



**FHS GRADUATE PROGRAM  
MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH (MPH)**

**Program Handbook**

*Approved September 1, 2024*

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## i. Greetings

Welcome to the Master of Public Health (MPH) Program at McMaster University. The MPH Program sits in the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI), both operating within the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS).

The MPH Program is governed by the policies and procedures described in the current [School of Graduate Studies \(SGS\) Calendar](#), supplemented by the program-specific policies and procedures described in this Handbook.

As the MPH Program Handbook is a supplement to the SGS Calendar, it **does not provide a comprehensive set of binding regulations and does not replicate or modify the information found in the SGS Calendar. If there is any discrepancy between this handbook and the SGS Calendar, then the SGS Calendar shall prevail.** Students and faculty are encouraged to look at the SGS Calendar for information about:

- Officers of Administration
- Sessional Dates
- Graduate Study at McMaster University
- General Regulations of the Graduate School
- Regulations for Degree Progression
- Financial Matters
- Additional University Regulations Affecting Graduate Students
- Graduate Scholarships, Bursaries and Other Awards
- Governing Bodies
- General Information
- Areas of Study

Updates, along with news and announcements, are also posted on the [MPH website](#). Please check the website regularly for new information.

## ii. MPH Program Administration

**Program Director** | Dr. Elizabeth Alvarez  
Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact  
Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4K1  
905 525 9140, ext. 22248

**Acting Program Administrator** | Lynnden Kelly  
Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact  
Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4K1  
[askmph@mcmaster.ca](mailto:askmph@mcmaster.ca)

**Curriculum Coordinator** | Oluwasola (Joshua) Awolusi  
Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact  
Faculty of Health Sciences, McMaster University  
1280 Main Street West, Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4K1  
[mphcc@mcmaster.ca](mailto:mphcc@mcmaster.ca)

## iii. MPH and HEI History

### Our Mission

The Master of Public Health (MPH) Program prepares future public health leaders to apply evidence-informed thinking to address emerging population and public health challenges and pursue health equity locally, nationally and internationally.

### Core Values

- Health equity and social responsibility
- Interdisciplinary
- Evidence-informed thinking
- Collaboration
- Community and partner engagement
- Sustainability/accountability
- Innovation
- Integrity

### About the Program

Drawing on the world-renowned strengths of the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI) in evidence-based decision-making, health research methodology, policy analysis, and epidemiology, the McMaster MPH Program was created in 2015 to bolster the public health workforce's knowledge and skills for response to future health challenges. The program is unique in Canada as a leading generalist program that provides learners with a broad foundation in public health science, research methodology, and one-of-two degree track options - thesis or practicum. The MPH Program is also situated in a vibrant environment of students, community members, faculty, staff, influential public health organizations and research groups, and a community that allows for a dynamic setting that prepares public health leaders to address health challenges in a meaningful, responsible and equitable way.

### The Department

*A Note on the Historical Development of the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact. Prepared for the Departmental Ad Hoc Committee by Dr. D.L. Sackett September 1987 and revised January 1988.*

The Department of Clinical Epidemiology & Biostatistics (CE&B) was formed in November 1967 to develop a focus on applied research methodological expertise that would carry out independent and collaborative research, education and methodological services in the new Faculty of Medicine (later the Faculty of Health Sciences [FHS]) of McMaster University. Its formation drew upon the definition of clinical epidemiology and biostatistics developed by its first chair: the application of epidemiological and biometric methods to the study of the diagnostic and therapeutic process to effect improvement in health. Its initial staffing (3 members – 2 clinical epidemiologists and 1 biostatistician, for the period of 1967-1975) was based on its anticipated impact and the projected calls on its expertise by the programs under development at that time. Recognizing that the CE&B name captured only some of the depth and breadth of disciplines and expertise now in the department, we formally changed its name to the Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact, effective January 1, 2017.

The subsequent growth and development of the Department have demonstrated that these initial plans required major quantitative and qualitative changes if the Department (and FHS) were to achieve their mission.

In quantitative terms, within 18 months of its formation, it became clear that both the Department's opportunities for independent research and education and the calls on the Department's expertise were far greater than anticipated at the time of its inception and at the direction of Faculty Council, its growth has proceeded at ten times the original estimate. The Design, Measurement and Evaluation Program, the forerunner to the Health Research Methodology Program, was designed and initiated in 1969.

In qualitative terms, it became clear that achieving the ultimate mission, "to effect an improvement in health", required expertise in areas beyond clinical epidemiology and biostatistics. Although these initial disciplines continue to be highly successful in research, education and methodological service related to the validation of the clinical examination and other diagnostic tests and the determination of the efficacy of preventive, therapeutic and rehabilitative regimens, programs, and health professionals, it has become apparent that additional areas of expertise are essential to this ultimate mission. These areas have been added to the Department. These areas are described in terms of functions rather than people since most departmental members wear several hats and contribute to more than one area (e.g., the biostatisticians contribute to all).

1. **Health Economics:** recognized as essential for quantifying the cost-effectiveness and cost-utility of validated interventions and for analyzing the efficiency of alternative methods of financing and organizing health care systems as well as delivering specific services, this area has both flourished and has pointed out the need for additional developments in the Department (see #3).
2. **Public Health Epidemiology and Public Health:** recognized as essential for determining the distribution and determinants of disease (including occupational and environmental causes of human illness), this area has flourished. It has added a key dimension to the graduate programs as the latter has attracted a broader array of applicants. The Public Health and Preventive Medicine Residency Program has existed in the Department since the early 1980s. The Master of Public Health Program was added in 2015, and the Graduate Diploma in Community and Public Health was added in 2023.
3. **Medical Informatics and Knowledge Transfer:** recognized as essential for making validated and efficacious interventions accessible to frontline clinicians, this new area has, in part, developed as a natural extension of the Department's long-standing involvement in educational research (including collaboration with the Program for Educational Development) and is rapidly developing both local and international programs. The eHealth and Health Education Masters programs have grown from this expertise and interest.
4. **Health Services Research and Policy:** recognized as essential for understanding health service delivery and effecting the translation of validated, effective findings into professional and governmental policy, this area of the Department is seen as an essential element in the sequence of events that can most successfully be achieved if this information is to reach those who can benefit from it.

The Department has displayed the awareness, openness, and innovation necessary to identify and act upon the need for these quantitative and qualitative changes, and the FHS has provided encouragement and support for this growth and maturation. There is no doubt that the future will call for additional change, and the Department, therefore, must ensure the continuation of the awareness, openness, and inventiveness that brought it to its present level of maturity.

### **Editorial Note**

Dave Sackett left McMaster in 1994 to found the International [Centre for Evidence-Based Medicine](#) at the University of Oxford in England. He officially retired from academia and clinical practice in 1999 and returned to Canada to establish a research and education centre about clinical trials. Dr. Sackett died at the age of 80 in the spring of 2015.

As a professor emeritus, he remained closely connected to HEI, teaching seminars and courses and participating in the research symposia that was established in his honour.

## **iv. MPH Program and Leadership**

The department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI) is the administrative and intellectual home of the MPH Program, although the MPH faculty come from across FHS and the McMaster campus.

The MPH Program Director is a faculty member in the Department of HEI who provides faculty-level leadership and oversight of the MPH Program.

The MPH Program Administrator oversees the day-to-day management of the MPH Program and supports the Program Director, Program Committees, and the admissions and selection process.

The MPH Curriculum Coordinator supports the faculty, core courses, practicum and thesis tracks, and provides support for the elective options.

