

Guidelines for Master of Public Health Master's Essay

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Guidelines for the MPH Master's Essay

I. General Information

The MPH degree program requires satisfactory completion of a professional skills development component, in addition to formal course work. This component of the curriculum serves as a culminating experience for the students. It has two options: (1) completion of a field practice, or (2) the writing of a research-oriented master's essay. Fourteen percent of the student's total hours are awarded upon successful completion of this part of the Master of Public Health (MPH) Program. Students selecting the field practice option earn six (6) semester hours of credit (PUBH 587-88) and have the opportunity for an additional three (3) credit hours (PUBH 589) if completing an approved extended placement. Students selecting the master's essay option earn six (6) hours of credit (PUBH 587-88). In addition, students approved for the essay option are required to complete a three (3) hour research methods course. Either option is considered a significant learning experience for students enrolled in the MPH Program.

For those with health-related work experiences who possess a professional degree or have firm plans to pursue a doctoral degree, the MPH program allows these students to request approval for completing a professional skills development opportunity known as the master's essay option. Accordingly, the MPH program does not waive field practice, but provides for an alternate highly relevant learning experience in lieu of field practice. The master's essay option is restricted to those students receiving MPH Academic Program Committee (MPH/APC) approval.

The master's essay should be a scholarly work of high quality which is worthy of publication or other professional exhibit. Although the finished essay does not have to be written in publishable form, students are strongly encouraged to make necessary revisions to meet specific journal guidelines, and to submit the paper for publication.

In most cases, the master's essay will require more of the student's time than will the field practice experience. Completion of a defined field practice experience is considered more controllable than the various factors involved in developing a high quality master's essay. An unacceptable essay will delay completion of the degree.

II. Topic Selection for the Master's Essay

An acceptable research topic for the master's essay should have the potential for meaningful contribution to the field of public health. The following categories of investigation are considered appropriate for the master's essay option:

- a) Epidemiological investigation
- b) Analytical essay on a public health policy
- c) Administrative case study including analysis and solution(s)
- d) Analysis and evaluation of an existing public health program
- e) Critical review of major public health issue or problem
- f) Educational initiatives
- g) Other _____ (requires MPH/APC approval)

A student may develop an idea for a topic in one of several ways. Students with extensive work experience in a specialty area may already have a well-defined area of investigation. Other students may determine a specific problem area for exploration once they have been exposed to course work. In some cases, students may become involved with a faculty member on a research project. Regardless of the origin of the idea and the type of investigation, the student is expected to demonstrate originality in the conception and development of the project.

III. Qualifications and Selection of Master's Essay Candidates

Each student who seeks to fulfill the professional skills development component of the MPH program by writing a master's essay must discuss the option with his/her faculty advisor (ME-04) and secure advanced written approval by the MPH Academic Program Committee (MPH/APC). The petition to the MPH/APC should be prepared utilizing the Summary Sheet for Master's Essay (Form ME-01). All decisions by the MPH/APC are final.

Guidelines for approval are as follows:

- A. Statement of written rationale for the student's preference of the master's essay option.
- B. Evidence of experience and background knowledge in the area of proposed study (years of experience, letters of reference, personal interview with advisor, etc.)
- C. Planned enrollment in a specifically-defined research methods or quantitative course (3 hours) prior to initiating detailed work on the essay.
- D. Availability of faculty time. Due to the student's need for considerable access to faculty advisor(s), the number of students approved for the master's essay option will depend to some extent on the workload of the supervising faculty member. The maximum number of students to be approved for the master's essay option is 10% of the total enrollment with no more than two (2) students per faculty advisor per semester.

