



Trinity College Dublin

Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath

The University of Dublin

UG Religion

Senior Sophister

Capstone Project

Handbook

2025-26

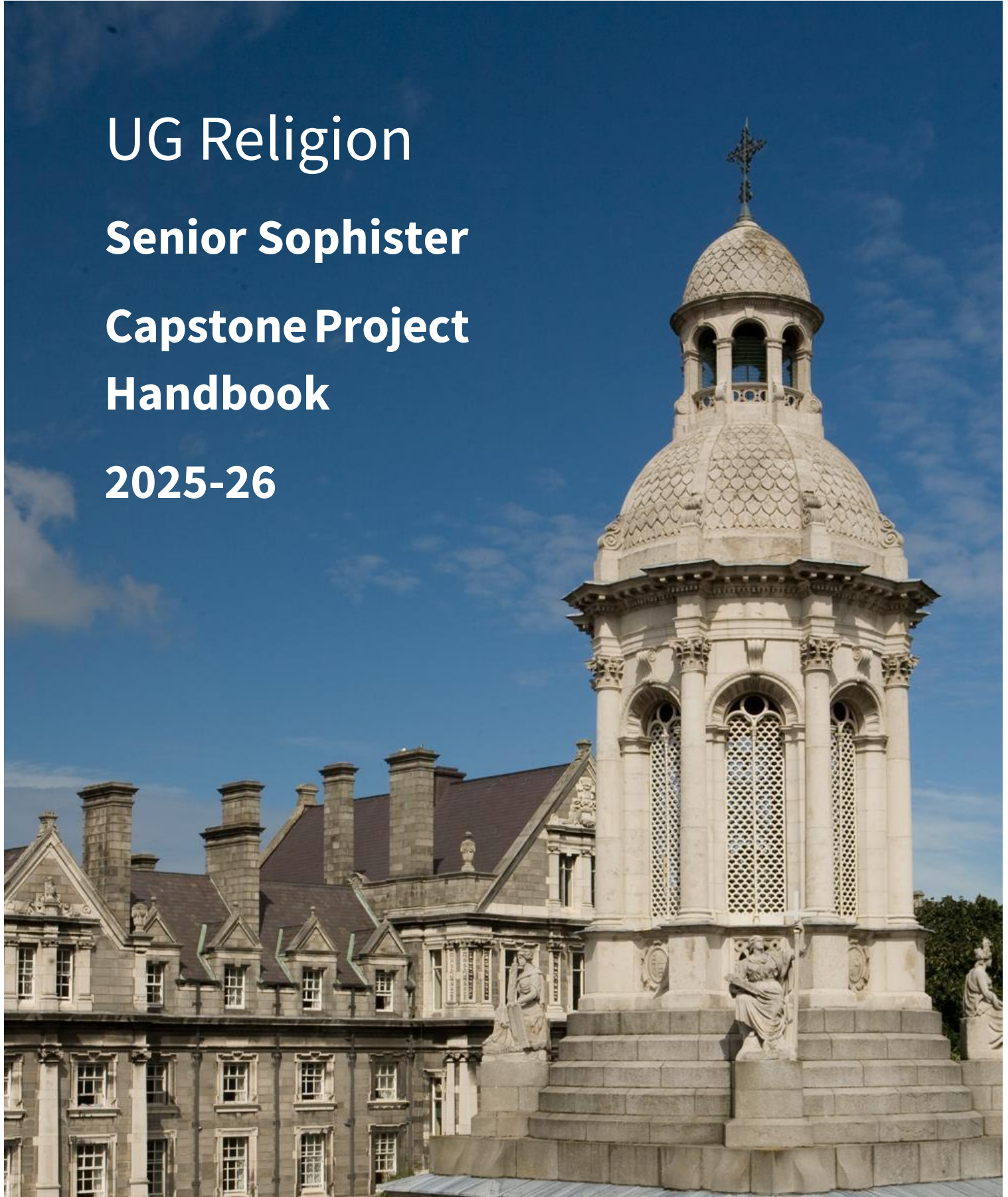


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1. GENERAL INFORMATION

All Senior Sophisters are required to take a 20-credit, year-long module of independent research, referred to a *capstone project*. This constitutes one third of the final year's work; the remaining credits will consist of Sophister module options.

