

**Guidelines for the Culminating Project
Master of Public Health Program**

2008-2009

**Division of
Health Services Management and Policy**

**The Ohio State University
College of Public Health**

INTEGRATIVE WRITING PROJECT IN HEALTH SERVICES MANAGEMENT AND POLICY

The culminating experience requirement for the MPH specialization in Health Services Management and Policy is an integrative writing project, which is usually in the form of an applied research project, policy analysis, or comprehensive case analysis. It is intended to give the student an opportunity for intensive study of a topic in close partnership with a faculty adviser and at least one other faculty reader.

Students also have the option to complete a traditional research-based master's thesis as the integrative writing project. Although this option is less frequently chosen, those students who expect to pursue an academic doctorate are encouraged to consider a thesis, and there are of course some students who are simply interested in a topic that is best approached in the thesis format. The remainder of this document is addressed to the non-thesis option. Students interested in a thesis should discuss this with their advisers no later than the beginning of their third quarter of enrollment, to be sure they understand the requirements and time line.

Objectives

Although the topical content and style of the integrative writing projects vary widely, each should have some consistent objectives. The core objectives are that the student should:

1. Improve critical reading skills and the ability to analyze and discuss the literature of health services management and policy.
2. Study a topic in depth, integrating appropriate material from the curriculum to inform the analysis.
3. Demonstrate ability to use appropriate methods of analysis correctly.
4. Demonstrate creativity in seeking information and formulating positions on issues.
5. Develop abilities in expository writing and persuasion, using a variety of evidence to support the analysis or argument.

The Basics

Each faculty adviser will establish specific expectations with the student, including the frequency and timing of meetings, etc. These characteristics, however, are uniform:

1. You should enroll in HSMP 693 in your adviser's section. A maximum of four hours of credit for the culminating experience can be applied to the 60 credits required for the MPH. You may enroll for all four hours in a single quarter, or may spread the effort over two quarters. It is possible to enroll for more than four hours of credit, but no more than four hours may be applied toward the sixty required for the MPH degree.
2. The integrative writing project serves as your Master's Examination. Your adviser and one other faculty member assigned for that purpose will evaluate your project. The second reader is primarily to provide an objective second opinion on the quality of the effort. A pass/fail result on the paper will be reported to the Graduate School to determine your eligibility to graduate.

3. If you wish to undertake a project that lies outside your current academic adviser's areas of interest or competence, you may approach another HSMP faculty member and request a change of adviser assignment. However, faculty members are not obligated to advise students on projects that they believe are infeasible or poorly conceived.
4. **The paper is due to your adviser and second reader in final form by Wednesday of the eighth week of classes in the quarter in which you expect to graduate (one week before the result must be reported to the Graduate School).** This is a firm deadline; papers received after that date may delay graduation. Your adviser may establish additional due dates for outlines, drafts, or other progress markers.
5. There is not an oral portion of the non-thesis Master's Examination. However, your adviser may require various sorts of presentation and discussion, and you are encouraged to seek outlets to disseminate your work.
6. The Graduate School establishes various deadlines for graduating students. These are always published in the Master Schedule of Classes each quarter, and can also be obtained online or from the Office of Academic Programs. **It is your responsibility to know and observe these deadlines!**

Project Types

There are three typical forms of the integrated writing project. These are described below, and your adviser will discuss specific expectations with you.

- **Applied research project**

An applied research project ordinarily includes data analysis of some sort in order to permit hypothesis testing or evaluation. The expectations of scale and completeness are less than for a thesis, perhaps at the level that one might use for a "pilot study." However, you are expected to use appropriate methods and provide interpretation suitable for the approach taken. A typical applied research project might be an economic evaluation (cost-effectiveness, etc.) of limited scope.

- **Policy analysis**

This sort of project concentrates on critical review of an actual or proposed policy intervention (which may include a proposal of the student's own design). The methods of inquiry may include traditional data analysis, but should also demonstrate an ability to undertake qualitative analysis. This will involve critical reading, and may include key informant interviews and other sources. A typical policy analysis might be a review of proposed legislation or administrative rule.

- **Comprehensive case study**

The student may write an original case study of a scope to permit integrative use of skills gained in the curriculum. The adviser will establish the format and expectations, particularly the concern for scope and opportunity for integration. A typical comprehensive case study would require analyzing a real situation, identifying issues, and applying appropriate methods to arrive at recommendations. A typical case study might be a critical review of a specific public health intervention decision.

Length and Style of the Paper

The most frequently asked question is, “How long does the paper have to be?” The paper should be a significant effort, but specific expectations concerning the paper may differ because of topic, analytic approach, etc. In the past, papers have ranged as high as 65 pages, which was clearly excessive. Most topics can be covered quite adequately in approximately 20 pages. Many students seem to believe that length and quality are perfect substitutes in grading (if you can’t be good, at least be long-winded). That is not the case; the faculty would greatly prefer a carefully argued concise paper that makes good use of relevant evidence instead of a rambling paper that has no apparent point, but lots of uncritically assembled sources.

