

**Guidelines for the Integrative Writing Project
MHA/MD Program**

2013-2014

**Division of
Health Services Management and Policy**

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

THE INTEGRATIVE WRITING PROJECT

The culminating requirement for the MHA/MD 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 not frequently chosen, 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 second semester of MHA 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. The integrative writing project serves as your Master's Examination, as required by the Graduate School. 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.
2. If you wish to undertake a project that lies outside your current academic adviser's areas of interest or competence, you may approach another 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.
3. MHA/MD students complete the integrative writing project during the Med IV year. The work may be done by devoting a concentrated period to the project, possibly using one of the Med IV elective rotations for that purpose, or may be spread over a longer period. This should be discussed and planned carefully with the adviser to be sure the requirements and expectations are fully understood and agreed upon.
4. Regardless of the time frame over which the work is completed, in order to receive a graduate

degree you must be enrolled for a minimum of three graduate credit hours during the semester in which you graduate. You should enroll in PUBHLTH 7193 in your adviser's section. A maximum of 3 hours of credit for the integrative writing project can be applied to the 60 credits required for the MHA. .

5. **The paper is due to your adviser in final form by Wednesday of the thirteenth week of classes in the semester 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.
6. 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.

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 a proposed or actual policy intervention (including 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 management or policy 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. Recent 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. 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).