

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the differences between the regular International Relations Capstone Project and the Distinction Project?

Regular Capstone Projects and the Distinction Projects differ in depth and length, and faculty expectations for Distinction Projects is significantly higher. Regular capstones have a minimum length of 4,000 words and require a grade of “C” or better for both the course grade and the project. Distinction capstones have a minimum length of 6,000 words, and require a grade of “B” or better for both the course grade and the project. Distinction students are also required to present the results of their research in a public forum or conference - typically, students present during the [Maxwell Celebration of Undergraduate Scholarship](#) near the end of the Spring semester. Finally, Capstone projects can be completed in any approved seminar class, but Distinction students all register for the IRP 495 Distinction Seminar led by the International Relations Chair or the International Relations Director of Undergraduate Studies.

What are the advantages of participating in the Distinction Program?

The Distinction Program provides an opportunity for enhanced intellectual engagement with peers and your seminar faculty instructor and for in-depth professional development geared towards the eventual publication of the research paper. The Distinction designation is recognized in the printed programs for the College of Arts & Sciences convocation and in university-wide commencement ceremonies, and is entered on your official university transcript. This achievement may signal to prospective employers and graduate degree programs that you possess exceptional analytic, organizational, and writing skills and that you are capable of completing sustained original research.

Can I use my Distinction Capstone in IR for Distinction in my other major as well?

No. Capstone projects cannot be used to fulfill distinction requirements in two different majors.

What about using the Distinction Capstone for the Renée Crown University Honors Program?

The Honors program is typically a multi-semester academic experience culminating in a long and detailed Honors Capstone paper. The Distinction Capstone can be *part* of the larger Honors project, but the Distinction project must be capable of “standing alone” as a piece of academic research - that is, it must be a complete project with a specific research question, thesis, literature review, original analysis of primary sources, and findings of its own. Students who pursue this option must also meet the separate and more detailed requirements for the Honors Capstone.

Can I still complete and earn my International Relations degree if I withdraw from the Distinction Program, my eligibility changes, or my capstone project does not meet the Distinction capstone criteria?

During the semester that you enroll in the Distinction seminar (IRP 495), you may choose to change your registration during the add/drop period to enroll in a different IR-approved senior seminar (including an IRP 400 that “meets with” IRP 495, if one is available). You may also continue working on the capstone project with the same faculty instructor, but your registration would be changed either to IRP 490 “Independent Study” or to IRP 499 “Honors Research,” as appropriate to your academic program, to enable your degree completion.

Additionally, after the drop period ends, you could withdraw from IRP 495 at any time before the university-wide withdrawal deadline. If you withdraw in the Fall semester, you would be able to enroll in a regular IR senior seminar in the Spring semester. However, withdrawal would not be an option in the Spring semester, as that would delay your completion of the requirements for the major in International Relations and your undergraduate degree.

If your capstone project does not meet the Distinction criteria for quality (“B” vs. “C”) or depth (4,000 vs. 6,000 minimum) or is not presented to the Maxwell faculty in an appropriate venue, you would still complete the major in International Relations if the project is approved by the standard review given to every capstone project, by the core faculty on the IR Curriculum Committee.

I sent in my Distinction request form. Why can't I register for IRP 495 “Distinction Seminar” on MySlice right now?

Enrollment in Distinction is by the invitation of the International Relations Program each semester. Students who accept the invitation to participate in the Distinction Program will receive instructions on how to enroll in IRP 495 in the appropriate semester.