A capstone is a project 'that provides students with an opportunity to integrate the knowledge, skills and competencies which they have acquired during their undergraduate studies, and to demonstrate these in a form appropriate to the discipline'.

In Religion, the Capstone Module allows students to consolidate their learning across the programme by writing a dissertation, investigating in-depth a specific topic. The module provides students with the opportunity to work and think independently, while at the same time experiencing a research community and receiving constructive feedback from peers and staff.

While writing their capstone project, students learn to process feedback in creative ways, discuss general and specific problems occurring in the research process and find appropriate solutions to them, and to identify and put into practice the academic standards pertaining to their chosen field of investigation.

Module Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

1. Identify a research topic, formulate viable research questions and goals, and develop an adequate methodology.
2. Find, assess, contextualise and analyse critically primary and secondary sources and produce an annotated bibliography.
3. Conduct self-directed, original research; give and process constructive feedback from a diversity of perspectives.
4. Apply concepts and argument for discussion and interpretation of the findings.

5. Draw conclusions and critically discuss them on the basis of the existing work and the evidence provided.
6. Present their research effectively and in compliance with the academic standards of their chosen field of investigation.

Module Content

All Senior Sophister students (Single Hons, as well as Joint Hons students, and Religion Majors who choose to focus on Religion in their capstone) are required to write a dissertation of **10,000 – 12,000 words (including footnotes, excluding bibliography)**.

The capstone module will support students with the process of producing this self-directed project. It complements the cooperation between the student and their supervisor. This process begins at the end of JS year when students contact their possible supervisors and agree on a topic. A proposal with a preliminary title, a rough structure and initial list of literature has to be handed in during Hilary Term of the JS Year. Over the summer between JS and SS years, preparatory work can be done, especially when fieldwork, collection of data or extensive literature research or translation is involved.

The Capstone Seminar starts with the Senior Sophister Year; it supports the process by providing tailored workshops. Discussing diverse topics and formats (such as case studies, philosophical and theological discussion, philological work etc.) will improve interdisciplinary work skills and will help to refine the research question and tackle problems that researchers share across the approaches they take. Participation in the activities of the seminar meetings, proactive communication with the supervisor, self-motivated conduct of the project; and on time submission of chapters are seen as crucial evidence of students' engagement in the learning process and contribute to the final mark.

Teaching and Learning Format

Self-directed research and dissertation writing; Capstone Seminar, workshop presentations, panel discussions, peer review and feedback, problem-oriented input by staff, four tutorials or other form of individual supervisions.

Module Assessment Component

- 10,000 – 12,000 word-Dissertation (Including Footnotes, Excluding Bibliography), **plus** engagement in the learning process (Tutorials, Capstone Seminar, pro-active communication etc.). 10% of the overall mark will consider this engagement, either matching or improving the overall mark.

Assessment

Each dissertation will be read, evaluated and given an agreed mark by your supervisor and one other member of staff. Senior Sophister dissertations and the reports of supervisor and moderator are then reviewed by the External Examiners and addressed at the School Court of Examiners.

Marking Scale

First Class	I	over 70%
Second Class, First Division	II.1	60 - 69%
Second Class, Second Division	II.2	50 - 59%
Third Class	III	40-49%
Fail	F1	30-39%
	F2	less than 30%

For more information on these classifications, see the BA Religion Handbook on the School [Current Students page](#).

Key Contacts

Capstone Project	Name	Email
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Capstone Coordinator (Course Coordinator)	Dr. David Shepherd	shepherd@tcd.ie
UG Administrative Officer	Dominique Plant	srundergrad@tcd.ie
Director of Undergraduate Teaching and Learning (DUTL)	Dr. Alexandra Grieser	griesera@tcd.ie

Accessibility and Support

In the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies, we are committed to providing and maintaining an inclusive learning environment for all our students. One of the ways we do this is through working closely with the Trinity Disability Service. If you have a disability, a mental health condition, or an ongoing illness or medical condition, the Disability Service is there to support you.

Through registering with the Disability Service, you will be able to discuss your experience of and needs in College, including accommodations in learning and exams. The Disability Service can then tell us, while respecting your confidentiality at all times, whether there are changes we can make to teaching and assessment which will support you. For more information on the Disability Service and how to register, visit the [Trinity disAbility Service website](#), and you can also contact your Tutor, who can advise and assist you.

2. TIMELINE AND PROCESS FOR PROPOSING YOUR CAPSTONE (JUNIOR SOPHISTER YEAR)

Students who take up a capstone project in Religion are free to choose a research topic and approach a potential supervisor who is familiar with the subject area and the approach that the student intends to take. While some departments in College allocate capstone supervisors, Religion relies on student-led interest and supervisor agreement.

- ✓ Approach potential supervisors for your topic early in Hilary term, as some staff members may reach a limit of students they can advise, while others may be on Research Leave. **Week 3 Hilary Term**

Course Meeting to explain the Capstone, possibilities, and the process of approaching potential supervisors.

***Trinity Joint Honours students** will need to choose their Capstone Subject at the beginning of Hilary Term. Please follow all instructions from the TJH Office on Capstone selection. More information can be found [here](#).

- ✓ **Weeks 4-6 Hilary Term**

Email and meet with an appropriate member of staff as a potential supervisor to discuss your project.

- ✓ **Week 13 Hilary Term**

Students should meet with their supervisor to agree on a work plan for the summer.

- ✓ **Week 16 Hilary Term**

The capstone project proposals must be submitted to the Undergraduate Officer by Microsoft Forms through the link <https://forms.office.com/e/3h5QLMawC2>

submitting your proposal, please contact your Undergraduate Officer at SRUndergrad@tcd.ie. You should have already sought advice from a member of the academic staff about your proposal and have an agreed upon supervisor. The proposal

for the dissertation model should be around 500 words long and include a tentative title and a short bibliography (ca. 5 titles).

3. CAPSTONE SEMINARS AND ADVISOR TUTORIAL MEETINGS

As part of the Capstone Project, students are expected to agree with their supervisor to meet to discuss their project on a regular basis. The number and length of meetings of these **Tutorial Meetings** will depend on each student's contract with their supervisor. Give them time to read work you have written and submit work regularly so that discussions can be productive. These meetings form a core part of the research experience and students are expected to be in regular contact with their advisor throughout the year.

Once at the end of their Junior Sophister Year, and then five times in their Sophister Year, Capstone Students will gather together for the required **Capstone Seminar**. During the Seminar, students will learn about library resources, writing practice, peer workshops, academic integrity, and the editing process. The focus lies on the discussion of your work-in-progress and improve your work by providing and processing constructive feedback and support each other in the writing process. Students are enrolled in **REU44010 DISSERTATION** on Blackboard, and Capstone Seminar meeting dates will be posted there at the beginning of Michaelmas Term.

Timelines and Deadlines for Submission

Students will agree with their supervisors a timeline for production of the dissertation. This should include:

- (a) the drafting of a preliminary outline and a working bibliography of primary and secondary sources early in Michaelmas Term of the Senior Sophister year, as well as an agreed-upon critical approach and methodology for the dissertation

(b) specific deadlines for the completion of individual sections or chapters in the dissertation over the course of Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. The number of chapters or sections will vary from dissertation to dissertation.

(c) The dissertation must be submitted by all students no later than noon on Friday of Week 9 of Hilary Term to Blackboard (March 20th 2026)

Be aware that most staff have multiple students to supervise and may not be able to read drafts from all of them in the weeks immediately before the deadline.

A possible schedule of work might be as follows (note that this is only an example and not intended to be prescriptive):

- Michaelmas Term Week 1 – meet supervisor, discuss work done over summer, agree plan of work.
- Michaelmas Term Week 4 – submit initial draft of writing (introduction, detailed plan or other work, as agreed).
- Michaelmas Term Week 11 – submit draft of first full chapter (c. 3000 words).
- Hilary Term Week 1 – submit draft of a second piece of work/chapter for discussion/feedback.
- Hilary Term Week 5 – submit redraft/work/re-written introduction and conclusions for discussion in week 6.
- Hilary Term Week 7 – submit full draft of dissertation to supervisor.
- Hilary Term Weeks 7-9 – revise and redraft final version following supervisor feedback.
- Hilary Term Week 9 – submit final dissertation.

