Description of Capstone (AY2020/2021) – DDP Law and Liberal Arts

Identification of project and supervisor:

Students are required to have one supervisor each from Yale-NUS and NUS Faculty of Law (FOL). Students should first meet with the DDP Head of Studies (DDP HOS) to discuss their potential topics and supervisors from Yale-NUS and FOL. If a student decides on an FOL main supervisor, the Yale-NUS faculty will be the co-supervisor, and vice versa. After the initial meeting with DDP HOS, students should meet with their possible supervisors from Yale-NUS and FOL to discuss their potential topic and research question. After these meetings, they should meet with the DDP HOS again to discuss whom they wish to have as first and second choices for supervisors. Their choice of FOL supervisor and research topic and question must be approved by DDP HOS and FOL’s Vice Dean (Academic Affairs) no later than Week 12 of Semester 2 in Year 4. Their choice of Yale-NUS supervisor and research question and topic must be approved by DDP HOS and, where necessary, the HOS of the potential supervisor’s department.

Students are therefore advised to begin the process of identifying their research project and supervisors in the first half of Semester 2 of Year 4. Students who are abroad may complete this process by email. Please refer to the respective websites for information on the research interests and expertise of Yale-NUS and FOL faculty.

Research topics and questions:

Students should choose a topic that incorporates both law and an aspect of the liberal arts. Topics that engage the interdisciplinary study of law with a liberal arts subject, or use methods from the social sciences, sciences, humanities, or any other liberal arts field to explore questions related to law are especially encouraged. Topics that focus mainly on doctrinal analysis of case law or the use of legal methods to interpret statutes or codes are firmly discouraged. Research questions should be feasible such that they (a) can be answered in the available research period (b) with data or research materials that are accessible and (c) by means of a methodology the student can be reasonably expected to master at the undergraduate level and within the available timeframe. Both supervisors must approve the capstone’s topic, format, and methodology. Students will not be allowed to choose a topic in an area in which they have already written a paper for the fulfilment of a module requirement at NUS, Yale-NUS or another tertiary institution. In case of doubt, students should consult the DDP HOS.

Activities as part of project:

After identifying their research topics and questions and deciding on their supervisors, students should begin background work, and/or seek research ethics clearance (if necessary) over the summer. By the end of Semester 1 of Year 5, students are to have a well-developed prospectus setting out their topic, question, hypothesis/thesis, and methodology in some detail. The prospectus must be approved by both supervisors and submitted to the DDP HOS. Semester 2 of Year 5 will be taken up with the completion of the project, which will ultimately be submitted as a research paper and presented orally.

1 Students may be allowed to sit in for a capstone seminar organized by liberal arts major in Semester 1 if this is recommended by the Yale-NUS capstone supervisor and the relevant Head of Studies agrees to this arrangement.
Preparation of students:

Students should discuss the method and availability of research resources (for example, data sets, primary sources or legal materials) with their supervisors by the end of Semester 2 of Year 4. Students must adhere to the ethical conduct and academic integrity stipulations of Yale-NUS and FOL.2

Expectations for students/supervisor interactions and work on the project:

At a minimum, students should meet with each of their supervisors three times per semester. Main supervisors may wish to meet with their students more often than this recommended minimum. However, the arrangements with main supervisors and co-supervisors should ultimately depend on the nature of the projects and work habits of the students in question. Therefore, students and their supervisors should, at the start of the project, decide on the number of meetings and interim deadlines. Regardless of whether they serve as main supervisor or co-supervisor, FOL faculty should ensure there is enough law content whereas Yale-NUS faculty should ensure there is sufficient engagement with at least one aspect of liberal arts in the capstone projects (refer to “Research topics and questions” above). If there is disagreement between the two supervisors on the direction of a project, the student should consult both supervisors and work out a mutually agreeable solution.

If students wish to change supervisors in the middle of their capstone projects, they must consult DDP HOS, and seek the necessary approvals for identification of supervisor again (refer to “Identification of project and supervisor” above). Generally, students will not be encouraged to switch supervisors mid-way, unless there are strong academic or personal justifications.

Format(s) of capstone:

The capstone format will be a research paper of 12,000 words and a 30-minute oral presentation, which consists of 18 minutes of delivery on the capstone project’s aim/s, research methods, findings, and analysis/arguments and 12 minutes of answering questions raised by their supervisors and other audience members.

There is no particular citation style or format to which students must adhere. They are free to adopt a law-school style citation format, or a format more familiar to the humanities, social sciences, or sciences, so long as they use the same format consistently throughout their research papers. If supervisors have a particular preference, they may communicate their preference to supervisees.

Footnotes are excluded from the 12,000-word limit. If the chosen citation format requires endnotes and not footnotes, the endnotes are effectively treated as footnotes and thus excluded from the word count. If the chosen citation format requires a bibliography or reference list, the bibliography or reference list will also be excluded from the word count.

For students who opt for a citation format where the full citations are provided in the footnotes/endnotes and not in a bibliography/reference list, they should not pack substantive content

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2 These include Yale-NUS rules on conducting human subjects research. For FOL ethical conduct guidelines, see http://law.nus.edu.sg/student_matters/ethical_conduct.html.
into the footnotes/endnotes to circumvent the word limit. Supervisors are asked to ignore substantive content in the footnotes/endnotes that appear to be excessive and meant to circumvent the word limit. The disregard of substantive content in footnotes/endnotes applies less strictly to those who adopt formats with short in-text cites followed by bibliography/reference list at the end.

Tables of content, acknowledgements, epilogues, prologues, appendices, glossaries, tables, charts, figures, graphs, photographs, captions, and illustrations are all included in the word limit of 12,000. If in doubt, students should ask DDP HOS for clarification.

Assessment(s):

The assessment of the DDP capstone will have the following components: the research paper will be worth 80% and the oral presentation will be worth 20%. Assessment of the oral presentation will take into consideration: (a) the clarity of the information; (b) the strength of oral communication, including the ability to deliver a compelling central message; (c) creativity of the presentation; (d) speaking style and delivery, including keeping to the allotted time; and (e) effective use of supporting materials (e.g. audio-visual aids).

The oral presentation will be held in Week 10 of Semester 2. If a student does not present during the allotted timeslot, the student will be deemed to have sat for and failed the oral presentation component of the capstone. The oral presentation will be not be rescheduled, unless the student submits to the DDP HOS (a) documented medical evidence stating that the student is physically unable to give an oral presentation of 30 minutes during the allotted time slot and/or doing so would cause harm to the health or well-being of audience members, or (b) an Assistant Dean’s note. No other exception will be made. Therefore, students who want to participate in law moots or any other school activity should take the capstone presentation date into consideration.

The research paper should be submitted by Friday of Week 11 of Semester 2. No extension will be given for the submission of the research paper, unless the student submits to the DDP HOS (a) documented medical evidence stating that a medical condition had prevented the student from undertaking any work related to the capstone whatsoever for at least three consecutive weeks prior to the submission deadline, or (b) an Assistant Dean’s note.

The paper and the presentation will be graded independently by the main supervisor and co-supervisor, serving as first and second examiners. The final grade will be the average of the grades awarded by the two supervisors. If the two supervisors’ grades differ by more than two grade steps, the DDP HOS may request them to resolve the difference by agreeing to a mutually satisfactory grade. If a mutually satisfactory grade cannot be determined, a third examiner will be appointed by DDP HOS (or the Divisional Director, if DDP HOS is one of the supervisors) to assess the project and determine the final grade in consultation with the Divisional Director or HOS.