### **Getting Help**

- Questions about policies and procedures are best directed to the MPH Program Administrator.
- Questions about course scheduling and placement or thesis track learning are best directed to the MPH Program Curriculum Coordinator.
- MPH Program staff will sometimes direct inquiries to the Program Director.
- MPH policies and procedures are summarized in this Handbook and in the SGS Graduate Calendar. Forms and additional materials are available on Avenue to Learn and on the [School of Graduate Studies](#) website. Contacts for specific inquiries can be found on the [MPH website](#), or students can contact [askmph@mcmaster.ca](mailto:askmph@mcmaster.ca) for guidance.
- Students may consult the Program Director regarding various matters beyond routine procedural inquiries. These may include interpreting the applicability of regulations and policies, concerns about supervision or personal problems affecting work, or if the student wishes to deviate from regulations considering a particular circumstance. In such cases of petitions for special consideration, the Program Director is normally required to approve the student's request, which is then adjudicated by the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Health Sciences. As such, the support of the Program Director does not guarantee that a request for special consideration will be approved.

## 1.0 MPH Areas of Focus

Students in the MPH Program pursue a general Master of Public Health degree and can explore other areas, such as health policy and management, epidemiology, health economics, research methods, health promotion, health informatics, environmental health or health ethics.

### 1.0 Selection of the Thesis or Practicum Track

MPH students must choose one of two tracks: 1) thesis or 2) practicum. MPH students will be expected to pick one of these two tracks by the end of their first term in consultation with the Program Director. Students must submit the [Request for In-Program Course Adjustments](#) form to indicate their choice. Further details and instructions will be provided in PUBHLTH 712, Professional Development Studio I. The deadline for confirmation of the student's practicum and/or thesis site and supervisor is May 1. Degree requirements for both options are listed in Table 1. An overview of the practicum and thesis track options is provided in the corresponding supplementary sections at the end of this Handbook, entitled the 'MPH Practicum Manual and the MPH Thesis Manual'. Please refer to these two separate manuals for specific information about the practicum or thesis tracks within the MPH Program.

**Table 1: Degree Requirements**

	Thesis Track)	Practicum Track
<b>Number of Core Courses</b>	8	8
<b>Number of Electives</b> <i>A list of suggested electives will be posted on A2L prior to the term.</i>	0 <i>Optional: Thesis students may choose 1-2 electives</i>	5 <i>Note: A second part-time practicum can take the place of 2 electives</i>
<b>Capstone Paper</b> – within PUBHLTH 708 Leadership and Applied Public Health	No	Yes
<b>Thesis protocol, implementation, and defense</b>	Yes	No

**Electives are a unique feature of the MPH Program.** Additional electives will be circulated each term by the Curriculum Coordinator for electives being held in the following term. Electives that are not on the circulated list must be reviewed and approved by SGS on the recommendation of the Program Director. Please refer to the [Graduate Calendar](#) for a course list.

Students can work with MPH faculty to develop an independent study course. The MPH Independent Study Application form is available on Avenue to Learn. This form must be reviewed and approved by the Program Director at least six weeks before the start of the term.

**Note: Water Without Borders courses are non-credit and cannot be counted as electives.**



## 2.0 Faculty Advisors, Supervisor, and Student Relationships

The School of Graduate Studies webpage on [Graduate Supervision](#) outlines the responsibilities of graduate students, their supervisors, and the expectations of a graduate student-supervisor relationship in the document titled '[Getting the Supervisory Relationship off to a Good Start](#)'.

### 2.1 General Objectives

The MPH Program Director and core faculty will advise all students in the MPH Program. As appropriate, mentors and additional faculty support may be identified.

The Program Director will be the initial contact person for the MPH students and act as the students' primary representative to the faculty in all aspects of the student goals within the Program, including funding requests for student-related activities. The students' responsibility is to inform the Program Director about their direction and progress in the Program.

### 2.2 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the Program Director-student relationship include the following:

- The Program Director ensures the student feels welcome from the beginning of the student's enrolment in the program through the Professional Development Studio, a two-part course series.
- The Program Director and the student should meet regularly, on a one-on-one basis, to discuss progress through the program and evaluations that have been received.
- The Program Director and student will discuss the thesis/practicum options early in their meetings to decide which option best meets the student's learning objectives.
- The student will keep the Program Director informed about project activities in courses.
- The Program Director assists the student in selecting appropriate courses to optimize their education in the elective portion of the program.
- The Program Director may act as the thesis supervisor on the agreed-upon thesis topic.

Students are expected to take advantage of various opportunities during their MPH Program. The Program Director will assist the student in contacting other faculty members who might act as resources for MPH activities such as course projects and thesis. The initiative should usually come from the student in specifying the type of resources required; input from the Program Director helps identify faculty members with the most appropriate skills and interests. While students may, in principle, contact any individual for help during their program, they should realize that only faculty members associated with the Department of HEI are eligible to assume roles where formal academic credit is required.

**The specific objectives of the thesis supervisor-student relationship include the following:**

- The supervisor must be a McMaster Faculty member. In consultation with the Program Director, if needed, the supervisor will direct students to identify a suitable thesis committee consisting of two additional committee members, one of whom could be external to McMaster (all committee members, including external members, must be approved as soon as their willingness to sit on the student's committee has been determined). The external reader must be approved at least 4 weeks in advance of the scheduled defense date. The external reader should be arms-length and not directly involved in the student's thesis. The thesis committee will meet to ensure the student is

progressing. It is also the student's responsibility to work with the MPH Program office and inform the Curriculum Coordinator so that a room or virtual meeting room (i.e. Zoom room) is booked for the defense. The student must provide all readers with a copy of the thesis in sufficient (at least 4 weeks) time before the defense itself. The thesis should not be sent to the external reader before all internal committee members have read it and provided feedback. Failure to carry out any of these steps may result in postponement of the defense or partial or complete disapproval of the thesis. Refer to the MPH Thesis Manual for complete details concerning the thesis. The thesis supervisor is required to have a formal appointment in the School of Graduate Studies.

A change of supervisor for students in the thesis track must be negotiated with the approval of the MPH Program Director. In the circumstance of a breakdown of a supervisor-student match, the Program Director is contacted to help remedy the situation. Under exceptional circumstances, a student may be allowed to select a new supervisor. A change in supervision or thesis project requires the student to submit a revised education plan. Note, a change in thesis supervisor is not the norm, and students and supervisors should refer to section [3.1 General Regulations on Supervision](#) in the SGS Calendar for procedures regarding a request to change a member of the supervisory committee.

## 2.3 Organization

Beginning in September of each academic year, incoming students are welcomed by the MPH Program Director, the Program staff and core faculty at the orientation day. Afterwards, the frequency of meetings should be negotiated, but it is suggested that they occur at least once per term. Subsequent meetings may be needed at certain times during the student's progress in the Program, when the student is new to the Program, and during the time the student is selecting the thesis or practicum track.

## 3.0 MPH Program Requirements

### 3.1 Requirements for a Thesis-Based MPH Degree

For full-time thesis track students, the expected timeline for completion is two years of continuous, full-time study (minimum of 16 months) from initial registration in the MPH Program. Students may be allowed to continue for a maximum of three years.

#### To complete the MPH Thesis-Based Degree students must:

- i) Successfully complete all eight core MPH Program courses:
  - a. PUBHLTH 700: Foundations of Population and Public Health Practice
  - b. PUBHLTH 701: Population and Public Health Epidemiology
  - c. HTHRSM 702: Introduction to Biostatistics
  - d. PUBHLTH 703: Population and Public Health Policy
  - e. PUBHLTH 704: Population and Public Health Research Methods (Prerequisite: PUBHLTH 701: Population and Public Health Epidemiology or permission of the instructor)
  - f. PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health
  - g. PUBHLTH 712: Professional Development Studio I
  - h. PUBHLTH 713: Professional Development Studio II

- ii) Present their updated progress in PUBHLTH 708: Leadership and Applied Public Health course.
- iii) Successfully defend their thesis and submit it to MacSphere.
- iv) Optional: students may complete one or two electives relevant to their thesis, area of focus, or interest.

