

## Public Health Practice Program Guidelines for Special Projects

**Purpose:** The special project is an opportunity for the student to utilize the academic preparation that he or she has had to study a problem, carry out a project, analyze a policy, or conduct other supervised activities, which result in a final scholarly product. The purpose of the special project is to provide an opportunity to develop research skills through the conduct of an individual effort on a specific health-related topic or issue. The special project is intended to allow the student to apply public health knowledge and critical thinking skills in order to investigate or analyze complex public health practice issues.

**Registration:** PHP students should register for 3 credit hours of special project as they near the end of their program. At minimum, the five core courses should be completed prior to registering for the Special Project. Project design should begin earlier than this registration. With consent of their faculty advisor, the student may implement the project concurrently with the field experience. Each special project must have a contract form/syllabus signed by their faculty advisor 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. Work may not begin on the special project before the faculty advisor has been selected (faculty advisor must be selected by the completion of 21 credits) and the form submitted to the College. In addition, students must also complete any HIPPA training and Protection of Human Subjects credentialing required by the College of Public Health. IRB applications or requests for IRB exemption must be submitted on ALL special projects. Further information regarding the IRB process can be found on the website for research compliance at <http://www.research.usf.edu/dric/hrpp/irb-hrpp.asp>.

**Project Topics:** The student should explore possible special project topics. It is expected to be a topic relevant to the student's area of professional interest. 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. Students may select from a wide range of project types. These include, but are not limited to, the following activities:

- analysis of data which relates to the student's field experience or other research activity
- evaluation of a program chosen either through field experience or other contact
- analysis of a policy issue related to the student's area of professional interest
- formative research conducted as part of a social marketing project
- pretesting and revision of informational materials
- needs assessments
- development and/or implementation of an appropriate public health program

In some cases, an extensive assessment 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. All students are 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, or recommendations for further research in a specified field that emerge from the special project.

Please note: The Special Project topic can be related to the topic or work completed during the student's Field Experience; however, it is not required.

**Assignment of Project Supervisor:** Each special project will have both a faculty project supervisor (first reader) and a second reader. The student's faculty advisor will ordinarily supervise the project. In the event that the content areas of the project are more appropriate for another faculty member, alternate arrangements can be made within the College. In those cases, it is expected that the faculty advisor will serve as second reader. In cases where the advisor is the project supervisor, the second faculty reader may be selected on the basis of proposal content from within the College.

**Project Proposal:** A written proposal 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 the project supervisor before the student begins the project.

The proposal will form the foundation of the special project report. The proposal should include 3 sections: (1) introduction, statement of problem and purpose of study; (2) extensive literature review; and (3) methods for conducting or proceeding with special project.

**Elements of a Research Project Proposal:** Proposals for research projects should include the following components. These are outlined in the order that they should appear in the proposal.

- (1). *Statement of the problem, background, purpose:* This section of the proposal delineates the issue that the student is studying. The statement should specifically identify the question that is being addressed. It 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 should be clear. The intent of the study to contribute to the general knowledge in the literature should be specified, if appropriate. How this data might be used is of critical interest. For example, if the content of the study is to determine whether public health nurse home visits increase or decrease later attendance at child health clinics, then the purpose of the project might be to make recommendations to public health providers about the benefits of continuing or discontinuing home visits.
- (2). *Literature review:* A complete literature review should be included in the proposal. This literature review will help to focus the study and ascertain whether similar types of studies have been previously done. 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 quantitative studies have been conducted to test the theories that have been presented. In other situations, it may be clear that a few studies exist in the area of interest, but most are 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, preferably 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.
- (3). *Proposed methods:* The final section of the proposal should include the methods proposed for the project, including methods for collecting information or data and methods of analysis. Human subjects review (IRB) approval is required for any project where data is used from human subjects (data through intervention or interaction or identifiable private information). A number of approvals are available, some of which require only submission of information, where as others require appearance before the full board. The guidelines for the human subjects review board can be found at <http://www.research.usf.edu/cs/irb.htm>.

**Elements of a Policy Analysis Special Project Proposal:** Proposal 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, which might be discussed, may include legislative intent, political perceptions, data supporting the existence of various problems, etc.
- (2). *Statement of analysis criteria to be used in the 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 means for analyzing the different criteria, identifying the factors, which they will utilize to assess the strategies. Examples include: cost, effectiveness, and political feasibility.

**Elements of a Project Proposal for Developing and Implementing Public Health 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 public health.
- (2). *Literature review:* The student should have a complete literature review in the proposal. This should include information pertaining not only to the program but also prior successful and unsuccessful programs.
- (3). *Proposed methods:* The methods for developing the program should be thoroughly described. This description will be the major part of the proposal. Plans should also be described as to how the project will be implemented and methods of process, impact, and outcome evaluations.

**Length and Format of the Special Project Report:** There is no specific length requirement of the special project report. The length will be dependent upon the nature of the study. The paper should be prepared in American Psychological Association (APA) style.

Students are encouraged to design their report in a manner which will enable them to easily convert 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.

**Grading of Special Projects:** The faculty project supervisor, with consultation from the second faculty reader, will read, approve, and grade the final project as represented in the written document. The project will be assigned a satisfactory or unsatisfactory grade. Specific letter grades will not be assigned.

## **A Summary of How to Do Your Special Project**

- Step 1: Share your idea for your special project topic with the Assistant Director on the Faculty Advisor Request Form. (This step should be completed by the time you have completed half of the curriculum.)
- Step 2: Begin working with your advisor to develop your project's overall design. Select a second reader (in consultation with your faculty advisor).
- Step 3: Conduct your literature review. Finalize your project purpose and method of data collection. Prepare a final proposal for presentation to your first and second reader. This proposal should include the statement of the problem with background and purpose, the review of the literature and your anticipated method of analysis.
- Step 4: Complete the Human Subjects Training, your Special Project contract, and Register for the 3 credit hours of PHC 6977.
- Step 5: Submit your study to IRB for approval or exemption as indicated.
- Step 6: Conduct your project.
- Step 7: Write the final sections of your report including the data, their analysis, your summary, conclusions, and recommendations and submit the report to your readers for approval and grading.
- Step 8: Receive a Satisfactory Grade on the project. Submit the report for publication if appropriate.