Capstone Experience
M.S., Educational Research and Evaluation
Northern Illinois University

In addition to coursework and an Internship, the Master of Science (M.S.) in Educational Research and Evaluation program requires that students complete a capstone experience. For the capstone experience, a student has the option to complete a thesis, a project, or a portfolio. All capstones are typically started near the end of one’s studies, typically after 24 to 30 credit hours have been completed.

All capstones require a student to assemble a committee of three faculty members (one Chair and two Members). A student will work primarily with the Chair, who will guide one through the capstone experience. The two Members will generally only provide feedback at key junctures. All capstones culminate with a formal oral defense of the capstone to the committee. The thesis and project options also involve an earlier proposal defense. The capstone experience serves as the Comprehensive Examination for students in the MS-ERE program.

A. THESIS

Thesis Description:

The thesis option engages a student in the conduct of a traditional, empirical research project. Per the Graduate School at Northern Illinois University, a thesis is to be a substantial contribution to knowledge, in the area of the student’s major, in which the student exhibits original scholarship and the ability to conduct independent research. This capstone option is a good match for a student who is especially interested in research or who wants to continue into a doctoral degree program.

In completing a thesis, a student must first write a research proposal, orally defend the proposal, and then receive approval to conduct the research from the capstone committee. The final outcome of the thesis option is the production of a written thesis document, consistent with the elements described in an approved proposal. This written thesis must be presented and successfully defended in a final oral defense before one’s capstone committee and others. The mode of the thesis defense (or thesis proposal defense) may be either face-to-face or online.

The thesis typically requires at least three semesters from initialization of a committee through the final thesis defense. Institutional review board (IRB) human-subjects review is generally required for completion of a thesis.

A student pursuing a thesis as his or her capstone must strictly adhere to the Graduate School’s deadlines for theses and dissertations: https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml For example, there are deadlines for submitting: the Request for Oral Defense of Thesis form (which must also be submitted three weeks before the proposed defense date; the Results of Oral Defense of Thesis or Dissertation form (which must also be submitted within three days of a defense); and the post-defense version of a thesis for review. A student pursuing a thesis should also consult the Graduate School’s general policies and procedures surrounding theses: https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml

A student pursuing a thesis as his or her capstone must also strictly adhere to the Graduate School’s deadline for submitting comprehensive examination results (the thesis serves...
Thesis Process:

1. Review the thesis requirements and process outlined in this document and ask the Program Advisor if there are any questions about those requirements.
2. Review previous theses completed by M.S. Educational Research and Evaluation students (available on ProQuest).
3. Identify a potential research question or questions to address with an empirical research project.
4. Arrange a thesis committee Chair.
   a. The committee Chair must be a faculty member from the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program.
   b. The student should e-mail the prospective Chair with a request for his or her service. Invitations to a prospective committee Chair should include information about the proposed thesis, the expected timeline for the thesis (e.g., semester of completion), and the anticipated modality of the oral defenses (e.g., face-to-face, online). It may be helpful in this process to share a brief prospectus for the project.
   c. The Chair should be CC’d on all communications with prospective Members and informed when Members are willing to serve on the committee.
5. Work together with the Chair to identify two additional committee Members.
   a. At least one of these committee Members should be a faculty member from the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program.
   b. Invitations to prospective committee Members should include information about the proposed thesis, the expected timeline for the thesis (e.g., semester of completion), and the anticipated modality of the oral defenses (e.g., face-to-face, online). It may be helpful in this process to share a brief prospectus for the project.
   c. The Chair should be CC’d on all communications with prospective Members and informed when Members are willing to serve on the committee.
6. Once all committee members have tentatively accepted service on the committee, communicate this to the Chair, who will formally institute the committee by preparing and submitting the Thesis Committee Approval Form.
7. Register for ETR 699A.
   b. In total, a student must enroll in six semester hours of ETR 699A for the thesis. A student may enroll in as few as two semester hours of ETR 699A each semester, and must maintain continuous registration in this course once the student has enrolled in it, until the completion of the degree. Only six semester hours of ETR 699A may be counted on one’s Program of Courses.
   c. Note that a student should ideally register for ETR 699A by the end of the semester prior to the semester/s during which he or she intends to enroll in it (or at the very latest within two days after the start of the target semester).
   d. Note that a student cannot begin the actual research until his or her Chair and committee have approved the proposal at an oral defense of the proposal (and all Graduate School forms have been completed, all Graduate School clearances have

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as a comprehensive examination for the Educational Research and Evaluation program): [https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml](https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml)
been resolved, and institutional review board (IRB) human-subjects approval has been obtained).