**Table 2: Thesis Track Schedule Full-time**

	Fall Term	Winter Term	Summer Term
<b>Year 1</b>	<p><b>PUBHLTH 700</b> Foundations of Population and Public Health Practice</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 712</b> Professional Development Studio I</p> <p><b>HTRSM 702</b> Introduction to Biostatistics</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 701</b> Population and Public Health Epidemiology</p>	<p><b>PUBHLTH 703</b> Public Health Policy</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 704</b> Population and Public Health Research Methods (Prerequisite: PUBHLTH 701)</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 713</b> Professional Development Studio II</p>	<b>Thesis Work</b>
<b>Year 2</b>	<p><b>PUBHLTH 708</b> Leadership &amp; Applied Public Health</p> <p><b>Thesis Work</b></p>	<b>Thesis Work</b>	<b>Thesis Defense</b>

### 3.2 Requirements for a Practicum-Based MPH Degree

The practicum track requires completion of all core courses, a select number of elective courses, and a full-time practicum. For full-time study, it takes approximately 16 months to complete the degree.

**To complete the MPH Practicum-Based Degree students must:**

- i) **Successfully complete all eight core MPH Program courses:**
  - a. PUBHLTH 700: Foundations of Population and Public Health Practice
  - b. PUBHLTH 701: Population and Public Health Epidemiology
  - c. HTRSM 702: Introduction to Biostatistics
  - d. PUBHLTH 703: Population and Public Health Policy
  - e. PUBHLTH 704: Population and Public Health Research Methods (Prerequisite: PUBHLTH 701: Population and Public Health Epidemiology or permission of the instructor)
  - f. PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health
  - g. PUBHLTH 712: Professional Development Studio I

- h. PUBHLTH 713 Professional Development Studio II (Prerequisite: PUBHLTH 712 Professional Development Studio II).
- i. This course includes an MPH Capstone Report: A capstone paper relevant to the student's practicum experience or a public health issue of interest is written in the fall term of the second year for full-time students and after the completion of the practicum for part-time students. Capstone papers not related to the practicum can be requested by students in discussion with the Program Director.
- ii) **Successfully complete five electives relevant to the student's area of focus or interest are required.** (An additional part-time practicum of 17.5 hours per week for 16 weeks can replace two electives in the fall term of the second year of study.)  
**The following MPH Program elective courses all available to our students:**
- Fall Term
    - PUBHLTH 710: Introduction to Knowledge Synthesis and Guidelines
    - PUBHLTH 714: Communicable Disease Prevention, Epidemiology and Control
    - PUBHLTH 721: Fundamentals of Environmental Health and Health Impacts of Climate Change
  - Winter Term
    - PUBHLTH 715: Advanced Topics in Epidemiology
    - PUBHLTH 716: The Science and Practice of Knowledge Translation: Foundations
    - PUBHLTH 706: Introduction to Health and Public Health Economics
    - PUBHLTH 711: Program Evaluation in Public Health
  - Spring/Summer Term
    - PUBHLTH 707: Implications of Infectious Diseases
    - PUBHLTH 709: Theories of Health Behaviour
- iii) **Successfully complete a 16-week full-time (35 hours per week) practicum. The practicum is typically done during the spring/summer term of the first year of study.**

In addition to MPH electives, there are also opportunities to take electives from other programs within McMaster. MPH elective enrollment takes place the term prior to the course being offered. A list of approved electives will be circulated to students by the MPH program staff in the term preceding the course. Electives not on the list must be approved by the Program Director. Students can work with MPH faculty to develop an independent study course. The 'MPH Independent Study Application' form is available on Avenue to Learn. This form must be reviewed and approved by the Program Director at least six weeks prior to the start of the term.

**Note: Water Without Borders courses are non-credit courses and cannot be counted as electives.**

**Table 3: Practicum Schedule Full-time**

	Fall Term	Winter Term	Summer Term
Year 1	<p><b>PUBHLTH 700</b> Foundations of Population and Public Health Practice</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 712</b> Professional Development Studio I</p> <p><b>HTHRSM 702</b> Introduction to Biostatistics</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 701</b> Population and Public Health Epidemiology</p>	<p><b>PUBHLTH 703</b> Public Health Policy</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 704</b> Population and Public Health Research Methods (Prerequisite: PUBHLTH 701)</p> <p><b>PUBHLTH 713</b> Professional Development Studio II</p> <p><b>Elective(s)*</b></p>	<p><b>Full-Time Practicum</b> (mandatory)</p> <p><b>Elective*</b> (optional)</p>
Year 2	<p><b>PUBHLTH 708</b> Leadership &amp; Applied Public Health</p> <p><b>Elective(s)* and/or Optional Part-Time Practicum</b></p> <p><i>Students complete the MPH Program at the end of the fall term (December).</i></p>		

### 3.3 SGS 101 & SGS 201 Requirement

All graduate students are required to successfully complete [SGS 101 Academic Research Integrity and Ethics](#) and [SGS 201 Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\)](#) during their first term of study. Registration information will be circulated each term by the School of Graduate Studies. Students can register through MOSAIC, the University’s online portal, and complete the courses in A2L. Completion of SGS 101 / 201 will appear in the Student Centre in MOSAIC.

### 3.4 Declaration of Thesis or Practicum Option

Declaration of degree track (thesis or practicum) is typically submitted to the MPH program office no later than the end of the first term; however it must be submitted no later than the end of the winter term in the first year of study. A change in status requires the permission of the thesis supervisor and the Program Director and will have implications for financial support. Thesis/practicum students who change their status after May 1st may be subject to repayment of the thesis stipend.

## 4.0 Evaluation

### 4.1 Student Evaluation in the MPH Program

There are several components of evaluation in the MPH Program. They are coursework and practicum report/final Capstone paper (practicum-based Master's) or thesis (thesis-based Master's).

### 4.2 Course Work

Each course has its own approved criteria, usually based on assignments, papers and class participation. A letter grade is awarded by the course instructor. Late assignments will be penalized unless the student has been given an extension in writing by the course instructors. Specific details will be clearly stated in the course outlines.

Graduate level courses taken at McMaster University, which includes the MPH program, use the Graduate Student Grading Scale found in the [School of Graduate Studies Calendar in section 2.6.9](#).

Grade	Points	Equivalent Percentages	Pass/Fail
A+	12	90-100	P+
A	11	85-89	P
A-	10	80-84	
B+	9	77-79	
B	8	73-76	
B-	7	70-72	
F	0	69 and under	F

The minimum passing grade for a graduate student is a B-. If a student receives a course grade below B-, remediation will be required, and a recommendation may be made for the student to withdraw from the program.

Courses are a minimum of 12 weeks in length. [Sessional Dates](#) for the academic year can be found in the School of Graduate Studies Calendar.

Students are expected to consult with the course instructors for specific course related dates. Classes may run during reading week(s) at the course instructor's discretion; students must contact their instructors to confirm.

### 4.3 Practicum

Students and their practicum supervisors meet to discuss the objectives of the practicum before the practicum begins, at the beginning of the practicum, during the practicum to discuss progress, and then at the end of the practicum where the supervisor provides input for a pass/fail grade.

**The student must submit the learning contract by the deadline provided by the program. Instructions for submission will also be provided by the program.** It is recommended that the student and practicum supervisor develop the learning contract together prior to submission.

