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MOUNT SINAI  
SCHOOL OF  
MEDICINE  
NEW YORK

## MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM



## GUIDE TO COMPLETING THE MASTER'S THESIS

*Disclaimer* This Guide to Completing the Master's Thesis is meant as a resource for students in the Master of Public Health Program of Mount Sinai School of Medicine. The Program reserves the right to make amendments to the contents without notice. The content of this guide is not intended to be nor should it be regarded as a contract between the Program and any student or other person.

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## **CORE REQUIREMENTS**

Students register for the following to fulfill the Thesis requirement:\*

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

**MPH320**

Research Methods encompasses a set of fundamental skills and tools necessary for approaching the process of developing and answering a research question or being an informed consumer of information in the marketplace. This course provides a solid and practical framework enabling students to successfully embark upon their Master's Theses. The course is an essential component to understanding how to organize research: helping students to conceptualize, develop, propose, design, and write research papers, in general, and the thesis, in particular. Students write a Master's Thesis Proposal Outline as the final exam for this course. The Proposal Outline is graded for feasibility, soundness of methodology, and relevance to Public Health. In some cases this will form the basis of their Master's Thesis though this is not a requirement and students are free to change topics. (If a student does change the topic, they will have to submit a new outline to their Master's Thesis Advisor for approval.)

1 credit

Students register for this course in the Winter Term of their first year of study. The course will be graded on a Pass/Fail basis.

Pre-requisites: Introduction to Epidemiology

Introduction to Biostatistics (students may take this course concurrently with Research Methods)

### **MASTER'S THESIS**

**MPH099**

Students register for their Master's Thesis on or before the Winter Term of their second year of study while researching and writing their Thesis. The Master's Thesis must address a topic of relevance to Public Health.

4 credits

### **MASTER'S THESIS RESEARCH**

**MPH098**

(FOR STUDENTS IN THE DUAL MD-MPH PROGRAM ONLY)

Dual degree MD-MPH students may register for this as one of their clinical electives in either the third or fourth year of medical school. This is a four-week elective that will enable the student to dedicate time to completing his/her Master's Thesis. Prior to beginning this rotation, a student must complete the MPH Program's Elective Approval Form and register for the elective. The student's Specialty Track Advisor will be the instructor for this elective.

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\**Substitutions & Waivers* Students are required to discuss any issues or questions regarding possible course substitutions or waivers with the Program Director.

## SPECIALTY TRACK ADVISORS & MASTER'S THESIS ADVISORS

The **Specialty Track Advisor** serves as an important resource for students, providing information and advice on selecting elective courses, Practicum development, Master's Thesis topic development, opportunities for research, as well as information on the Public Health profession. Please refer to the Student Handbook for a complete list of Specialty Track Advisors and their contact information.

Specialty Track Advisors can be a source of insight and suggestions for identification of a **Master's Thesis Advisor**. In some cases the Specialty Track Advisor and the Master's Thesis Advisor will be one and the same. Regardless of who performs the role of Master's Thesis Advisor, students must obtain approval of their topic and plan from their Specialty Track Advisor or General Track Advisor *prior* to initiating research to ensure relevancy to Public Health.

The Master's Thesis Advisor will be responsible for overseeing the development of the outline, proposal, finished write-up, intellectual dialogue, and the evaluation for a grade, of the Master's Thesis. The Master's Thesis Advisor works to help identify a Second Reader prior to completion of the Master's Thesis. The Second Reader participates in the evaluation of the Master's Thesis for a grade and the intellectual dialogue.

Students can also find faculty members with similar research interests who might be willing to function as Master's Thesis Advisors by searching Mount Sinai's website. Suitable faculty for student advisement may be specialists in the student's area of interest or have a command of pertinent literature and/or research.

Students are advised to begin to contemplate a topic for their thesis research early in their studies in the Program. This enables the student to maximize opportunities to interact with faculty most capable of assisting in the student's intellectual growth. An open and consistent dialogue with the Specialty Track Advisor and/or Master's Thesis Advisor can help students to pick topics and research questions that are more likely to be successful.

