

# SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH **W**

## MPH Thesis Guidelines

2022-2023

### THE THESIS EXPERIENCE

[Overview](#)

[Thesis goals](#)

[Thesis advising and supervision](#)

[What's the difference between a thesis and a capstone?](#)

[What's the difference between the practicum and a thesis?](#)

[Examples of thesis deliverables](#)

### MPH THESIS PARAMETERS

[Academic credits and time commitment](#)

[Grading the thesis](#)

[Council on Education for Public Health \(CEPH\) Competencies](#)

[Project deliverable criteria](#)

[Suggested Timeline](#)

### RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY ADVISORS

[Students](#)

[Committee Chair Responsibilities](#)

[Committee Member Responsibilities](#)

## A. THE THESIS EXPERIENCE

### **Overview**

The Graduate School defines a master's thesis as "evidence of the graduate student's ability to carry out independent investigation and to present the results in a clear and systematic form." The thesis meets the Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) requirement of the MPH degree.

### **Thesis goals**

The masters thesis should be of publishable quality, a benefit to the student author and faculty members on the committee, as well as to the organization and/or community where the data came from.

### **Thesis advising and supervision**

While conducting the thesis, students work closely with a thesis committee, usually two faculty members; although, the Graduate School allows up to four members.

1. The thesis chair and at least one-half of the total membership must be members of the UW graduate faculty. Graduate faculty status is a university-wide designation; see the Graduate Faculty Locator.
2. The thesis chair must have an appointment in the School of Public Health (SPH) and/or the department in which the student's program is housed.
3. If a committee has more than two members, the additional members may be based at institutions or organizations from outside the UW. However, non-UW committee members must have their CVs approved by and filed with the department in order to be officially members of the thesis committee.

### **What's the difference between a thesis and a capstone?**

A thesis is a research effort conducted explicitly for the purpose of creating new knowledge and contributing to the public health literature. A capstone project is a scholarly effort of high quality that demonstrates students' ability to produce independent professional-quality work for a public health practice audience. Both the capstone and thesis count as the *Integrated Learning Experience* or 'ILE' part of a student's requirements from the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

### **What's the difference between the practicum and a thesis?**

The practicum gives MPH students the opportunity to integrate and apply classroom learning with professional experience. It allows them to observe and learn from practicing professionals and to engage with real-world public health challenges, concurrently with their academic experience. It counts as the student's *Applied Practice Experiences (APE)*, which is a requirement for graduation. The thesis may be connected to the practicum, for example conducted using data from the same partner organization. However, the thesis should result in

a product distinct from the practicum that is **substantially greater in scope** since the thesis requires more credits and time.

### ***Examples of thesis deliverables***

Some examples of thesis deliverables are listed below. It is the student's job to review any criteria or additional guidance provided by their department or program.

- Descriptive study
- Analytic study
- Program evaluation
- Policy analysis
- Case study
- Experiment

## **B. MPH THESIS PARAMETERS**

### ***Academic credits and time commitment***

The MPH program requires a total of 9 thesis credits. All thesis credits may be taken in one quarter, but are usually distributed over two or more quarters.

### ***Grading the thesis***

The chair assigns a grade of N for each quarter until the thesis has been completed and approved by the committee. (N is a grade that indicates that work is in progress, and it is acceptable for purposes of continuing student financial aid. An "I" for incomplete should typically NOT be given.)

The Chair assigns a final grade for the thesis; previous N grades will convert to this final grade. The final grade may be either Credit or a decimal grade. A thesis must meet the standard for a grade of 2.7 or higher before it can be accepted by the committee.

### ***Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) Requirements***

Students are required to identify competencies they will learn and be assessed on as part of the Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) (this is section D7 under the CEPH criteria). Students should work together with their faculty committee members to identify appropriate competencies in a process similar to that of the practicum. The School of Public Health requires that students select a minimum of two competencies for their capstone project, and that at least one of these competencies should be unique to their department or program. CEPH foundational competencies can be found [here](#) on pages 17-19 (section D2). Competencies need to be tracked individually. Once competencies are chosen, students will create their thesis project and enter their competencies into an online tracking form. The ILE project tracking form is currently integrated with the practicum dropbox and management system, <https://practicum.sphcm.washington.edu>. The protocol for tracking can be found [here](#). Additionally, part of CEPH compliance requires schools to ensure thorough documentation management. This means that each student's thesis project materials need to be saved in an

internal, secure location. In years when a self-study is due, schools must submit a random mix of student work examples showing how this criteria is met.

### ***UW Records Retention***

The University of Washington guidance on records retention is for schools to retain these types of records in their system for six years after the degree has been awarded. This is longer than the CEPH requirement so we will use this timeframe as the SPH requirement for retaining this type of record.

### ***Project deliverable criteria***

Standard thesis format includes the following sections: Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Appendixes (if appropriate). These are the typical sections of an academic journal publication, although the organization of the student work may vary depending on the topic and the preferences of the student and committee. Below are suggested guidelines for each section that can serve as a starting place for a student to discuss with their committee members.

