

M.A. in Digital Humanities & M.S. In Data Analysis and Visualization Capstone “White Paper” Report Guidelines

The M.A. in Digital Humanities and M.S. in Data Analysis Program capstones require the submission of a “white paper” that records the methods, project accomplishments, and theoretical framework for the project undertaken. The “white paper” must be completed according to the program guidelines below and the library’s guidelines, and must be submitted to the program and the library by their respective deadlines to satisfy the program’s graduation requirements.¹

The successful capstone white paper accomplishes *four* primary goals:

1. It communicates the *pedagogical, public, or scholarly value or impact* the project brings to the field or discipline so that it may be cited and referenced by others.
2. It articulates the *theoretical, technical, and practical framework* informing the capstone project as the culmination of coursework and independent research.
3. It describes the *process of creating the project*, particularly the decisions, challenges, constraints, and opportunities that brought the project to its current state. It also gestures toward the project’s possible future of the project.
4. It *documents the project’s technical and procedural components* and data for the purpose of sustainability and reproducibility.

Impact: The white paper should provide a succinct articulation of the project’s intended purpose, its contribution to digital humanities or digital scholarship, and a short summary of the project undertaken. Evidence of impact is best illustrated through specific examples of the way the project addresses the needs of the capstone’s intended audience. How does the capstone relate to other similar work in the field? What efforts have been taken in the capstone to accommodate the existing ecosystem by either adding to, extending, critiquing, or redressing existing work?

Framework: As a metacognitive exercise, the white paper should demonstrate a student’s ability to situate their work within the context of their coursework in the program and the goals of the project. It should reflect how the capstone relates to the student’s course work, what challenges were encountered (technical, methodological, or other) during the project and how they were overcome. What technical or formal choices were made and why? The white paper may also include recommendations for best practices that future scholars may wish to consider.

Documentation: The white paper should document the process and the product of a digital capstone project. The narrative will help future scholars, students, and practitioners understand the values, theorization, labor, and technical opportunities and constraints that contributed to the digital project. White papers for digital capstone projects should include a “Digital Manifest,” which is described on the library’s Lib Guide: https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/ld.php?content_id=44359564. The contents of the Digital Manifest will change depending on the forms, technologies, and data types included in the capstone.

All white papers should be approximately fifteen pages and must be submitted to the department with the digital component. It is later submitted to the library following the Library’s formatting guidelines for submitting a thesis (<http://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/dissertations>). The format (including cover page and signature pages) should follow that of the Library’s requirement for a

¹ See the program websites for current program deadlines: gc.cuny.edu/dh or gc.cuny.edu/datavis

thesis, otherwise the white paper will not be accepted until it is formatted correctly.

White Paper Structure

The structure of the “White Paper” should follow library and program guidelines. Use the following as a checklist to review with your advisor before submitting your final draft.²

- 1. Cover Page:** The cover page should include the student’s name, the name of the program (eg. M.A. in Digital Humanities & M.S. in Data Analysis and Visualization Program), the title of the capstone project, and the year and month of submission.
- 2. Copyright Page:** (see sample)
- 3. Program Approval Page:** This page should be signed by the Advisor and Department (like the thesis signature page).
- 4. Abstract:** Include the abstract that was submitted to the department or a revised version thereof.
- 5. Preface, Forward, and/or Acknowledgements** (optional)
- 6. Dedication and/or Epigraph** (optional)
- 7. Table of Contents**
- 8. List of Tables** (if applicable)
- 9. Lists of Figure, Illustrations, Charts, Diagrams, etc.** (if applicable)
- 10. Digital Manifest (required for all digital projects)**

List and briefly describe the project components to form an inventory or “packing list” for the deposit. For each component included in the deposit, indicate its file type, a brief description, and URL, if applicable. For example, a capstone project that is a website containing geospatial visualizations created using CARTO might deposit: an archived version of the website (submitted as WARC files), data files exported from CARTO (as CSV, Shapefile, KML, GeoJSON, or SVG files), and an accompanying white paper. All of these items would be listed in the Digital Manifest.

11. Note on Technical Specifications

All capstone projects that contain digital projects must include a “Note on Technical Specifications” in the preliminary pages. Use this section to provide an introductory note to readers that will serve as a high-level overview of the project’s components and technical specifications. Include information about components housed outside of the intended library deposit, such as GitHub repositories, and where to find the latest version of materials.

12. Narrative

The items listed are provided to help guide the narrative description of the report. Because projects vary considerably, some items may not be relevant for certain projects. Students are encouraged to organize this portion of the report to present the clearest account of the project and the process behind the completion of the project.

² Detailed instructions and examples for library requirements can be found on their LibGuide: https://libguides.gc.cuny.edu/ld.php?content_id=44359564.

- *Provide a description of the Capstone Project*
 - Include process of development and impetus for the project.
 - Discuss what practices worked best to realize project goals.
 - If the project is digital in nature, please provide the URL.
- *Relationship to Focus Area and Previous Course of Study*
 - Discuss how the capstone project relates to the student's DH focus area and previous course work.
- *Evaluation*
 - Provide an evaluation of the project that assesses how strongly the completed version of the project captures the objectives outlined in the initial project application.
 - Discuss what setbacks and challenges one faced and how one handled these.
 - Outline the successes and failures of the project.
- *Continuation of the Project*
 - Indicate if there are any plans to continue working on the project after the completion of your MA. Specify if this is due to the success of the project or a desire to see the project through if it has not yet been completed.
- *Select Bibliography*
 - Include sources that were important to the capstone project.

13. Appendices

Include any supporting material that would contribute to an understanding of the project and its accomplishments to date. These materials can include representative samples or screenshots of completed work, articles submitted to journals, publicizing materials, illustrated field reports, exhibition catalogues, examples of fiction, and the like.

- **List of Variables** (if applicable): If the digital project is a database or includes code, a List of Variables must be included in the preliminary pages or as an Appendix (back matter). If brief, the List of Variables should be located in the front matter, or preliminary pages; lengthier sections are more appropriate as an Appendix. Format according to Turabian instructions for lists of abbreviations, presenting information in two columns and in alphabetical order
- **Glossary of Functions** (if applicable) If the digital project consists largely of code, a Glossary of Functions must be included in the preliminary pages or as an Appendix (back matter) to document the uses of functions and code. Formatted like a traditional glossary of terms, the Glossary of Functions should list important functions included in the software code alongside a brief explanation of what each function does. Format according to Turabian's instructions for Glossary.