

University of New Mexico

Public Health Program

MPH Professional Paper Requirements

To complete the Master of Public Health degree, one of the culminating experience is the Professional Paper, which involves developing a technical manuscript based on an investigation (primary or secondary data) or a critical analysis of the literature. This should involve the following general steps (explained in more detail later in this document):

First semester (required 1 credit):

- Select a public health problem/issue to develop the professional paper;
- In consultation with the adviser, select the Professional Paper Committee (its members will compose the Master's Examination Committee for the oral exam);
- Prepare a written proposal;
- Obtain approval of the proposal by the committee;
- If the proposed study involves human research subjects, submit an application to the Human Research Protection Office (HRPO).

Second semester (required 2 credits):

- Complete the proposed study;
- Write the professional paper;
- Submit the final draft of the professional paper to the committee;
- Prepare an oral presentation of the professional paper to the committee and other interested persons and pass the Master's Examination.

A professional paper project generally involves an investigation or a critical analysis of a well-defined public health issue or problem. The written product of this effort is a scholarly manuscript. It is professionally written, develops a persuasive argument, and addresses an important public health issue. It may or may not include the collection of original data and may be presented in the form of a case study, intervention development, or policy analysis. The professional paper requires a more detailed and extensive analysis of the issue or problem than that included in a term paper. It is not merely a literature review, a needs assessment, or a chronology of work in the practicum.

Samples of professional papers completed by previous MPH students are available for review in the Public Health Program office. The range of topics addressed in professional papers is large and reflects the diversity of the field of public health, as well as the diversity of MPH students and their interests.

The length of the manuscript, though closely related to the scope of the topic or research problem, normally ranges from 30 to 50 pages. Manuscripts written for submission to professional journals are of shorter length 25 pages or less (see [Submitting a Paper for Publication](#)). However, sections on the implications of the study, recommendations for public health practice and a summary of the student's experience and reflections as a public health practitioner must be added as addenda to the professional paper. These sections are expected to

add another 5 to 10 pages to the total length of the professional paper if it is written for submission to a journal. Manuscript length may also depend on other products of the professional paper work, including the production of educational materials that are best presented in a form other than a printed-paper manuscript, such as videotapes or interactive CD-ROM. It is the candidate's responsibility to define the contents of the final manuscript and other products of the professional paper with her/his committee during the approval of the proposal.

Students may begin a professional paper and enroll for credit only after completion of one semester of graduate studies with a minimum GPA of 3.0 in all graduate coursework. Students must enroll in the Professional Paper PH 596 for a maximum of 3 credit hours; additional professional paper credits will not be counted toward graduation. The student must be enrolled in PH 596 for 1 credit hour in the semester that they are writing the proposal and for 2 credits when they complete their professional paper and their oral examination. PH 596 may be taken for a letter grade or credit/no credit (CR/NC), but this must be in consultation with his/her adviser.

Students are highly recommended to enroll in a professional writing course to strengthen their skills in conceiving and planning research projects, and in writing proposals. A 1 credit hour course is usually offered each fall and spring semester (PH 511 Writing for Public Health Professionals or Advanced Writing for Public Health Professionals as PH 560). For maximum benefit, students should enroll in the course while they are writing their proposal.

The Professional Paper Committee (equivalent to the Master's Examination Committee in the Oral Exam Guideline)

Students should discuss their ideas for the professional paper with their prospective chair. The chair will assist the student in identifying the other committee members who have the appropriate expertise in the selected subject area. The student's committee must be comprised of at least three (3) faculty members, two who are considered primary faculty in the Public Health Program. Committee chairs must be primary faculty who hold appointments in the Public Health Program (consult the Public Health Program office). The student advisor does not have to be either the chair or part of the committee. Adjunct faculty, faculty from outside the Public Health Program, and emeriti may serve on the committee at the discretion of the student and her/his committee members. All members of the committee must be approved for graduate instruction and service on examination committees by the UNM Graduate Studies.

Once the committee is selected, the student should also discuss his/her ideas for the professional paper with the other committee members in advance of beginning to prepare the proposal. Committee members may recommend other courses be taken, depending upon the nature of the work required to complete the professional paper.