The learning contract needs to be approved and signed by the supervisor. The mid-term evaluation is due at the end of the second month (midway) of the practicum and the final evaluation is due at the end of the practicum. Students must ensure that the practicum evaluations are submitted per the instructions provided by the program and before the deadline. If all practicum documents are not received, a milestone indicating completion of the practicum requirement will not be recorded with the School of Graduate Studies. Practicum milestone/s are required for program completion. The Program Director will assign pass/fail based on the evaluation feedback provided by the practicum supervisor.

#### 4.4 Thesis

The final evaluation for thesis-based MPH students is the written dissertation and oral defense of a thesis before a thesis examination committee. The thesis is simply graded as pass/fail. Both components, oral and written, must be successfully completed. If a student fails either part of the thesis, the curriculum and thesis examination committees will decide if the student may retry the defense. See the MPH Thesis Manual for the requirements for a thesis and thesis defense.

#### 4.5 Capstone Paper

The evaluation for practicum-based MPH students is a written paper completed during the course PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health in the fall term of the second year. See the MPH Practicum Manual for the requirements of this paper.

## 5.0 Policy on Overlap in MPH Program

This policy is intended to clarify the Master of Public Health Program regarding the overlap between topics used in course assignments, theses, and Capstone papers.

The MPH program adopts the principle that students avoid duplication but overlap (methodological or content area) in courses and theses is allowed; however, in accordance with the [McMaster Academic Integrity Policy](#), “the submission of an assignment, report or essay, which has been submitted at an earlier date for a different course, is an act of academic dishonesty unless the instructor has specifically authorized it in advance” (pg. 31). Adjudication is the responsibility of the student’s Supervisory Committee for thesis students or the Program Director for practicum students.

## 6.0 Policy on Attendance in the MPH Program

### 6.1 Illness or Unavoidable Absence During Course Work

If a student is ill or legitimately absent (e.g., personal reasons) before an examination or course deadline, the student must email the Course Instructor and copy the Program Administrator and the Curriculum Coordinator as early as possible so that arrangements can be made for an extension or deferral.

### **The MPH Program Attendance Policy is as follows:**

- Any absence must be due to a reasonable excuse that is exceptional and out of the control to some extent of the student (illness, death in the family, special exams etc.). Note that travel and vacations are not considered a reasonable excuse to miss class.
- The course-specific requirements for absence notices will be posted on Avenue to Learn.
- One absence from a tutorial or class with a legitimate excuse is reasonable; two may be acceptable, but three missed tutorials/class will result in the student NOT receiving credit for the course.
- If the student is absent, they will receive a “0” participation grade on that day.
- In the event of greater than two absences, the student will be required to meet with the Program Director. The student will be asked to withdraw from the course if the absence is deemed unacceptable (and the prior expectation is that most would not be).
- Students must inform course instructors about any absences, whenever possible, before the class they are absent.

Please note that students should consult the course material for the specific attendance policy, as the above policy is the minimum requirement, and each course may have additional requirements for attendance and participation.

### **6.2 McMaster Policy for Inclement Weather**

Students should familiarize themselves with the McMaster [Storm Emergency Policy and Procedures](#). McMaster will post updates on school closures on the [Daily News](#) webpage.

## **7.0 Petitions for Special Consideration**

For information regarding Petitions for Special Considerations including requests for leaves of absence, please refer to the [School of Graduate Studies Calendar, Section 2.5.9](#).

The ‘Petition for Special Consideration’ form can be found on the School of Graduate Studies’ website on the [Forms and Policies for Graduate Students, Staff and Faculty](#) webpage.

## **8.0 Appeal Procedures**

For information regarding the Appeals Procedure please refer to the [School of Graduate Studies Calendar, Section 5.4](#). Students may also refer to the [University Secretariat’s webpage on Student Appeals](#).

## **9.0 Accommodation Policies**

Students who require accommodations for religious, spiritual or cultural observances are encouraged to review the [Policy on Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous and](#)



## Spiritual Observances.

Students who require academic accommodations for disabilities and/or medical reasons are encouraged to review the policy on [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#). For accommodation plans or discuss options, students can make an appointment with the [Student Accessibility Services \(SAS\)](#) office. SAS works closely with Programs to develop accommodation plans to meet the individual needs of the students and the programs.

## 10.0 Special Petition Requests for Alternate Course

Students who have completed graduate-level courses at other institutions that are comparable to an MPH program course can request to have them approved to be used as prerequisites to more advanced courses. Approval is determined on a case-by-case basis and supporting documentation (such as a course syllabus and a signed petition form) is required.

**Please note that approval of a non-MPH Program course does not reduce the number of MPH courses a student must complete for the MPH degree.**

To request approval please submit the ['Request for In-program Course Adjustment'](#) form found on the [SGS website](#).

## 11.0 FHS Graduate Policy on Adjustment of Financial Support

Any financial support received from the program will be unaffected if students receive a competitive scholarship.

## 12. Academic Integrity Policy & Generative AI

### 12.1 Academic Integrity

McMaster's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) states, "*Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage*" (pg. 7). Students must understand what academic dishonesty is and what consequences may occur by breaching the policy.

### 12.2 Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

While we acknowledge that the use of Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, may be helpful to your learning, we require you to act with [academic integrity](#) when being assessed. Currently, MPH assessments have not been designed with Generative AI tools in mind and using them threatens the integrity of the assessment.

The main purpose of a university is the pursuit of knowledge and scholarship. As a student at McMaster University, you are expected to practice intellectual honesty and to fully acknowledge the work of others by providing appropriate references in your scholarly work. You must not take credit for work that is not your own. Please note that the McMaster University [Academic Integrity](#)

Policy states under item 21(c), "It shall be an offence to knowingly... submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source".

Please check with your course coordinator and the course outline for each MPH and elective course, as course coordinators will provide additional guidance for specific assessments. In general, the direct use of text originating from a Generative AI tool, beyond using the tool to correct grammar/spelling, should be included in quotation marks or equivalent and cited using a citation style appropriate for the context. Should an AI assistant like ChatGPT be permitted for a particular assessment, you must be transparent by including a Generative AI statement as an appendix. This statement must declare the specific Generative AI tool used, the prompts used to create the submitted content, and for which sections/tasks in the assessment you used the tool. If you use Generative AI but do not declare this, the course coordinator will refer the case to the Office of Academic Integrity.

## 13.0 HEI Department Special Events

The Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI) presents "Special Events" such as rounds, lectures, research days, workshops, and symposia. Students will receive advance notice of these events via McMaster email and/or in the Cohort Shell on A2L. Students wishing to receive email notifications when an announcement has been posted on A2L can set up notifications by following these instructions:

1. Navigate to the course shell on A2L where you wish to receive notifications.
2. Click on your photo/name in the upper right corner then select "Notifications" from the menu.
3. Here you can choose for which activities you would like to be notified.

Special events are also listed on the [HEI website's News & Events](#) page. Please check this website periodically to keep up to date on departmental events.

All students are expected to attend these department events. These will be very beneficial to students as methodological issues are discussed in the context of various research questions.

In addition, individual research units may hold their own rounds. If your supervisor belongs to one of these units, you are also expected to attend these.

## 14.0 Helpful Resources

### 14.1 Academic Resources

#### **Faculty of Health Sciences Graduate Studies**

Online hub for resources for FHS graduate students at McMaster University. Contact

Information: HSC 4H4; 905-515-9240 ext. 21609;

<https://grad.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/>; [fhsgrad@mcmaster.ca](mailto:fhsgrad@mcmaster.ca).

### **School of Graduate Studies**

Policies, procedures, guidelines, resources, information for graduate study at McMaster University. Contact Information: Gilmour Hall 212, Online chat available on the website at <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/>.