8. Write thesis proposal.
   a. A proposal for a thesis research project should generally be organized in three major chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature Review, and 3) Method. Such a proposal includes: a problem to be addressed by the research; a research question or questions (and a hypothesis or hypotheses, if applicable); the significance of answering the research question or questions for theory, policy, and/or practice; a summary of relevant theory and empirical literature; and a description of the proposed research methodology (i.e., participants, procedures, instrumentation, and proposed analytic approach).
   b. The thesis proposal must adhere to the style guidelines of both the American Psychological Association and the Graduate School’s Guidelines for Preparing and Submitting Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs). Where these guidelines conflict, a student should follow the Graduate School guidelines.
   c. The Chair can provide support as the student works on the thesis proposal.

9. Submit a draft of the thesis proposal to the committee Chair for feedback.

10. Revise the thesis proposal using feedback from the Chair until the Chair indicates readiness for an oral defense of the proposal.

11. Contact the full committee indicating readiness for an oral defense of the thesis proposal and to schedule a day and time for the oral defense of the thesis proposal.
   a. Consider using a tool such as Doodle with lots of options for scheduling purposes.
   b. Make sure that the options are at least two weeks after the date by which committee members are expected to complete the Doodle.

12. Contact the ETRA office to reserve a room for the proposal defense and communicate that room to the committee.

13. Orally defend the thesis proposal.
   a. On the day of the oral defense, a student should arrive early to the room and set up required technology (e.g., turn on computer, connect and turn on projector, and open presentation) for face-to-face defenses; or login early, configure tool settings (e.g., turn on audio and video for all persons), and import and open presentation, for online defenses. A student may bring food and drinks to face-to-face defenses, but it should be kept simple (e.g., cookies, bagels, coffee).
   b. Student first presents proposed study in 20-30 minutes.
   c. The presentation is followed by an oral defense of the proposed research. The thesis committee will conduct this examination of the proposed research.

14. As needed, revise the proposal using feedback gathered from the committee during the oral defense and re-submit it to the Chair for final approval.

15. Submit for institutional review board (IRB) approval (if applicable).

16. Conduct thesis research (i.e., collection and analysis of data).

17. Prepare research report.
   a. A report for a thesis research project should generally be organized in five major chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Literature Review, 3) Method, 4) Results, and 5) Discussion. Such a report includes: a problem to addressed by the research; a research question or questions (and a hypothesis or hypotheses, if applicable); the significance of answering the research question or questions for theory, policy,
and/or practice; a summary of relevant theory and empirical literature; a description of the research methodology (i.e., participants, procedures, instrumentation, and analytic approach); presentation of results; and a discussion of the results in relation to theory and prior literature. The student should also include a Table of Contents, List of Tables, List of Figures, and List of Appendices.

b. The thesis must adhere to the style guidelines of both the American Psychological Association and the Graduate School’s Guidelines for Preparing and Submitting Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs). Where these guidelines conflict, a student should follow the Graduate School guidelines.

c. The Chair can provide support as the student works on the thesis.

18. Submit a draft of the thesis to the committee Chair for feedback.

19. Revise the thesis using feedback from the Chair until the Chair indicates readiness for an oral defense.

20. Contact the full committee indicating readiness for an oral defense of the thesis and to schedule a day and time for the oral defense of the thesis.

   a. Consider using a tool such as Doodle with lots of options for scheduling purposes.
   b. Make sure that the options are at least three weeks after the date by which committee members are expected to complete the Doodle.

