

Project and Thesis Guidelines

Master of Public Health Program Kasiska School of Health Professions



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Table of Contents

General Information	3
Introduction	3
Project Procedures	5
Project Formats.....	5
Formation of the Project Committee.....	7
General Steps	8
Responsibilities of Involved Parties.....	9
Proposal and Final Document Structure	10
Thesis Procedures	12
Thesis Formats	12
Formation of the Thesis Committee	13
General Steps	14
Responsibilities of Involved Parties.....	16
Proposal and Thesis Structure.....	17

GENERAL INFORMATION

Introduction

The MPH Project/Thesis is intended to serve as the Capstone or culminating academic experience. The project/thesis should demonstrate the student's skills in a variety of areas including formal academic/technical writing, the research process, and the ability to apply Public Health concepts.

MPH students must complete 6 hours of project or thesis credits in order to meet graduation requirements. Although the goals of both a project and a thesis are similar, the processes, formats, and topics differ. The differences in the two types of capstones are briefly described below. More detailed descriptions of the capstones are provided in this document.

Project. Students who choose the project capstone will design an applied public health project that demonstrates their mastery of public health skills and concepts. The project proposal requires approval from the student's project advisor. The final project document is submitted to members of the project committee for final approval. The project capstone is appropriate for students who plan to work in public health practice settings and/or those whose project topics/formats are not in line with the traditional basic research required for the thesis capstone.

Thesis. Students who choose the thesis capstone will design original research to answer specific questions and to synthesize new information contributing to the understanding and solution of public health problems. Although students will develop their own research study, the thesis research proposal and final document require approval by all members of the thesis committee. The final thesis document will be publically available through their deposit in the ISU Electronic Theses and Dissertations repository. The thesis can be submitted in article form for publication in academic

journals. The thesis capstone is appropriate for students who intend to further their academic career by pursuing a doctoral degree, those who plan to pursue a career in a basic research setting, and/or those who want more experience in research methods.

Project Procedures

Project Formats

Capstone projects allow students to apply public health skills and concepts and further develop competencies essential to public health practice. Project topics and formats are varied and allow students the flexibility to investigate salient public health topics under the guidance of their project committee chair. Some examples of formats or designs for the project include:

Literature review- systematic literature review. The project would be an analysis of an important public health problem through a survey of current literature on the topic. Search strategy, including relevant search terms, should be discussed in the proposal stage. The project may include sections that clearly describe and assess a public health problem and its magnitude, evaluate its causes and determinants, and/or review prevention strategies and interventions.

Program implementation plan. The project would involve the development of a plan to implement a public health program. It would address critical issues such as management, fiscal, ethical and logistical issues.

Program plan. This project format would involve the development of a public health program plan. It would address a health issue/problem and goal, target population, program activities, and process and impact evaluation activities. Detailed examples of surveys, educational pamphlets, lesson plans, and other program components would be included in the appendices.

Program evaluation plan. The project would involve the development of an evaluation plan of an existing public health program including data collection instructions and protocols, and analytical guidelines.

Program evaluation. The project would involve the evaluations/monitoring of an existing public health program, such as process evaluation, monitoring of outputs and outcomes, impact assessment, and /or cost analysis and evaluation of organizing program.

Policy analysis. The project would involve analysis of the public health implications of a current or proposed policy. The project could include perspectives on economics and financing, need and demand, politics/ethics/law, or quality/effectiveness.

Research proposal. The project would simulate a grant proposal or research plan. The project would include a clear statement of research questions, the specific aims of the proposal, review of literature, study design, methods of analysis, innovation, implications and significance of the work. The research question would be one that is encountered in professional work such as the evaluation of a public health intervention.

Research report. The project could involve the collection, analysis, and/or interpretation of data to address a public health problem. The project could include sections on the research question, study design, data collection procedures, data analysis, interpretation, and significance of findings.

Meta analysis. The project could involve the systematic aggregation of data from published studies to report a meta-analysis of a public health intervention or epidemiologic relationship. The project would involve a systematic literature review to identify studies that match pre-specified criteria and data analysis.

Other capstone project formats or designs not included in the previous list must be discussed with the project advisor.

