



The University of Hong Kong  
Department of Geography

AY 2025-2026

CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES MANUAL

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

## **CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES MANUAL**

Please read this document in its entirety, and sign and return **document C2. Capstone Contract and document C3. Topic Agreement Form** 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 a professoriate staff’s supervision 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](mailto:bgerlofs@hku.hk)) and/or GEOG4002/3/4 Demonstrator, Mr. Joshua Joseph WHEELER ([joshuajw@hku.hk](mailto:joshuajw@hku.hk)) and/or the Undergraduate Program Office ([geogug@hku.hk](mailto: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;
- 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;
- 3) **Conduct** the research project you have designed in full compliance with the rules and procedures established by the Department of Geography;
- 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 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 website of the Department of Geography, 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](mailto: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 will be required to conduct a Face-to-Face or virtual meeting with your advisor regularly or irregularly, as long as there is a good communication with advisor, and you have a great progress through the deadline for the submission of your Written Report. Your progress will form a central part of the assessment for each of our Capstone Experience Courses, including especially with regard to timely meetings with your advisor, satisfactory progress on your project throughout the academic year, etc.

#### **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](mailto:joshuajw@hku.hk), Room 10.48, 10/F, JCT)
- 2) CEC Coordinator, Prof. Ben GERLOFS ([bgerlofs@hku.hk](mailto:bgerlofs@hku.hk), Room 10.48, 10/F, JCT)
- 3) The Undergraduate Program Office of the Department of Geography ([geogug@hku.hk](mailto: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 AND ETHICAL APPROVAL**

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 Ethics Review process. However, many of the research projects carried out as part of our Capstone Experience Courses require the participation of human beings other than the researcher conducting the project, such as through the completion of survey instruments (e.g., questionnaire forms), interviews, behavioural observations, or any number of other methods of data collection. Research projects that involve the use of human participation will require formal Ethical Approval secured through the Department of

Geography after they have submitted their Ethics Review. This Ethical Approval has to be secured BEFORE any research may be conducted. Research projects that do not involve the use of human participation will still require the Ethical Review process to be completed but will not proceed along the path for formal Ethical Approval

Please note that Ethics Review Approval 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 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](mailto:bgerlofs@hku.hk))
- 4) Consult with GEOG4002/3/4 Demonstrator, Mr. Joshua Joseph WHEELER ([joshuaajw@hku.hk](mailto:joshuaajw@hku.hk))
- 5) Contact the Undergraduate Program Office of the Department of Geography ([geogug@hku.hk](mailto: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 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, which must be approved by your advisor. 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 sort of 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.

## 8 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 2026. 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.

## 9 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. 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.

## 10 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 breeches 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.

## 11 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](mailto:geogug@hku.hk) for more information.



## 12 TIMELINE OF CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE COURSES, 2025-2026

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 Research based Capstone Experience Courses and serve as an important guide as you move through the academic year.

	<b>Date</b>	<b>Event Description and Details</b>
1	28 May, 2025	First Information Briefing Session with Prof. Gerlofs
2	28 May, 2025 (Thu)	All materials and forms updated for Academic Year 2025-2026 will be made available on the ' <a href="#">Download Corner</a> ' page of the website of the Department of Geography.
3	30 May, 2025 (Fri)	<u>Topic Agreement Form</u> and <u>Capstone Contract</u> registration opens. From this date, you may begin submitting these materials to the Department of Geography (geogug@hku.hk) for Academic Year 2025-2026.
4	2025-2026 Semester 1 Course Registration Period	<b>Course registration /Add/Drop Period ←</b> <b>IMPORTANT!</b> Register in the SIS to enroll in one of our full-year Capstone Experience Courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEOG4002 Directed Project in Geography, 6 credits total, 3 credits per semester</li> <li>• GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation, 12 credits total, 6 credits per semester</li> <li>• GEOG4004 Directed Project in Urban Governance, 6 credits total, 3 credits per semester</li> </ul>
5	September, 2025 TBC	Capstone Experience Courses Information Sharing Session through Zoom with CEC Coordinator Prof. Gerlofs
6	9 October, 2025 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of <u>Topic Agreement Form</u> and <u>Capstone Contract</u> via Course Moodle
7	20 November, 2025 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of <u>Capstone Research Proposal</u> via Course Moodle
8	15 January, 2026 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of <u>Departmental Ethics Review Form</u> via Course Moodle

9	<b>March 2026, (Reading Week)</b>	Oral Presentations <i>(The date will be announced to students at a later date.)</i>
10	9 April, 2026 (Thu)  OR  30 April, 2026 (Thu)	Deadline for submission of the Written Report, as follows: <b>9 April 2026 (Thu), 5:00pm (HKT):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEOG4002 Directed Project in Geography</li> <li>• GEOG4004 Directed Project in Urban Governance</li> </ul> <b>30 April 2026 (Thu), 5:00pm (HKT):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation</li> </ul>