GUIDELINES FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS

DEPARTMENT OF GLOBAL HEALTH

Purpose of the Special Project

The Master's Special Project in the Department of Global Health is a major requirement for the Master's in Public Health (MPH) degree. This project is the culminating experience in the students' graduate MPH program. The purpose of the special project is to give the students an opportunity to synthesize and apply the knowledge and skills gained in the MPH course work and demonstrate the ability to produce a scholarly product. This project also allows student the opportunity to develop research skills, as they conduct an individual project on a specific Global Health related topic. The special project will demonstrate the critical thinking skills of students as they prepare to enter their career in public health. The special project should be relevant to their field of study and their long-term goals in public health.

Registration for Special Projects

MPH students in the Department of Global Health should register for their special project following successful completion of their Cap Stone course *or have completed all core courses and at least 30 hours of their MPH program".* Project design should begin earlier than this registration, and with consent of the project supervisor, the student may implement the project concurrently with their field experience or completion of final course work. Each special project must have a contract form signed by the project supervisor, which specifies the nature of the project and designates an anticipated completion date. This contract form must be signed and submitted at the time of registration for the special project. The project supervisor must be selected, and the contract form must be submitted to the college before work can be started on the special project.

Assignment of Project Supervisor

Each special project will have a project supervisor (or first reader) and in some cases a second faculty reader. The student's Departmental advisor will ordinarily supervise the project. In the event that the content areas of the proposed project would make another faculty member more appropriate for this role, alternate arrangements can be made within the Department (or in some cases the College). In those cases, it is expected that the faculty advisor will serve as a second reader and will be responsible for signing off on the document. The faculty advisor must agree that another faculty member will become the first reader. In cases where the advisor is the project supervisor, the second faculty reader many be selected on the basis of proposal consent from either within the department or outside.

Project Topics

The student's faculty advisor will discuss with the student the process of generating a special project topic. It is expected to be a topic relevant to the student's concentration area. The topic should be one in which the student can contribute to the existing body of

knowledge about an issue, program, or policy, or confirm existing data through replication of earlier work. After a topic area has been chosen, the student will select the faculty member who is most appropriate to be project supervisor. Students may select from a wide range of project types. Projects should pertain to one or more of the 10 Essential Public Health Services.

Some examples of appropriate projects include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- Lab based research relating to the student's area of interest, field experience or other research activity.
- Analysis of data which relates to the student's field experience or other research activity;
- Evaluation of a program which the student has chosen either through field experience or other contacts;
- Analysis of a policy or policy issue related to the student's area of concentration;
- Formative research conducted as part of a project;
- Pre-testing and revision of health materials;
- Development and implementation of a health program;
- Development of an educational program for a defined population;
- Evaluation of existing programs and use of those data to develop an improved program;
- Other topics as appropriate and determined by contract with the Special Project Supervisor & the Advisor;

		Essential Services
Assessment	1	Monitor health status and identify community health problems
	2	Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community
Policy Development	3	Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
	4	Mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems
	5	Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts
Assurance	6	Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety
	7	Linking people to needed personal health services and assuring the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable
	8	Assuring a competent Public Health and personal health care work force
	9	Evaluating effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services
	10	Researching for new insights an innovative solutions to health problems

In some cases, a critical and extensive review and synthesis of the literature, which is available surrounding an issue of concern to the student, may be appropriate for the special project. Replications of existing studies are also appropriate for special projects if approved by the project supervisor. In all cases, a written summary of the special project is to be presented in a typewritten, bound document to the supervisor and faculty reader. Also, all students will be expected to become familiar with the literature surrounding the topic or problem and knowledgeable about the methods selected to complete the project. Each student will also be expected to generate recommendations for public health practice or policy and recommendations for further research in a specified field that emerge from the special project.

The specific content of the special project must be approved by the student's faculty advisor prior to implementation of the project. A written proposal and a one-page abstract briefly describing the idea should be submitted to the student's faculty advisor prior to approval of the project.

Project Proposal

A written proposal and a one-page abstract briefly describing the idea should be submitted to the student's faculty advisor prior to approval of the project. The proposal should be written following careful discussion and planning with the project supervisor. By the time the proposal is completed, few questions should remain about its acceptability. The proposal is expected to be the final opportunity for the student and the project supervisor to decide on the scope and nature of the project. The proposal must be formally approved, in writing, by both the project supervisor and the second reader before the student begins the project. The proposal will form the basis of the Special Project Report. In fact, the first two chapters of the proposal (the Introduction and the Review of the Literature) will be almost identical to the final paper. The third chapter (Methodology) will be the blueprint which will be used to conduct the study. When the proposal is complete, it will be submitted to the project supervisor and second reader. When they have approved it in writing the project can begin. When the project is complete, it must be presented in the form of a special project paper.

Outline for Special Project Proposals

Proposals for research projects should include the following components. These are outlined in the order that they should appear in the proposal.

