



Department of
GEOGRAPHY



The University of Hong Kong
Department of Geography

AY 2024-2025

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES MANUAL
& CAPSTONE CONTRACT

GEOG4002 Directed Project in Geography
GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation
GEOG4004 Directed Project in Urban Governance

PART A: CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES MANUAL

Please read this document in its entirety, and sign and return Part B to the Department of Geography in soft copy (i.e. digital, .docx or .pdf format) through the relevant Capstone Experience Course Moodle Submission Box.

1 INTRODUCTION TO CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES

GEOG4002 “Directed Project in Geography”, GEOG4003 “Honours Dissertation”, and GEOG4004 “Directed Project in Urban Governance” are Capstone Experience Courses (CEC) in written format. They offer Geography or Urban Governance majors a valuable opportunity to engage themselves in empirical/applied research projects under the supervision of a professoriate staff member in the Department and gain hands-on experience in research work. The assessment is divided into three parts: 1) research proposal (25%); 2) project presentation (25%); and 3) final written report (50%).

This document outlines the procedures required for the successful completion of these CEC, along with the timelines and major events pertaining to each. You are responsible for understanding and complying with the deadlines, requirements, and policies laid out in this document, and for contacting the CEC Coordinator, Prof. Ben GERLOFS (bgerlofs@hku.hk) and/or GEOG4002/3/4 Demonstrator, Mr. Joshua Joseph WHEELER (joshuajw@hku.hk) and/or the Undergraduate Program Office (geogug@hku.hk) to seek any necessary clarifications.

2 GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND PROCEDURES

Each of our three Capstone Experience Courses will require you to complete four essential tasks:

- 1) **Establish** a working relationship with an advisor from among our professoriate staff in the Department of Geography, which you will formalize through the submission of the *Capstone Contract* and *Topic Agreement Form*;
- 2) **Design** an independent research project in consultation with your advisor, either beginning ‘from scratch’ or working within a project design proposed by your advisor, and to be codified through the submission of a *Research Proposal*;
- 3) **Conduct** the research project you have designed in full compliance with the protocols approved through the *Ethical Review* process;
- 4) **Share** the results of your research through an *Oral Presentation* of your findings and a *Written Report*.

Conducting independent research and sharing the results through these courses will allow you to develop important marketable skills and gain valuable experience for life after your undergraduate university career has ended, whatever vocation or profession you may choose to pursue.

3 GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING AN ADVISOR

The single most important part of the process for successfully completing one of our three CEC is establishing a solid, professional relationship with an academic advisor. This person will be your primary point of contact throughout the course of the year, and will be there to offer you the support you need to carry out your research with excellence. This person will also be the primary point of assessment for your work in this course. You should, therefore, make your best effort to find the advisor whose expertise and approach to supervision is best suited to you and your project and/or areas of interest.

The first step in this process is to look carefully at the list of research interests/areas of our professoriate staff available on our ‘Download Corner’ page and staff’s personal websites of the Department of Geography. When you have found a research area that interests you, send an email to the staff member you have identified, introducing yourself and inquiring about the possibility of working under this teacher’s supervision for the Capstone Experience Course in which you will (have) enroll(ed). Don’t worry if reaching out in this way feels unfamiliar to you. The members of our professoriate staff are all experienced researchers, educators, and advisors, and are here to guide you through the process successfully. Bear in mind, however, that you are responsible for taking the first step in establishing this relationship.

Once you have reached an agreement with an advisor, you must formalize this relationship by completing and submitting the **Topic Agreement Form** available on our three course Moodle sites and on the ‘Download Corner’ page of the website of the Department of Geography, at <https://www.geog.hku.hk/download-corner>. Both you and your advisor must sign this form, and it must be submitted through the Topic Agreement Form Submission Box on the relevant Capstone Experience Course Moodle by the deadline.

