

# HRE 495 II – Individual Capstone Projects Within Organizations

[Course Description](#) | [Course Objectives](#) | [Course Requirements](#) | [Evaluation & Grading Policy](#) |

## Course Description

This "*Individual Capstone HRD Projects within Organizations*" course is the final step in a student's journey: The real execution of a real project, selected by the student, while working with a Mentor.

This project is expected to use elements from every course the students have taken during their time with HRE Online and link them together in a methodical, systematic way.

The ability of a group of 4 to 5 students to work closely with a mentor is key to the success of the program. While the work is the students' responsibility, the mentors serve as a sounding board and source of experience to the student. The Mentors, all professionals in their fields, are visiting Lecturers in the Education College.

There will be a series of optional synchronous sessions. Students are most strongly encouraged to attend these sessions. They will provide a wealth of information that will probably be helpful during the project, and certainly useful in your work subsequent to graduation.

In December, after the projects are complete and the write-ups are done, there will be two synchronous sessions. The Mentors and their groups will be divided in two near the end of the course by Professor Williams. One half presents on the first night, one half on the second night. The students are making a presentation to the other members of their Mentor-Teams, and to the best of our ability, a member from the HRE Online office will audit at least part of the discussion.

It is very important for the student to keep up with the schedule, so monitor the course site for information as it time goes on.

[back to top](#)

## Course Objectives

As a result of lectures, discussions assignments and projects, students will be able to:

- Apply theoretical and course-based knowledge in a comprehensive manner.
- Plan a project from idea inception through execution.
- Deliver and/or conduct a project within an unfamiliar environment.
- Utilize a variety of resource(s) to achieve desired results (execute project).
- Report on experience and/or findings to relevant audience(s).
- Reflect upon knowledge gained and/or skills developed, personally, as a result of managing a project.

[back to top](#)

## Course Requirements

Because of the importance of completing the work within the scheduled time, there are two dynamics involved in the grading.

First is the timeliness of submission. Expect heavy assessments for work turned in late without the support of your mentor and the expressed permission of the course instructor. If you see a problem arising, **BE PROACTIVE!**

Second is the quality of work. As the capstone course is for students completing their Masters Degree, the expectation for quality is high. Students are required to complete the following assignments:

**1. Participation (25 points).** Active and vigorous participation in asynchronous and synchronous discussions is an important requirement of the course. Students benefit from online courses to the extent that they actively participate and become engaged in the conversation. For grading purposes, participation will be based on:

a. Synchronous participation (10 points).

1) There are only 3 mandatory synchronous sessions required for this course. Attendance at and participation in these sessions is required. If you cannot attend a session, please notify the instructor and TA via email.

2) Optional synchronous sessions are planned for about once a month on topics that will help you with your projects. Facilitators/speakers for these sessions will be content leaders in their respective fields. Topics for optional synchronous sessions may include sensitivity to human subjects used in research, project management (resource planning allocation), project management (roadblocks to success). See the Master Schedule for more information.

b. Mentor-team participation (15 points). The student is expected to support the mentor-team group. Mentor-team meetings are expected to occur periodically. If they do not occur, you will be graded based on your one-on-one communications with your mentor. This value will be assigned by the mentor based on communication and timely submission of requirements.

**2. Incremental project submissions (35 points).** Because of the complexity necessary to support multiple project types, a detailed rubric has been created showing how the grades will be broken up within these categories.

a. Project Overview (5 points). This 1 paragraph rough draft will be due to the professor almost immediately after the first synchronous session. Because of its importance in mentor assignments, no points will be given for late submission.

The purpose of your overview is to enable the instructor to pair you with a suitable mentor for the course. We will be pairing mentors with students based upon the student's project idea, so that you can be aligned with a person who has experience in your area of interest, and who can guide you toward a successful outcome. We will also be doing "course correction" for any project ideas that seem to be off-track from course expectations.