### **Department of Health Research Methods, Evidence, and Impact (HEI)**

The MPH Programs sits in the Department of HEI. The HEI website contains information for students, faculty and staff, including faculty listing, research groups, key contact people in HEI, upcoming events, etc. Contact Information: HSC 2C; <https://hei.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/>.

### **Master of Public Health**

The MPH website offers information for students, faculty and staff, including: degree requirements, course listing, faculty information, news and announcements, etc. Contact Information: HSC 2C5; [askmph@mcmaster.ca](mailto:askmph@mcmaster.ca); <https://hei.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/>.

### **Student Success Centre**

Provides support in student orientation, academic skills, leadership, service-learning, volunteerism, educational planning, employment and career transition. Contact information: Gilmour Hall 110; 905-525-9140 Ext. 20960; <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/international-students/>; [studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca](mailto:studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca).

### **Student Success Centre - International and Exchange Student Experience**

Offers information and services for International Students in various areas, including immigration matters, University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), work/study abroad, and more. Contact information: Gilmour Hall 110; 905-525-9140 ext. 20960; Chat live on their website at <https://studentsuccess.mcmaster.ca/international-students/>; [studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca](mailto:studentsuccess@mcmaster.ca).

### **Academic Grievances**

Students who have academic grievances and wish to make an appeal should visit the University [Secretariat webpage on Student Appeals](#) as well as the [Student Appeal Procedures](#) policy.

## **14.2 Student Cultural, Wellness and Safety Resources**

### **Student Accessibility Services (SAS)**

SAS assists with academic and disability-related needs. This support is available to students diagnosed with a disability or disorder. Contact information: Gilmour Hall, Room B110, (905) 525-9140 ext. 28652; <http://sas.mcmaster.ca/>; [sas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:sas@mcmaster.ca)

### **Office of Respectful Conduct in Clinical and Academic Environments (ORCCA)**

ORCAA is a community recourse for all FHS members. Their goal is to foster a respectful, safe, equitable and inclusive environments for working and learning across all of FHS. ORCCA addresses issues under University's [Discrimination and Harassment Policy \(PDF\)](#) and [Sexual Violence Policy \(PDF\)](#). Additionally, ORCCA also oversees the [Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Graduate Learners – Faculty of Health Sciences \(PDF\)](#) and [Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Undergraduate Learners – Faculty of Health Sciences \(PDF\)](#). Contact Information: Health Sciences Centre (HSC) 3H46; 905-525-9140 ext. 22249; <https://orcca.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/>.

### **Student Wellness Centre**

The Student Wellness Centre offers various services. Contact information: PGCLL 210/201; 905-525-9140 ext. 27700; <http://wellness.mcmaster.ca/>; [wellness@mcmaster.ca](mailto:wellness@mcmaster.ca).

**Indigenous Student Services**

Indigenous Student Services helps all Indigenous students at McMaster University to discover the support and opportunities that are available to them. Contact information: L.R. Wilson Hall; ex.27426; <https://indigservices.mcmaster.ca/>; [indigssa@mcmaster.ca](mailto:indigssa@mcmaster.ca).

**Indigenous Health Learning Lodge (IHLL)**

The IHLL works alongside FHS with the goal of creating a learning environment that is culturally safe, and to advance the work around concepts of truth, reconciliation and anti-colonization with all aspects of Indigenous health and well-being. Contact information: MDCL 3510; <https://ihll.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/>; [ihll@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ihll@mcmaster.ca).

**Indigenous Health Learning Lodge (IHLL) Student Services**

The IHLL Student Services office is dedicated to providing services, supports and programs for the academic success and wellbeing of all First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in the Faculty of Health Sciences at McMaster. Contact information: MDCL 3510; <https://ihll.healthsci.mcmaster.ca/students/>; [ihll@mcmaster.ca](mailto:ihll@mcmaster.ca).

**Campus Safety Services - McMaster Emergency Guidebook**

The McMaster Emergency Guidebook provides clear, concise, and up-to-date safety resources to help prepare for, and deal with, emergencies. Contact Information: Clarke Center 201; 905-525-9140 ext. 24281; <https://css.mcmaster.ca/services/campus-emergency-guide/>; [security@mcmaster.ca](mailto:security@mcmaster.ca).



**FHS GRADUATE PROGRAM  
MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH (MPH)**

**Thesis Manual**

Supplement to the MPH Program  
Handbook

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## 1.0 MPH Thesis

### 1.1 Guidelines

The School of Graduate Studies (SGS) provides several options for completing requirements for a master's degree. One option requires the writing and defense of a thesis. The thesis offers students the opportunity to undertake a major piece of investigation on a topic of their own choosing. It thus constitutes, for many students, their first piece of independent professional work. It is a useful training experience for people who plan research careers and may help them launch their careers.

### 1.2 Thesis Proposal Instructions

With guidance from the thesis supervisor, the proposal should be limited to two pages, single-spaced, and should include the following:

- Thesis Title
- Background and rationale
- One-sentence statement of the question to be posed in the thesis
- The most important part of this submission should list and briefly describe the methodological or analytic problems which the student thinks they may encounter and will have to solve in the execution of their thesis
- A brief statement of the implications of this work to population and public health
- List of the thesis committee members
- Draft schedule for thesis completion, including timeline and anticipated outcomes
- Signatures from all committee members

### 1.3 Thesis Proposal Approval Process

Once a student has confirmed their thesis supervisor, the idea for the thesis proposal has usually been discussed and accepted in principle. The student initially drafts the proposal and gives it to their thesis supervisor for comments before distributing it to the remainder of the committee.

After the final draft of the proposal is ready, the student distributes the thesis proposal to their committee members. The student is responsible for setting up a meeting that requires attendance by the student, thesis supervisor, and internal MPH faculty readers. The meeting should be held within one month of distributing the final proposal draft. The meeting itself is a mini defense of the thesis proposal. Each committee member becomes aware of exactly what the other committee members expect of the student while also having the opportunity to become involved in the whole process at the onset. Questions or issues can be answered and sorted out to everyone's satisfaction. At this time, the committee negotiates how it will work together and assist the student during the thesis development.

The proposal will be circulated to the Program Director by the Curriculum Coordinator via email after the supervisor has approved and signed it. If a concern arises, the Program Director approaches the thesis supervisor directly for clarification. Unless objections are raised that indicate the proposal needs to be revised and resubmitted two weeks after distribution, the thesis proposal is deemed acceptable by the MPH Program. If the student subsequently does what is proposed, the effect of the faculty approval is that the faculty will subsequently raise no objection as to the legitimacy of the topic as a thesis subject.

Please refer to the MPH Thesis Guidance Document and Checklist on page 27.

## 1.4 Ethics Section of Thesis Proposal

Each student will be expected to include in their graduate thesis a section (of varying length according to the research) addressing the ethical considerations associated with their project, including ethical concerns about the hypothesis, question and findings, and the ethical issues related to the proposed methodologies.

MPH thesis students who require research ethics board approval will follow the process as set out by the [Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board \(HIREB\)](#).

## 2.0 Areas for Acceptable Thesis Topic

The master's degree must demonstrate competence on the student's part as an independent investigator. Students must explore a topic in considerable depth, write up the findings, and defend these findings in a public forum. To accomplish these goals, students may choose to:

- design or execute a survey or trial of some population or policy study
- undertake the definition and measurement of a phenomenon pertinent to population health, public health services and policy research, public health education research or public health economics
- conduct secondary analysis of a dataset related to public health
- engage in evaluating or analyzing a prevention or screening procedure or public health or healthy public policy

The thesis will be a coherent document that provides a complete and systematic account of the research accomplished or designed by the writer. While a master's degree may advance our understanding, this is not a necessary condition that a master's thesis must meet.

