

**Marjorie Williams Academy**

**Graduation Project Handbook**

**Mission Statement**: The mission of Williams Academy is to offer a stable, emotionally supportive, educational environment for children with a goal of empowering each child to achieve his or her real academic and social potential.

**Vision:** The vision of Williams Academy is to become a model school for academic achievement.

**Graduation Project - Home**

Williams Academy students will work on the senior project as a local graduation requirement. High School Seniors are responsible for specific graduation project components and this requirement will count as part of the total grade in their English IV class, a course required for graduation.

The Graduation Project has four parts: a research paper, product, portfolio, and oral presentation before a review board. These four components are designed to be a culmination of the entire high school experience. To complete the Graduation Project, students will apply skills needed to be successful in post-secondary education and careers. The project requires students to demonstrate what they know and what they can do with the skills acquired in high school.

## The four components:

* A research paper demonstrating research skills and writing skills, to be completed in the Senior year
* A Service Learning Experience (SLE) / product that demonstrates the use of knowledge and skills in a meaningful way to accomplish a goal, to be completed in the Senior year
* An oral presentation, during which, students become a source of information communicating their project work before a review panel, to be completed in the Senior year
* A portfolio to catalogue/document tasks, record reflective thinking and insights, as well as demonstrate responsibility for learning as work progresses through the entire process, to be kept throughout the process

**Contact Information**

For more information regarding the Marjorie Williams Academy Graduation Project, contact Dr. Cyndi Austin, Principal; Whitney Shoupe, High School English Teacher; Neal Gragg, Testing Coordinator; or Dale Trivette, Dean of Students at 828-733-5241 or visit the [Williams Academy website](http://www.williamsacademy.org/#!staff-directory/c16gv) at [www.williamsacademy.org](http://www.williamsacademy.org) to locate individual email addresses.

**Documents**

[The North Carolina Graduation Project](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/accountability/testing/eoc/gradproject14.pdf)

**Helpful Links**

[NCDPI - Course & Credit Requirements](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/graduation/)

[NCDPI - Exit Standards](http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/curriculum/home/exitstandardsguidehs.pdf)

[MLA Formatting Help](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)

[Sample Senior Project](http://youtu.be/S0DQRdc0Og0)

[Sample Senior Project](http://youtu.be/MrqqD_Tsy4Q)

**Requirements**

## The Graduation Project contains four parts:

1. A research paper demonstrating research skills and writing skills.
2. A product created through the use of knowledge and skills in a meaningful way to accomplish a goal,
3. A portfolio to catalogue/document tasks, record reflective thinking and insights, as well as demonstrate responsibility for learning as work progresses through the entire process, and
4. An oral presentation, during which students become a source of information communicating their project work before a review panel.

Evaluation of the graduation project will be based upon the four components listed above. Students must successfully complete each component of the graduation project, in addition to passing both the English IV course and North Carolina Final Exam, to receive a high school diploma.

Successful graduation project programs at the local level are developed and owned by the entire school and community. There is no one size fits all format for implementation. However, there should be clear evidence of the following framework essentials:

* Commitment to high student accountability in all phases of the process.
* Commitment to the Three R' s—Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships.
* Alignment of project content with state and district curricula content goals and objectives.
* Integration of knowledge, skills, and performance across all disciplines.
* Commitment to annual reflection, review, and adjustment of the process.
* Support and engagement of community members and all school faculty and staff.
* Leadership and direction from school administrators that is focused and strong.

Because of the multifaceted, multidisciplinary nature of the graduation project, it is not intended to be housed within one classroom or content area. Graduation project program guidelines should allow for flexibility and input from various stakeholders. Guidelines should provide the opportunity to foster student-teacher relationships, nurture the exploration of new ideas, and encourage student-centered, lifelong learning.

## Expectations for implementation of the Graduation Project include the following:

* All eligible seniors are to participate.
* Principals are to establish a steering committee to help implement and monitor the project.
* All parents/cottage parents and students are to be uniformly informed.
* All seniors are expected to maintain a project notebook.
* All faculty members are expected to serve as advisors, as needed.
* School results will be reviewed for consistency of evaluation.
* Principals are responsible for monitoring the appropriate implementation of the project.

**The Paper - Topic Selection**

**The research topic should be one that requires cumulative knowledge across grade levels and content areas.** It should be a natural outgrowth of interest and combine skills of all, or most, content areas. For example, a student who researches the changes in the ozone layer is using cumulative knowledge from English, math, science, and history.