21. Contact the ETRA office to reserve a room for the defense and communicate that room to the committee.

22. Chair prepares and submits the Request for Oral Defense of Thesis form to the Graduate School.

   a. The Graduate School has a strict deadline for submission of the Request for Oral Defense of Thesis form. It must be submitted three weeks before the proposed oral defense date.
   b. At the same time, the student should submit the pre-defense (draft) version of the thesis to the Graduate School.

23. Orally defend the thesis

   a. Successful completion of the oral defense is the last major step toward completing degree requirements.
   b. The Chair will bring a completed Results of Oral Defense of Thesis or Dissertation form to the oral defense.
   c. The Chair will bring a completed Examination Report form to the oral defense.
   d. On the day of the oral defense, a student should arrive early to the room and set up required technology (e.g., turn on computer, connect and turn on projector, and open presentation) for face-to-face defenses; or login early, configure tool settings (e.g., turn on audio and video for all persons), and import and open presentation, for online defenses. A student may bring food and drinks to face-to-face defenses, but it should be kept simple (e.g., cookies, bagels, coffee).
   e. Student first presents study in 20-30 minutes.
   f. The presentation is followed by an oral defense of the research. The thesis committee and an appointed designee from the Graduate School’s Dean’s Office will conduct this final examination of the research. The oral defense presentation is open to the public, so the student should anticipate questions from other faculty, fellow students, and the lay public as well.
24. As needed, revise the thesis using feedback gathered from the committee during the oral defense and re-submit it to the Chair for final approval.

25. Chair prepares and submits the Results of Oral Defense of Thesis or Dissertation form to the Graduate School. The Graduate School has a strict deadline for submission of this form. It must be submitted within three days of the oral defense. It may by physically delivered or faxed to the Graduate School.

26. The Chair prepares and submits the Examination Report form indicating successful completion of the thesis. Note that the Graduate School has a strict deadline for submission of the Examination Report form.

27. Student submits post-defense version of the thesis to the Graduate School’s Thesis and Dissertation Office.
   a. Make sure it conforms to the Graduate School’s Guidelines for Preparing and Submitting Electronic Theses and Dissertations (ETDs). Student uses checklist that covers the requirements. It will also be reviewed by a Graduate School Thesis Advisor.
   b. The Graduate School has a strict deadline for submission of the post-defense version of a thesis for review. Note that the post-defense version of the thesis should be submitted online through ProQuest ETD Administrator.

28. Receive a letter from the Graduate School and the ETRA Department confirming the outcome of capstone.

B. PROJECT

Project Description:

The project option engages a student in an applied professional experience. A project may involve a variety of professional activities other than traditional, empirical research. Such experiences may include but are not limited to program evaluation, test development and validation, or software development. While either a thesis or project may involve traditional empirical research, the latter offers a more flexible timeline in that one need not meet Graduate School deadlines. This capstone option is a good match for a student who is interested in working in applied settings, who is not considering a doctoral degree, or who desires more flexibility in the timeline for the capstone.

In completing a project, a student must first write a project proposal, orally defend the proposal, and then receive approval to conduct the project from the capstone committee. The final outcome of the project option is the production of a product, consistent with the elements described in an approved proposal. The nature of the product will vary, and may include but are not limited to an evaluation report, a fully-developed and -validated test, or a software program. This product must be presented and successfully defended in a final oral defense before one’s capstone committee. The mode of the project defense (or project proposal defense) may be either face-to-face or online.

The project typically requires at least two semesters from initialization of a committee through the final project defense. Institutional review board (IRB) human-subjects review may be required for completion of a project, depending on the nature of the project and whether the results may be professionally disseminated (e.g., as a conference presentation or journal article).
The timeline for a project is more flexible than a thesis. However, a student pursuing a project as his or her capstone must strictly adhere to the Graduate School’s deadline for submitting comprehensive examination results (the project serves as a comprehensive examination for the Educational Research and Evaluation program): https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml As an example, should the student want to graduate in May, he or she should probably aim to have a complete draft of his or her project to the Chair by early April, after which the Chair can provide feedback with expectation that the student submits a revised project to the full committee by mid-April, so that the student can schedule a final project defense by the end of April.