Chapter 1- Introduction: Statement of the problem, background, purpose

The Introduction will be the first chapter of your proposal and will typically consist of three subsections (statement of the problem, background and purpose). This is your opportunity to educate the reader about the problem/topic on which you are focusing. This section of the proposal delineates the issue that you are studying. The statement should specifically identify the questions being addressed and should include background information on why this is an important issue or an issue of interest to a public health researcher. Included in this background information might be policies, legislation, program changes or other bodies of information that contribute to an understanding of the significance of the research.

The purpose of the study and the objective should be clear. If it is the intent of the study to contribute to general knowledge in the literature, this should be specified. The uses to which the data might be put are also of critical interest and should be discussed.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

A complete literature review should be included in the proposal. This literature review will help to focus the study, as well as to ascertain whether similar types of studies have been done and their results. The review should include not only a description of the literature, but also a review of the adequacy of the literature. For example, in reviewing a topic one might find that there are a number of articles about the topic but that all of them are theoretical. No empirical or data based or systematic studies have been conducted to test the theories that have been presented. In other situations it may be clear that though there are a few studies in the area of interest, most may be improperly conducted. Often one will find that the conclusions drawn from the data analysis are controversial or open to debate. All these issues should be described in the literature review. The literature review should be scientific and from peer-reviewed journals. Although important information about trends and policies might be found in popular literature; this should be mentioned in the introduction or conclusions, not in the literature review, unless the article is specifically evaluating the impact or trends of popular literature.

Chapter 3 - Proposed Methods

The final section of the proposal should include the methods proposed for the project, including a description of the population, sampling procedures, methods for collecting information or data, methods of analysis, and limitations of the research design. Human subjects review (IRB) approval may be required for most special projects. Students should consult with their faculty advisor about completing the information needed for IRB.

Policy Analysis Special Project Proposals

Proposals for policy analysis projects should include the following components. These are outlined in the order that they should appear in the proposal.

1. ***Statement (restatement) of the problem***

   When analyzing a policy the first step is a restatement of the problem that the policy was designed to address. It should include background on the question at the time the policy was developed and should include statements about why this is an important issue for a public health researcher. Issues that might be discussed include legislative intent, political perceptions, data supporting problem existence, etc.

2. ***Statement of analysis criteria to be used in analysis***

   These criteria are the values that will be utilized to analyze the policy. They will cover both the values of the researcher and the values of the policy developer.

Examples include values such as equity, liberty, fraternity, efficiency, justice, rights, such as privacy, self -determination, etc.

3. ***Synthesis of information***
   This section will include the literature review and available data on the topic, including historical data.

4. ***Alternative strategies***
   The alternative strategies are the most realistic possibilities for policy implementation. The analyst should select those strategies that seem to have been most successful or which should have been tried. Two or three strategies (no more) should be selected for analysis.

5. ***Criteria for strategy choice***
   The student will select the criteria for analyzing the different criteria, identifying the factors that they will utilize in assessing the strategies. Examples include cost, effectiveness, and political feasibility.

Proposals for Developing and Implementing Programs

Proposals for developing and implementing health education programs should include the following components. These are outlined in the order that they should appear in the proposal:

1. Statement of the problem, background, and purpose – The student needs to clearly delineate the need for this program, the target population, and the appropriate setting(s). Students should ask themselves what gap this program fills in health education.
2. Literature review – The student should have a complete literature review in the proposal. This should include information pertaining to not only the topic of the health education program but prior successful and unsuccessful programs that addressed this issue.
3. Proposed methods – The methods for developing the program should be thoroughly described. This will be the major part of the proposal. For example, a student could follow a model such as the PRECEDE/PROCEED planning model in developing the program.

Human Subjects (IRB) Approval and HIPAA Compliance

The USF IRB must approve any project consistent with University requirements. Human subjects review (IRB) approval is required for any project where data is being collected directly from individuals or data will be used from an existing data source. Human subjects review (IRB) approval is required for Special Projects involving data analysis and is usually not required for literature or systematic reviews. A number of IRB approval types exists, some of which require only submission of brief information. More complicated applications may require an appearance before the full board. Students should contact the USF Office off Research Integrity & Compliance (website:

http://www.research.usf.edu/cs/) to obtain the guidelines for review of studies involving human subjects. Students should consult with his/her project supervisor about completing the information needed for IRB. IRB approval must be obtained PRIOR to data analysis or implementation of the Special Project. All Special Projects involving data from human subjects must comply with HIPAA regulations. Guidelines for compliance with HIPAA regulations can be found on the USF website.

Special Project Report
In all cases, a final written report for the Special Project is to be presented in a typewritten document to the supervisor.