Preparing the Proposal

The draft proposal must be submitted to the Professional Paper Committee. It must contain the following sections:

- a. Title Page
Title

- Student's Name
- Name of Professional Paper Committee members (indicate Chair)
- b. Background and Rationale
 - Introduction to the public health problem (literature review)
 - Significance for public health practice
- c. Purpose
 - Research questions and/or hypotheses
- d. Methods
 - Data collection (primary, secondary and/or searching strategies for analytical papers based on literature review).
 - Analytical approach for any type of paper (epidemiology, interventions, case studies, analytical, systematic literature review, etc.)
 - If the study involves working with human subjects Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) approval number or letter granting exempt status limitations must be included. A regular faculty, such as the chair of the Professional Paper Committee, must act as the PI for the application to be accepted by HRPO.
- e. Student's Role in the Project
- f. Timetable
- g. References
- h. Appendix (e.g., consent form, questionnaires, previous publications)

The length of the proposal, though related to the scope of the proposed topic, usually ranges from 5 to 15 pages, depending on the length of the literature review. The proposal must be typed with double-spaced text lines. Pages must be numbered and the proposal should not be bound.

The Professional Paper Proposal Approval Process

The deadlines for submitting the professional paper proposal to the student's MPH Professional Paper Committee depend upon the anticipated date of completing the professional paper and the Master's Examination. The proposal must be given to the MPH Professional Paper Committee by:

- Graduation in Fall Semester: one month **before the end** of the Summer Semester.
- Graduation in Spring Semester: one month **before the end** of the Fall Semester.
- Graduation in Summer Semester: one month **after the beginning** of the Spring Semester.

Within two-weeks of receipt of the proposal, the MPH Professional Paper Committee will make a decision on approval and provide written notification to the student on the decision. The MPH Professional Paper Committee can approve the proposal, require a written response from the student addressing the issues raised by the MPH Professional Paper Committee, or require the proposal to be re-written.

The proposal will be evaluated for completeness according to the outline described in the previous section above. The review will identify the strength and weaknesses of the proposal, and consider the appropriateness of the proposed committee membership vis-à-vis the topic area. If the chair and other committee members feel that additional faculty expertise is needed, then, additional faculty members may be added to the committee.

The student's committee shall indicate their approval of the proposal with their signatures on the *Program's Professional Paper Approval* form (available from the Public Health Program office). The student shall submit the signed form with a copy of the proposal to the Public Health Program office or directly to the Chair of the MPH Professional Paper Committee.

Preparing the Professional Paper

The professional paper manuscript must be presented in a form amenable to examination and review. This means that documentation of the research or inquiry process must be provided in a form that is sufficient to allow others to follow the line of reasoning and to evaluate the credibility of the work.

At a minimum, the professional paper must meet criteria of content and presentation that are as rigorous as those applied to work done in a professional public health setting (public agency, non-profit organization, etc.). However, if the manuscript is to be submitted to a peer-reviewed scientific journal, the student and committee may agree that higher standards are appropriate. It is the student's responsibility to define the content of the professional paper manuscript and other products of the research in the proposal.

The Public Health Program requires these content areas in each professional paper:

1. Title page and abstract;
 2. Introduction: Explain why the proposed topic is a public health problem; the goal of the paper; hypotheses/questions and specific objectives or aims that the paper will address.
 3. Background: Present the literature review; search strategies and identified gaps in the literature that the paper is addressing.
 4. Methods:
 - a. If the proposed project is based on primary data collection, detail the conceptual approach, study design, sampling design, and other appropriate methods, data collection, and analytical and data analysis approaches (whether quantitative or qualitative).
 - b. If the project is based on secondary quantitative and/or qualitative data describe other methods used (discourse or content analyses, systematic or non systematic review, search strategies, etc. and analytical approach).
 - c. If the project is not based on data, but is a program development or curriculum development project, describe methods used to develop the program/curriculum, evaluation methods, and expected results.
 5. Results: All type of papers must include a section on results.
 6. Discussion: Connect the analyses to the literature reviewed and demonstrate how the data or issues analyzed relate to the original study questions.
 7. Discussion of the implications of the study and recommendations for public health practice, research, and policy, and development of a plan for dissemination of information.
- Addendum:
8. Discussion of the student's role as a public health practitioner in relation to the problem, and if appropriate, to the agencies addressing with the issue or problem and a self-reflection about yourself as a public health professional. As part of your culminating

experience, write a short self-reflection (up to 650 words) on your growth as a public health professional throughout the master's program. Please use the following dimensions to develop your self-reflection: 1) what you've learned specifically from your professional paper experience and the implications of this knowledge for your public health practice, research, or policy work in the future; 2) what you've learned more generally from the program and the implications of this knowledge for your public health practice, research, or policy work in the future; 3) how your own values and background (family, racial/ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, self-described identity), might influence your public health career.

