

EPIDEMIOLOGY MPH ESSAY GUIDELINES

Overview of the MPH Essay

An MPH essay can describe the student's original research, but it is not required. Other options include a literature review, a grant proposal, or a surveillance report (see suggested acceptable formats below). No oral exams are required for an essay. Epidemiology MPH students are required to do an essay, the thesis format is not an option.

Criteria for an acceptable essay

The acceptable formats for an essay are the following:

- a journal article reporting on original research, much like a master's thesis
- a review of the literature on a specific public health topic
- a grant proposal describing an hypothetical epidemiologic study to be conducted
- a surveillance report based on local or national surveillance data
- another format agreed upon in advance by the student, advisor, and essay readers

If the student is to conduct original research, this can be done in the following ways:

- Collecting new data – e.g., the student adds data to an existing study or executes a small study on his or her own
- Doing something novel with existing data such as applying a new analytic technique, making novel use of an existing technique, or combining datasets
- Overseeing data collection or management
- Developing a new protocol or way of collecting data
- Executing additional laboratory assays or genetic evaluation of existing samples

Timing and composition of committee formation and essay

MPH students should form their essay committees by the end of the semester prior to the one in which they plan to graduate. The committee must consist of at least two, preferable three readers. One member must be the student's academic advisor. There are no MPH committee chairs; all members are considered to have equal standing, but the academic advisor generally takes a leadership role. The student should describe the nature of his essay to each reader at the time of committee formation so that readers can determine whether the essay topic is suitable.

MPH Essay Committee Composition Rules are:

- The committee must consist of at least two, preferably three, University of Pittsburgh faculty members, one of which must be the students' academic advisor.
- Members must have primary appointments in different University departments (at least two departments represented).
- At least one member must be on the core list of some GSPH department.

The student's advisor should forward an e-mail to Lori Smith, Epidemiology Student Services Manager and Program Administrator, listing the readers, and identifying the type of committee being proposed (e.g. MPH Essay). Committee composition review is conducted by Dr. Nancy Glynn, Master's Degree Program Director and Ms. Lori Smith on behalf of the department chair. Once reviewed, Ms. Smith will forward the proposed committee lists to the Pitt Public Health

Assistant Dean for Student Affairs, Mary Derkach for school-wide approval, and will then notify the students' advisor and the student when the proposed committee has been approved at the departmental and Pitt Public Health levels. **Please note that subsequent changes in committee composition must be similarly approved.**

NOTE: If student work involves data, policies, or experiences from an outside agency, organization, or practicum site, they should ensure that they follow the guidelines that may include a requirement to have a member of the agency, organization, or site on their committee. Any student who will use data or experiences from an experience at the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD) must include their ACHD preceptor as a member of his/her committee. The agencies with which these members are associated should be identified in the e-mail to Ms. Lori Smith.

MPH ESSAY DEVELOPMENT TIME FRAMES

(The Pitt Public Health [Web site](#) identifies specific deadlines for each graduation period)

Benchmark	December graduation	April graduation	June graduation	August graduation
Select readers /advisors request approval	By end of Summer Term	By end of Fall Term	By end of Spring Term	By end of Spring Term
Submit outline to readers	By September 15	By February 15	By April 15	By June 15
Submit First Draft to readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by students and their readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by students and their readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by students and their readers	Time frames and number of drafts determined by students and their readers
Final Draft submission/ Reader sign-off	Two weeks prior to school-wide deadline			
Submit final draft to Joanne Pegher, Pitt Public Health Graduation Coordinator, for her review. Additional formatting changes may still be required.	Determined by school. See Pitt Public Health website for semester-specific deadlines ¹	Determined by school. See Pitt Public Health website for semester-specific deadlines ¹	Determined by school. See Pitt Public Health website for semester-specific deadlines ¹	Determined by school. See Pitt Public Health website for semester-specific deadlines ¹

¹ Requests for extensions to complete work on the essay can be made of Pitt Public Health Student Affairs ONLY through Dr. Nancy Glynn, Director of the Master's degree programs. Requests to Dr. Glynn should be made in writing by the students' academic advisor only in extenuating circumstances.

Guidelines for the written format of the essay

- Original research

Use journal article format, with the goal of publication in a journal (this is the standard to strive for, but actual publication or submission is not required). The length of the article should be that of an original research journal article, with an expanded introduction/literature review.

- Literature review

The introduction should include the research question and its importance to public health. The methods section should explain how the literature review was conducted, the results section should synthesize the current literature on the topic, and the discussion section should critically review what is currently known and what further research is needed. Suggested length is 20-40 pages.

- Grant application

A hypothetical grant proposal should be in the format of a standard NIH grant application. Suggested length is 20-30 pages.

- Surveillance report

A surveillance report should resemble original research requirements plus include text, tables and graphs in a format similar to those used by CDC and state health departments (see MMWR article "Surveillance for Acute Viral Hepatitis --- United States, 2006" at <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss5702a1.htm> or other MMWR surveillance reports as examples). Suggested length is 20-30 pages.

Final written paper

All essays require an abstract limited to 350 words as per Pitt Public Health policy. The abstract must contain a clear and concise statement of the significance of the paper to the field of public health, specifically using the words, "public health." For other format requirements, see instructions provided by Joanne Pegher in the Pitt Public Health Student Affairs office. Please pay close attention to formatting requirements early in the process so as to save time and frustration at the end.

The final essay typically requires multiple drafts. Readers should not sign the Report on Requirements for Master's Degree form or the essay signature page until they have seen and approved those changes. The Report on Requirements Form may be downloaded from the [school Web site](#).

Students who do not meet school-wide essay deadlines may not be able to graduate in the term of their choice.

Grading

Readers will grade the essay on a 4-point scale (4=excellent 3=good 2=meets expectations 1=does not meet expectations). Readers should assign an overall score, as well as scores for various components: understanding of public health importance, review of the literature, grasp of study design and statistical analysis, strength of conclusions and recommendations, and quality of writing using the [Essay Grading Form](#). The readers should not approve the essay unless it is worthy of an overall score of 2 or 3. After all revisions to the essay are made, the readers should reach a consensus about the final scores, and the academic advisor should complete the grading form. A copy of the [Essay Grading Form](#) be given to the Student Services Office (A536 Crabtree) by the academic advisor.

If the student fails to meet passing standards after receiving comments from readers, the advisor can ask the student to embark on a different essay topic and graduation may be delayed.

Authorship

If the essay is to be submitted for publication, readers may be included as authors on the paper, but this is not a requirement. The primary advisor and student should make this decision and it should be based on the degree to which a given reader influenced or contributed to the paper.

Time limits should be set so that publication is not delayed if the graduate does not submit the paper following graduation. For example, the advisor and student may decide that if the work is not submitted for publication within 6 months of graduation, the materials will be turned over to the advisor so that the advisor can move forward with the publication.