4. PRESENTATION AND STYLE

- The basic compulsory format for the dissertation is as follows:

Cover sheet (with Generative AI Declaration)

Title page (title, date, your name and your supervisor's, BA Religion, [TCD Logo](#))

Table of contents, including page numbers, and chapters (each with a chapter title)

Bibliography or list of Works Cited

- Optional extras include: a dedication or acknowledgements (which would be inserted on a separate page before the table of contents)
- Appendices at the end (if, for instance, you are referring to field data, illustrations or other visual printed material)
- The dissertation should follow referencing conventions outlined in the School of English stylesheet and found here: <https://www.tcd.ie/media/tcd/english/pdfs/style-sheet-update-2018-19-1.pdf>
- The dissertation should be double-line-spaced and presented in a size 12 Sans Serif font such as Helvetica, Calibri, or Cambria.
- Submission is electronically via Blackboard.
- Information on how your dissertation will be uploaded as an electronic copy to Blackboard, will follow nearer to the date of submission.

5. ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

In Trinity College Dublin, we commit ourselves as staff and students to acting responsibly and ethically, embracing integrity in all our actions and interactions as members of the College community. Understanding that integrity requires honesty, transparency and accountability, we agree to:

- Strive to do what we say we will, ensuring that we are aware of our commitments and responsibilities in order to fulfil them, and abiding by College and other relevant policies and the highest standards of conduct.
- Give credit where credit is due, recognizing and acknowledging the contributions and achievements of others in scholarship, teaching, research and service.
- Tell the truth, as a community and as individuals, speaking out and listening even when it is difficult, naming problems and honestly acknowledging mistakes.
- Hold ourselves and others to account for the things for which we are each responsible.
- Use resources for the purposes for which they are intended and be above reproach in financial dealings.
- Deal fairly, consistently and transparently with others.

Information about academic integrity at Trinity College Dublin can be located under the Academic Integrity Policy and procedures: <https://libguides.tcd.ie/academic-integrity>.

Plagiarism

It is clearly understood that all members of the academic community use and build on the work and ideas of others. It is commonly accepted also, however, that we build on the work and ideas of others in an open and explicit manner, and with due acknowledgement. Plagiarism is the act of presenting the work or ideas of others as one's own, without due acknowledgement. Plagiarism can arise from deliberate actions and also through careless thinking and/or methodology. The offence lies not in the attitude or intention of the

perpetrator, but in the action and in its consequences. It is the responsibility of the author of any work to ensure that they do not commit plagiarism. Plagiarism is considered to be academically fraudulent, and an offence against academic integrity that is subject to the disciplinary procedures of the University.

Whenever you draw on another person's work, you are required to acknowledge your source. Failure to do so exposes you to the accusation of passing off someone else's work as your own. This is called 'plagiarism.' The University [Calendar Part II](#) states that this is "a major offence, and subject to the disciplinary procedures of the University". As your essays count towards your final mark, plagiarism in your essays is considered the equivalent of cheating in an examination, a major offence for which you may be expelled.

Plagiarism results from either deliberately using the work of another without proper acknowledgement, or from lack of care in acknowledgements. All quotations and paraphrases of other people's work must be properly referenced to avoid the charge of plagiarism. This includes the work of other students and internet sites. If you use another student's essay notes without acknowledgement, both you and the author of the notes might be charged with plagiarism. To properly reference material taken from an internet site, you should give the full URL of the page.

To ensure that you have a clear understanding of what plagiarism is, how Trinity deals with cases of plagiarism, and how to avoid it, you will find a repository of information on the Library website re [Plagiarism](#). It is very important that you familiarise yourself with this information.

Plagiarism can arise from actions such as:

- (a) copying another student's work.
- (b) enlisting another person or persons to complete an assignment on the student's behalf.
- (c) procuring, whether with payment or otherwise, the work or ideas of another.
- (d) quoting directly, without acknowledgement, from books, articles or other sources,

- either in printed, recorded or electronic format, including websites and social media.
- (e) paraphrasing, without acknowledgement, the writings of other authors.