This overview is a simple one- or two-paragraph description of your concept for your capstone project. It should express your idea for the project and what that idea might

entail with respect to the work you will do. Utilizing some of the sample project ideas, your project may be to evaluate a program already in place at your organization or deliver a program that you designed as a course assignment. You may want to implement and facilitate a cross-functional team to address a task at your workplace. You can also do investigative work on behalf of an organization and seek existing research data to help the organization address a problem or issue that it foresees. Additionally, you can design an internship in the HRE field – either part time or full time – that allows you to hone your skills more fully.

Your overview of the project should also include how your idea relates to your Ed.M. studies and how it complements at least one aspect of the course material you have learned thus far. If resources will be needed for you to complete your project, you should provide an indication of this plan (time needed, funding, management support, administrative access, etc.). You do not need to have these resources aligned or committed for you to write the overview assignment, but you should reveal your basic contemplation of the resources you will utilize. Finally you might want to include how your idea fits into your professional development plans – how it might be suitable for you career aspirations, your next expected job, or your own professional growth.

b. Project Proposal (10 points).

At this stage, you are creating a document which your host organization can use to assess your concept and determine its interest in assisting your efforts. Your proposal can be a discussion outline, an internal memo, a formal document, or a letter. It will vary in length depending upon your audience. However, it may be used by your host organization in a variety of manners and for purposes that are internal to the host organization, such as to inform others, to secure resources, to commit participants, or to solicit volunteers. Therefore, you need to be appropriately specific about your intended project design, the extent of the work to be done and potential outcomes at this point, such that a reader can understand the project's general parameters. A project proposal layout might include the following sections:

Background – Explain the source of your idea – this can be your own thoughts, a stimulus from your course work, discussions with others, a problem you have observed, or an issue that the organization might be experiencing but not have resolved. Additionally, you will want to explain *why* the project is being considered. This may be to obtain more information, to make a decision, to assess opinions, to align resources, or to restructure workflows, as examples. If you have done prior work on the issue that the project seeks to address, those efforts should be explained in this section (i.e. “this is part two of a project which was begun...”, or “this is a proposed evaluation of a program originally designed to...”).

Purpose – Be more explicit regarding the full extent of your project effort and the reasons for its undertaking. Explain what purpose your project is intended to serve. It is recommended that you focus this section from the organization's perspective – What goal might the organization accomplish? What new information might be learned? How will the organization benefit from working with you? Who, specifically, might benefit from the outcomes of your project? How will workflows be more effective? At this point, you are explaining what you desire to implement through your project work, and why you believe it is important work to be undertaken.

Project Scope - In this section, you want to carefully describe the breadth and the parameters of the work you anticipate will be done within this project. You may also want to express your standards of commitment to project completion in order to build

understanding and confidence within your host organization. You will need to distinguish your efforts on this project, specifically, from other works that the organization conducts. Write a careful description of the type of activities in which you will be engaged within the scope of your project – how much effort will be expended?, how deep will your investigation reach?, how complete will your tasks be?, etc. You will also need to describe the type of work that you will be doing (i.e. interviewing, reviewing documents, analyzing existing data, gathering new data, conducting surveys, assessing functions, conducting focus groups, facilitating teams, etc.). At this point, you will also need to include an overview of the resources that the organization will need to dedicate, if any. You might want to identify any assistance you will need by organizational function – such as department managers, administrators, executives, HR/HRE personnel, employees, students, associates, career services, etc., even if you do not know the exact names of individuals. You should also give an indication of the duration of your project efforts. For example, include language such as “employee survey to be made available online for 2 weeks”, “4 focus groups to be conducted over a multiple week timeframe”, “observations made at 5 locations over a 3 week period”, etc.

Anticipated Outcomes – Describe the expected benefits the host organization will receive from allowing you to conduct your project, as well as any professional benefits you hope to derive. Although you will not have results to report at this stage, you should have an idea of the type of information your final outcome will contain (i.e., will the results be in the form of suggestions? findings? comments? an event? a new perspective?, etc.). Describing a picture of anticipated outcomes provides the organization with a concept of the depth of your thinking and the breadth of your foreseen efforts. This enables you to gain internal support for your project, as well.