Alongside submitting the Topic Agreement Form, you must also submit the **Capstone Contract**, which will formalize and confirm your intention to complete the Capstone Experience while upholding the standards of Academic Integrity and Student Responsibility outlined in this manual. The Capstone contract is also available on our three course Moodle sites and on the ‘Download Corner’ page of the Department of Geography website at <https://www.geog.hku.hk/download-corner>. You must read this manual in its entirety and sign this contract, and it must be submitted through the Capstone Contract Submission Box on the relevant course Moodle by the deadline.

As you consider your options from among our professoriate staff, please keep the following conditions in mind:

- 1) As a rule, **only full-time members** of our professoriate staff may serve as advisors.
- 2) Each member of our professoriate staff may only advise **THREE** capstone students per annum in order to ensure sufficient availability and quality of supervision.

Because of the limit on the number of advisees per annum (three), you are encouraged to approach potential advisors as early in the process as possible to ensure a strong fit for your project.

If you need additional help finding an advisor, please contact the CEC Coordinator, Prof. Ben GERLOFS (bgerlofs@hku.hk) who will be glad to assist you.

4 MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH YOUR ADVISOR

Once you have formalized your relationship with your advisor, you should conduct face-to-face or virtual meetings with your advisor regularly to ensure good communication. This will help you make great progress towards the deadlines for your submission of assessed work.

5 ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There may be times in the course of the year when you need additional support beyond your advisor. In these cases, you may have a number of options at your disposal, including but not limited to the following:

For general inquiries, you may contact:

- 1) GEOG4002/3/4 Demonstrator, Mr. Joshua Joseph WHEELER (joshuajw@hku.hk, Room 10.48, 10/F, JCT)
- 2) CEC Coordinator, Prof. Ben GERLOFS (bgerlofs@hku.hk, Room 10.36, 10/F, JCT)
- 3) The Undergraduate Program Office of the Department of Geography (geogug@hku.hk, Room 10.48, 10/F, JCT)

For assistance with Written Reports and/or Oral Presentations, you are encouraged to contact: The Center for Applied English Studies (CAES) (<https://www.caescss.hku.hk/>, Room 6.60, 6/F, Run Run Shaw Tower); CAES offers free consultation services of which you are highly encouraged to take full advantage.

6 ETHICS REVIEW

Completing the process of Ethical Review and securing Ethical Approval is a fundamental skill for any researcher to ensure that academic standards are being upheld and that research participants are protected, as well as yourself as investigators. As such, all CEC students are required to undergo and complete our Departmental Undergraduate Ethics Review Process to help you understand the research process and acquire the necessary skills for ethical review.

All research projects will undergo the CEC Ethical Review process, and Ethical Approval MUST be secured BEFORE any research may be conducted. Any data collected outside of Ethics Approval will be considered invalid and cannot be used. Some research projects will involve the use of human participation other than the researcher conducting the project, such as through the completion of survey instruments (e.g. questionnaire forms), interviews, behavioural observations or any other methods of data collection, while some research projects will involve no human participation. As such, there are two forms of Ethical Approval. Those projects that involve human participation will need to secure Ethical Approval, while research projects with no human participation will need to secure Ethical Exemption.

Please note that the Ethics Review process can take up to four weeks from the date of initial submission, depending on the time of year and the number of submissions. The application can

be made by submitting the Application Form for Ethics Approval through the relevant submission box on the relevant Capstone Experience Course Moodle. The Application Form for Ethics Approval is available on our three-course Moodle sites and on the 'Download Corner' page of the Department of Geography website at <https://www.geog.hku.hk/download-corner>.

You alone are responsible for securing the necessary Ethics Approval. If you are unsure of the process of completing an Ethical Review and/or securing Ethics Approval please take note of one or more of the following steps:

- 1) Review the definitions of Human Research Ethics on the website of the University of Hong Kong's Human Research Ethics Committee (page of the website of the Research Services, at <http://www.rss.hku.hk/integrity/ethics-compliance/hrec>)
- 2) Consult with your advisor
- 3) Consult with CEC Coordinator, Prof. Ben GERLOFS (bgerlofs@hku.hk)
- 4) GEOG4002/3/4 Demonstrator, Mr. Joshua Joseph WHEELER (joshuajw@hku.hk)
- 5) Contact the Undergraduate Programme Office of the Department of Geography (geogug@hku.hk)

Please remember that all students must undergo and complete an Ethical Review even if their research does not include human participants.

