IRB chair to either designate the proposal as Full Board Review, Subcommittee Review, or Administrative Review.

For more information on this process, or to download the forms needed, please visit the ORC website at www.grad.niu.edu/orc and click on Institutional Review Board, or you can call 815.753.8588 for more information.

CHOOSING A CAPSTONE PAPER DIRECTOR

Students should consult closely with the M.P.A. Coordinator and appropriate faculty members to decide on a research topic and the appropriate faculty member to guide them in their writing. Students may choose a capstone paper director from any of the full-time faculty members within the Division of Public Administration. It is vital that students contact faculty members early to allow adequate time for filing IRB paperwork and collecting data.

Once a faculty member is chosen, the student is required to write a one-page summary of his or her proposal, and attach it to a Capstone Paper Approval form (see Appendix F) available at the Division office. The faculty member will sign the Approval form to indicate he/she has agreed to act as the student's capstone paper director and has approved the topic for the paper. The Capstone Paper Approval Form is then kept on file until the paper is complete. Upon completion of the capstone paper, the capstone paper director will sign the bottom of the form to indicate that it has been approved and that the student may sit for the comprehensive examination.