IV. Developing the Essay Proposal

Following approval by the MPH/APC permitting the student to pursue the master's essay option, the student is required to take the following steps:

- A. Select two (2) faculty members to serve on the student's advisory committee, one of whom is the student's advisor. The student must include a community health professional from outside the department as the third member for service on the committee, thereby providing linkage with the field of practice.
- B. Submit a written proposal to the advisory committee for review. In addition, the proposal must be formally presented and defended by the candidate. The proposal must contain the following:
 - 1. Introduction of a the research topic
 - 2. Statement of the research objectives

3. Research question to be addressed
 4. Description of the presentation format (essay, handbook, videotape, educational materials)
 5. Timetable for completion of various components.
- C. Before proceeding with the master's essay project, the candidate must make any necessary revisions to the proposal, and resubmit the proposal for final approval. An approval form (ME-02) must be signed by all members of the advisory committee. Copies of the ME-02 form and the final approved version of the proposal represent an academic agreement between the student and the committee and will be maintained on file. This final approval gives the student permission to proceed with the project. Once this approval is granted, the student will not be permitted to pursue the field practice option.

V. Formatting the Essay

The format and style selected for the master's essay must be approved by the advisory committee as part of the essay proposal. The MPH Advisory Committee will exercise final editorial approval. The master's essay, although completed under the guidance and supervision of the student's advisory committee, should demonstrate independent action leading to a high quality result.

In general, the following format of the master's essay should be utilized:

- A. Purpose of the Essay -- This section provides a brief literature review which summarizes pertinent background information and the current state of knowledge. The problem or area of investigation is defined, and the significance/rationale for the study is explained.
- B. Methods -- In this section, research techniques, data collection and analysis are described. The types of methods used may include survey research (interviews or questionnaires), observational studies (case-control, retrospective, cross-sectional), experimental studies (clinical/community-based trials), etc. The method chosen depends upon the research question and the type of data to be collected. Some data collection techniques may be inappropriate to the proposed application or may be limited by resources. Statistical procedures are briefly explained; these should be appropriate for the study design and the type of data collected. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required for projects involving human populations.
- C. Results -- The results of the investigation are described in the narrative and are presented in tables and/or figures. Statistical results are clearly specified.
- D. Discussion -- The interpretation of the results and the relevance to other similar studies are discussed in this final section. The student should integrate his/her findings with relevant information from the literature, discuss the significance and implications of the results, comment on the limitations of the study, and suggest areas for further investigation.

VI. Essay Preparation and Committee Review

The preparation of an expository essay will develop/expand the student's skills in conducting a systematic study, in organizing pertinent information, and in communicating the discipline to others. This type of project investigation and resolution is similar to those which may be anticipated during professional life. Writing is an exercise in thinking and in creative scholarship which is demanding, time consuming and very satisfying when effectively accomplished.

The student should be fully aware that revisions and rewriting are necessary to produce an acceptable outcome. Most essays will evolve through a series of drafts as structural logic, phrasing, and intended messages are improved. The final essay should reflect not only a mastery and critical assessment of the relevant literature but also an ability to apply knowledge and skills independently.

The faculty advisor and committee members have a key role to play in the guidance of the student and in the development of the essay. Individually and collectively, faculty review and comment should be elicited regarding reasonableness of ideas, study approaches, clarity of the narrative, and substantive omissions requiring attention. The disciplinary knowledge and professional experience of committee members provide a competency-based framework for considering the student's ideas and for contributing a constructive critique.

To derive the full benefits of an advisory committee, the student must recognize the value of securing early suggestions and reactions and of keeping the committee informed. Requests for review of the actual written document should be for fully developed sections only, so that the proper context of the essay is accurately presented and interpreted. Equally important, the request for review should permit adequate time (usually no less than one week) for the advisor or committee member to provide a thoughtful response. Rarely should a first draft be submitted for committee review, because it will not reflect the level of effort or quality expected. Sections which are reviewed early will be reconsidered during the final presentation and defense.