## 3.0 Thesis Advisory Committee

### 3.1 The Selection of a Supervisory Committee

Thesis-based students are supervised by a committee. The supervisory committee is composed of a supervisor, who must be a McMaster Graduate faculty member, and at least two other faculty members. The committee should be balanced regarding background or expertise and include obvious content experts from the MPH Program. Students should consult their supervisor and the Program Director for committee member suggestions. Committee members should be approved by the supervisor.

An external examiner, at arms-length from the project (i.e., they should not be directly involved in the thesis work and/or the student and supervisor should not have active collaborations with the external member), will be added to the committee by the supervisor in consultation with the Program Director when the thesis draft is finalized for defense. The external examiner reviews the final written draft and participates in the defense but is not involved in the ongoing supervision of the project.



The policy of the MPH program is that students should choose supervisors and readers who will be most helpful to them in the preparation of their theses. While the supervisor takes on the main task of directing progress, readers must have the opportunity to react early to major methodological decisions. This can be achieved through a supervisory committee meeting when the main approach is clear. An oral defense can only be planned when the committee agrees that the written thesis is acceptable. The roles of the various committee members are described in detail below.

**Note:** A thesis committee can also advise the student on selecting elective courses that may be appropriate to the thesis.

### 3.2 Faculty Available for MPH Thesis Supervision and Supervisory Committee Members

The MPH Program maintains an updated list of MPH faculty members available to serve as MPH thesis supervisors and members of a student's supervisory committee.

Note that the **School of Graduate Studies requires all faculty members involved in graduate student supervision to be approved by the Program, the applicant's respective faculty, and the Office of the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and the School of Graduate Studies** to supervise MPH students. MPH supervisors and committee members can be HEI full-time, joint or associate faculty. Part-time HEI faculty and faculty outside of HEI can be considered for thesis roles on a case-by-case basis.

Please refer to the updated list of [MPH faculty](#) available to supervise MPH theses and sit on MPH supervisory committees. The list is updated as new faculty are approved and is available.

### 3.3 The Supervisor

The supervisor (or first reader) of an MPH thesis must be an approved member of the MPH Graduate Faculty. If in doubt, please consult the Curriculum Coordinator and/or the MPH Program Director. The supervisor assumes responsibility for the management of the thesis. Specifically, they are responsible for providing direction to the student, advice on data sources and potential avenues of approach, instructions on the proper content and form of the thesis, review of the student's progress, and serving as the first reader of the thesis. It is the supervisor's responsibility to help the student think through methodological issues and to raise questions about possible methodological decisions faced/taken by the student. The supervisor is not eligible to be chair of the thesis defense examination.

A student selects a topic of their own choice along with their thesis supervisor, who helps the student select the remaining supervisory committee members. Students receiving stipends from a faculty research grant are typically expected to develop a thesis topic related to the supervisor's research.

The Program Director should discuss and offer suggestions about the appropriateness of the thesis supervisor and the other committee members. The supervisor typically has competence and interest in the area chosen. After the proposed supervisor has been approached and agreed to take on a student and their thesis, the student should discuss the remainder of the committee with their supervisor. Once a student has identified their supervisor, the information must be submitted to the Curriculum Coordinator. At that time, the Curriculum Coordinator will review the supervisor's information. If the supervisor had not been previously approved by the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), specifically for MPH, the Curriculum Coordinator will begin the approval process and work with the faculty member and FHS.

### 3.4 The Second Committee Member

The second reader must be selected from faculty with graduate faculty status in MPH. This faculty member should be chosen in consultation with the supervisor. The second reader is responsible for providing methodological advice and criticisms to the student during the thesis preparation and when they read the thesis for approval. The second reader is eligible to be chair of the thesis defense examination.

### 3.5 The Third Committee Member

The criteria for selecting the third reader are usually the same as that for the second reader. The third reader may be a member of graduate faculty outside of HEI but within the University. The third reader is eligible to be chair of the thesis defense examination.

### 3.6 The External Reader

The external reviewers must be at arms-length from the project and not be involved in the supervision of the student until the end of the process to review the final written document after the internal committee has approved it for defense.

The external reader is contacted directly by the thesis supervisor. The thesis supervisor will provide the MPH Program Director with the name and position of the proposed external reader along with their qualifications to act as an external reader. The external reader must provide their CV to the Curriculum Coordinator, who will work with the Program Director to obtain approval, which must be provided in writing.

The final draft of the thesis must be in the hands of the external reader at least one month before the defense. The external reader will generally be knowledgeable about some aspects of the population or public health aspects of the thesis topic (e.g. acts as a content expert). External readers are expected to send their thesis report to the MPH Program Office via the MPH Curriculum Coordinator before the thesis defense takes place if they do not attend the thesis defense. Email is acceptable. The email or letter should be copied to the thesis supervisor.

Once a student has identified their committee members, the information must be submitted to the Curriculum Coordinator, who will review the committee members' information. If a committee member has not been previously approved by the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), specifically for MPH, the Curriculum Coordinator will begin the approval process and work with the faculty member and FHS.

### 3.7 MPH Thesis Supervisory Committee Meetings

MPH thesis-based students should contact the Program Director in addition to meeting with their supervisor and other members of the supervisory committee regularly (consult supervisor to determine regularity) to ensure that the student and their project are on track, and they can complete their MPH degree within the maximum two-year timeframe. The program will monitor the progress of the thesis through regular meetings between the student and the Program Director. All thesis forms are available on Avenue to Learn.

### 3.8 The Reading of the Thesis

The supervisor and second and third readers must read the thesis, and each concludes that it is in an acceptable state to proceed to a defense. Typically, a student will provide each reader with a completed first draft. The readers will make whatever recommendations they feel are

necessary for revision so that subsequent and final drafts will be acceptable. The external reader will not be involved at this point.

If necessary, it is the supervisor's responsibility to get the readers and the student together to understand what changes in the first draft are necessary for an acceptable subsequent document. If the recommendations for change are contentious or detailed, the student is entitled to a written statement from the committee outlining the required revisions. When the student presents a final draft, which each of the inside readers concludes is acceptable, the committee will confirm this and then give the student permission to book a date for the thesis defense. The final draft must be in the hands of the committee, including the external reader, at least four weeks before the defense.

The external reader must be given a written copy of the thesis at least one month before the oral defense. The external reader's report will be considered during the defense if an external reader does not attend the defense. The MPH thesis defense, when decided, will then be set up by the MPH Curriculum Coordinator.

## 4.0 Thesis Defense

### 4.1 Attendance at the Thesis Defense

Every effort should be made to have all thesis committee members present at the thesis defense. If circumstances dictate that a committee member absolutely cannot be present, then they must contact the MPH Program office, who, on the advice of the MPH Program Director, will appoint a substitute examiner to attend the defense and present comments and questions on the written document. If the external reader cannot be present, no substitute member is required to attend, but the external reader's recommendation concerning the acceptability of the written document should be sent, in writing, to the MPH Curriculum Coordinator and the thesis supervisor, along with any questions that are to be directed to the candidate at their oral defense.

If a committee member cannot attend the defense at the last minute, they should notify the MPH Program office and send comments and questions to the thesis supervisor (a copy must be sent to MPH Curriculum Coordinator).

Thesis defenses are open to all members of the University community.