It is expected that the paper conform to the standard norms for crediting and citing sources. Sloppiness in keeping track of your sources and how you used them does not excuse any resulting appearance of plagiarism.

The most common faculty criticisms of the papers over the last few years have included these:

- The paper is unnecessarily long, and seems to have been written with length as the objective.
- The content is either exclusively or excessively descriptive, with little evidence of analysis.
- The topic is too broad or ill-defined; there is no clear line of argument, making it seem as though the paper stops simply when the writer gets tired.
- Sources are used uncritically, citing clearly biased or inadequate sources without evaluation.
- The paper seems too much like a rehash of a term paper for a course.

A Note on Using the Internet

Most students make use of sources discovered by Web search strategies. It is particularly important that students recognize three points in making use of such sources: First, the “unfiltered” character of much of this information means that the sources must be evaluated extremely carefully. Second, it is unlikely that any topic can be adequately researched using Internet resources alone, though the Web may be very helpful in locating data, searching for relevant literature, etc. Third, simply listing an Internet address is not an adequate citation. Any information must be identified so that it is unambiguously clear who produced it and what it is. It should be obvious that the technical possibility of “cutting and pasting” from the Internet does not lessen the expectation of complete citation of sources and avoidance of plagiarism.

Guidelines concerning appropriate citation are available both in print and at several Internet sites. A generally authoritative source is:

Janice R. Walker and Todd Taylor, *The Columbia Guide to Online Style*, 2nd ed.
(Columbia University Press, 2006).

MANUSCRIPT REQUIREMENTS

1. The manuscript must be typed on white paper (8.5 x 11 inches), one side of the page only, double spaced, with a margin of at least one inch on each side, and stapled or bound very simply. Elaborate binding or presentation is not appropriate.
2. The manuscript must be in a readable 11 or 12-point font; however, tables and footnotes may be in 10-point font if necessary.
3. Page numbers should be inserted on each page except the title page.
4. All figures and tables must be numbered, and all appendices must be labeled alphabetically.
5. The title page should include:
 - Title of the project
 - Student's name and prior degrees
 - Submitted in Partial Completion of Requirements for the Master of Public Health Degree at The Ohio State University
 - Committee members' names
 - Month and year of completion
6. The sections of the manuscript will depend upon the nature of the project. However, every project should include a title page, abstract or executive summary, table of contents, and references. The remainder of the work will vary according to the project requirements.
7. Citation of references should follow a standard format, such as that used for biomedical journals or the American Psychological Association publications. Staff of the Prior Health Sciences Library can help if you have questions about citation styles.
8. After it has been approved by your committee, an electronic copy of your final completed manuscript must be provided to the Office of Academic Programs.

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS SUMMARY

IN ORDER TO GRADUATE, YOU MUST:

- 1) Complete an *Application to Graduate* form. Fill out your personal information and have it signed by your academic adviser. Return the form to the Office of Academic Programs for the graduate studies chair's signature. This form must be filed with the Graduate School no later than the second Friday of the quarter you intend to graduate, and is valid for that quarter only. Submitting this application indicates that you expect to complete all degree requirements that quarter. If you do not, you will need to complete a new *Application to Graduate*.
- 2) Register for a minimum of 3 graduate credit hours in the quarter in which you intend to graduate. This may include individual studies credit for the culminating project.
- 3) Complete your culminating project under HSMP 693. A maximum of 4 hours of culminating project credit may be counted toward the 60 hours required for the MPH. The Office of Academic Programs can provide you with the appropriate HSMP 693 call number for your adviser.

A *Master's Examination* form will automatically be provided to your project adviser after your *Application to Graduate* form has been filed with the Graduate School. The *Master's Examination* for the MPH is your integrative writing project. In response to any direction from your committee, you must revise your document until the committee finds it satisfactory, making sure that the Graduate School deadlines are met. Upon successful completion of your project, your committee will sign your form. Take the signed form to the Office of Academic Programs, M006 Starling Loving Hall, where the staff will complete the processing for you.

- 4) Meet the requirements noted in the *Graduate School Handbook* :

Graduation, Master's Students VI.5

... the student:

1. must have earned a cumulative point-hour ratio of at least 3.0 for all graduate credit hours taken at this university
2. must have fulfilled all additional requirements published by the Graduate Studies Committee
3. must have final grades for all courses received in the University Registrar's Office by the deadline published in the Master Schedule of Classes
4. must have fulfilled all other requirements by the deadlines established by the Graduate School

....

End of Quarter A student who does not meet published graduation deadlines but who does complete all degree requirements by the last business day prior to the first day of classes for the following quarter may graduate the following quarter without registering or paying fees.

The Graduate School graduation deadlines for each quarter are available from the Graduate School (www.gradsch.ohio-state.edu).

Plan ahead and give yourself plenty of time, and make sure you are aware of all the deadlines.

These are not negotiable!