Project Process:
1. Review the project requirements and process outlined in this document and ask the Program Advisor if there are any questions about those requirements.
2. Identify a potential scope of work for the project.
3. Arrange a project committee Chair.
   a. The committee Chair must be a faculty member from the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program.
   b. The student should e-mail the prospective Chair with a request for his or her service. Invitations to a prospective committee Chair should include information about the proposed project, the expected timeline for the project (e.g., semester of completion), and the anticipated modality of the oral defenses (e.g., face-to-face, online). It may be helpful in this process to share a brief prospectus for the project. Be sure to verify with the Chair that the proposed project is suitable as project capstone.
4. Work together with the Chair to identify two additional committee Members.
   a. At least one of these committee Members should be a faculty member from the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program.
   b. Invitations to prospective committee Members should include information about the proposed project, the expected timeline for the project (e.g., semester of completion), and the anticipated modality of the oral defenses (e.g., face-to-face, online). It may be helpful in this process to share a brief prospectus for the project.
   c. The Chair should be CC’d on all communications with prospective Members and informed when Members are willing to serve on the committee.
5. Once all committee members have tentatively accepted service on the committee, communicate this to the Chair.
6. Register for ETT 699B.
   b. In total, a student must enroll in six semester hours of ETR 699B for the project. A student may enroll in as few as two semester hours of ETR 699B each semester, and must maintain continuous registration in this course once the student has enrolled in it, until the completion of the degree. Only six semester hours of ETR 699B may be counted on one’s Program of Courses.
c. Note that a student should ideally register for ETR 699B by the end of the semester prior to the semester/s during which he or she intends to enroll in it (or at the very latest within two days after the start of the target semester).

d. Note that a student cannot begin the actual project until his or her Chair and committee have approved the proposal at an oral defense of the proposal (and all Graduate School forms have been completed, all Graduate School clearances have been resolved, and institutional review board (IRB) human-subjects approval has been obtained).

7. Write project proposal.
   a. A proposal for a project will vary in content and form, depending on the specific nature of the proposed project. The committee Chair can provide guidance as to expectations for a proposal for the proposed project. However, the proposal must specify the production of a product (e.g. evaluation report, a fully-developed and -validated test, or a software program). Typically, such a proposal would include: a statement of the need for the project, a summary of the background and/or basis for the project, the scope and nature of the proposed project, a project timeline, the potential outcomes that are expected, and the implications of this project for theory, policy, and/or practice. The proposal must adhere to the style guidelines of the American Psychological Association.
   b. The Chair can provide support as the student works on the project proposal.

8. Submit a draft of the project proposal to the committee Chair for feedback.

9. Revise the project proposal using feedback from the Chair until the Chair indicates readiness for an oral defense of the proposal.

10. Contact the full committee indicating readiness for an oral defense of the project proposal and to schedule a day and time for the oral defense of the project proposal.
   a. Consider using a tool such as Doodle with lots of options for scheduling purposes
   b. Make sure that the options are at least two weeks after the date by which committee members are expected to complete the Doodle.

11. Contact the ETRA office to reserve a room for the defense and communicate that room to the committee.

12. Orally defend the project proposal.
   a. On the day of the oral defense, a student should arrive early to the room and set up required technology (e.g., turn on computer, connect and turn on projector, and open presentation) for face-to-face defenses; or login early, configure tool settings (e.g., turn on audio and video for all persons), and import and open presentation, for online defenses. A student may bring food and drinks to face-to-face defenses, but it should be kept simple (e.g., cookies, bagels, coffee).
   b. Student first presents proposed project in 20-30 minutes.
   c. The presentation is followed by an oral defense of the proposed project. The project committee will conduct this examination of the proposed project.