**The research topic should be one that is broad enough to allow the student access to enough information, yet narrow enough to make the research scope reasonable.** For example, a student choosing the topic *First Aid* would find it impossible to include EVERYTHING about first aid (home remedies, history of emergency services, the treatment of burns, how to stop bleeding, evolution of first aid courses, etc.) On the other hand, a student choosing the research topic *The Application of Band-Aids to Skin Abrasions* probably would not find enough information.

**The research topic should be one in which the student is interested, but not one about which the student is already an expert.** If a student has been a diabetic for ten years, worked closely with the Juvenile Diabetes Association, and has been a volunteer in the children’s diabetic ward in a local hospital, he or she probably already knows a great deal about the subject of juvenile diabetes. Unless that student pursues a new angle to diabetes, that topic might not yield much new learning.

**The research topic should be one that is academically and creatively challenging to the student.** The student should take care not to choose a topic that is limited to relatively simple ideas or one that has little application or extension possibilities. Making such a choice would relegate the essay, the product, and the presentation to the mundane and uninteresting. The topic should require an academic and creative s-t-r-e-t-c-h for the student.

**The research topic should be one that will help students gather the skills necessary to demonstrate global readiness including 21st Century Skills (e.g., entrepreneurship, self-enrichment, job shadowing/career explorations, volunteerism, physical product, etc.).** The student should choose a research topic that is not only interesting to them and will provide a challenge, but the research topic should be one that naturally lends itself to gaining 21st century skills. 21st century skills include, but are not limited to, problem solving, finding and evaluating information, creating and innovating, communicating, collaborating, and analytical thinking.

**Expenditures will not enhance the evaluation of the project.** Students should avoid choosing topics that might involve expenses they are not prepared to handle. If the research will involve travel or long distance calls, the student may want to make another choice. If the product that grows out of the research will require expensive materials, the student may want to make another choice. Remember, the student is NOT EXPECTED to spend money in order to complete the project.

**Students should avoid choosing topics that might endanger themselves or others.** For example, experiments which are potentially explosive or activities such as handling poisonous snakes are not appropriate.

**Primary research is a valuable component of any inquiry.** It may be wise for students to explore the possibilities for personal interviews, informal surveys, empirical observation, etc., before making a final selection of topic.

**Some preliminary research may be helpful to the student.** By reading about a certain topic, the student may expand his/her areas of interest. Possibilities for new areas of exploration may surface. For example, if a student was not able to find precisely what he or she needed but did find usable information, it is possible for him/her to change focus while keeping the same main topic.

**Students should use good judgment to be certain that the topics they choose are appropriate for presentation to a Review Board and the general public.** Remember that the senior English teacher, the mentor, and the parent(s)/guardian(s) of the student must approve the selection of the topic.

**The Paper - Essay Guidelines**

1. The research-based essay can be constructed from any genre, as specified by the English teacher, including but not limited to:
   * Expository
   * Compare and Contrast
   * Cause and Effect
   * Argumentative (Persuasive)
   * Critical Review
   * Analytical
   * Literary
2. Each essay must cite a minimum of six different sources. Encyclopedias and other general resources are not acceptable, including current, technological reference bundles. Students should strive for variety and balance in their selections (i.e., professional journals, professional websites, interviews)
3. Essays should be approximately six to eight pages of text, excluding the outline and works cited page.
4. The thesis statement should be in bold-faced type.
5. Sources should include at least one primary source, such as original documents, authoritative interviews, or analytical data based on interviews. Primary sources add immediacy and relevance to the research. Students whose primary sources are individuals should note in the text or annotate in the works cited entry the person’s area of expertise.
6. Students should learn to interpret research in terms of possible bias and to examine research in terms of validity. This examination is especially important when students are using on-line sources.
7. Research should take a variety of forms, both primary and secondary, traditional and non-traditional. Students may design, administer, and analyze surveys, conduct interviews of experts, access on-line databases, or consult portable database products. Students should tailor the type of research to their topic of research to ensure a reasonable balance of sources.
8. Students should be cautioned not to rely solely on on-line sources.
9. Students must carefully document all research information they cite in their papers. This should include parenthetical documentation within the paper and a list of works cited at the end of the paper.
10. Students should access the most recent edition of the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* for guidelines for appropriate documentation.
11. Students should be thoroughly informed of research ethics and the serious consequences of plagiarism.

