Traditional Capstone/Thesis Project
You will conclude your Saint Mary’s Honors Program experience by designing, executing and presenting an original research project or a product in your chosen field. Because you thesis project will require collaboration with, at the very least one faculty mentor, and may require collaboration with constituencies within and beyond the Bay Area’s academic and service communities, you must start dreaming and planning early to construct a product of which you will long be proud. A cap and gown and various awards symbolize the end of your tenure at Saint Mary’s, your thesis or capstone project will be your legacy. Make it a good one!

If your discipline already demands a thesis or capstone project, you will not be required to complete another for the Honors Program. You will, however, be required to submit an Honors Thesis Proposal by the appropriate deadline, to submit an electronic copy of your finished thesis for the approval of the Honors Program Director, and to give a formal presentation of your thesis at one of several possible venues including:
* State, regional or national Honors Conference
* Undergraduate conference in the student’s field
* Saint Mary’s Spring Symposium
* Departmental or School Thesis Showcase

Thesis or capstone projects must be approved by the Honors Advisory Board to fulfill graduation requirements for the Honors Program.

The SJE Capstone/Thesis Project
Social Justice Emphasis (SJE) Capstone Projects are not intended to be studies of or on social justice, but instead educate and prepare students to work for lasting social change. As such, in addition to an academic thesis, students pursuing an SJE must complete 50-100 hours of service and produce some kind of product (pamphlet, service program, fund etc.) for lasting social change. In other words, the legacy of their labors must outlive their tenure as a student at Saint Mary’s. Because such projects require more time to complete, a student interested in pursuing a SJE Capstone/Thesis project should contact the director at honors@stmarys-ca.edu no later than the fall of his or her junior year.

Thesis Deadlines
Upper-division honors program students are welcome to begin building their capstone/thesis projects whenever they discover a topic that moves them. The capstone/thesis proposals must be submitted before December 1st of a student’s final year. An abstract of the completed thesis/capstone must be submitted by finals week a student’s last semester. Topics might grow out of summer research and internship experiences or from successful Honors Contract Courses. Students who wish to pursue a thesis with a Social Justice Emphasis must begin recruiting committee members in the spring of their junior year.

To receive academic credit for a capstone/thesis a student must enroll in their department’s capstone/thesis course. If a student is enrolled in a department that does not require a capstone/thesis the student may a) enroll in an Honors Independent Study (198 and 199 in the catalog) or b) enroll in a related department’s thesis course.

- Capstone/Thesis Proposal Template
- Capstone/Thesis Abstract Form
- Capstone/Thesis Proposal Rubric

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Keys to Success

Start Early
Begin to brainstorm possible thesis projects no later than the spring of your junior year and utilize thesis workshops to solidify and focus your ideas.

Cultivate relationships with mentors and advisors:
In the fall and spring of junior year, you should begin to seek a primary and a secondary reader for your thesis. Your primary reader will also be your mentor and should be a full-time faculty member versed in the discipline you wish to pursue, willing and able to advise you in the planning and proposal stages, as well as the in execution and documentation of the project. The secondary reader, though perhaps actively advising you, will be responsible only for assessing the finished product. If your capstone project integrates more than one area academic interest, the second reader might be chosen for his/her expertise in this other area.
If you are pursuing a Social Justice Emphasis (SJE), you must begin identifying, contacting, and forming relationships with the constituency with whom you will be working by the spring of your junior year. Utilize resources on campus (CILSA, Mission and Ministry, the Career Center etc.) to help you contact willing organizations.

Craft a Detailed Proposal
Like your Honors Contract Proposals, your Thesis Proposal must articulate a clear and focused objective, a series of assessable outcomes, and a well-considered, detailed methodology appropriate to the discipline. Don’t be afraid to integrate an allied discipline (math with history for example) when constructing your proposal. Also feel free to integrate internship, research, work experience as well as coursework into your project, and to use your contract courses to explore possible areas of interest.

Creative Thesis Projects
All creative thesis/capstone projects (e.g., novels, choreographed shows, play productions, fine art exhibitions) must also meet the academic demands of a traditional thesis. Therefore, the same template may be used for creative thesis/capstone projects.

Get Feedback Throughout
Use your mentors as sounding boards for your ideas, frustrations and inspirations. Share your experiences with your fellow honors students and you are always welcome to speak with the Honors Program director about any concerns you have. Don’t labor in a void!