Examples (d) and (e) in particular can arise through careless thinking and/or methodology where students:

- (i) fail to distinguish between their own ideas and those of others.
- (ii) fail to take proper notes during preliminary research and therefore lose track of the sources from which the notes were drawn.
- (iii) fail to distinguish between information which needs no acknowledgement because it is firmly in the public domain, and information which might be widely known, but which nevertheless requires some sort of acknowledgement.

Ensure that you:

- i. Visit the online resources to inform yourself about how Trinity deals with plagiarism, how you can avoid it, and and sanctions ^[OBJ] located on this website and the sanctions which are applied. a that are applied. that are applied.
- ii. Refer to the ['Ready. Steady. Write' online tutorial on plagiarism](#). **Completing the tutorial is compulsory for all students.**
- iii. Contact your Course-Coordinator or your Advisor if you are unsure about any aspect of plagiarism.

Ensure you have read and understand the plagiarism provisions in the General Regulations of the [University Calendar, Part II](#) for the current year.

The Use and Referencing of Generative AI

Aligned with the [College Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI in Teaching, Learning, Assessment & Research](#) (2025), the use of GenAI is permitted unless otherwise stated. Where the output of GenAI is used to inform a student's document or work output, this usage should be acknowledged and appropriately cited, as per [Library guidelines on acknowledging and reference GenAI](#). From an academic integrity perspective, if a student

generates content from a GenAI tool and submits it as his/her/their own work, it is considered plagiarism, which is defined as academic misconduct in accordance with College Academic Integrity Policy.

Beyond limited legitimate uses of generative AI, **presenting the output of generative AI tools as your own work, without acknowledgement, violates the principles of academic integrity and is academic misconduct.** In other words, you cannot use AI tools to generate all or part of the content for an exam or assignment and submit it as if it was your own work.

This implies that **undisclosed and/or inappropriate use of generative AI tools may violate the principles of academic integrity.** Accordingly, the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies requires a declaration of generative AI use to be completed and submitted with all work (exams, assignments). This declaration is made in addition to the standard declaration of academic integrity as part of a revised assessment cover page (see below). Any assignment submitted without the declaration will not be marked. Such assignments will be returned to the student and must be resubmitted with the cover page, potentially resulting in a delayed mark.

This policy recognises that generative AI tools may have some legitimate uses to support your learning and to help you to research for or to polish an assignment. For example, you might use generative AI to summarise your notes in preparation for an exam or assignment, to perform some initial research into a topic (bearing in mind the limitations noted above and the learning effect that may inhibit), or to polish your own writing in terms of grammar or spelling or to make it more concise (especially for non-native speakers, however, we recommend to use the free software of Grammarly instead as it does not intervene with the content). All such uses must be declared. No credit/marks will be awarded for use of generative AI, nor are students expected to use generative AI for any purpose. You should also reflect on whether relying on such tools to do this work for you will reduce opportunities for you to develop and hone your own academic skills.

Where generative AI tools have been used to generate content, they must be clearly cited and full details of how the content was generated must be declared in appendix. There is a

helpful and detailed description of how to cite ChatGPT (which can be applied to other generative AI tools) from the Chicago Manual of Style [here](#).

You should assume this policy applies to all assessments/exams in the School of Religion, Theology, and Peace Studies but please note that individual module coordinators may supplement this policy with further restrictions or permissions regarding generative AI use. Please check the module assessment information on the Blackboard for that module, and if in doubt, please email the module coordinator.

As part of the declaration, students are asked to select either (A) or (B), below.

(A) Nothing to declare. I did not use generative AI software as part of the work for this assessment.

(B) I used generative AI as part of the work for this assessment.