7 ASSESSMENT STRUCTURE

In each of our Capstone Experience Courses, you will be required to submit three different formal pieces of work which act as your assessment for these courses:

- Research Proposal (25% of your grade)
- Oral Presentation (25% of your grade)
- Written Report (50% of your grade)

Each of these aspects are vital in assessing your skills as a researcher and are designed to help you in completing your directed project/dissertation. The Research Proposal and Oral Presentation are not intended to take up your time but are there to help you focus your research and improve your ideas through dialogue with your advisor and other Professoriate staff of the Department.

The Research Proposal is due at the end of November; the Oral Presentations will take place during the Semester 2 reading week in March; and the Written Report is due in April or May, depending on whether you are submitting a Directed Project or Dissertation. Please see the annual CEC timeline for specific dates.

8 GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH PROPOSALS

In each of our Capstone Experience Courses, you will be required to construct a **Research Proposal** prior to beginning your research, makes up 25% of your total grade and will be graded by your supervisor. There are several reasons for this requirement, and the proposal itself is expected to serve several useful purposes, including:

- 1) Serving as a guide for your research. Constructing a solid proposal provides you as a researcher with a ‘roadmap’ of sorts for completing your project. It’s very common to feel a bit lost in the middle of your research project, to lose sight of your objectives, to get bogged down in the details in ways that can distract you from seeing things holistically, and/or to feel discouraged about your progress. In such moments, your proposal is the document you should return to for guidance. If you’ve crafted it well, it will remind you of the questions you’re trying to answer, the data you need to answer these questions, and the steps you need to take to fulfill your stated objectives.
- 2) Providing a forum for you and your advisor to shape your project and share feedback. Your advisor must approve your proposal before you begin your research, so you are encouraged to share your ideas with them early in the process and solicit their feedback. Remember, your advisor is a professional researcher who can help you to develop valuable and workable research questions and a sound methodology for answering them; they can also direct you to important literatures, key debates, and other important scholarly resources, and provide you with advice on your research budget (as applicable).
- 3) Establishing expectations. Your proposal, once approved, acts as a contract between you as the researcher, your advisor, and the Department of Geography. Of course, things can change in the course of research, but any and all major deviations from your proposal must be discussed in detail with your advisor throughout the process. When you deliver your Oral Presentation and submit your Written Report at the end of the process, these results should reflect a consistent approach and speak directly to the plans laid out in your proposal. If your advisor approves a proposal that’s focused on analyzing tree rings, but your Oral Presentation and Written Report describe instead a project focused on the differential effects of education policy in secondary schools, for instance, you’ll likely find yourself in a difficult situation when it comes to your final assessments.
- 4) Research Proposal Template. We have provided you with a Research Proposal Template. You are welcome to use and submit the provided template, or you are welcome to create and use your own as long as the necessary information and sections from the template are included (e.g. Summary, Literature Review, Research Questions, Research Methods, Expected Outcomes, Potential Implications, References).

9 GUIDELINES FOR ORAL PRESENTATIONS

One of the main deliverables for each of our Capstone Experience Courses is the Oral Presentation. Guidance will be offered on how to construct a successful Oral Presentation through our three-course Moodle sites beginning in January 2025. The Oral Presentation makes up 25% of your grade and you will be graded by your advisor and a second examiner. You are encouraged to consult with and seek feedback from your advisor as you construct the elements of your presentation. As you prepare, please keep the following in mind:

- 1) Your Oral Presentation must include visual elements (e.g., a slideshow presentation, graphs, charts, maps, photos, video content, etc.); copyrighted materials can generally be used under educational exemption for these presentations, but you are highly encouraged to craft your own original materials to the degree that you are able.
- 2) Time management is an essential part of the assessment of your Oral Presentation; you will be allowed 15 minutes to present your research project, including results and findings, followed by 5 minutes allotted for fielding and answering questions from your examiners and a broader audience.