Although not an exhaustive listing, the student should be aware that the following are unacceptable aspects of a master's essay:

- a) an incomplete or inadequate literature review
- b) long quotes with little interpretation by the student
- c) improper citation of references
- d) use of first person
- e) awkward sentence structure
- f) inclusion of extraneous information
- g) lack of organization and poor readability (inadequate attention to paragraph structure, continuity, subheadings, etc.)
- h) informal language or jargon
- i) typos and misspellings
- j) improperly constructed graphic presentations

VII. Scheduling Master's Essay Activities

Completion of the master's essay will require careful planning by the student to avoid graduation delays. Adequate time must be scheduled especially for data analysis, narrative preparation and advisory committee review. Final defense and committee approval of the master's essay must occur at least three weeks prior to graduation. Only very minor adjustments to the essay should be anticipated following acceptance by the advisory committee.

Realistically, this completion schedule demands that without exception a fully developed, carefully edited essay must be in the possession of the advisory committee no later than one week prior to the scheduled defense. As noted above, the student will benefit by securing review and comments on developed sections prior to requesting final review and approval.

For the full-time student who seeks to fulfill the professional skills development component of the MPH curriculum by preparing a master's essay, the following timetable is mandatory:

A. No later than the 12th week of the first semester of study

Petition (**Form ME-01**) to MPH Academic Program Committee (MPH/APC) for permission to engage in the master's essay option, that clearly identifies proposed area of study.

B. No later than five weeks prior to end of the second semester of study

Extensive literature review, design of study protocol and preparation of a detailed written proposal (see section IV). Student should be registered for PUBH 587 (3 credit hours).

C. No later than the end of the second semester of study

Committee approval of proposal (**Form ME-02**), initial data collection and projected activities.

D. No later than three weeks prior to graduation

Completion of study, preparation of master's essay, defense before advisory committee. Student should be registered for PUBH 588 (3 credit hours).

E. No later than end of final exam week of semester of intended graduation

Final modifications to essay as stipulated by advisory committee. Completion of Acceptance Page (**Form ME-03**) with appropriate signatures.

Adopted: May 1988

Revised: July 2010; April 2014

Policy Statement by the MPH Academic Program Committee

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville	Policy: Master's Essay Option
Department of Public Health	Issued: 09/27/13
Master of Public Health Program	Revised:

A required 360-hour supervised field experience is integral to the MPH curriculum which is designed to prepare students for professional practice. In the practice setting, less experienced students are presented a variety of opportunities to apply public health theory, to improve and expand their skills, to enhance selected professional competencies, to function under project deadlines and to realize the benefits of having a mentor.

Faculty encourage those students with extensive work experience in the health arena to complete a field practice in a totally different work environment. Fulfilling a field experience in another work setting may expand the perspective of the more experienced student, provide helpful cross-training and contribute to more informed consideration of career possibilities.

For those with health-related work experience who possess a professional degree or have firm plans to pursue a doctoral degree, the MPH program allows these students to request approval for completing a professional skills development opportunity known as the master's essay option. Accordingly, the MPH program does not waive field practice, but provides for an alternate highly relevant learning experience in lieu of field practice. The master's essay option is restricted to those students receiving MPH Academic Program Committee (MPH/APC) approval.

Student Responsibilities:

1. Obtain and review *Guidelines for Master of Public Health Master's Essay*.
2. Submit Student Request Form to faculty advisor and schedule an individual conference to confirm eligibility.
3. Following agreement of the faculty advisor, prepare Summary Sheet for Master's Essay which is a petition to the MPH/APC. For full-time students, this decision should be made no later than the 12th week of the first semester of study to enable timely progress.
4. Request by email that the petition to secure MPH/APC approval be placed on the agenda.

Requirements for Approval:

1. Eligibility and defensible rationale for seeking approval to complete a research-oriented master's essay.
2. Completion of a three-credit hour research methods course.
3. Producing a scholarly work of high quality which is worthy of publication or other professional exhibit is the overall program expectation.
4. Institutional Review Board approval is required for projects involving human populations.
5. The three-person master's essay advisory committee must include one community health professional to provide linkage of academia to practice.
6. To ensure commitment, the student will not be permitted to switch to the field practice option, following the advisory committee's approval of the master's essay proposal.
7. A faculty advisor may not supervise more than two master's essay students per semester.