13. Submit institutional review board (IRB) application (if applicable).

14. Conduct project.
   a. Carry out the scope of work of the project outlined in the approved project proposal. This must include production of a product (e.g. evaluation report, a fully-developed and -validated test, or a software program).
   b. The Chair can provide support as the student works on the project.
15. Submit a draft of the project to the committee Chair for feedback.
16. Revise the project using feedback from the Chair until the Chair indicates readiness for an oral defense.
17. Contact the full committee indicating that readiness for an oral defense of the project and to schedule a day and time for the oral defense of the project.
   a. Consider using a tool such as Doodle with lots of options for scheduling purposes
   b. Make sure that the options are at least three weeks after the date by which committee members are expected to complete the Doodle.
18. Contact the ETRA office to reserve a room for the defense and communicate that room to the committee.
19. Orally defend the project.
   a. Successful completion of the oral defense is the last major step toward completing degree requirements.
   b. The Chair will bring a completed Examination Report form to the oral defense.
   c. On the day of the oral defense, a student should arrive early to the room and set up required technology (e.g., turn on computer, connect and turn on projector, and open presentation) for face-to-face defenses; or login early, configure tool settings (e.g., turn on audio and video for all persons), and import and open presentation, for online defenses. A student may bring food and drinks to face-to-face defenses, but it should be kept simple (e.g., cookies, bagels, coffee).
   d. Student first presents study in 20-30 minutes.
   e. The presentation is followed by an oral defense of the project. The project committee will conduct this final examination of the project.
20. As needed, revise the project using feedback gathered from the committee during the oral defense and re-submit it to the Chair for final approval.
21. The Chair prepares and submits the Examination Report form indicating successful completion of the project. Note that the Graduate School has a strict deadline for submission of the Examination Report form.
22. Receive a letter from the Graduate School and the ETRA Department confirming the outcome of capstone.

C. PORTFOLIO

Portfolio Description:
The portfolio option engages a student in the development of a professional portfolio, plus additional coursework. For the portfolio option, a student is required to construct, present, and defend an e-portfolio that documents and reflects on his or her experiences in the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program. Completion of the portfolio option as a capstone requires a student to also take 5 additional credit hours of coursework (because the portfolio only involves the curation and repackaging of, and reflection on, previous work). The additional coursework must be in research and assessment, and allows a student to focus on a methodological area that is of interest to him or her.

The capstone portfolio is designed to allow a student to 1) reflect on his or her professional goals and demonstrate how he or she has progressed during the course of study, 2) reflect on the assessment, evaluation, quantitative, and qualitative analysis skills he or she has
acquired and highlight what he or she believes are his or her personal strengths, and 3) demonstrate his or her written and oral communication skills in research and evaluation. Therefore, the capstone portfolio will give a student the opportunity to showcase his or her strongest skill sets in the research and evaluation field and show how different methodological approaches can be used to address particular research/evaluation questions. Further, the capstone portfolio will allow a student the opportunity to reflect on his or her professional development during the course of his or her MS degree and how this relates to his or her professional goals. This option is a good match for a student who wants to continue or gain employment in research and evaluation after his or her degree and who is not at the current time considering continuing into a doctoral degree program.

The final outcome of this experience is the production of a portfolio that includes all of the required components below. The format for the portfolio must be electronic (e.g., Google Sites, Moodle, Weebly, LiveText). The portfolio must be presented and successfully defended in a final oral defense before one’s capstone committee. The mode of the portfolio defense may be either face-to-face or online.

Assuming that one has already completed 5 additional credit hours of coursework, the portfolio experience can typically be completed in one semester. Institutional review board (IRB) human-subjects review is generally not required for completion of a portfolio.

The timeline for a portfolio is more flexible than a thesis. However, a student pursuing a portfolio as his or her capstone must strictly adhere to the Graduate School’s deadline for submitting comprehensive examination results (the portfolio serves as a comprehensive examination for the Educational Research and Evaluation program): https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml As an example, should a student want to graduate in May, he or she should probably aim to have a complete draft of the portfolio to the Chair by early April, after which the Chair can provide feedback with expectation that the student submits a revised portfolio to the full committee by mid-April, so that the student can schedule a final project defense by the end of April.