10 GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN REPORTS

The Written Report is an extremely important part of all three of our Capstone Experience Courses, and each course carries unique requirements for the Written Report. The Written Report is worth 50% of your total grade, and will be graded by your advisor and a second examiner. You are responsible for ensuring that your Written Report meets these requirements. As you prepare, please keep the following in mind:

- 1) Your report must conform to all formatting guidelines, as made available through our three course Moodle sites.
- 2) Written Reports for each of our three Capstone Experience Courses must comply with the following length requirements (failure to comply carries a minimum 10% grade penalty):
 - a) GEOG4002 “Directed Project in Geography”: 6,000 words MINIMUM of text in the body of the report, exclusive of all titles, references, captions, appendices, and other ephemera
 - b) GEOG4003 “Honours Dissertation”: 12,000 words MINIMUM of text in the body of the report, exclusive of all titles, references, captions, appendices, and other ephemera
 - c) GEOG4004 “Directed Project in Urban Governance”: 6,000 words MINIMUM of text in the body of the report, exclusive of all titles, references, captions, appendices, and other ephemera
- 3) You must submit a cover sheet with your Written Report, which can be found on our three course Moodle sites.

11 PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Your work for our Capstone Experience Courses must be entirely original. The Department of Geography upholds the highest standard and strictest interpretation of academic integrity for all submitted work. Plagiarism is a serious offense—regardless of intent—and will be treated as such. Any and all cases wherein plagiarism or other breaches of academic integrity are suspected will be elevated for arbitration according to the appropriate protocols of the Department of Geography, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and the University of Hong Kong, and could result in disciplinary actions including but not limited to assignment/course failure, dismissal from the university, and even the revocation of degrees and credential already awarded. **You and you alone are responsible for strict compliance with the highest standards of originality and academic integrity.**

You should also familiarize yourself with HKU’s operative definitions, policies, and procedures (<https://tl.hku.hk/plagiarism/>), including the following passages:

Plagiarism is a serious offence in the academic world. It constitutes academic theft – the offender has ‘stolen’ some intellectual property and presented it as his or her own. Plagiarism speaks to a person’s integrity and honesty, stifles creativity and originality, and defeats the fundamental purpose of education. In this University, plagiarism is a disciplinary offence. Any student who commits the offence may face disciplinary action. It is the responsibility of all students at all levels to familiarize themselves with proper academic practice of writing, citation and referencing.

Plagiarism is defined as the use of another person’s work (including but not limited to any materials, creations, ideas and data) as if one’s own without due acknowledgement, whether or not such work has been published and regardless of the intent to deceive. Self-plagiarism is defined as the reuse of one’s own work without acknowledging that such work has been submitted elsewhere. Self-plagiarism is also plagiarism. It is the reuse of one’s own work without acknowledging that it has already been submitted elsewhere.

Plagiarism covers all forms of assessment, including theses, dissertations, take-home examinations, assignments, projects, and all other forms of coursework. The same rules apply whether students work individually or in groups.

It can take many forms. Indeed, any of the following may constitute plagiarism. You should consult your teachers when in doubt.

- copying word for word from a source without due acknowledgement of the source;
- closely paraphrasing, or substantial copying with minor modifications (such as changing grammar, adding a few words or reversing active/passive voices), without due acknowledgement of the source;
- translating a source in one language into another language and using it as your own without due acknowledgement of the source;
- collusion or unauthorized collaboration between students on a piece of work without acknowledging the assistance received;
- use of the work of another student or a third party (e.g. an essay writing service) for submission as one’s original work; and
- submitting part or all of the same assignment for different courses without acknowledging it, which is a form of self-plagiarism;
- getting a ghostwriter to write your assignment.”

