Master’s Project Guidelines

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Master’s Project Guidelines

The Master’s Project (HSCI 897)

Students in the Master of Public Health program (all streams) who are electing to submit a master’s project in partial satisfaction of degree requirements must enroll in (HSCI 897). The Master’s project (HSCI 897) is meant to be a culminating experience which requires students to synthesize and integrate the knowledge they have acquired in coursework and other learning experiences (including the practicum) throughout the Program. Students should demonstrate their mastery of a body of knowledge and demonstrate an ability to apply theory and principles to some aspect of professional practice.

The Council on Education for Public Health defines a “culminating experience as follows:

A culminating experience is one that requires a student to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired in coursework and other learning experiences and to apply theory and principles in a situation that approximates some aspect of professional practice. It must be used as a means by which faculty judge whether the student has mastered the body of knowledge and can demonstrate proficiency in the required competencies. [Council on Education for Public Health, 2005 Accreditation Criteria for Public Health Programs, p. 13, URL: http://www.ceph.org/files/public/PHP-Criteria-2005.S05.pdf].

At SFU, the culminating experience consists of the mentored preparation of a scholarly paper and successful presentation and defense of this paper before a Faculty committee.

The master’s project will generally involve a critical investigation of a public health issue or problem based on original analysis. It should approximate what would be required of a public health scientist engaged in professional practice. The written product of this effort is a high quality scholarly paper. The paper demonstrates the student’s ability to:

- succinctly define a public health issue or problem;
- discuss the public health problem within the context of public health practice and/or policy in Canada or globally;
- critically review the research literature of relevance to the topic;
- develop a persuasive, evidence-based argument;
- describe the methodology employed (e.g., data sources; data or policy analysis, case method analysis, program evaluation, etc);
- explain findings in a style appropriate for public health practice or scholarly publication;

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1 On return from their practicum students will develop a poster that reflects their practicum experience. This poster will be displayed along with all other student posters on the same day where faculty, students and preceptors attend. On completion of the poster presentation, the student will get credit (a grade of complete or incomplete) for the practicum. The practicum poster and related written materials that a student may prepare as part of their practicum may not be submitted in satisfaction of the Master’s project. However, a Master’s project may include data, information, case studies, and other relevant practice-based experiences.
• analyze and interpret findings and make appropriate conclusions and recommendations for policy/practice.

The capstone project requires a more detailed and extensive analysis than a term paper and is not merely a literature review, needs assessment, or chronology of the work in the practicum. Some master’s projects can be written in a publishable style.

The paper should represent an effort to synthesize or integrate across multiple public health disciplines. The paper should be written in a scholarly style with correct referencing. The length of the manuscript text (excluding references and tables/figures) will not exceed 30 pages and will typically be 20-25 pages or 5500-7000 words.

Selecting the Supervisory Committee

The supervisory committee for a project defense is comprised of the student’s senior supervisor, and a second committee member. Typically the second committee member is another SFU faculty member, but arrangements can be made to have committee members from other universities or from a private research institution. If the latter, a CV must accompany the supervisory committee form to the office of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Before a defense can be arranged, the supervisory committee must be registered with the Dean of Graduate Studies. The Graduate Program Assistant will oversee this process.

The second committee member should be decided on and registered with the Dean of Graduate Studies before the writing of the master’s project proposal or first draft, early in the Fall semester for those students planning to defend in the Spring. Refer to the calendar 1.6.4 Supervisory Committee for graduate general regulations (page 254, 2008/2009 calendar).
Preparing the Project proposal or outline

The master’s project is a mentored experience. Students should expect to work closely with their senior supervisor. The senior supervisor will review and make comment on the outline to help guide and prepare the student for discussion of their proposal with their supervisory committee. Students are required to submit a project proposal or detailed outline of their paper to their supervisory committee BEFORE they begin their work. The proposal must contain the following:

Title page
- Student’s name
- Names of committee members

Background and Rationale
- Introduction to the public health problem
- Discussion of the problem in the context of the theory, concepts, and methods of relevant public health disciplines.
- Significance for public health practice/policy

Purpose/Argument
- One or, at most, two primary research questions, topics, and/or hypotheses as appropriate
- Argument or central purpose/thesis of the paper

Evidence in Support of Argument
- Data sources
- Methods
- Analysis or approach
- Ethical review (if appropriate)

Timeline
- Include proposed dates of drafts/sections of paper as well as projected defense date
Preparing the Master’s Project

The master’s project must be presented in a form that is amenable to examination and review. This means that the documentation of the research or inquiry process must be provided in a form that allows others to follow the line of reasoning and to evaluate the credibility of the work.

