

Wesleyan University Graduate Liberal Studies



Master of Arts in Liberal Studies & Graduate Certificate in Writing Capstone Guidelines

Fall 2026, Spring 2027, Summer 2027

Your GLS guide to the process:

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Overview

MALS degree candidates may choose to complete a Capstone as the final course of the degree. It is an advanced program of independent study within the student's area of concentration, in which the student produces a 30-page critical essay based on academic research, or a creative or scientific project accompanied by a 20-page analytical essay.

The MALS Capstone is an opportunity to pursue, in depth, a topic, issue, or project of the student's choosing, under the guidance of a faculty member. It is an essay or project providing evidence of the student's ability to independently produce, organize, and complete a graduate-level scholarly or creative work for academic credit.

Please note: The Capstone for the Graduate Certificate in Writing must be an academic essay or a work of creative fiction or non-fiction – it may not be a non-writing-focused project, such as a performance or portfolio of photographs. Aside from that more narrow focus, all of the information included below for the MALS capstone pertains.

Essay

The MALS Capstone essay is a written work of approximately 30 pages in length, to allow the student to fully introduce and develop the topic, to incorporate the relevant literature (as applicable), and to summarize the conclusions.

Project

The MALS Capstone project may take many forms: creative writing; performance; theatre, film, or video production; experimentation/investigation; artistic exhibition, etc. It may be an original body of art, a creative performance, or a laboratory science study. The MALS project may be used to demonstrate artistic or creative ability. Examples of MALS projects in this area could include an art portfolio of new pieces, a music or dance performance, a play production, or a film. The MALS project in the area of writing could include a collection of poems, short stories, a short novel, a screenplay, or other creative writing.

Analytical Paper to Accompany Project

An analytical paper of approximately 20 pages must accompany the master's project. This written analytical component explains the nature of the project, incorporates the relevant literature in the field, and analyzes the work in its artistic and academic context. The academic analysis is meant to examine what the work does/argues and why; it is not meant to answer questions about personal inspiration, how your feelings have changed over time, or other such non-academic topics. Personal narratives may be appropriate in the creative component. In the academic component, however, your responsibility is to explore the academic relevance, critical success, and intellectual significance of the creative work. For example, the paper for a painting project might include research on and references to artists or styles that influence the

student's technique, or a subject or theme on which the work is based. The paper accompanying a choreography project might include research on a particular dance style, choreographer, or an event in dance history.

Project Documentation

Students who complete a master's project must submit audio or video recordings, photographs, slides, charts, programs, gallery lists, and/or other appropriate forms of documentation. Field projects might include a research-style manuscript and/or videos, photographs, charts, computer files, or other appropriate forms of documentation. The faculty advisor must view the performance or studio work, preferably in person. Whenever possible, the GLS director or designee should also attend a show or performance.

The Proposal Process

Step-by-step Timeline with resources and accountabilities on pp. 9-10

The purpose of your proposal is to put forward a plan for the work that you will undertake in your MALS Capstone. Your proposal will be evaluated by the Continuing Studies office and your prospective advisor to ensure that it is manageable and achievable. Presenting the work that you plan to undertake is also the best way to obtain agreement from your prospective advisor. After doing some initial research on your proposed topic, you will arrange a meeting with Glenn Knight, Associate Director, Continuing Studies Admission and Student Services (AD, Continuing Studies)). Contact info: gknight01@wesleyan.edu, 860-685-3345. From this meeting, you will end up with a more concrete subject. Please note: it is the student's responsibility to identify an advisor in an appropriate field. The AD, Continuing Studies, will discuss your choice for advisor, or your ideas about potential advisors, when you meet. You may then meet with the GLS Writing Consultant. If you meet with the writing consultant, they will review the work you have prepared. This is the appropriate time for you to receive objective feedback on the writing and the construction of the proposal. The Writing Consultant may subsequently choose to meet with your advisor to ensure that your project proposal meets the advisor's expectations.

Following these meetings, you will prepare your proposal, which will include: a brief abstract, outline, and preliminary bibliography, which will be reviewed by the AD, Continuing Studies, before you approach a possible advisor. These will help you to convince the faculty member, when you present the documents to them, of the value of your project and of your ability to accomplish your goals.

Now you will be ready to approach a potential advisor. If the advisor agrees to advise you, you will contact the AD, Continuing Studies, who will reach out to the advisor to finalize his or her participation. Once a faculty member has agreed to serve as your advisor, you will both set up a timetable for meetings and submission of drafts. This timetable is a required component of the proposal. It is your responsibility to keep your advisor apprised of your progress. In most cases, students and advisors need to meet two to four times in the proposal stage: initially, to finalize a topic, then to review drafts. Keep in mind that your advisor must have enough time to read and evaluate your work before returning it to you with comments, and that you will need time to

incorporate those comments. You should also be prepared for the possibility that your advisor will request significant changes to every draft, including your proposed final version. Your advisor and the Writing Consultant may meet to review your draft proposal to ensure that both content and style guidelines are met. Lastly, you will submit your final proposal for consideration to the GLS Director.

Once you have obtained sign-off from your advisor on the content of the Capstone and their availability to be your advisor, you will request a link to the online Proposal Form from the AD, Continuing Studies. You will need to attach all of your documents and a copy of the email from your advisor to the proposal. After your proposal is approved, you will be enrolled in your Capstone course.

Choosing a Topic

You will be spending a lot of time with your chosen topic, so reflect carefully and choose a topic of compelling, sustainable interest to you.

Requirements:

- The topic must be within your area of concentration
- The topic must be compatible with Wesleyan's liberal arts curriculum
- There must be an appropriate faculty member who is available and willing to be an advisor. Advisors can be members of the Wesleyan University faculty or GLS visiting lecturers within the past year
- The topic must be approved by the GLS director

Where to begin:

The most successful MALS Capstones usually arise from ideas developed in previous coursework. You should think back through your GLS courses for ideas and topics that can be developed into a graduate-level essay or project. Choosing a topic in which you have already done some research will make the essay or project much more manageable, because you already have a base of knowledge and research from which to draw.

You may also choose to consult with faculty members about ideas. In addition, you are welcome to examine previous master's essays/projects in the Olin Library archives (in closed stacks; advance request required). Many liberal arts topics in your concentration area may be chosen for the MALS Capstone. However, professional projects such as business plans, instruction manuals, or purely technical descriptions are not consistent with Wesleyan's curriculum and may not be approved for the essay or project. Areas of inquiry not taught at Wesleyan may not be approved.

Note: The publishing/binding requirement has been discontinued for MALS Capstones and M.Phil. Theses.

Choosing a Faculty Advisor

The MALS Capstone must be completed under the guidance of a faculty advisor with expertise in the student's chosen topic. The faculty advisor serves as the expert on the academic subject and discipline-specific style.

Requirements:

- The advisor must be
 - A member of the Wesleyan faculty
 - A visiting faculty member who has taught at Wesleyan within the previous calendar year
 - A GLS visiting lecturer who has offered a course in the program within the previous calendar year
- The advisor's area of expertise must be within the student's area of concentration
- The advisor must be available to serve as an advisor throughout the entire process
- The advisor must be approved by the GLS director

The best place to begin is with your previous GLS instructors. During your initial meeting with the GLS writing consultant and AD, Continuing Studies, you will brainstorm possible advisors. Choosing a faculty advisor with whom you have previously studied is strongly encouraged because the faculty member is already familiar with your academic work, and you are already familiar with his or her expectations and critical methods.

If it is not possible to work with one of your previous GLS instructors, you will need to find a faculty member or recent GLS instructor who has expertise in the area of your Capstone essay or project.

Once someone has provisionally agreed to serve as your advisor, notify the AD, Continuing Studies at masters@wesleyan.edu so that crucial administrative information can be sent to your advisor.

Student-Advisor Relationship and Responsibilities

The student and faculty advisor will work together from the development of the initial proposal through to the completion of the final revisions. It is important for both the student and the advisor to understand their responsibilities to ensure that the student-advisor relationship is successful.

The faculty advisor should:

- Ensure that the student's proposal is sufficiently detailed so that it communicates the intent and viability of the proposed topic
- Ensure that the student is meeting the goals of the proposal during the development of the official draft
- Serve as an academic subject expert to the student, helping to identify source materials, etc.
- Assist the student in meeting the requirements of the style manual appropriate to the essay or project topic (e.g., APA, MLA, Chicago, Turabian), unless other arrangements are made with the student. Please note that students should always use the latest edition of any publication style manual

The student should:

- Ask the advisor for help when necessary.
- Implement changes suggested by the advisor.
- Keep in contact with the advisor on a regular basis, as agreed upon in your timetable.

Structure

The proposal is the foundation on which the essay or project is developed. You should view the proposal not as just a description of what you intend to accomplish in the MALS Capstone, but as the first step in the development of the work. The proposal should be a detailed document that incorporates research, coursework, and timeframes for completion. In addition to serving as a guide to the student throughout the development of the master's essay or project, a thoroughly developed proposal also demonstrates to the GLS director that you have a clear vision and plan for accomplishing your goals.

