

**Master's Essay Guidelines** Department of  
Health Policy & Management Graduate  
School of Public Health  
University of Pittsburgh  
2015- 2016

**Requirement**

All MPH and MHA students must complete a 2-credit Master's Essay to satisfy the School's graduation requirements for an integrative experience (CEPH) and for MHA students, the requirement for "applied and integrative learning" (CAHME).

**Rationale**

The Master's Essay is required to fulfill the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accreditation requirement that all the professional degree Programs in the School provide an integrative experience that provides the student an opportunity to synthesize and apply the knowledge, methods and practices learned in the curriculum in the form of a scholarly essay, based on the student's independent research, presumably of publishable quality. The Commission on Accreditation of Health Management Education (CAHME), the agency which accredits our MHA Program, also requires that the MHA curriculum include an integrative experience, entailing an applied project or study with relevance to the world of practice.

**Content**

The focus and content of the Essay should be relevant to the disciplinary base of the student's Department and problems or issues relevant to the profession. Furthermore, the student must explicitly justify the public health relevance of the study. Otherwise the specific content will be determined by the student's scholarly and/or career interests in collaboration with his/her Primary Essay Advisor.

**Committee Composition**

GSPH academic policy requires that the Master's Essay research be guided by a faculty Committee including the student's Primary Essay Advisor and at least one other faculty member outside his/her Department. The primary advisor must be among the Department's designated core faculty while the "second reader" must have a primary appointment in another academic unit in the University. For the MHA, Master's Essay (the Applied Integrative Project) the student's on-site project sponsor or mentor in the host organization (which might be the Residency or Practicum site) will be encouraged to serve on the Essay Committee as a 3rd member. A 3rd member may also be appropriate for the MPH student's Master's Essay depending upon the nature of study.

**Process Guidelines**

All full-time MHA and MPH students will register for the 1st credit of their two-credit Master's Essay requirement in the second (Spring) term of their program. This will be structured as a seven week in-class course that will address Program expectations and process, research study design and methods, IRB review process and issues, library and information sources, effective academic writing, manuscript formats, and other issues to assist the student in designing and implementing a study of professional quality. Students will not receive credit for this experience until they have submitted an approved proposal outline and Essay Proposal Form with their Essay Advisor's signature.

All MHA students are required, and MPH students are encouraged, to focus their Essays on an applied, work-site based project. We anticipate that the Management Residency and Practicum field experiences will provide opportunities for identifying an appropriate Master's Essay topic. Consequently, we expect that most full-time

students will be able to identify a project upon completion of the 1<sup>st</sup> summer term. In order to complete their Essay projects in time to meet University and School deadlines, students are required to submit their proposal outline and the Master's Essay Proposal Form with required signatures by no later than September 30 of Year 2. In no case will a student be permitted to register for her/his final term without having satisfied this requirement.

Students will typically register for the final Essay credit in the term in which they expect to complete the work.

**NOTE:** The student will be prohibited from registering for his/ her final academic term unless this reporting requirement has been satisfied, absent justification of exceptional circumstances. This process is designed to insure that the student initiates his/her essay to provide sufficient time to plan and implement a study of professional quality, suitable for publication.

### **Essay Presentation**

All students will be required to present their project design, methods, findings and recommendations to their committee in a formal presentation, using Power Points or equivalent visual methods. The student's Essay Advisor will not sign approval of the Essay until this requirement has been satisfied. It is the responsibility of the student to work with the Department staff, Secretary and Program Administrator, to book a room in which to present and to schedule the use of any necessary AV equipment (laptop, projector).

### **Institutional Review Board /Protection of Human Subjects**

All research conducted by faculty, staff and students in the University of Pittsburgh is subject to review, approval and monitoring by the University of Pittsburgh Institutional Review Board (IRB). Most studies implemented by students in our Department will be considered as exempt studies by IRB definition. Some students are in fact excluded from IRB review, e.g., those not involving human subjects, literature reviews and analyses, etc.

**However, we will proceed under the assumption that all student research studies, funded or unfunded, are subject to review and approval by the IRB staff.** All students in the Department must demonstrate that they have completed an on-line IRB Certification before they begin their Masters Essay. More information on the University IRB process is provided in the Appendices of this document.

