

**Guidelines for
Master of Public Health
Master's Essay**

**Public Health Program
The University of Tennessee
1914 Andy Holt Avenue
Knoxville, Tennessee 37996-2710
(865) 974-6674**

**ELIGIBILITY AND INFORMATION
REGARDING
FIELD PRACTICE/MASTER'S ESSAY**

Student Eligibility for Participation

1. Must have completed a minimum of 15 semester hours of graduate course work for master's essay option or a minimum of 24 semester hours for field practice option.
2. Must have earned an overall grade point average of 3.0 or higher.

Initiating Actions to be taken by student no later than one semester prior to desired placement (for master's essay, no later than twelfth week of the first semester of study)

1. Obtain and review carefully, *Guidelines for Master of Public Health Field Practice/Master's Essay*"
2. Complete and submit to advisor:
 - a) Student Request for Field Practice or Master's Essay" (PH-11) form
 - b) An up-to-date résumé (see Recommended Format, PH-10)
3. Schedule an individual conference with advisor
4. Following discussion with advisor, prepare Summary Sheet for master's essay (ME-01), if applicable

Constraints

1. The master's essay option is restricted to those students receiving Public Health Academic Program Committee (PHAPC) approval of petition.
2. A student must not initiate contact with potential field organizations (particularly in the Knoxville area) without express permission of the faculty advisor.
3. If field practice is desired out of state, additional time for negotiation will be necessary.
4. A student may not take more than one 3 credit hour course during field practice scheduled full-time for the summer months unless a petition is addressed to the PHAPC, which will rule on the request by majority vote.

MPH Faculty

Recommended Format for Résumé

Name

local mailing address

local phone #s
email address

Education (chronological listing with undergraduate degree first)

University, degree, major, minor, date

(For MPH, indicate anticipated graduation date: _____ and the following descriptor:

An accredited Graduate Public Health Program

Employment¹ (chronological listing most recent first)

Dates/position title/organization/location

- responsibilities

Health-Related Volunteer Experience² (chronological listing most recent first)

Date/position title/organization, agency, or community/location

- responsibilities

Special or Technical Skills

- specialized training
- computer/software proficiencies
- languages
- programming

Certifications/Licensure²

Professional Affiliations

- list professional organizations and dates
- cite involvement

Honors²

- cite awards, honor societies, fellowships, graduation with honors, special recognition

Invited Presentations²

Publications²

International Experience²

Notes:¹Do not include non-health related employment (e.g., food server, clerk) unless the position included supervision of others or other professional-level duties.

²Omit heading, unless you have information to report in these sections.

PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM

GUIDELINES FOR THE 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) 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 (PH 587-88) and have the opportunity for an additional three (3) credit hours (PH 589) if completing an approved extended placement. Students selecting the master's essay option earn six (6) hours of credit (PH 587-88). In addition, students choosing 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.

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 are 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 _____

(II. TOPIC SELECTION FOR THE MASTER'S ESSAY, continued)

A student may develop an idea for a topic in one of several ways. Some 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 secure advanced written approval by the Public Health Academic Program Committee (PHAPC). The petition to the PHAPC should be prepared utilizing the Summary Sheet for Master's Essay (Form ME-01). A listing of students approved for the essay option will be provided by the PHAPC prior to the end of each semester. All decisions by the PHAPC 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 teaching and advising loads of the faculty. 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 PHAPC 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 may include a health professional from

(IV. DEVELOPING THE ESSAY PROPOSAL, continued)

outside the department as an additional 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 in the proposal, and resubmit the proposal for final approval. An approval form (ME-16) must be signed by all members of the advisory committee. A copy of this form and of 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. FORMAT

The format and style selected for the master's essay must be approved by the 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

(V. FORMAT, continued)

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

(VI. ESSAY PREPARATION AND COMMITTEE REVIEW, continued)

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) long quotes with little interpretation by the student
- b) informal language or jargon
- c) use of first person
- d) awkward sentence structure
- e) inclusion of extraneous information
- f) lack of organization and poor readability (inadequate attention to paragraph structure, continuity, subheadings, etc.)
- g) improper citation of references
- h) an incomplete or inadequate literature review
- 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, typing/duplicating 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 in a previous guidelines section, 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:

(VII. SCHEDULING MASTER'S ESSAY ACTIVITIES, continued)

A. NO LATER THAN THE TWELFTH WEEK OF THE FIRST SEMESTER OF STUDY

Petition (**Form ME-01**) to Public Health Academic Program Committee (PHAPC) for permission to engage in the master's essay option, which will clearly identify proposed area of study. (The PHAPC will release a listing of students approved for the option by the end of each semester).

B. NO LATER THAN FIVE WEEKS PRIOR TO END OF THE SECOND SEMESTER

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

C. NO LATER THAN THE END OF THE SECOND SEMESTER OF STUDY

Committee approval of proposal (**Form ME-02**) and initial data collection/project 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 PH 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 by PHAPC

May, 1988

Latest revision: April, 2008

NAME _____

Student ID No. _____

**SUMMARY SHEET FOR MASTER'S ESSAY
- PETITION TO PHAPC -**

- A. ADVISORY COMMITTEE: (List PH faculty persons and the outside adviser.)
- B. STUDENT CONTACT INFORMATION: (mailing address, telephone, and e-mail if available)
- C. PUBLIC HEALTH CONCENTRATION: (Please mark with an X) ___CHE ___HPA ___VPH
- D. TITLE OF ESSAY: (Limit to 12 words)
- E. STARTING DATE REQUESTED:
***Note: No research may be initiated until approval is granted by PHAPC**
- 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 where the essay will be submitted
 5. Topic Category: (a-g) _____

APPROVAL BY PHAPC _____
(Signature of PHAPC Chair)

Date _____

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 what contributions 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 _____

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 Instructional Technology, Health, and Cultural Studies

Name of Committee Member and Title
College Affiliation
Department Affiliation

Name of Committee Member and Title
Organization Affiliation

Date

ME-03
4/2008