Once a student has identified a Master's Thesis Advisor with whom he/she would like to work, the student asks the faculty member to complete the **Statement of Support** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/statement\\_of\\_support.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/statement_of_support.pdf)) indicating his/her willingness to serve as a Master's Thesis Advisor. Students and Master's Thesis Advisors should discuss and reflect on, in addition to potential topics, those Public Health Competencies that should be covered during the Master's Thesis experience. Advisors will be asked to note in the **Master's Thesis Evaluation Report** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis\\_evaluation\\_report.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis_evaluation_report.pdf)) which Competencies are covered. For a full discussion of Competencies please see the **Student Handbook** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/handbook\\_2007-2008.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/handbook_2007-2008.pdf)).

Students must submit the following in sequence to their Master's Thesis Advisor for review, evaluation, and approval. Students should work with their Master's Thesis Advisors to decide together how best to get the following information to them, whether through hard copy or email. In any case, students must deposit a final copy of the Master's Thesis, approved by their Thesis Advisor and Second Reader, in hard copy along with a completed Master's Thesis Deposit Form to the Program Office. (For a complete Checklist see Appendix 1.)

1. **Master's Thesis Proposal Outline.** (Students can use the Proposal Outline generated as the final exam for the MPH 320 Research Methods course if this is the topic they intend to pursue for the final Master's Thesis.)
2. **Master's Thesis Proposal.**
3. Submit final approved Thesis Proposal to Specialty Track Advisor for their records.
4. **Master's Thesis.**
5. **Deposit final hard copy of Master's Thesis** to Master's Thesis Advisor, Second Reader and to Program Office.

### **MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL OUTLINE**

The Master's Thesis Proposal Outline should be no more than two pages typed in a font no larger than 12 points and with margins of one inch on all four sides, single spacing is acceptable. References are optional and not included in the two-page limit.

### **COMPONENTS OF THE THESIS PROPOSAL OUTLINE**

1. *Identify the Research Question.*
2. *Specific Aims & Hypothesis.* This section explains the purpose of the Thesis and succinctly states the Thesis' hypothesis.
3. *Background & Rationale.* This section explains why the proposed topic is a question of public health significance.
4. *Study Design & Methods.* This section describes the target population and how the research will be conducted.
5. *Timeline* indicating when each of the following will be achieved:
  - a. Submission of completed Thesis Proposal.
  - b. IRB approval or documentation from the IRB that approval is not required.
  - c. Submission of the completed Thesis to Advisor.
  - d. Submission of Thesis to Program Office.

Following submission of the Master's Thesis Proposal Outline, the student will meet with his/her Master's Thesis Advisor. The Outline will be reviewed and evaluated to determine, among other things, if the topic is suitable, the project feasible, and the research question is valid. The Master's Thesis Advisor may consult with other faculty members in making this determination. The student will be notified when the Outline, or a subsequent resubmission, has been accepted. The student can then proceed to the next step of completing necessary research, data collection, etc.

## **MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL**

Using the Master's Thesis Proposal Outline as a starting point, the student writes his/her Thesis Proposal, elaborating on each of the sections of the Outline.

The student works with his/her Master's Thesis Advisor to determine an achievable timeline; the due date for the Thesis Proposal is based on a timeline established upon the acceptance of the Outline. Students are strongly advised to plan ahead, keeping the deadline for completion of the entire Master's Thesis in mind to ensure completion in time for graduation in the Spring of the following year. Master's Thesis Proposals are to be submitted to the Master's Thesis Advisor for review.

Ordinarily, the Master's Thesis Advisor will have read and commented on the student's Thesis Proposal prior to submission to the Specialty Track Advisor. The version of the Thesis Proposal that is submitted to the Specialty Track Advisor is regarded as the version that is acceptable to the Master's Thesis Advisor.