Formation of the Project Committee

The project committee consists of three faculty members. The project committee chair will be selected by the student under the guidance of the academic advisor. The project committee chair and the third member (Graduate Faculty Representative or GFR) must have GFR status. The project committee needs to be formalized when the student files the Final Program of Study. The project committee chair guides the student through the project proposal development. All members of the project committee approve the final project document and oversee the final oral defense of the capstone project.

1. Project committee chair

The capstone project is selected by the student under the guidance of the academic advisor from faculty members in the Kasiska School of Health Professions (KSHP)

2. Second project committee member

The second project committee member is selected by the student under the guidance of the project committee chair from faculty members in KSHP

3. Graduate faculty representative (GFR) member

The GFR is selected by the student under the guidance of the project committee chair from faculty members outside of KSHP. Alternatively, he/she can be appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School.

In special cases, a fourth committee member can act as a content consultant if requested by the student and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

General Steps

1. Topic approval:

MPH students must select a project topic no later than the beginning of the third semester of coursework. The student will complete the project topic approval form and submit the completed form to the project committee chair for approval.

2. Human subjects training:

All students must complete human subject training through the ISU Office of Research Integrity. The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is web-based training program that addresses research with human subjects.

3. Project proposal development:

After the project topic has been approved, the student is allowed to register for project credits. The project proposal will be developed under the guidance of the project committee chair and will be distributed to the second committee member for additional feedback. The project proposal must be approved by the chair before the project can begin.

4. Final project preparation:

If the proposed project requires involved human subjects, the student must submit an "Application to Involve Human Subjects in Research" or a "Certificate of Exemption Request" to the ISU Human Subjects Committee before data can be accessed and analyzed. Information about submission of proposals to the HSC can be found on their website (<https://www.isu.edu/research/research-support/research-outreach-and-compliance/human-subjects/>).

5. Final project document:

Project implementation and preparation of the final project document will be completed by the student under the guidance of the project committee chair.

6. Final project defense:

After the final project document is completed, the student will present it to the project committee for approval. The student will send the final project document to all project committee members at least two weeks before the project defense date, and will coordinate a meeting to present it orally. A 15-20 minute presentation is expected, followed by questions from the project committee. After this session, the committee will vote on whether the student passed the oral examination.

Responsibilities of Involved Parties

1. Project committee chair:

- Provides assistance and direction to the student during the project proposal development and final project preparation
- Ensures that the project proposal and final project conform to the guidelines of the Graduate School and the Division of Health Sciences
- Informs in writing, using the Oral Examination Notification form, the Dean of the Graduate School, the Department Chairperson, the committee members, and the student of the time and place of the oral defense of the project
- Conducts the final project defense meeting
- Informs the student of the results of the final project defense and any recommendations from the committee
- Informs the MPH Director of the results of the final project defense
- Submits a change of grade form to the Graduate School to remove incomplete status (IP) of project credits and to document satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U) completion of project.

2. Second project committee member:

- Participates in the development of the project and provide feedback as requested, and is expected to attend all meetings of the total project committee
- Is a voting member of the committee

3. Graduate faculty representative (GFR):

- Is a voting member of the project committee
- Collects the paperwork for final project defense the day before and immediately after delivers paperwork in person to the Graduate School
- Completes report per GFR policy for the Graduate School

4. Fourth committee member (if applicable):

- Participates in the development and conduct of the project as requested
- Attends all meetings of the project committee
- Is a voting member of the project committee

5. Student:

- Develops the project proposal and final project document under the guidance of the project committee chair
- Coordinates with project committee members date, time and place of final project defense meetings
- Distributes final project document to all committee members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting

Proposal and Final Document Structure

Project proposal. The project proposal should be written in the format and bibliographic style of the current edition of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual and include references. Below are specific sections of the project proposal and suggested page lengths:

1. Purpose
 - a. State the reason for conducting the project. (1/2 page)
2. Statement of the Public Health Issue or Problem
 - a. Provide a clear description of the issue or problem that you will be addressing. Your description should include who is affected by the issue/problem, what is the scope or size of the issue/problem, etc. Include

evidence to support the importance of addressing the issue/problem. (3-4 pages)

3. Objectives

- a. State the objectives of your project. (1/2 page)

4. Methods/Activities

- a. Describe the activities of your proposed project (2-3 pages). The information contained in this section will differ based on the format and type of project that you have chosen. In general, this section will cover how you will carry out the project activities.
 - i. Examples of information for different project formats:
 1. Literature review-systematic literature review: Include the research question, search terms, search engines or databases to be accessed, inclusion/exclusion criteria, and assessment criteria
 2. Program evaluation plan: Include a description of the program, evaluation questions, how new data collection tools will be developed or existing data collection tools will be identified, and size and scope of the proposed evaluation plan.