### 4.2 Booking a Thesis Defense Date

When students book the defense date, they should ensure the thesis committee has agreed to the date and time. The student and supervisor will decide on either an in-person or virtual defense. Once this has been determined, contact the MPH Curriculum Coordinator with specifics and provide the Curriculum Coordinator with the latest title of your thesis (sometimes it has changed from the initial proposal). As soon as a defense date is confirmed, the Curriculum Coordinator will begin securing a Chair for the defense. Typically, defenses occur in the summer term of your second year of study. If you defend outside of this timeline, it must be pre-approved by your thesis supervisor, and additional tuition charges may apply. Deadlines for submitting thesis documents to SGS are posted on the SGS website in the [Sessional Dates](#).

### 4.3 Preparing for the Oral Defense

The typed document must comply with university formatting requirements for thesis publications found on the SGS website on the page titled '[Completing your Master's degree – thesis](#)'.

Prior to the defense, the thesis supervisor must submit the final thesis to [iThenticate](#), McMaster's chosen academic integrity software. The supervisor will notify the MPH Program Administrator of the thesis's integrity score.

#### 4.4 Oral Defense Procedure

The examination will be chaired by either the second or third reader or another MPH faculty member, not the supervisor. At the defense of the thesis, the student is expected to present a brief (typically 20 minutes, not longer than 30 minutes) presentation of the thesis with particular emphasis on the methodology. The presentation is expected to be orderly and concise. Following this, the student must be prepared to defend their presentation and written thesis. Initially, questions will be asked by the thesis readers, then by other faculty members, and finally by other audience members.

During the question period following the oral presentation, the readers may pose questions concerning either the oral presentation or the written document. The candidate may be questioned on any aspect of the thesis, but most questions should emphasize the methodological aspects. Candidates can be expected to justify or clarify, but not debate, their responses.

At the conclusion of the defense, the supervisory committee will reach (in-camera) a judgment as to whether the defense was acceptable. If the defense is deemed unacceptable, the Examination Chair will provide a statement of the deficiencies and the improvements that must be addressed before the defense can be reconvened. If the deficiencies are substantial, the committee may recommend a follow-up committee meeting to review the student's progress before the defense is reconvened. Students who demonstrate major deficiencies may be required to complete additional work before reconvening the defense.

Any corrections or modifications which the examiners feel should be made in the written thesis should be communicated in writing by the Chair to the candidate and the thesis supervisor, who will take responsibility for ensuring that the corrections/modifications are properly incorporated into the thesis.

A thesis may be submitted at any time of the year.

## 5.0 Deadlines, Style Requirements, and Other Hurdles

The School of Graduate Studies website contains several formal requirements pertaining to dates when theses must be submitted, the style which theses must follow, costs of binding theses, maximum permissible time for completion of degree requirements, and continuous registrations. The student is responsible for understanding and complying with each of these requirements. Students must be aware that to be eligible for convocation in the autumn or spring, there are deadlines by which theses must be submitted to the School of Graduate Studies. Please refer to the [School of Graduate Studies' Guide for the Preparation of Master's and Doctoral Theses](#).

## 6.0 Expected Duration of a Thesis

It is important to emphasize that students are writing a master's thesis, not a PhD dissertation. For many MPH theses, a document of approximately 80-100 pages is sufficient with the expectation that 200 pages is the maximum. The MPH Program expects that the average completion time for a thesis is three to six months of full-time intensive work following selecting a topic and successfully acquiring data. While the efforts and endeavours of individual students will vary, and while some students may choose not to devote their full time to the thesis, the MPH Program does not expect the work for a thesis to extend for more than a year. In negotiating an appropriate project, consider that a full-time student is expected to complete seven core courses and a thesis within six terms (two years). Students who have not defended their thesis within two years need to be aware that there is normally a three-year time limit on completion of a master's degree as detailed in the policies and procedures described in the section on Regulations for Master's Degrees (Program Duration section) in the University Graduate Calendar.

Please refer to the MPH Thesis Guidance Document and Checklist below in Section 8.0.

## 7.0 Final Submission of a Thesis to SGS

Students are responsible for the costs associated with typing, preparing, printing and binding their thesis. As of June 2014, students can submit their final thesis submission electronically. Information regarding the process can be found at: <https://gs.mcmaster.ca/current-students/completing-your-degree/masters-thesis/>.

After the student's successfully defended thesis has been approved in writing by their supervisor, a final copy of the thesis may be printed for the supervisor and other members of the supervisory committee (if appropriate). The student is required to submit the final thesis to [MacSphere](#), which is the final degree requirement for the MPH Program. The student may now complete a request to graduate along with the convocation and alumni form. At this point the student has done everything they need to do towards completing their degree.

## 8.0 Thesis Guidance Document & Checklist

### 8.1 MPH Thesis Guidance Document and Checklist

The timeline below is the *recommended* timeline for completion within 24 months. Students are encouraged to discuss with their supervisor and modify the timeline to meet their needs. Timely completion is encouraged.

Task	Action Item	Recommended Deadline / Timeline	Completed
Identify and submit supervisor for thesis	Submit 'MPH Thesis Supervisor Confirmation Form'	May 1*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Committee member form and approvals	Submit 'MPH Thesis Committee Members Form'	June 15*	<input type="checkbox"/>

Hold first committee meeting	After committee meeting, submit 'MPH Supervisory Committee Meeting Report'*	August 31*	<input type="checkbox"/>
Thesis proposal with signatures	Submit signed thesis proposal. See instructions on next page and refer to thesis supplement in MPH Program Handbook for additional details.	Mid-September	<input type="checkbox"/>
Additional thesis committee meetings	After each committee meeting, submit 'MPH Supervisory Committee Meeting Report'*	Fall to winter (as determined by your committee and supervisor)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Submit full thesis draft for review by supervisor and committee members	Email draft of thesis first to supervisor, then to committee members.	April to May (as determined by your committee and supervisor)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Once draft is approved by supervisory committee, submit approval for defense form to the MPH Program	Submit 'MPH Thesis Approval for Defense' form.	April to May (as determined by your committee and supervisor)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approval of external thesis examiner by MPH and SGS***	External thesis examiner is selected by your supervisor and approval process is to be initiated by MPH Program.	April / May	<input type="checkbox"/>
Final thesis submitted to supervisory committee and external reviewer.	Thesis must be sent to external examiner and supervisory committee at least 4 weeks prior to defense ( <b>mandatory</b> ).	June	<input type="checkbox"/>
Defend thesis	Submit the "License-to-McMaster" form along with any 'Copywrite Permission' forms required to the MPH Program. Supervisory committee will submit the 'MPH Report of Examining Committee for Masters Thesis Examination'.	July	<input type="checkbox"/>
Complete thesis revisions and upload on MacSphere	Complete any required revisions and upload the final thesis to MacSphere.	Aug/early September****	<input type="checkbox"/>

\*Important actions that should happen in the first year

\*\*Note, this form should be submitted for each of your thesis committee meetings. It is recommended that you have a minimum of 2-3 committee meetings over the course of your thesis

\*\*\* External examiner must be external to your committee, but at the master's level, they do not need to be external to McMaster (consider using McMaster faculty whenever possible)

\*\*\*\* Refer to McMaster [SGS Calendar](#) for the exact dates for each year for thesis submission requirements and convocation, and any deadlines regarding payment of tuition fees for the exact dates for each year for thesis submission requirements and convocation, and any deadlines regarding payment of tuition fees

## 9.0 Suggested Template for MPH Thesis Proposal

### 9.1 Suggested Template for MPH Thesis Proposal (2-3 Pages Maximum)

**Single-spaced proposal limited to two pages (excluding title page and references), including:**

1. Thesis title
2. *Background and rationale*: Brief background and summary of the literature supported by references.
3. *Research question*: One-sentence statement of the question posed in the thesis (include any secondary questions or specific objectives).
4. *Methods*: The most important part of this submission should list and briefly describe the methodological or analytic problems which the student thinks they may encounter and will have to solve in the execution of their thesis.
5. *Public Health Implications*: A brief statement on the implications of this work to population and public health.
6. *Timeline*: Draft schedule for thesis completion, including timeline and anticipated outcomes.
7. *Supervisory committee*: Names and signatures of all supervisory committee members and student:
  - i. Student name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. Supervisor name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_
  - iii. Committee member 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_
  - iv. Committee member 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

References and other appendices as needed (these do not count towards the limit of 2-3 pages)

### 9.2 Committee Meetings

The student must ensure that 3 committee meetings are completed in advance of defending their thesis. Please note each committee meeting date below.