It is suggested that a student look to his/her Master's Thesis Advisor for regular supervision. It is up to the student to schedule appointments with his/her Thesis Advisor to keep them informed and updated on the progress being made.

The student is reminded that faculty members need a reasonable period of time to review material. It is reasonable to expect that it may take one month for the student to receive written or verbal comments on work submitted to the Thesis Advisor. In some instances, it is entirely reasonable that the student be asked to meet with the Thesis Advisor and/or Specialty Track Advisor prior to a Thesis Proposal's formal acceptance. Students are strongly advised to build these review times into the creation of their timelines and work closely with their Advisors to make sure they do not fall behind.

The length of the Master's Thesis Proposal will vary with the topic covered; generally it will be between ten and twelve pages double-spaced in a font no larger than 12 points and with margins of one inch on all four sides. References are required and not included in the overall page length.

## COMPONENTS OF THE MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL

1. *Describe the Research Question.* Elaborate on what was presented in the Thesis Proposal Outline. (2 pages)
2. *Specific Aims & Hypothesis.* This section explains the purpose of the Thesis and succinctly states the thesis' hypothesis. (2 pages)
3. *Preliminary Background & Rationale.* This section explains why the proposed topic is a question of public health significance. (4-5 pages)
4. *Preliminary Study Design & Methods.* This section describes the target population and how the research will be conducted. (2-3 pages)  
The student is reminded to keep the following in mind:
  - If the thesis consists of epidemiological research, the proposal should contain a preliminary methods section including, but not limited to: the overall study design, target population, sampling methods, interventions (if any) to be carried out, outcomes to be measured, potential confounding variables to be measured or controlled for, operational definitions of variables to be measured, and preliminary data analysis plan. If the method of accruing study subjects is other than straightforward, contingency plans for responding to unexpectedly low recruitment rates should be included as well.
  - If the thesis consists of other types of research, the proposal should contain a description of the methods to be used sufficient to enable a person with expertise in the area to evaluate the suitability of the proposed design and the feasibility of carrying out the research. The level of detail of this section should be analogous to that specified for epidemiological research above.
5. *Preliminary Timeline* indicating when each of the following will be achieved: (1 page)
  - a. IRB approval or documentation from the IRB that approval is not required.
  - b. Submission of the completed Thesis to Advisor.
  - c. Submission of Thesis to Specialty Track Coordinator.

The student will meet with his/her Master's Thesis Advisor to review the Master's Thesis Proposal. They will evaluate the proposal and discuss whether it is acceptable as is, acceptable with revisions, or unacceptable. The Thesis Advisor may consult with other colleagues in reaching this determination. The student will be notified in writing when the proposal, or a subsequent resubmission, has been accepted. A copy of the final proposal is submitted to their Specialty Track Advisor for their records.

## MASTER'S THESIS

Approved Thesis Proposals provide faculty with a sufficient sense of the student's area of study to permit valuable advisement as the student progresses in his/her research. If a student submits drafts of his/her work, it is reasonable to expect that it may take one month for the student to receive written or verbal comments. Students are strongly advised to build these review times into the creation of their timelines.

The length of the Thesis will vary with the topic covered; generally it will be between twenty-five and thirty pages double-spaced in a font no larger than 12 points and with margins of one inch on all four sides. References are required and not included in the overall page length. Appendices are not included in the overall page length.