Format of Special Project Report
The Special Project report should be approximately 25-35 typewritten, double-spaced pages. However, some final reports may be longer or shorter than the recommended page length depending upon the nature and scope of the project. The paper should be prepared according to the guidelines published in the *Handbook of Graduate Theses and Dissertations,* which is available in the University Bookstore and on the USF website. APA style is the preferred style for the Department of Global Health. Electronic submission of the final draft must be submitted to the advisor. At the discretion of the advisor, the paper will be checked for plagiarism. The consequences of cheating or copying will not be tolerated at this stage in a student's completion of the MPH degree.

The final document should include a set of cover pages in the following order (see Appendix for format): a blank page (fly page), a signature page, an abstract, and a table of contents.

The document should have pages numbered on the bottom in the center of the page. The abstract is limited to 500 words and should include the following: Background, Brief review of the literature, Public Health significance, Statement of purpose, Methods, Study design, Research methodology, Results, Primary results from study, and Conclusion.

Students are encouraged to design their report in a manner which will enable them to easily covert the report to a paper suitable for publication. The student's project supervisor shall assist the student in manuscript development in cases where immediate publication is indicated. Recommended outlines for various types of special projects are given below.

Research Based Project
1. Statement of the Problem, Background and Purpose
2. Literature Review
3. Methods
4. Implementation and Evaluation or Results
5. Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations
6. Literature Cited
7. Tables and Figures (if applicable)

8. Addendum including Institutional Review Board (IRB) review approval where needed

Policy Analysis Special Project Proposal

Proposals for policy analysis should include the following components. These are outlined in the order they should appear in the proposal:

1. Statement (restatement) of the problem. When analyzing a policy the first step is a restatement of the problem that the policy was designed to address. It should include background on the question at the time the policy was developed, and should include statements about why this is an important issue for a public health researcher. Issues which might be discussed are such items as legislative intent, political perceptions, data supporting problem existence, etc.
2. Statement of analysis criteria to be used in analysis. These criteria are the values which will be utilized to analyze the policy. They will cover both the values of the researcher and the values of the policy developer. Examples include values such as equity, liberty, fraternity, efficiency, justice, rights, such a privacy, self-determination, etc.
3. Synthesis of information – this section will include the literature review and available data on the topic, including historical data.
4. Alternative strategies – the alternative strategies are the most realistic possibilities for policy implementation. The analyst should select those strategies which seem to have been most successful or which should have been tried. Two or three strategies (no more) should be selected for analysis.
5. Criteria for strategy choice – the student will select the criteria for analyzing the different criteria, identifying the factors which they will utilize in assessing the strategies. Example include: cost, effectiveness, and political feasibility.

Grading of Special Projects

The project supervisor, with consultation from the second faculty reader, will approve the final project as represented in the written document. Specific letter grades will not be assigned. If after review of the written document, the project supervisor feels that it is appropriate or necessary, the student may be asked to present his/her project in oral discussion. The oral discussion includes the student, the project supervisor, the faculty advisor (if different), the second faculty reader and the chairperson of the department and any guest.

Departmental Criteria for student's registering for the Special Project

Each MPH student will register for three credit hours of Special Project. This level of credit recognizes that the student will invest significant time on their project (i.e., a three credit course is equal to 135 contact hours). Students should be prepared to document the time spent on their project.

APPENDIX A

Steps to Completing your Special Project

Step 1: Discuss the project with your faculty advisor. Do this early in your course of study. With your advisor, decide on a topic and on the persons who will be your first and second readers. Your advisor will usually serve as either first or second reader.

Step 2: Ask the professors to serve as your first and second readers, and begin working with them to develop your project's overall design. Register for credit for special project work and sign a contract with your first and second readers.

Step 3: Conduct your literature review. Finalize your project's purpose and method of data collection. Prepare a final proposal for presentation to your adviser. This proposal should include the first three chapters, the statement of the problem with background and purpose, the review of the literature, and your anticipated method of analysis. Proposals should be turned in three weeks prior to the anticipated start of the study. You must allow 2 weeks for review of the proposal by faculty and 1 week for modifications and resubmittal as necessary.

Step 4: Submit your study to the human subject's review board for approval, if needed. Be sure to discuss this with your advisor.

Step 5: Conduct your study.

Step 6: Write the final sections of your report including the data, data analysis, and your summary, conclusions, recommendations and submit the draft report to your readers for their comments/suggestions. Each reader should be allowed approximately 2 weeks to review the draft and make comments.

Step 7: Make corrections to the Special Project report and resubmit the corrected report to the first and second reader for review and approval. This must be done at least one week before the end of the semester (the last Friday of classes) prior to final exam week.

Step 7: Submit final bound copies to both readers and the department Secretary prior to the end of the semester.

SAMPLE TITLE PAGE

TITLE (ALL CAPS)

By

YOUR NAME HERE, WITH DEGREES ALREADY EARNED

SPECIAL PROJECT

Master of Public Health

Department of Global Health

College of Public Health

University of South Florida

Tampa, Florida

Month, Year

APPROVED:

_____ _____

Project Supervisor Name & Degrees Date

_____ _____

Second Reader Name & Degrees Date