5. Relevance to Your Educational or Career Goals in Public Health

- a. State how the implementing the proposed project will contribute to your educational or career goals in public health. (1 page)

Final project document. The project document should be written in the format and bibliographic style of the current edition of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual. The document should be approximately 20-30 double-spaced pages of text, not including references, tables, and figures.

THESIS PROCEDURES

Thesis Formats

A thesis involves original research that is designed to answer specific questions and to synthesize new information contributing to the understanding and solution of public health problems. The overarching principle used to determine if a thesis topic is suitable is whether an unanswered question has been identified through a thorough review of the public health literature. In addition, the topic must be manageable in scope and size. Students may use qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approached for their research design. The most common formats or designs for the thesis include:

Secondary data analysis. Typically a thesis utilizing quantitative methods is in the form of secondary data analysis, using an existing data set. Note that IRB approval may need to be obtained for any project that uses data gathered from human subjects. Even in cases where the data is de-identified, the thesis student must submit a “Certificate of Exemption Request” to the ISU Human Subjects Committee before data can be accessed and analyzed.

Primary data analysis. The thesis can also involve collection of data. Data collection can be in the context of an ongoing study or the student can initiate a new study involving primary data collection. All theses that use primary data collection will require approval from the ISU Human Subjects Committee. An “Application to Involve Human Subjects in Research” must be submitted to and approved by the ISU Human Subjects Committee” before data can be collected.

Formation of The Thesis Committee

The thesis committee consists of three faculty members. The thesis committee chair will be selected by the student under the guidance of the academic advisor. The thesis committee chair and the third member (Graduate Faculty Representative or GFR) must have GFR status. The thesis committee needs to be formalized when the student files the Final Program of Study. The thesis committee guides and evaluates the student through the thesis proposal development and defense, and final thesis preparation and defense

1. Thesis committee chair

The thesis committee chair is selected by the student under the guidance of the academic advisor from faculty members in the Kasiska School of Health Professions (KSHP)

2. Second thesis committee member

The second thesis committee member is selected by the student under the guidance of the thesis committee chair from faculty members in KSHP

3. Graduate faculty representative (GFR) member

The GFR is selected by the student under the guidance of the thesis committee chair from faculty members outside of KSHP. Alternatively, he/she can be appointed by the Dean of the Graduate School.

In special cases, a fourth committee member can act as a content consultant if requested by the student and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

General Steps

1. Topic approval:

MPH students must select a thesis topic no later than the beginning of the third semester of coursework. The student will complete the thesis topic approval form and submit the completed form to the thesis committee chair for approval.

2. Human subjects training:

All students must complete human subject training through the ISU Office of Research Integrity. The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) is web-based training program that addresses research with human subjects.

3. Thesis proposal development:

After the thesis topic has been approved, the student is allowed to register for thesis credits. The thesis proposal will be developed under the guidance of the thesis committee chair. The thesis committee chair will approve all thesis documents prior to distribution to other committee members.

4. Thesis proposal defense:

Once the thesis proposal is completed, the student will present the proposal to the thesis committee for approval. Once the proposal has been approved by the chair, the student will send the thesis proposal to all thesis committee members at least two weeks before the thesis proposal defense date and will coordinate a meeting for an oral presentation. A 15-20 minute presentation is expected, followed by questions from the thesis committee. After this session, the committee will vote to reach one of the following decisions (majority is needed):

- Accept the thesis proposal as is
- Accept the thesis proposal with modifications without another meeting
- Accept the thesis proposal with modifications with another meeting

- Reject the thesis proposal with further direction clarified

5. Final thesis preparation:

After approval of the thesis proposal by the thesis committee, and before any data collection occurs, the student should submit the thesis proposal to the Human Subjects Committee (HSC) at Idaho State University for approval. Information about submission of proposals to the HSC can be found on their website (<http://isuresearch.org/institutional-review-board-irb-also-known-as-human-subjects-committee/>).