## COMPONENTS OF THE THESIS

1. *Thesis Cover Page* (See Appendix 2.)
2. *Acknowledgements.*
3. *Abstract.* Limited to 150 words.
4. *Table of Contents.*
5. *Describe the Research Question.* (2 pages)
6. *Specific Aims & Hypothesis.* This section explains the purpose of the Thesis and succinctly states the thesis' hypothesis. (2 pages)
7. *Background & Rationale.* This section explains why the proposed topic is a question of public health significance. This section is for the student to write a critical review of the most pertinent published material that led the student to this thesis topic. (6-8 pages)
8. *Study Design & Methods.* This section describes the target population and how the research was conducted. (2-3 pages)
9. *Results.* Description of what was accomplished accompanied with relevant tables and figures. (3-5 pages)
10. *Discussion.* Evaluate results and explain their significance. The Results and Discussion sections may be combined. (6-8 pages)
11. *Conclusion.* Summarize and state the significance of the research findings. (3-5 pages)

## SUBMISSION SCHEDULE

Students should submit their thesis to the Master's Thesis Advisor and one to the Second Reader. The student and the Advisors should agree ahead of time what form submission will take: email or hard copy. The suggested deadline for Thesis submission to Advisors is **March 1<sup>st</sup>** of the year in which the student hopes to graduate. If this is not possible, the student should agree with the Master's Thesis Advisor and the Specialty Track Advisor (if applicable), before the beginning of March, on the dates for submission and receipt of the student's Thesis. Such dates may provide some flexibility for individual schedules, but they must also allow adequate time for the student to meet the final Master's Thesis deposit date of **April 15<sup>th</sup>**.

The Thesis Advisor identifies a Second Reader. The responsibility for selecting a Second Reader rests with the Thesis Advisor and/or the Specialty Track Advisor; students should not be placed in the position of having to ask particular faculty members to fulfill the role of a Second Reader. (Second Readers who are not affiliated with Mount Sinai School of Medicine or Graduate School of Biological Sciences must be approved by the Program Director.)

**At the end of March or beginning of April**, the student will meet with the Master's Thesis Advisor and Second Reader to discuss the Thesis.

This meeting is intended to be an **intellectual dialogue** in which the student should be prepared to discuss his/her work with respect to sources, findings, interpretations, and conclusions. The student is asked to begin with a **five-minute oral summarization** of the pertinent background and findings. The faculty members meeting with the student will take turns asking the student questions. At the end of the question period, a student is usually asked to leave the room and wait until asked to return. During the faculty discussion period, a decision is made on the Thesis. The three possible decisions are Pass, Incomplete, and Fail.

**Pass:** The Thesis is deemed acceptable subject to minor revisions. The student amends the Thesis in light of comments made by the faculty. Upon completion of the revisions, the Thesis Advisor and the Second Reader sign the **Master's Thesis Evaluation Report** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis\\_evaluation\\_report.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis_evaluation_report.pdf)) noting that all requested revisions have been made and that the student has passed the requirement.

Then, the student submits the revised Thesis and the **Thesis Deposit Form** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis\\_deposit\\_form.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis_deposit_form.pdf)) to the Office of the Master of Public Health Program. All revisions must be made and the Thesis deposited with the Program Office by **April 15<sup>th</sup>** if the student wishes to graduate in the month of May.\*

**Incomplete:** The Thesis is deemed to be acceptable subject to major revisions. All revisions must be completed within three to four months but no later than one year from the date of the faculty meeting. If the student's revisions have not been received by the first anniversary date, he/she will be charged a Thesis Extension Fee.

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\* Thesis Extension Fee - If a student is unable to meet this deadline, he/she may request an extension for no more than three years. When applying for an extension, the Program Director will confer with the Thesis Advisor and the student to determine whether completion of the Thesis during the extension period is attainable. During the extension, the student will be required to provide semi-annual updates to the Thesis Advisor to demonstrate that progress is being made. There will be an annual Thesis Extension Fee equivalent to the cost of 1 credit due on the anniversary date of the extension approval.

Upon satisfactory completion of the revisions, the Thesis Advisor notifies the Specialty Track Advisor and the student submits three hard copies: one to the Thesis Advisor, one to the Second Reader, and one to the Program Office. (NB: In some cases the Thesis Advisor may decide to call the student back for a second meeting and the process continues as outlined above.)