**The Product - Guidelines**

1. The product must be student-generated and should include artifacts from the SLE that demonstrates the student's problem-solving skills. For example, students cannot purchase and assemble a model kit as a product. However, if a student designs a model, builds it from raw materials, and uses it to show application/synthesis of knowledge acquired from research and service, that would constitute an acceptable product.
2. The product is tangible evidence of the effort and time invested in the endeavor to meet the criteria established for the product. The student should be able to show this product is an extension, application, and synthesis of the research and service and has practical applications in the real world.
3. The product should be tangible evidence that reflects applications of learning, critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, teamwork, and personal employability skills, such as responsibility, persistence, and independence.
4. The conception, development, and refinement of the product created must respond to the identified need or desire. This phase of the graduation project offers students an opportunity to connect their educational aspirations with real world career or community service opportunities.
5. The product abstract/proposal must be approved by the academic advisor and project coordinator.
6. Students should avoid choosing topics that might require excessive expenses, as the state does not provide funding for student graduation projects.
7. Successful completion of a graduation project is not dependent upon the amount of money invested in the graduation project.

**The Presentation - Guidelines**

1. Wait for a signal from the Review Board before you begin your presentation, or ask the Review Board members if they are ready.
2. Introduce yourself to the Review Board.
3. Remember that you will be making a formal presentation. Please dress appropriately. If you are not sure what constitutes appropriate dress, consult your mentor or English teacher.
4. Do not chew gum.
5. Be aware of your body language. Avoid nervous gestures that may adversely affect your presentation.
6. Maintain eye contact with the Review Board.
7. Do not read your presentation.
8. Write a letter of introduction to include in the portfolio. Panel members should read this letter before listening to your presentation.
9. Practice your presentation several times until you feel comfortable with its format and content. Also, time your presentation to be sure that you do not exceed the ten-minute maximum.
10. Practice imagining what questions your Review Board might ask you (or ask a parent or a friend to compose questions for you) and plan the answers you would give. Your board may not ask these exact questions, but this will give you an opportunity to practice answering questions. Remember that questions should address a clarification or extension of your topic. Review Boards will be trained regarding the nature of appropriate questions. However, if you are asked a question that you feel is not appropriate (e.g., a question that is purely personal), you have the right to reply politely that the question does not relate to your research.

**The Portfolio - Guidelines**

The portfolio should serve as a learning record of the process and progress as the journey unfolds through all the steps of the graduation project, including periodic reflections. This physical record of the process and progress will help you keep track of your work. Additionally, this record will help your mentor and academic advisor monitor your project as it develops.

## Portfolio Guidelines are as follows:

1. The appearance and format should be neat and orderly.
2. The portfolio should be organized using a table of contents.
3. All forms and content should meet the requirements of the portfolio.
4. The portfolio should demonstrate depth in academic and personal growth.
5. The portfolio reflection should provide insight into how the student has anticipated and dealt with changes and contingencies.
6. The portfolio construction should employ technology.

**The Portfolio - Components**

Below is a list of items that can be contained in the student portfolio.

* **Title page**
* **School information sheet and timeline for NC Graduation Project**
* **Progress checklist**
* **Resumé**
* **Letters of recommendation**
* **Letter of intent**
* **Student agreement and parent agreement**
* **Project information**
  + Mentor information and agreement
  + Project proposal (abstract/proposal) and approval
  + Time logs
  + Work samples, pictures, sketches
  + Communications (letters, emails, and thank you notes)
  + Reflection journal
  + Evaluation rubric
* **Evaluated research paper**
  + Documentation of editing (drafts and comments)
  + Evaluation rubric
  + Reflection on the paper and process
* **Presentation copy of PowerPoint or other visual aids**
  + Letter to the review panel
  + Outline and summary of the presentation
  + Copy of PowerPoint or other visual aids

Graduation Project Evaluation

The Graduation Project will be evaluated with rubrics created by the state of North Carolina for this particular project. Each member of the Review Board will serve as an evaluator for the projects.

**Special Considerations**

* Transfer students:
  + In the case of a student transferring into Marjorie Williams Academy from another school while working on the project, any component completed at the previous school will be accepted by Williams Academy.
  + A student transferring into Marjorie Williams Academy during the 2nd or 4th nine weeks of his or her senior year from a district or school that does not require a graduation project will be exempt from the project. A student transferring during the 1st or 3rd nine weeks of the senior year from a district that does not require a graduation project will be required to complete the graduation project in order to graduate.
* Exceptional children, LEP students and students with 504 plans:
  + Teachers must adhere to each student’s IEP, LEP, and 504 accommodations/modifications that are located within his/her plan.

\*\*\*Williams Academy Graduation Project adapted from Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Graduation Project.\*\*\*\*