Publication Style Manual Guidelines

Students should select the style manual appropriate to their discipline (i.e., APA, MLA, Chicago Style, or Turabian) and should follow the style manual for the proposal as well as the final work. Students should pay particular attention to and adhere to the style manual requirements in the following areas (this list is not intended to be all-encompassing):

- Title page (see page 12 of this handbook)
- Copyright page (optional)
- Preface or acknowledgements
- Margins
- Table of contents
- Chapters (headers)
- Footnotes or endnotes
- Use and placement of quotes and punctuation
- References, bibliography, list of works cited/consulted
- Citations

- Figures (charts, graphs, maps, photos, drawings) and tables
- Appendices

Copies of the style manuals below can typically be found in libraries or can be purchased at a bookstore such as Wesleyan R. J. Julia Books, 413 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06459; (860) 685-3939. The below list of references follows the APA publication style manual.

American Psychological Association. (2001). Publication manual of the American psychological association (5th ed.). New York, NY: American Psychological Association.

Gibaldi, J. (1998). MLA style manual and guide to scholarly publishing. (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Modern Language Associate of America.

Grossman, J. (1993) (Ed.). The Chicago manual of style: The essential guide for writers, editors, and publishers. (14th ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Turabian, K. L. (1996). A manual for writers of term papers, term papers, theses, and dissertations. (6th ed.). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Proposal Requirements

A proposal must include all the following components:

Title page (1 page)

The title page must include a working title, formatted exactly as the sample (found on page 12).

Proposal (2-1/2 to 4 pages)

1. Abstract (3 or 4 sentences)

In one paragraph, state the central question, theme, or problem your essay or project will address. Do not use generalizations—state your issue in the form of a developed thesis statement.

2. Development of topic

Provide a detailed description of the topic and the academic context (i.e., the problems or issues in the field that the essay/project will address). This discussion may include a description of a hypothesis, anticipated results, process, product, artistic direction planned, or expected findings.

3. Methodology

Have a discussion with your advisor about the structure and format of the methodology you'll be expected to use. Address the academic disciplines from which you will draw and explain which of these disciplines will inform the

methodology you use. Provide a detailed description of the methods of inquiry and analysis.

4. Literature review: analysis of scholarly context

Review the available literature on the topic: what is already known about the topic? What is not known? How does this information relate to the proposed work?

5. Wesleyan Resources

Meet with a reference librarian who can discuss your topic with you and direct you to the library resources available at Wesleyan that will support your project. Please also list any faculty you hope to use as a resource.

Appendices (in addition to the above)

1. Timetable

Document the key milestones required to complete the MALS Capstone in a specified timeframe and provide a description of how you will interact with your faculty advisor: schedule of meetings, timeframe for response and feedback, key dates to deliver information for review, review for publication style compliance, etc.

2. Bibliography (2 to 4 pages)

Preliminary list of the source materials to be used (libraries, readings, references, labs, field area, etc.), documented using one of the publication styles (i.e., APA, MLA, Chicago, or Turabian).

3. All documents required for IRB approval (required only if student plans to use human subjects as data)

Timeline: Capstone Submission and Review

Students may submit the proposal for the MALS capstone as early as during their tenth or eleventh course, but no later than 8 weeks prior to the start of the term in which the work will be done.

Students are expected to complete the capstone in one term; this should be the final course toward the MALS degree. If a student is unable to complete the capstone during that one term, the student may petition to continue into the following term. No extensions will be granted beyond the two-term maximum. If the student does not complete the final work by the end of the first term, the student will be given an incomplete grade with a provisional grade. If the work is not completed by the end of the second term, the provisional grade will become the final grade.

Pre-Work:

1. Develop a preliminary Capstone idea.

2. Work with AD, Continuing Studies, to develop a draft proposal.
- 3.** Select a Capstone faculty advisor.

Proposal Deadlines:

1 Submit draft proposal to GLS

Proposal submission deadline for Fall 2026: July 08, 2026.

Proposal submission deadline for Spring 2026 November 18, 2026.

Proposal submission deadline for Summer 2027: March 15, 2026.

Proposal submission deadline for Fall 2026: July 14, 2026.

Timing: Roughly 8 weeks prior to the final proposal deadline above:

Submit a draft proposal by email to GLS at masters@wesleyan.edu for review by your advisor and the writing consultant. We forward your draft to your advisor and to the writing consultant for review. You will receive comments within 3 weeks, for incorporating into the final Capstone proposal.

2 Submit final proposal to GLS by 5 PM on the Tutorial, Capstone or Thesis Proposal Deadline above

All materials, including advisor sign-off must be submitted to Continuing Studies by this deadline.