The manuscript shall be typed and organized in a style that is in accordance with one of three professional organizations:

1. American Psychological Association – *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th edition. American Psychological Association, 2010.
2. American Public Health Association – *What AJPH Authors Should Know* printed in the front pages of each month's issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*.
3. American Medical Association – *Manual of Style: A Guide for Authors and Editors*. 10th Edition. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Current editions of these style manuals are available in the Health Sciences Center Library and Informatics Center. With prior advice and approval of the student's committee, other professionally recognized guidelines may be followed if the paper will be submitted to a journal that requires a different style (e.g., *American Journal of Epidemiology*, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, etc.).

Submitting a Paper for Publication. From time to time, a student has requested permission to use as their professional paper a manuscript that has been prepared or accepted for publication. The Public Health Program has generally approved these requests, but requires an introductory section describing the public health problem, as well as additional sections which describe the implications of the research for public health practice, the student's role as a public health practitioner and a self-reflection. These are generally not included in the body of the manuscript, which has been prepared for publication but are addenda. The Public Health Program strongly encourages publication of research, but the student must recognize that these additional requirements exist to create a coherent statement of the research work that is being submitted for the MPH degree.

Students who submit their professional papers for publication are strongly encouraged to consult the authorship guidelines proposed by the *American Journal of Public Health*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, or the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Students should not automatically assume that Professional Paper Committee members must be included as co-authors on a manuscript submitted for publication. Authorship should be decided by the criteria proposed by these professional journals. The inclusion of a committee member is to be based on whether the author has contributed substantively to the conception/design of the project, analysis/interpretation, and writing of the paper. The issue of authorship should be discussed at initial meetings of the student's Professional Paper Committee. In many cases, authorship cannot

be determined until the manuscript has been completed, but the student and the committee should reach agreement as to how this decision will be made at the appropriate time.

Completing the Oral Presentation and Master's Examination

When **all** major work and writing on the professional paper manuscript are completed and the Chair and committee members have received the final draft of the manuscript, the oral presentation should be scheduled. Working with her/his committee, the student should arrange an appropriate time and place for the presentation. Two weeks prior to the oral presentation, the student must provide each committee member with a clear, typed copy of the professional paper. Preparation of the final typed copy of the professional paper should be delayed until after the oral presentation since the committee members may, on the basis of the defense, require that the student make revisions. For specific instructions in regards to the Oral Presentation and Master's Examination see the document "**Guidelines for Master's Examination for Professional and Integrative Experience Papers.**"

Summary of Deadlines and Forms

Candidates are responsible to understand and monitor UNM and Public Health Program requirements and due dates at all times while they are completing the requirements for the Master of Public Health degree. Deadlines are listed in the University Calendar. It is the student's responsibility, not the responsibility of the chair or members of the Professional Paper Committee, or the Public Health Program, to ensure that the general University requirements and due dates have been met for graduation. Students who plan to graduate should consult UNM Graduate Studies to ensure requirements and deadlines are understood (<http://grad.unm.edu/home/>).

ALL REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION (except for classes in which students are currently enrolled) MUST BE COMPLETED BY November 15th (Fall), April 15th (Spring), July 15th (Summer), or graduation will be delayed.

Incompletes: Must be removed and the grade recorded by the following dates or graduation will be delayed until satisfied:

- Fall Semester: November 15th
- Spring Semester: April 15th
- Summer Semester: July 15th

Program of Studies and Notification of Intent to Graduate (POS): *Due* to the MPH Program *an entire semester in advance of graduation* - by the following deadlines:

- Fall graduation: June 15th
- Spring graduation: September 15th
- Summer graduation: February 15th

The POS may be submitted any time after completion of 12 credit hours. POS must be approved before a student can take their master's exam.

Professional Paper Proposal: The professional paper proposal should be submitted to the MPH Professional Paper Committee by:

- Fall Semester: one month **before the end** of the Summer Semester.

- Spring Semester: one month **before the end** of the Fall Semester.
- Summer Semester: one month **after the beginning** of the Spring Semester.

Announcement of Master's Examination: Once the final draft of the professional paper has been submitted to the Professional Paper Committee members, the student should schedule the oral presentation using the *Announcement of Examination* form. The form lists the committee members and must be signed by the Public Health Program Director and delivered to UNM Graduate Studies **two weeks** prior to the oral presentation.

Deadlines for Report of Examination: Documentation of the completion of the Master's Examination (e.g., *Report of Examination* form) must be submitted to the UNM Graduate Studies by the following dates to allow graduation:

- November 15th to allow graduation at the end of the Fall Semester.
- April 15th to allow graduation at the end of the Spring Semester.
- July 15th to allow graduation at the end of the Summer Semester.