At minimum the project must meet the criteria of content and presentation that are as rigorous as those applied to work done in a professional public health setting. Some projects can be written in a publishable style appropriate for the discipline. Students should consult with their senior supervisor about writing style early on in the process. However, if the paper is to be submitted to a peer-reviewed scientific journal, the student and committee may agree that higher standards are appropriate.

The program suggest the following content areas in each Master’s project:

1) Title page and abstract
2) Introduction to the public health problem
3) Purpose of the paper
4) Critical review of relevant literature
5) Methods
6) Results or Findings (to include tables, figures, and/or exhibits)
7) Discussion
8) Implications and recommendations for public health practice and/or policy
9) Critical reflection of the student’s role as a public health practitioner in relation to the problem, and if appropriate, to the agencies addressing the issue or problem.
10) References should be completed in American Psychological Association (APA) or Canadian Journal of Public Health (CJPH) style

Depending on the nature of the project and intended purpose of the report, an alternative structure and sections of the paper may be warranted (e.g., in the case of a critical essay or commentary). If so, this should be discussed and agreed upon by the committee members.

In the discussion section students are expected to integrate their findings with relevant literature, discuss the strengths and limitations of methods/approach/analysis and consider the implications of their work for practice.

Student’s critical reflection of their role as a public health practitioner should include the following: What you learned about yourself in the process of doing the work? How did your research/practice influence others? What would you do differently?

The paper should be typed and organized in a style that is in accordance with library requirements. Project/thesis templates, are available from the Library web site: http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/writing/thesestemplates/msword_pc.htm.

*Please note that this template is set up for theses and so not all sections/headings may be relevant to master’s projects.*
Master's Project Guidelines

Preparing to Defend

You must be registered in the Master's project or the project completion course in the semester you plan to defend. Master's project students register in HSCI 897 (Master's Project) or HSCI 895 (Project completion). The defense of the Master's project must follow Graduate General Regulations (1.9 Preparation for Examinations Master's Students, page256, 2008-2009 SFU calendar).

Students need to allow 3 to 4 weeks to organize their defense. To help with the planning and organization of your defense, refer to the defense checklist in your graduate program handbook. The “readiness to defend” form must be signed off by the student’s supervisory committee before the defense is set up by the graduate program assistant. Students must provide the graduate program assistant an abstract (no more than 150 words) describing their Master’s project. The abstract with the examining committee form will be submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies by the graduate program assistant.

When organizing your defense, consult with the graduate program assistant to determine the two week minimum deadline for distribution of your project. Students are responsible for distributing their Master’s project to their examining committee by that deadline. If a student cannot meet the two week deadline, the defense may be postponed. All members of the examining committee should receive the Master’s project by the deadline date. The graduate program assistant is responsible for making sure that the chair of the examining committee receives a copy of the master’s project.

If the examining committee is in agreement, a student may distribute the Master’s project beyond the two week deadline. It is the responsibility of the student to arrange the new deadline for submission of the project, and to confirm that deadline with the examining committee and the graduate program assistant. To go into effect, the new deadline must be agreed upon by all members of the examining committee, otherwise the defense must be postponed. It is the responsibility of the graduate program assistant to notify the Dean of Graduate Studies of the defense and any scheduling changes.
The Examining Committee

The examining committee for a Master’s project defense is comprised of a defense chair, the supervisory committee and an external examiner. Normally, the external examiner is someone with no prior involvement in the writing and development of the Master’s project, and may be from the Faculty of Health Sciences, or from another department at SFU. External examiners are typically individuals who are familiar with the problem being addressed, but have not had any input into the preparation of the Master’s project. An external may be someone from outside SFU.