- ❑ Introduction: Introduces the problem, research question or questions, previous research on the problem, and the conceptual approach used in this study.
  - ❑ Specification of the problem; significance, magnitude, and importance of the problem
  - ❑ Specific research questions or hypotheses addressed by the study
  - ❑ Literature review
  - ❑ Conceptual model
- ❑ Methods: Describes in detail the research methods used in the study.
  - ❑ Study setting
  - ❑ Study participants i) Source ii) Sampling method/recruitment iii) Criteria for eligibility/exclusion of cases
  - ❑ Description of intervention (if any)
  - ❑ Data collection i) Source (e.g., questionnaire, interview, record review, vital records) ii) Protocol for typical subject iii) Steps taken to assess and assure data quality
  - ❑ Analysis (as applicable) i) Hypothesis testing/generation ii) Definition of key analysis variables iii) Sample size/power considerations iv) Statistical methods
- ❑ Results: Provides a clear, systematic presentation of results, linked back to the research questions and conceptual model. It does not include interpretation or discussion of results.
  - ❑ Characteristics of the study sample, including the number of subjects and the response rate.
  - ❑ Table(s) or figure(s) addressing each research question. Tables and figures usually progress from univariate, to bivariate, to multivariate analyses. Text highlights (but does not duplicate) results shown in tables and figures.

- ❑ Discussion: Provides the opportunity to discuss the findings, compare them with previous research, and consider the implications of the findings.
  - ❑ Study strengths and limitations
  - ❑ How key findings compare or contrast with previous work
  - ❑ Implications of findings i) For the theory or conceptual model described in the Introduction. ii) For public health practitioners or clinicians
- ❑ Appendixes: Contain detailed materials related to the thesis, such as cover letters to respondents, instructions for computing a scale score from the raw data, documentation of the mathematical equations used in the data analysis, and so forth.

### ***Suggested Timeline***

We encourage first-year students to read these thesis guidelines closely early in their program and ask questions about the thesis to their program director or first-year faculty advisor. Theses should begin after completion of the first-year curriculum.

Students should aim to complete portions of work during the quarters listed below. Please check department and program guidelines for specific dates. The faculty advisor is encouraged to use these milestones to check the progress of the project each quarter.

### **SUMMER OR FALL QUARTER**

#### *Start and Organize Your Study*

- Step 1: Find a Topic
- Step 2: Form a Thesis Committee
- Step 3: Obtain Committee Approval of Thesis Proposal
- Step 4: Obtain Human Subjects Approval (if needed)
- Step 5: Establish a Realistic Timeline

### **WINTER QUARTER**

*Conduct Your Study* - complete research and begin writing by the Spring quarter of their second year

### **SPRING QUARTER**

*Complete Your Thesis* - submit their finished thesis to the UW Graduate School by the end of their last quarter

## **C. RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS AND FACULTY ADVISORS**

### ***Students***

- ❑ Identify and confirm a committee chair. Then inform your first-year faculty advisor that you have identified a chair; the role of faculty advising moves from the faculty advisor to the thesis chair at this point.
- ❑ Identify and confirm committee members. Consult with the thesis chair to identify

faculty to serve on the committee who have relevant, complementary expertise regarding the thesis project.

- ❑ Complete Use of Human and Animal Subjects for UW Graduate Student Theses and Dissertations form when the thesis committee finalized and submit to the staff advisor.
- ❑ Establish a communication plan and timeline with the thesis committee. Specifically determine when committee members will be expected to review and provide feedback on thesis drafts.
- ❑ Write a thesis proposal and identify the competencies to be gained. The thesis proposal and identified competencies should be complete and approved by the thesis committee before proceeding with data collection or analysis. The completed proposal must be sent to all members of the committee and the student's staff advisor.
- ❑ Determine if human subjects application needs to be filed with the UW in consultation with the thesis committee. When in doubt contact the Human Subjects office at [hsdinfo@uw.edu](mailto:hsdinfo@uw.edu) or 206.543.0098. NOTE: human subjects applications may need to be filed with other entities as well depending on the country and organization you will be working with.
- ❑ Register for a minimum of 9 thesis credits, using the faculty code of the thesis chair.
- ❑ Conduct thesis work with the highest ethical standards.
- ❑ Write up a thesis abiding by the SPH Academic Integrity Policy.
- ❑ Submit final draft of thesis to committee members at least 6 weeks before the intended graduation date. If the full draft has not been received by that time, the student should expect to graduate the following quarter.
- ❑ Present thesis orally to departmental students, faculty, and staff; staff to organize (optional, following program specific requirements).
- ❑ Follow the Graduate School's Final Submission Guidelines.

### ***Committee Chair Responsibilities***

- ❑ Guide the student's expectations about the scope of the project as it relates to the time constraints of their academic program.
- ❑ Assess the student's ability to carry out all parts of the proposed thesis project, if gaps are identified, advise the student on how to gain the skills necessary for completion of the project.
- ❑ Assist the student in identifying appropriate committee members. Ensure all committee members have read and approved the thesis proposal (i.e. brief overview of problem statement, data collection and proposed analyses) early in the thesis process.
- ❑ Review, approve, and evaluate the students' defined competencies.
- ❑ Negotiate with committee members the extensiveness of their roles (see below) on the thesis.
- ❑ Assist the student with establishing a communication plan and timeline. Specifically determine when committee members will be expected to review and provide feedback on thesis drafts.

- Assist the student with UW human subjects application or exemption, as well as other potential human subjects requirements.
- Assist with mediation if conflict arises.
- Sign the Master's Supervisory Committee Approval Form to convey approval of the thesis.
- Provide interim ("N") and final (CR is recommended) grade for thesis work

***Committee Member Responsibilities***

- Read, give advice and sign off on the initial thesis proposal.
- Work individually with the student on the thesis aspects for which the committee member carries primary responsibility.
- Read drafts and provide comments to the student and chair in a timely fashion, consistent with the communication plan and timeline provided by the student.
- Attend meetings requested by the student or chair.
- Sign the Master's Supervisory Committee Approval Form to convey approval of the thesis.