### **Design / Methodology**

MPH students in the Department of HPM should follow the Master's Essay requirements for the MPH Program School-wide. However, the subject matter should be grounded in one of the various disciplines relevant to health policy and organization management. A number of alternative approaches may be used to design your study, including the following:

- Original Investigation
- Position (Advocacy) Paper
- Management or Policy Analysis
- Program Evaluation/Evaluation Research
- Case Study
- Grant Proposal (external funding)
- Meta-analysis of a focused Literature Review

**Please note that your topic, design and methodology must be approved by your Essay Advisor before you proceed with the study as evidenced by your submission of the Master's Essay Proposal Form. If applicable, IRB approval must also be obtained and documented.**

## **MHA Program**

The MHA Program's accreditation body, the Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education (CAHME) requires that MHA curricula must provide an integrative experience that provides students an opportunity to synthesize and apply the knowledge, competencies and tools developed in their program of studies. It was the recommendation of the on-site accreditation team during a recent re-accreditation of our MHA Program that we consider other forms of integrative experience that would be more appropriate to a professional management program than the traditional scholarly paper. Consequently, the HPM Faculty has determined that completing a management or policy oriented project affiliated with a sponsoring health care organization would best serve this purpose. Please note that this policy applies to all MHA students graduating during the academic year 2008-09 and beyond. Exceptions must be approved by the Academic Advisor and the Department Chair.

One likely source of projects for the applied study is the organization serving as host for the student's Management Residency or Practicum. In this case the student's on-site supervisor or mentor would in most cases be named to the student's Essay committee. Beyond the expectation that the project be anchored in the world of practice, the student will have some latitude in selecting a topic and designing the study so long as the design and methodology are consistent with the objectives of the study and the nature of the data to be collected. However, the final approval of the primary academic advisor and the organizational sponsor will be required before the student initiates his/her study. This is especially critical if human subjects are involved in the study design. Some of the methods and designs likely to be appropriate for this applied organizational study include:

1. Survey instruments
2. Qualitative methods, e.g., in-depth interviews, focus groups, process observation
3. Quantitative methods, e.g., financial, cost/benefit analysis
4. Management or policy analysis
5. Case study (single or comparative)

Other designs and appropriate methods may be considered depending on the nature of the selected project. However, if the MHA student chooses not to base his/her study on a topic, issue or problem linked to a health care or related organization as a project sponsor, he/she must obtain the prior approval of the Department Chair and/or his/her designee. Please note that your topic, design and methodology must be approved by your Essay Advisor and you must submit the Master's Essay Proposal form before you proceed with your study.

### **Master's Essay Proposal Form**

Complete and obtain signatures on this form and submit to Missy Deasy [deasym@pitt.edu](mailto:deasym@pitt.edu)  
by September 15<sup>th</sup> of second year

<b>STUDENT INFORMATION:</b>	
NAME:	
MAILING ADDRESS: (include: street, city, state, zip)	
PHONE CONTACT:	EMAIL:
<b>COMPOSITION OF ESSAY COMMITTEE:</b>	
Name of PRIMARY ESSAY ADVISOR (HPM Faculty Member): Print:  Signature: Date:	
Name of SECOND READER (University of Pittsburgh Faculty Member): Print:  Signature: Date:	
Name of THIRD READER (If presentation is based on residency or practicum the third reader must be someone from the organization. Otherwise they must be Pitt faculty.): Print:  Signature: Date:	
<b>ESSAY INFORMATION</b>	
PROPOSED ESSAY TITLE	
TARGET DATE FOR PRESENTATION:	
TARGET JOURNAL REFERENCE FORMAT:	
OUTLINE OF YOUR ESSAY TOPIC: (include a description of: Objective/Aims, and Design/Methodology/Data Sources)	
STUDENT SIGNATURE:	DATE:
<b>FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY:</b>	
HPM CHAIR or HPM DIRECTOR OF HEALTH MANAGEMENT EDUCATION SIGNATURE:	DATE:
COMMITTEE APPROVED BY GSPH ASSISTANT DEAN FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS:	DATE: