

MSU English Capstone

Basics:

All students majoring in English must complete a 4-credit capstone, a culminating experience in which students complete a project or course that integrates the skills and knowledge they have gained throughout their time as a major.

The capstone can be a purely academic endeavor or it can be a “stepping stone” towards your endeavors post-graduation. You might, for example, complete an internship in the public relations industry that results in a job; write an undergraduate thesis that consists of a collection of short stories which you plan to send to a publisher; complete an ENG484 class where you write a research paper that you use as a writing sample for admission to graduate school, etc.

There are multiple options for the capstone, most of which require forms and approvals. Thus, capstones need to be planned in advance. Your first step should be meeting with your [advisor](#) to ask questions, determine which options fit your schedule and ideas, plan out how to approach faculty for theses, etc.

In short, there are four options:

1. ENG 484: a “critical questions” course that includes intensive study, research, writing, and discussion on a given topic in English literature. Topics vary with the instructor.
2. ENG 499 (or ENG 489H for honors college members): senior thesis, an independent research or creative project with an English professor.
3. ENG 493: internship, a semester-long (summer, fall, or spring) job experience using skills you’ve learned in English classes, such as editing, proofreading, writing, communications, PR, marketing; students must work minimum 18-20 hours per week over the course of a semester.
4. ENG 400 + ENG 4xx level course: student enrolls in a 3-credit ENG 4xx course and adds ENG 400 (Writing Intensive Unit) for 1 credit with professor approval; this additional credit will be a writing-based project, agreed upon collaboratively between student and professor.

How to choose which option is best for you:

You should first review the explanations for each option (see below). After that, consider scheduling an advising appointment! The academic advisor can discuss the different options further and help you select what best fits your interests and plans. Once you have selected your option, make sure to [complete an appropriate form](#) if you are doing ENG 499, ENG 489H, ENG 493, or ENG 400.

Note for secondary education and honors students:

If you are completing the secondary education program, your capstone is fulfilled via the required course, ENG 413: Critical Questions in Language and Composition. Students take this course senior year, and it is focused on training you to teach writing at the secondary education level—something you will soon be doing!

If you are a member of the Honors College, it is recommended that you complete an honors thesis (ENG 489H).

Longer Explanations and Advice:

ENG 484:

Explanation:

In this course, students will bring together the skills, methodologies, and forms of knowledge they have acquired and developed within the English major. Students will: refine close reading skills, illustrate research competency, demonstrate negotiating of primary and secondary sources, develop and implement a sustained research plan, utilize analytic thinking and cultural understanding, and display effective communication and integrated reasoning. In most courses, students engage in archival research in MSU's Special Collections, develop pedagogical skills by leading discussion and/or giving presentations, and compose a final research paper on a topic related to the course.

Advice:

Unlike most of the other capstone options which involve independent work, ENG 484 is an excellent option for those who want a *guided* experience. In this course, the professor will guide students through the many steps of completing a final research paper that incorporates primary and secondary sources. Students will get a class experience where they can work with other English majors to complete in-depth studies of texts. The topic of this course changes each semester and is related to the professor's field of study; thus, students can learn more about a particular topic that they have explored previously or that is new.

ENG 499 (or 489H):

Explanation:

A thesis project is a self-directed endeavor, with assistance from a faculty member who shares expertise in your area of interest. Typically, a thesis is a long research paper. For creative writers, it might consist of a portfolio of short stories, a play, a novella, etc. During the semester (or semesters—this can be taken one semester for 4 credits, or two semesters, with 2 credits each semester), students will complete research and writing related to their thesis. The exact deadlines, times of meetings, steps for completion of the project, etc. will be decided by the student and faculty member on the [thesis proposal form](#).

Advice:

This is an excellent option if you would like to explore and write about a specific topic of your interest. This option is largely independent and thus takes initiative and planning. If interested, students should meet with the academic advisor to strategize about how to approach the project. In this meeting, the advisor can help fine-tune project ideas, refer the student to faculty members who might be able to serve as director, plan out how this could fit within a schedule, etc. Note that students would typically initiate a meeting with a faculty director of the thesis spring of junior year to create plans for fall and/or spring of senior year.

ENG 493:

Explanation:

An internship is a professional learning experience where students can discover or test possible career choices, learn “real-world” applications of the reading and writing skills honed in the classroom, and make valuable professional contacts. Any job that makes use of the skills we teach in classes in the Department, including writing, editing, proofreading, reading, film making, film editing, or film criticism could serve as an internship. Students have completed internships in such areas as banking, government, non-profit fundraising, editing, publishing, literacy volunteering, public relations, advertising, law, academic departments at universities—but this list is not exhaustive. Students must be a junior or senior in English or Film studies and have completed at least 15 credits in the English Department to be eligible.

Advice:

For the capstone, students must complete a 4-credit internship which equals approximately 20 hours of work per week. The Department does not arrange internships for students, so students are responsible for lining up their internship. Students should schedule an appointment with the English advisor, talk with faculty they have worked with, consult the online listings on the [Excel Network](#) and [handshake](#), and review the [“internship credit” page](#) on the Department website. Students will need to complete the [internships form](#) to get approval. This is a great option for anyone wanting to explore a career and get some “real-world” experience!

ENG 400 + ENG 4xx level course

Explanation:

For this option, students will complete additional work in conjunction with a ENG 4xx class they are taking. Students might write a research paper, a portfolio of essays or creative writings, blogs, reports, etc. Students will determine the final form for assessment and project descriptions with the faculty member teaching the ENG 4xx class.

Advice:

This is somewhat guided like ENG 484 because it is part of a class with determined readings and topics, but it is also somewhat independent like ENG 499 because it

includes students working individually with a faculty member to complete an additional writing project. This option is thus great for students who have enrolled in a 400-level English class based around a topic of interest and want to complete a project that further investigates said topic. Students will need to meet with their professor before the class starts (or within the first week of class) to decide the logistics of this option and get it approved via the [appropriate form](#).