**Fail:** The Thesis is deemed to be unacceptable and the student is not recommended for the degree.

In addition to evaluating the written thesis, the Thesis Advisor and the Second Reader are asked to evaluate the five-minute oral summarization and intellectual dialogue and to note which Competencies were addressed during the Master's Thesis experience as found in the **Master's Thesis Evaluation Form** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis\\_evaluation\\_report.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis_evaluation_report.pdf)).

### **DEPOSITING THE THESIS**

Once the Master's Thesis Advisor has certified that the student has submitted a Thesis worthy of the Master of Public Health Degree, the student must, in order to receive his/her degree, deposit a final and clean copy of the Thesis with the Master of Public Health Program. The completed **Master's Thesis Deposit Form** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis\\_deposit\\_form.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/thesis_deposit_form.pdf)) must accompany all deposits.

Final deposit must occur **no later than 5 PM on or before April 15<sup>th</sup>** for the student to participate in graduation ceremonies held in the month of May.

### **GRADUATION APPLICATION FORM**

Students intending to graduate in May must submit a Graduation Application Form no later than February 1<sup>st</sup> of the year in which they intend to graduate. Please fill out the **Graduation Application Form** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/graduation\\_application\\_form.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/graduation_application_form.pdf)).

### **OTHER REQUIREMENTS FOR CONFERRAL OF DEGREE**

The Master of Public Health Degree cannot be awarded until all of the student's outstanding accounts have been cleared. These include the Library, Real Estate Office (for students living in Mount Sinai housing), Student Health Services, the Financial Aid Office, and the Registrar's Office. Please fill out the **Student Exit Form** ([http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/student\\_exit\\_form.pdf](http://www.mssm.edu/cpm/mph/pdfs/student_exit_form.pdf)).

Upon satisfactorily completing the above-mentioned requirements and payment of all outstanding fees, the degree is awarded on the conferral date following the final Thesis deposit. At the time of Thesis deposit, the student will receive a letter from the Director certifying completion of all academic requirements for the Master of Public Health Degree.

## APPENDIX 1: THESIS CHECKLIST

The following checklist is to help students monitor their progress.

- ❑ 1. Enroll in **MPH 320 Research Methods** course in Winter Term of first year.
- ❑ 2. Identify Master's Thesis topic and Thesis Advisor in collaboration with Specialty Track Advisor.
- ❑ 3. Submit **STATEMENT OF SUPPORT** completed by Thesis Advisor indicating his/her willingness to serve as Thesis Advisor.
- ❑ 4. Complete the Master's Thesis Proposal Outline.
- ❑ 5. Meet with Thesis Advisor to discuss Outline and plan for development of Thesis Proposal.
- ❑ 6. Write and submit the **MASTER'S THESIS PROPOSAL**.
- ❑ 7. Meet with Master's Thesis Advisor to review Proposal.
- ❑ 8. Submit final copy of Proposal to Specialty Track Advisor.
- ❑ 9. According to the agreed timeline, the student will notify his/her Thesis Advisor and the Specialty Track Coordinator (if applicable) of the achievement of specific milestones and overall progress. If the student falls behind the established timeline, he/she submits an amended timeline.
- ❑ 10. Submit completed **MASTER'S THESIS** to Thesis Advisor. When no further changes are required by Advisor or Second Reader, the Thesis is formally accepted.
- ❑ 11. Meet with Thesis Advisor and Second Reader to have intellectual dialogue and receive grade. Completed **MASTER'S THESIS EVALUATION FORM** returned to Program Administration.
- ❑ 12. Subsequent to all requirements, students must submit a final Thesis version (in hard copy) and the **MASTER'S THESIS DEPOSIT FORM** to Program Administration no later than **April 15th** if the student wishes to graduate in May.

**APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE THESIS COVER PAGE**

Master of Public Health Program

**Thesis Title**

Student Name

An Essay presented to

The Faculty of the  
Master of Public Health Program  
Department of Community and Preventive Medicine  
Mount Sinai School of Medicine

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master's Degree of Public Health

Advisor

Date Submitted