The GLS director will approve or deny the Capstone based on the proposal submitted in light of the previous comments from the advisor and writing consultant.

Registration: Students will be enrolled and billed within 1 week of approval of the proposal.

Please note: all meetings with the Writing Consultant and the Associate Director, Continuing Studies (and most likely your advisor, as well) may be held via phone or online meeting (Zoom, Skype, etc.). However, if you have already taken 5 courses online, your work with your advisor must include regular in-person interaction. Please contact the Associate Director, Continuing Studies, to make sure that you remain within the requirements for the degree.

Capstone work (deadlines to be reconfirmed with student, advisor and GLS office):

1 Write Capstone

2 *For those completing a Capstone in summer or fall:* By last day of classes in term (or other date approved by advisor and GLS) hand in completed MALS Capstone to advisor.

3 For graduating students completing a Capstone in spring: By close of early grading period for graduating students, hand in completed MALS Capstone to advisor.

4 Prior to Commencement: Submit one digital copy to masters@wesleyan.edu. This copy is required to make you eligible to participate in Commencement.

Making Changes After Approval of Final Proposal

Some of the most powerful learning opportunities in a Capstone occur during the development and finalization of Capstone proposals. The proposal is not intended to be a restrictive or inflexible document. It should serve as a guide for both the creative Capstone and the research Capstone. As you explore and deepen your understanding of your topic, you may find it necessary to shift your direction. This evolution is a natural and important part of the process, and meaningful learning often emerges from the journey between your initial ideas and your final outcome. If such a shift occurs, it is essential to consult your faculty advisor and clearly explain the reasons for the change in your final submission.

Use of Human Research Subjects

If your topic involves the use of human subjects (i.e., if you will interview and/or photograph people, etc.), you will need to get approval from Wesleyan's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The need for IRB approval extends to any manner of research, including experiments, interviews, surveys, and other data collecting methods. This process is designed to protect the rights and welfare of human participants by ensuring that they are selected equitably, participating voluntarily, fully informed of the risks and benefits of the research, and that the research minimizes risks to humans and protects their privacy and confidentiality.

Most proposals will be granted an expedited IRB review. However, if the proposed research presents particular concerns, it will be subject to a full board review. The full process for submitting all projects to the IRB can be found online at wesleyan.edu/acaf/support/reviewboard.html. Your proposal to GLS should include all the information you intend to submit to the IRB. After your proposal has been approved by GLS, you will submit the proposal to the IRB.

The IRB must be notified of any unanticipated problem involving risks to subjects or others, including physical or psychological injury to subjects, improper disclosure of private information, economic loss, or other potentially harmful occurrences.

Completing the Capstone Essay or Project

Submission of the Essay or Project

Once the Capstone is completed and approved by the advisor, you must submit one digital copy to the GLS office (preferably by email to masters@wesleyan.edu) to be kept in your file.

Sample Title Page

A sample title page, formatted as your page should be formatted, appears on the last page of this handbook.

Completion

Once the essay or project is approved and graded, credit will be awarded. Provided that all other degree requirements have been met, the student's program is considered completed. Please note that there are three opportunities each year for students to graduate, and for their diploma to be issued: September, December and May. However, Wesleyan's Commencement occurs once per year, in May. For letters of completion prior to one of the three graduation dates, please submit a written request via email to masters@wesleyan.edu but addressed to the Associate Director, Continuing Studies. Please allow, 2 to 4 weeks for requests to be processed. For an official transcript, students should submit a request through the Registrar's website: [wesleyan.edu/registrar/general information/transcripts.html](https://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/general%20information/transcripts.html). **Please note that the degree awarded will not appear on the transcript until one week after conferral.**

. For an official transcript, students should submit a transcript request online at <https://www.wesleyan.edu/registrar/transcripts/index.html>. Language stating that the degree was awarded appears on transcripts printed only after commencement in May.

Protecting Intellectual Property (optional)

Students might want to copyright their MALS Capstone. Students can provide some level of copyright protection by inserting a single page that contains only the copyright information in the front of the document. The copyright information should be centered in the middle of the page, detailed as follows:

Copyright 2027 © Jane E. Smith

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

(The title page is not numbered. The font, type size, and style should be the same as in the manuscript (no bolding). Below is an example of the GLS format for the Final Essay/Project Proposal and Official Draft cover sheet. Please note: the font size should be 11 or 12 depending on your publication guide.)

HUMANISM, MODERNISM, IDEALISM, AND THE DANCE ART OF DORIS HUMPHREY

by

Jane E. Smith

Submitted to Wesleyan University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Liberal Studies.

April 2027

Stephanie Weiner
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