Where (B) is selected, students are required to include an appendix containing a <350-word explanation of how generative AI was used (which tool (name, version, publisher, url); how the output was generated; how this output was used in the assignment) and how that use conforms with the principles of academic integrity. Questions and/or prompts and the generative AI output should be included as part of the appendix. These are not included in the word count for the assignment. Where these are not included, **they may be requested as part of the marking process.**

Further Information

Generative AI tools are a family of tools that incorporate natural language processing and deep learning techniques to generate answers (text, code, images etc.) to questions and prompts. The purpose of this policy is to outline how students' use of generative AI fits into our expectations regarding academic integrity.

It is first important to be aware that there are a number of serious concerns about generative AI tools and there are significant limitations to the outputs they produce. These include (please see links for further information):

- *Accuracy of the information produced.* Generative AI tools work by predicting the next most likely word in a sequence. [This means that the tools are susceptible to so-called "hallucination"](#) – producing text that is grammatically correct, and which may have face validity but is not factually correct.
- *Plagiarism and lack of source attribution.* [The sources of information relied upon to construct the text produced may not be appropriately acknowledged](#) and, where sources are provided, the references may be fabricated.
- *Ethical issues related to data sourcing.* Many generative AI models were trained on materials obtained from the internet and include [text](#), [images](#), [code](#) etc., that were proprietary, copyright-protected, or protected by non-commercial commons licenses. Using generative AI output risks these forms of plagiarism and copyright infringement.
- *Breach of TCD copyright.* If university module materials (e.g., slides, syllabus) are used to prompt or to guide the response of AI tools, this is a breach of TCD copyright and is illegal (see <https://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/assets/pdf/Intellectual-Property-Policy-2022.pdf>).
- *Bias.* As part of training, the models that underlie generative AI were exposed to data obtained from the internet, which may be biased in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other protected characteristics. Although guardrails may have been put in place, [text produced by generative AI models can reproduce these biases](#).
- *Ethical issues related to training.* To guard against toxic material (e.g., violent, illegal, distressing) being included in training data, outsourced content labelers were used to review training data and remove unwanted text. Such outsourcing often involves exploitative practices – for example, [employees who are resident in the Global South and are paid very little for distressing work](#). Similar content moderation practices are commonly used by social medial platforms.
- *Climate & environmental impact.* Training generative AI models requires vast amounts of [energy](#), [hardware](#), and [water](#) to keep that hardware cool. Such impacts,

[which will only continue to grow](#), are rarely considered in the rush to adopt the technology.

Beyond these concerns, the use of these tools has significant implications for our expectations about assessment in the university. The goal of assessment is to support learning and to ascertain the attainment of learning objectives, of which one is the ability to think independently and critically. A key assumption is that the work submitted for assessment is **original work completed by the learner, and that the learner is the sole author**. To earn your degree, you must be able to demonstrate full ownership of, and accountability for, the work submitted and must appropriately acknowledge all sources used in the preparation of the work.

These assumptions are encoded in the principles of **academic integrity**, defined by the National Academic Integrity Network¹ as, “**the commitment to, and demonstration of, honest and moral behavior in an academic setting.**” The principles of academic integrity entail that, “It is the responsibility of the enrolled learner to ensure that all submitted work for assessment purposes in an academic setting, which includes but is not limited to, text, graphics, tables, formulae, or any representation of ideas in print, electronic or any other media, in addition to artefacts, computer software and algorithms, correctly **acknowledges the source of any data which is not original to the learner.**”

References/Sources:

[College Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Generative AI in Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Research](#)

[Library guidelines on acknowledging and reference GenAI.](#)

6. CITATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC GUIDELINES

Capstones should follow **Chicago Referencing Style**. For more detailed instructions and examples on how to cite and create Bibliographies, please refer to the [Chicago Manual of Style Citation Quick Guide](#).

For TCD information on referencing, please access the [Library guides for Religion &](#)

[Theology](#). Also, please discuss with your advisor on their expectations on referencing. Remember that the word count of 15,000 includes footnotes but excludes bibliography.

The Purdue OWL Writing Lab offers a range of supports on writing and Chicago Style: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/chicago_manual_17th_edition.

7. EXAMPLES OF PREVIOUS CAPSTONE PROJECTS

Examples of previous projects are made available in the Seminar. They may be consulted in the School by arranging time with your Undergraduate Officer at SRUndergrad@tcd.ie.