It does not matter what the nature of source is. It may be published in traditional text or on the internet. It may be a book, an article, a dissertation, a Government report, a table, a memorandum, an assignment of another student, or teaching material distributed to you. The sources may also be graphics, computer programmes, photographs, video and audio recordings or other non-textual materials. It does not matter whether the source has been published or not.

The test of plagiarism is whether the work will give an ordinary reader a reasonable impression that the work is the original work of the author when it is in fact a copy of the work of someone else.

Our Capstone Experience Courses will use *Turnitin* originality reports as the initial (but not only) means of certifying originality, and all submitted material will be held to the highest possible standards.

12 RESEARCH FUNDING

Research often requires funding to support the cost of travel and transportation, necessary equipment and supplies, printing, survey instrument distribution, data acquisition, and many other expenses. If your project may incur such expenses, you may wish to apply for an Undergraduate Research Grant to mitigate these costs through the Royal Geographical Society-Hong Kong (RGS-HK). More information about this programme and the necessary forms can be found on the 'Download Corner' page of the website of the Department of Geography, at <https://www.geog.hku.hk/download-corner>. You may also contact the Undergraduate Program Office of the Department of Geography at geogug@hku.hk for more information.

13 TIMELINE OF CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES, 2024-2025

The timeline below will both provide you with an overview of the steps you'll need to take to successfully complete one of our three Capstone Experience Courses and serve as an important guide as you move through the process over the course of the academic year.

	Date	Event Description and Details
1	22 April, 2024	Information Briefing Session
2	23 April, 2024 (Tue)	All materials and forms updated for Academic Year 2024-2025 will be made available on the ' Download Corner ' page of the website of the Department of Geography.
3	26 April, 2024 (Fri)	Topic Agreement Form and Capstone Contract registration opens. From this date, you may begin submitting these materials to the Department of Geography for Academic Year 2024-2025.
4	[Check it in University Notice/Email]	Course registration /Add/Drop Period ← IMPORTANT! Register in the SIS system to enroll in one of our full-year Capstone Experience Courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEOG4002 Directed Project in Geography, 6 credits total, 3 credits per semester • GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation, 12 credits total, 6 credits per semester • GEOG4004 Directed Project in Urban Governance, 6 credits total, 3 credits per semester
5	24 September, 2024 (Tue)	Capstone Experience Courses Preparation and Information Session through Zoom with CEC Coordinator Prof. Ben Gerlofs
6	10 October, 2024 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of Topic Agreement Form and Capstone Contract via Course Moodle
7	28 November, 2024 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of Capstone Research Proposal via Course Moodle
8	16 January, 2024 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of Departmental Ethics Review Form via Course Moodle

9	[March 2025, (Reading Week)]	Oral Presentations <i>(The date will be announced to students at a later date.)</i>
10	10 April, 2025 (Thu) OR 1 May, 2025 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of the Written Report via Course Moodle, as follows: 10 April 2025 (Thu), 5:00pm (HKT): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEOG4002 Directed Project in Geography • GEOG4004 Directed Project in Urban Governance 1 May 2025 (Thu), 5:00pm (HKT): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation

PART B: CAPSTONE CONTRACT

Please sign and return this form to the Department of Geography by submission through the relevant Capstone Experience Course Moodle Submission box.

I. Course Interest Declaration

Please indicate in which of the following courses you have enrolled.

- GEOG 4002, Directed Project in Geography (6 credits)
- GEOG 4003, Honours Dissertation (12 credits)
- GEOG 4004, Directed Project in Urban Governance (6 credits)

II. Declaration of Understanding and Compliance

- Having read the Capstone Experience Courses Manual (Part A) in its entirety, I understand and shall comply with the arrangement and requirements of Capstone Experience Courses, 2024-25.

III. Student Information and Confirmation

Full Name: _____
Last First

University Number: _____ **Current Year of Study:** _____

Home Faculty: _____ **Curriculum:** _____

Current Year of Study: _____ **Home Faculty:** _____

Declared Single/Double Major(s): _____

Date: _____

Signature: _____