Personal Commitment and Professionalism – You might want to include a section within the proposal regarding your dedication to the project and your standards for managing its undertaking. This section is not necessary, but can be included both to indicate your respect toward your organizational contacts and to garner an appreciation of your professionalism. Here, you would describe your approach to the work you plan to do, and define your work style. You might want to address the confidentiality level you expect to maintain with the information at your disposal, your definition of due diligence, or the extent of your non-disclosure efforts. You will need to draw the boundaries for your host organization with respect to the information you gather, your safekeeping of that information, and your expected level of transparency with results or findings. You might also want to express your standards of honest and fair analysis and reporting – who will have privilege to your results and how information will be shared. If you have personal standards of conduct for conducting onsite work, or you can make a personal confidentiality commitment, it would be good to include those documents as an addendum (see Non-Disclosure Sample).

Organization Commitment – Sum up your proposed project to garner support from your host organization. This section only needs to summarize your proposal briefly and request confirmation to commence. A copy of this proposal might be signed by an organizational representative(s) so you have a documented “green light” for undertaking your project and so the organization has evidence of your plans. In other cases, depending upon the work your project entails, a signature to the proposal will not be necessary.

Your proposal format and length should be appropriate to your project. For instance, if you are working in an organization, you should provide the proposal in a format and length that is appropriate to present to your key organizational stakeholders. Whatever your format, you should address the topics mentioned above and be sure your project is executable in 6-8 weeks.

c. Formal Project Plan (20 points). Due Aug 30th. See August on the Course Homepage for more details.

In project planning, initially the scope of the project is defined and the appropriate resources for completing the project are identified. You determined the scope of your project in your project proposal. At this point, you will need to further break the scope down into a structure that enables you to see and manage the entire project – your managing document will be your formal project plan.

Overview: To create a complete formal project plan – you need to think about breaking down your full project idea into stages or phases. You will be writing expected outcomes or occurrences per stage, as well as identifying the general duration of each stage. It is also appropriate to be thinking about personnel or funding needs for each stage or phase. Importantly, phases or stages do not constitute an exhaustive list of the work. They are a comprehensive classification of the project's scope. This is similar to an architect creating the blueprint for constructing a home from the design concept and conversation that he/she has had with the future home owners. All parties have something in mind with respect to the concept – now you need to describe the phases of the concept in order to begin construction of your project. However, this staging or phasing needs to be done prior to the scheduling of work tasks or the commencement of your project activities. Without concentrating on the stages or phases completely, it is very difficult to manage the full breadth of the project or achieve successful results.

Phases: First you need to break down your project into stages and determine the estimated duration of each stage. Examples of stages are: information gathering; data collection; data analysis; needs assessment; survey administration; interim reporting, temporary instructing, or series facilitating. A well-designed, staged breakdown of your project describes planned outcomes at each stage instead of planned actions. Outcomes are desired mid-points within the project that can be predicted fairly accurately with a terminus. Certain stages will logically be dependent upon one another, although some may overlap. The progression of outcomes, or terminal mid-points, becomes the logical dependencies between the stages, and enables you to identify the critical path. You should have a critical path identified, even if some phases of your project work will overlap. For instance, in a research project, you may begin drawing similar findings from a cross-section of published literature pieces before actually reading every article on your literature review list. Nevertheless, the critical path becomes the baseline against which you will measure your progress.

There are a number of project manager software programs available to assist you in laying out the stages and creating your critical path. These programs can be good graphic illustrations of the visual phases of your project (week-to-week or month-to-month) and are usually fairly easy to use. Open-source desktop applications include: OpenProj, OpenWorkbench, TaskJuggler, KPlato and GanttProject. Proprietary desktop applications are also available; these include: Artemis, Microsoft Project, Merlin; OmniPlan and Track Suite. One benefit to these programs is the ability to lay out tasks on a spreadsheet and automatically roll-up point values (points for hours or dollars required).