NAME _____ Student ID No. _____

**SUMMARY SHEET FOR MASTER'S ESSAY
- PETITION TO MPH/APC -**

- A. ADVISORY COMMITTEE: (List PH faculty persons and the outside adviser.)
- B. STUDENT CONTACT INFORMATION: (mailing address, telephone, and e-mail)
- C. PUBLIC HEALTH CONCENTRATION: (Please mark with X) ___CHE ___HPM ___VPH
- D. TITLE OF ESSAY: (Limit to 12 words)
- E. STARTING DATE REQUESTED:
Note: No research may be initiated until approval is granted by MPH/APC
- F. ESTIMATED COMPLETION DATE:
- G. FRAMEWORK: (see reverse side)
1. Purpose of the essay: (additional page may be attached if necessary)
 2. Methods/procedures: (Human Subjects Committee approval is required for projects involving human populations)
 3. How will the essay make a contribution to Public Health?
 4. Specify the refereed journal for manuscript submission
 5. Topic Category: (a-g) _____

APPROVAL BY MPH/APC _____ Date _____
(Signature of MPH/APC Chair)

ME-01

INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMPLETING FORM ME-01

Please type the information

1. **Purpose:** Briefly state, in non-technical language, the purpose of the essay, with special reference to your public health discipline.
2. **Methods/procedures:** Briefly state, in non-technical language, the research methods which you plan to use (e.g., descriptive study, quasi-experimental, qualitative, etc.)
3. **Contribution:** Briefly state the contributions that you anticipate your essay will make to a public health discipline.
4. **Publication:** Briefly describe any tentative plans you envision regarding the potential for publication in a refereed journal.
5. **Topic Category of Essay:**
 - (a) Epidemiological investigation
 - (b) Analytical essay on a public health policy
 - (c) Administrative case study including analysis and solution(s)
 - (d) Analysis and evaluation of an existing public health program
 - (e) Critical review of a major public health issue or problem
 - (f) Educational initiatives
 - (g) Other _____ (requires MPH/APC approval)

Acceptance Page for Approved Master's Essay

We have examined the final copy of this Master's Essay for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Health with a concentration of study in _____.

Chairperson Name and Credentials
Chairperson, Master's Essay Committee
Department of Public Health

Name of Committee Member and Title
College Affiliation
Department Affiliation

Name of Committee Member and Title
Organization Affiliation

Date

ME-03

Handwritten Responses Are Acceptable
RETURN COMPLETED FORM TO FACULTY ADVISOR

THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE
Department of Public Health
Student Request for Master's Essay Option

Part I

- 1. Name _____
- 2. Local Address _____
- 3. Telephone (H) _____ (cell) _____
- 4. E-mail address _____
- 5. It is my intent to request that the MPH/APC permit me to develop a master's essay. **Obtain Form ME-01.**
(Available for six (6) semester hours, PUBH 587 and 588)

Note: Candidates submitting a master's essay also must successfully complete a graduate level three (3) semester hours research methods course.

- 6. Number of graduate credits that will be earned prior to master's essay (minimum 15): _____

Part II - Master's Essay Information

Note: A petition to the MPH/APC must be prepared utilizing Summary Sheet (Form ME-01).

- 15. Topic Category of Essay:
 - ____ (a) Epidemiological investigation
 - ____ (b) Analytical essay on a public health policy
 - ____ (c) Administrative case study including analysis and solution(s)
 - ____ (d) Analysis and evaluation of an existing public health program
 - ____ (e) Critical review of a major public health issue or problem
 - ____ (f) Educational initiatives
 - ____ (g) Other _____

- 16. Title of Proposal

- 17. Evidence of work experience and background knowledge in the area of the proposed study. (Be specific)
 - a. Professional work experience _____

b. Background knowledge _____

18. Research course selected _____

19. Advisory Committee (Tentative Composition)

- 1) _____ Faculty Advisor
- 2) _____ Faculty Member
- 3) _____ Proposed Community Health Member

20. Target date for completed proposal to Advisory Committee for review: _____

ME-04

Revised: 4/25/14