

## Honors College Capstone Project

### Guidelines for College of Education Seniors (July 2009)

Seniors in the College of Education who are also Honors College students complete a two-semester capstone project in addition to their regular coursework. Students enroll in HON322 during the fall and spring semesters of their senior year and their project is supervised by their ED450 / ED451 (Composing a Teaching Life I and II) instructor. Another faculty member with expertise on the particular topic of the capstone project may be considered as a co-supervisor.

The capstone project is a teacher inquiry, also known as a teacher action research project. Seniors are in the classroom 3 days a week in the fall semester, and they student teach in the spring semester in the same classroom. A teacher inquiry project is one of the assignments in the “Composing a Teaching Life” course in the fall semester. The Honors College students who are completing their capstone project pursue a more rigorous, systematic, and in-depth teacher research project than the rest of the students in the course. Furthermore, their fall research project is considered a pilot study and, thus, is followed by another, more developed, study in the spring semester.

The results from both studies are shared (a) in the professional teacher portfolio that all graduating elementary education majors compose at the end of the spring semester, (b) orally during the session where all seniors present their portfolios to their colleagues, mentor teachers, and university faculty, and (c) via a poster that is displayed during that session.

Teacher action research is a genre of educational research that stems from the teacher’s own practice and informs and transforms this practice. Often the transformation necessitates design and development related to a particular dimension of teaching—curriculum, instruction, assessment, and policy—which is then implemented and studied further. A teacher starts with something puzzling, intriguing, challenging, problematic, or maybe with a dilemma in her/his own practice. A review of relevant literature helps the teacher pose a research question that can be answered by collecting and analyzing data. Data come in many different shapes and forms: teacher’s own observations, reflections, wonderments kept in some sort of teacher journal; student artifacts, work, performances that are captured in various ways including video- or audio-recordings; classroom discourse; visits and trips to out-of-school settings, including students’ communities, neighborhoods, homes; conversations with students outside of regular class time, or during after school activities; conversations with significant adults in students’ lives, like parents, relatives, guardians, community members. Appropriate analytical approaches are then used on the data in ways that are relevant to the research question. The findings and conclusions reached are used to make changes that would strengthen teaching and learning and lead to another cycle of teacher action research. The capstone projects of the College of Education Honors College students are expected to demonstrate high quality, innovative, and forward-thinking research that contribute to our developing understanding of the beauty and complexities of education, especially of students from underprivileged, underserved, and understudied backgrounds.