Action Steps: Usually, projects phases or stages along the critical path can be further parsed into specific steps per stage. The action takes place at each specific step. A step can be a decision, an occurrence, a meeting, a delivery, a change, or a review point. Steps may require the input or coordination by several people, or several documents, or both. You may be coordinating the assistance of internal parties, or outside experts, and

compiling their work with your own to complete a step. This may be something like acquiring an outside survey instrument from a vendor, adding several items to it yourself, and reviewing the final survey instrument with an internal HRD professional. These would constitute action steps within a larger *phase* of employee survey creation. It is usually at the step-by-step level that you will want to oversee the project's progress. Also, at this point float, or slack, time can be built into the plan, perhaps between the steps, to allow for time overruns.

Tasks: Finally, each step can be further broken down into various tasks needed to complete the work within each step. These tasks are either listed chronologically or grouped together into a work breakdown structure. A work breakdown structure is useful when the tasks to be accomplished are to be completed by a team, or group, rather than by one person individually. Tasks can be structured as units of time, or funded resources, or as due dates.

Instruments: For the project plan, you will need to have developed any instruments you intend to be using for your project, and any planning agenda, if appropriate, for organizational meetings you may anticipate. Instruments might include a training plan, a session agenda, facilitator instructions or scripts, handouts for participants, a draft of survey questions, or a sample questionnaire. These instruments/documents should be attached to your formal project plan as addenda, such that any interested parties will know exactly what you intend to be investigating, and how the participants/audience will experience the investigative steps.

Formal Plan Review - At this point, you can review your formal project plan in its entirety and use it to estimate the resources necessary to actually complete your project. Costs for each activity can be allocated, giving the total project cost – in both dollars and time. Your host organization will want to know how much of its personnel time and effort will be required to assist you in your project completion. A well-documented formal project plan will enable you to make these estimates with some degree of certainty.

Usability - A full review of your formal project plan will enable you to foresee difficult stages or time requirements that are unrealistic. Thus, you can make alterations to your plan to avoid such problems beforehand. Additionally, you should use your formal project plan as your working management document for guiding your project through to completion and for discussing your project with your mentor. You will be able to conduct useful dialogues with your mentor if you both can be reviewing a plan that encompasses the full spectrum of your efforts. Shown at the bottom is a picture of a project plan using existing desktop software. However, your formal project plan need not take on this format. It is important that your plan take a format that is suitable to the organization with which you are working with or for the project you are undertaking. It may be that your formal project plan takes the format of an internal memo to an administrator, a discussion draft of terms, or a project schema.

**3. Final Project Report (15 points).** This is a project findings report, suitable for submission to your mentor and your organization. The format will be driven by your organization's needs. It may take the form of an internal memo, a report of findings, and evaluation of organizational practices and/or recommendations for institutionalization of practices. Project results write up, at a minimum this should be 5-8 pages, double spaced, APA format. The alternative of a literature review (Integrative Research Paper) is longer and should be 17-20 pages, not including references.

**4. Reflection Paper (15 points).** Each student will individually write a 4-5 page, double-spaced, APA format paper on their experiences with their individual project. Summarize

your observations, findings, and conclusions about what you have learned from conducting a project within a line organization and how your learning will assist your future endeavors within the HRD field.

**5. Presentation to fellow team members and mentor (10 points).** Sharing the project, what you have learned, and how you plan to practice HRD will be a crucial part of this course. We will spend the last two synchronous sessions learning from each other through these personal presentations.

[back to top](#)

### **Evaluation & Grading Policy**

All learning activities, assignments and projects must be completed and submitted on time. Late assignments will have a negative effect on grades. Scholastic misconduct will result in a failing grade. Every student is expected to abide by the UIUC [Academic Integrity Policy](#). Grading will be criterion-referenced. That is, individuals' grades will depend upon mastery of the material. Grades will be assigned as follows (pluses and minuses will be used).

- A: 90-100
- B: 80-89
- C: 70-79
- D: 60-69
- F: 59 and below

[back to top](#)