The role of the defense Chair is to preside over the defense to ensure that the rules for a defense (provided by the university Graduate general Regulations) are followed. The Chair will advise on examination results, but does not have a vote. The Chair of the defense will collect appropriate signatures on defense forms required by the student for submission to the library.
The Oral Defense

At the oral defense a student is required to provide a formal, 15-20 minute presentation of their paper, using PowerPoint or other visual aids. Students will then be asked questions by the examining committee. A defense chair is permitted to ask questions of the student. Defenses will last approximately one- to one and one-half hours. Normally, the Chair, the supervisory committee and the external are all present at the defense.

A defense is advertised to the SFU community, FHS faculty and graduate students, and is open to the public. In the event that a committee member or the external cannot participate in person, a conference call may be arranged, or a list of questions should be provided the Chair of the defense who will act on behalf of the missing examining committee member.

At the conclusion of the examination, the student and any non-members of the examining committee will be asked to leave the room. The Chair will conduct the deliberations “in camera” needed for the committee to reach the following conclusions: 1) A student may pass without revisions; 2) a student may pass on the condition that revisions be completed to the satisfaction of the senior supervisor (minor revisions), or the examination committee (major revisions); 3) the examining committee may choose to defer judgment if it judges that the project could pass after additional work by the student; or 4) the project may be failed (See 1.10.2 Classification of the Thesis, p246 2007-2008 SFU calendar).

The student will then be invited to rejoin the examining committee. The Chair will first announce results of the committee’s deliberation. Following the announcement, the committee will have an opportunity to discuss with the students any recommended changes or revisions, and the student will have an opportunity to ask questions of the committee.

At the conclusion of the defense, the student will submit an electronic copy of their PowerPoint presentation and any other materials presented to the examination committee to the Chair of the defense. It is the responsibility of the Chair of the defense to submit to the graduate program assistant all signed forms including the Examination Results form, a signed Approval page, the Recommendation for Award of Degree form, and the PowerPoint presentation. The PowerPoint copy will be archived in the program for use primarily for program (not student) evaluation purposes.

The Chair of the examination committee will distribute evaluation forms to committee members. These evaluation forms will ask the examination committee to evaluate the project and defense against relevant program objectives and core competencies.
-Repeating an examination

If the committee chooses to defer judgment in order to permit the student the opportunity to rework the project, it will identify the time period in which this work is to be completed. It is at the discretion of the committee whether to require a re-defense of the project, or whether it wishes to reexamine the project paper. The examination committee may not defer judgment a second time. (See 1.10.2 Classification of the Thesis, p246 2007-2008 SFU calendar).

On the successful completion of the Master’s project, students will receive a grade of “Complete”. This normally represents the completion of the course work for the Master of Public Health degree. If this is the case, students will be “Recommended for the Award of Degree” (1.10.3 2007-2008 SFU calendar, page 246) to the Dean of Graduate Studies, and eligible for convocation.
Submitting to the library

All master’s projects must meet SFU Senate guidelines before they are accepted by the library. To graduate in the semester you defend, a student must meet the semester [Senate] deadline for submission to the library. Students should check the graduate student handbook “Calendar of Events” for the dates that apply to them. Students must apply to graduate [www.gosfu.ca] and normally do so in their defending semester.

Students are responsible for providing copies of their Master’s project to the thesis assistant at the library. At minimum, three copies of the Master’s project must be produced and submitted; two copies are required by the library and one copy is required by the Faculty of Health Sciences. If a student wishes to purchase a bound copy of their Master’s project they must pay for that copy (currently $16.00 per copy). Students can order up to three copies for themselves. At the time of submission to the library, the graduate program assistant will collect the payment and provide the student with the necessary documents that must accompany the Master’s project: the signed approval page, an unsigned approval page, partial copyright license, examination results form with the approval of the senior supervisor.

Recommendation for the Award of Degree

Before the recommendation for award of degree is approved, the Coordinator, Graduate Programs checks course requirements against the student’s record. The recommendation for the award of degree is then approved by the Director, Graduate Programs. Following approval the recommendation for award of the degree is forwarded to the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies who seeks degree approval from Senate.