**Portfolio Required Components:**

1. Current resume or vita
2. Developmental goals statement (initial, middle, end)
   1. *Initial Program Goals:* List goals and pertinent knowledge, expertise, and interest at the start of the program. Indicate what shaped your goals.
   2. *Middle of Program Goals:* List goals, courses, and experiences completed by the middle of your program. Indicate how such shaped your professional goals.
   3. *End of Program Goals:* List goals, courses, and experiences completed by the end of your program. Indicate how shaped your professional goals. Also indicate any new goals that have emerged.
3. List of courses (i.e., number and title) completed by term.
4. Personal statement that reflects the development of your expertise in research and assessment and how the artifacts you have chosen to submit collectively exemplify your developing expertise in research and assessment and your mastery of the objectives. The objectives are:
   1. Design a study of an educational research problem or phenomenon using appropriate methodologies
2. Design and/or select appropriate assessment or evaluation tools for a given educational problem
3. Distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior when conducting educational research or evaluations
4. Select appropriate analyses for a given research question
5. Apply appropriate technology to conduct analyses of educational data
6. Conduct a study pertaining to an educational research problem or phenomenon
7. Demonstrate effective communication skills by presenting and defending a research project
8. Engage in research-related activities in diverse settings.

5. Blueprint (documentation of the alignment between artifacts and objectives)
6. The role of the artifacts is to demonstrate breadth of skills and experience aligned to program objectives. Precede each artifact with a 1-page introduction that includes a clear description of the artifact and your rationale for including it as evidence relevant to mastery of each objective identified. Ultimately within your portfolio, each objective should have sufficient evidence to demonstrate proficiency (linking to 2-3 artifacts).

**Portfolio Process:**

1. Review the portfolio requirements and process outlined in this document and ask the Program Advisor if there are any questions about those requirements.
2. Register for 699C for 1 credit hour.
   a. Enroll in ETR 699C during the semester in which the student plans to complete and defend the portfolio. The instructor of record for ETR 699C may be different than the portfolio committee Chair.
   c. At the start of the semester in which the student enrolls in ETR 699C, the student will gain access to a Blackboard course site for the portfolio. The Blackboard course site contains additional information about the portfolio, including sample portfolios, web links, and a discussion forum. Make sure to check out each tab in the Blackboard course site.
   d. Note that the student should ideally register for ETR 699C by the end of the semester prior to the semester during which he or she intends to enroll in it (or at the very latest within two days after the start of the target semester).
   e. Note that, in addition to 1 credit hour of ETR 699C, a student pursuing the portfolio as a capstone must also complete an additional 5 credit hours of coursework. These 5 additional credit hours may derive from two additional 3-credit courses, one additional 3-credit courses and two 1-credit smash-up courses, 5 credit hours of Internship beyond that which is required, or other 5-credit hour combinations of credit-bearing activities.
3. Request a portfolio committee Chair.
   a. Student submits a request via e-mail for a portfolio committee Chair to the Program Coordinator for the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program. The e-mail request should include information about the expected
timeline for the portfolio (e.g., semester of completion) and the anticipated modality of the ultimate oral defense (e.g., face-to-face, online). If a student has a preference for his or her committee Chair, he or she may indicate that preference in the e-mail. A committee Chair must be a faculty member from the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program.

b. The Program Coordinator will assign the student a committee Chair. A student’s assigned Chair may or may not be his or her preferred Chair.

c. The portfolio committee Chair, not the instructor of record for ETR 699C, will guide the student through the portfolio process. The student will primarily work with the Chair on the portfolio, and the committee members will only be involved once the Chair authorizes the student to send the portfolio to the committee, before the oral defense.

d. Once the Chair is assigned, the student should contact him or her early in the semester of portfolio completion to make arrangements for completing the portfolio.

4. Work together with the Chair to identify two additional committee Members who will be in attendance during the portfolio defense.

a. At least one of these committee Members should be a faculty member from the Educational Research and Evaluation (ERE) program.

b. Invitations to prospective committee Members should include information about the expected timeline for the portfolio (e.g., semester of completion) and the anticipated modality of the ultimate oral defense (e.g., face-to-face, online).

c. The Chair should be CC’d on all communications with prospective Members and informed when Members are willing to serve on the committee.

5. Develop the portfolio.

a. The Chair can assist the student with decisions concerning the development of the portfolio, for example, which artifacts are best to include or whether the written narratives about each artifact and why it addresses particular objectives are sufficient. The Chair should also be able to provide feedback on at least one draft of each portfolio component. However, the Members generally are not engaged until the Chair indicates that the portfolio is ready for an oral defense.

b. The portfolio has many components (e.g., curriculum vitae or resume, developmental goal statements, list of courses, blueprint, the artifacts themselves and introductions to them), as described above. A reasonable first step is creation of the blueprint identifying which artifacts will provide evidence of which of the program’s student learning objectives. The list of student learning objectives are listed above. It may be advantageous to finalize this blueprint prior to writing the narratives concerning each artifact.

c. Please note that artifacts are not courses. An artifact may have been completed as part of a course (e.g., research proposals, research reports, instruments, program evaluation reports completed for a class), but it is not the class itself. Artifacts also can emerge from non-course experiences; for example, research that one presented at a conference, or materials that one created as part of a teaching assistantship. Also, remember that the reflections on each artifact are critically important. One should remember to reflect on how completing the artifact contributed to his or her achieving particular ERE learning objectives.
d. The student will want to include about five artifacts in the portfolio, ensuring that the set of artifacts address all of the program’s student learning objectives. Make sure that each objective is addressed by more than one artifact. However, rather than connecting artifacts to all possible objectives to which they might apply, make sure to map each objective to only those two or so artifacts that provide best evidence of its mastery.

e. In assembling the portfolio, the student should closely review each artifact to make sure they are presentable. A student may also opt to revise some artifacts (as the student may have grown considerably since the artifact was originally produced).

f. As the student works on the portfolio, he or she should consult the ETR 699C Blackboard course site.

g. The portfolio must be electronic, though it is up to the student to decide which tool is used to create the digital portfolio (e.g., Google Sites, Moodle, Weebly, LiveText).

6. Submit a draft of the portfolio to the committee Chair for feedback.

7. Revise the portfolio using feedback from the Chair until the Chair indicates readiness for an oral defense.

8. Contact the full committee indicating that readiness for an oral defense and to schedule a day and time for the oral defense of the portfolio.
   a. Please note that **all portfolios must be presented prior to the last scheduled day of classes** (i.e., prior to Finals Week), although it would be wise to schedule the portfolio defense well in advance of this date, in the event that revisions to the portfolio are requested.
   b. Consider using a tool such as Doodle with lots of options for scheduling purposes
   c. Make sure that the options are at least two weeks after the date by which committee members are expected to complete the Doodle.

9. Contact the ETRA office to reserve a room for the defense and communicate that room to the committee.

10. Orally defend the portfolio.
   a. Successful completion of the oral defense is the last major step toward completing degree requirements.
   b. The Chair will bring a completed Examination Report form to the oral defense.
   c. On the day of the oral defense, a student should arrive early to the room and set up required technology (e.g., turn on computer, connect and turn on projector, and open presentation) for face-to-face defenses; or login early, configure tool settings (e.g., turn on audio and video for all persons), and import and open presentation, for online defenses. A student may bring food and drinks to face-to-face defenses, but it should be kept simple (e.g., cookies, bagels, coffee).
   d. During the portfolio defense, the student will present the portfolio to the Chair and committee Members, describing each element of the portfolio. Typically, this presentation takes approximately 30 minutes.
   e. Following the presentation, the Chair and committee Members will ask questions and provide feedback on the portfolio.

11. As needed, revise the portfolio using feedback gathered from the committee during the oral defense and re-submit it to the Chair for final approval.
12. The Chair prepares and submits the Examination Report form indicating successful completion of the portfolio. Note that the Graduate School has a strict deadline for submission of the Examination Report form.

13. Receive a letter from the Graduate School and the ETRA Department confirming the outcome of capstone.

Note: During the final semester of the capstone—whether it is a thesis, project, or portfolio—a student is expected to apply for graduation: [https://www.niu.edu/registration-records/graduation/index.shtml](https://www.niu.edu/registration-records/graduation/index.shtml) Complete the online graduation application at MyNIU—with fee payment—by the established deadline. Address any program deficiencies (if indicated) as stated in the Graduation Audit that will be sent to the student from the Graduate School. Once the application is submitted, graduation may be automatically deferred once, after which the student must request continued deferment in writing to the Graduate School. A student should be sure to attend to Graduate School deadlines for submitting an application for a degree and deferring one’s graduate date: [https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml](https://www.niu.edu/grad/graduation/deadlines.shtml)