Data collection and manuscript preparation should be completed by the student under the guidance of the thesis committee.

6. Final thesis defense:

After the thesis manuscript is completed, the student will present the final thesis to the thesis committee for approval. The student will send the final thesis manuscript to all thesis committee members at least two weeks before the thesis defense date, and will coordinate a meeting to present it orally. A 15-20 minute presentation is expected, followed by questions from the thesis committee. After this session, the committee will vote to reach one of the following decisions (majority is needed):

- Accept the final thesis as is
- Accept the final thesis with modifications without another meeting
- Accept the final thesis with modifications with another meeting
- Reject the final thesis with further direction clarified

Responsibilities of Involved Parties

1. Thesis committee chair:

- Provides assistance and direction to the student during the thesis proposal development and final thesis preparation
- Ensures that the thesis proposal and final thesis conform to the guidelines of the Graduate School and the Division of Health Sciences
- Brings paperwork for approval to thesis proposal presentation
- Conducts the thesis proposal defense and any subsequent committee meetings
- Informs in writing, using the Oral Examination Notification form, the Dean of the Graduate School, the Department Chairperson, the committee members, and the student of the time and place of the oral defense of the thesis
- Conducts the final thesis defense meeting
- Informs the student of the results of the final thesis defense and any recommendations from the committee
- Informs the MPH Director of the results of the final thesis defense
- Coordinates with other members of the committee in relation to recommended changes in the final thesis defense meeting
- Submits a change of grade form to the Graduate School to remove incomplete status (IP) of thesis credits and to document satisfactory (S) or unsatisfactory (U) completion of thesis.

2. Second thesis committee member:

- Actively participates in the development of the thesis, and is expected to attend all meetings of the total thesis committee
- Is a voting member of the committee

3. Graduate faculty representative (GFR):

- Actively participate in the development of the thesis, and is expected to attend all meetings of the total thesis committee.
- Is a voting member of the thesis committee

- Collects the paperwork for final thesis defense the day before and immediately after delivers paperwork in person to the Graduate School
- Completes report per GFR policy for the Graduate School

4. Fourth committee member (if applicable):

- Participates in the development and conduct of the thesis
- Attends all meetings of the thesis committee
- Is a voting member of the thesis committee

5. Student:

- Develops the thesis proposal and final thesis manuscript under the guidance of the thesis committee
- Coordinates with thesis committee members date, time and place of proposal defense and final thesis defense meetings
- Distributes thesis proposal and final thesis manuscripts to all committee members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled meeting

Proposal and Thesis Structure

1. Format:

The proposal and thesis should be written in the format and bibliographic style of the current edition of the American Psychological Association Publication Manual, following the Graduate School Instructions for Preparing Thesis and Dissertations for Advanced Degrees (<http://www.isu.edu/graduate/pdf/Thesis-Dissertation-Instructions.pdf>).

The text of the thesis should have the following sections: Chapter I: Introduction, Chapter II: Literature Review, Chapter III: Methods, Chapter IV: Results, and Chapter V: Discussion. If approved by the thesis committee chair, the Results and Discussion sections can be replaced for a research article in a publishable format according to the journal appropriate for the topic. The thesis proposal should include Chapters I, II, and III.

2. Thesis Page Order Model (Meeting Graduate School requirements)

The thesis should be arranged according to the approved style manual. Samples of the copy authorization, title, and approval pages are found in the appendix of this document.

1. Photocopy and Use Authorization
2. Title page
3. Copyright page (if appropriate)
4. Committee Approval page
5. Human Subjects Committee Approval page (if appropriate)
6. Dedication (if appropriate)
7. Acknowledgment page/s (if appropriate)
8. Table of Contents
9. List of Illustrations (if appropriate)
10. List of Figures (if appropriate)
11. List of Tables (if appropriate)
12. List of Abbreviations (if appropriate)
13. Glossary (if appropriate)
14. Abstract
15. Text of the thesis
 - Chapter I: Introduction

Chapter II: Literature Review

Chapter III: Methods

Chapter IV: Results

Chapter V: Discussion

* Publishable article in place of chapters IV-V, if approved by the thesis committee chair

16. References

17. Appendixes