Committee meeting 1: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Committee meeting 2: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Committee meeting 3: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_





**FHS GRADUATE PROGRAM  
MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH (MPH)**

**Practicum Manual**

Supplement to the MPH Program  
Handbook



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## 1.0 Practicum

Public health practice is an integral part of the MPH degree. The practicum provides the opportunity to integrate classroom learning and practice in a public health work environment.

The student contributes to a community agency's resources and addresses a public health problem while developing personal confidence and skills as a public health professional.

The practicum allows students to develop the skills needed to be a successful practitioner. Students will learn practical skills in public health management, including skills in project development, selection of measures and measures development, data gathering, analysis and reporting that complement their formal coursework.

### 1.3 Selection of Practicum

Each student who selects the practicum track can apply for posted practicum positions offered by the practicum agencies formally affiliated with the MPH Program. **Students are expected to secure their own practicum placements.**

**Spring/Summer practicum positions offered by our affiliated agencies will be posted by program staff as the positions become available, typically between January and March of the first year of study.** MPH students are expected to apply for practicum postings and secure a position by April of their first year of study. Students requesting practicum sites not currently affiliated with the MPH Program will need to discuss this with the Program Director in the fall of year one. Special requests will be considered but cannot be guaranteed.

Part-time practicum opportunities will be posted in August for the fall term, or in December for the winter term. Students who want to consider returning to the same agency where they did their spring/summer practicum for a part-time practicum in the fall should discuss this with the Program Director.

The practicum search is similar to a job search. Students will need to actively apply and interview for positions that may be competitive. While the MPH program will try to identify available opportunities, the MPH program does not have any control over when practicums are advertised, who is hired, and where they are located. Positions usually become available any time throughout the winter semester (from Dec to April).

The Program cannot control the availability of practicum opportunities external to the university; therefore, it is possible that a student might be delayed, or may not finish, the Program on time.

### 1.2 Requirements of Successful Completion

The MPH full-time practicum (35 hours per week for 16 weeks), or the part-time practicum (17.5 hours per week for 16 weeks) as a substitute for 2 electives, aims to provide students with an opportunity to:

- Integrate, synthesize and apply public health knowledge and skills (i.e., competencies) acquired in MPH courses to a real-world public health situation (see MPH Learning Plan for a description of competencies expected of MPH graduates).
- Enhance and develop skills needed to function in a professional public health setting including:
  - Problem identification, problem analysis and problem solving.

- Interpersonal skills, including working as part of an interdisciplinary public health team;
- Oral and written communication; and
- Understanding the mission, structure and function of the public health organization.
- Work on a substantive public health problem or issue relevant to the sponsoring organization;
- Engage in professional self-assessment and critical reflection; and
- Explore areas of concentration that interest them.

Students will cover their travel costs to the practicum location and their living costs while there. Where extensive travel is required to attend a practicum (e.g. international location, travel across North America), students must ensure that they have sufficient funds to cover expected costs well in advance of the practicum. An exception would be any travel and additional costs required to conduct practicum-related duties that are the responsibility of the hosting organization (e.g. practicum student asked to assist with investigating an outbreak in an outlying community).

## 2.0 Student Responsibilities

The student needs to actively engage in the MPH program's process in learning about the practicum sites to meet their learning and career development needs.

### **The student is expected to:**

- Work with the Program Director as necessary, to clarify personal and professional learning needs.
- Apply to relevant sites of interest and contact the field-based practicum supervisor.
- Work with the field-based practicum supervisor to establish the project and learning contract prior to the start of the practicum.
- Seek ethics approval, if required, for any of the practicum-related projects that require primary data collection.
- Once agreed to by the field-based practicum supervisor, submit the learning contract signed by both the practicum supervisor and student to the MPH office where it will be shared with the Program Director for review and approval. Ideally by the first week of the practicum.
- Be able to receive the program stipend, if applicable, once the learning contract is fully signed.
- Attend the practicum site agency full-time for 16 weeks (35 hours per week), or part-time for 16 weeks (17.5 hours per week).
- Conduct activities to meet learning objectives, service expectations and other deliverables of the learning contract.
- Identify, if applicable, where the practicum is not meeting your learning needs.
- Meet professional standards of conduct, including:
  - Respecting the confidentiality of health or other information related to individuals that they may encounter as part of their practicum experience.
  - Respecting the confidentiality of agency information.

- Behaving responsibly regarding attendance and interest in agency activities. Students are required to adhere to the [FHS Professional Behaviour Code of Conduct for Graduate Learners](#).
- Participate in the mid-placement and final evaluation interviews with the field-based practicum supervisor.
- Prepare an evaluation of the placement and provide it to the Program Director.

## 3.0 Practicum Processes and Forms

### 3.1 Identifying Learning Objectives

The learning objectives are the foundation of the practicum and the core element of the learning contract. They should build on the knowledge and skills acquired during the coursework and reflect the goals of the practicum placement (listed earlier in these guidelines). The objectives should also be informed by the student's overall training needs, interests and career goals. The Program Director and field-based practicum supervisor are key resources to advise the student in developing the objectives. It is critically important that the expectations of the student and field-based practicum supervisor are realistic, explicit and agreed upon prior to the onset of the practicum.

#### The learning objectives should be:

1. Linked to the goals of the practicum placement and/or Public Health Competencies.
2. Clear and specific statements about the learners' expected competencies (e.g., knowledge, skill, attitude changes as a result of the learning experiences).
3. Statements that will help guide the student's assessment of the experience, in addition to helping the Program Director and field-based practicum supervisor improve the practice-based teaching process.
4. Statements that begin with action verbs (e.g., list, explain, apply, predict, analyze, compare, contrast).
5. Linked to behaviourally-based, measurable statements of the learner's desired outcomes (i.e., to provide a way for the practicum mentor and agency field-based practicum supervisor to know whether a student understands or knows the subject matter).
6. Statements that convey the service or benefit to the agency and/or community.

### 3.2 Learning Contract

The learning contract is an indispensable tool for communicating, monitoring and evaluating the practicum. Misunderstandings related to practicum can be avoided by making explicit the expectations of the various parties involved. The student has the lead responsibility for developing the contract in collaboration with the field-based practicum supervisor prior to the onset of the practicum.

- A clear description of the practicum setting (name, address, field-based practicum supervisor name and contact info).
- The project title, dates, hours of work, stipend (if any).
- Core Competencies and areas of development.
- The learning objectives.

- Methods and timetable to accomplish objectives.
- Deliverables - the deliverable itself may involve a more detailed project plan that is developed with the field-based practicum supervisor.
- The need for ethics review, as required.
- The responsibilities of each party; these may be described in more detail in a separate affiliation agreement between the host organization and university.
- Signatures of the:
  - Student
  - Field-based practicum supervisor
  - MPH Program Director

### 3.3 Evaluation

There are two aspects to the evaluation of a practicum: an evaluation of the student and an evaluation of the practicum experience (including the supervisor).

Evaluation of the student is based on the expectations set out in the learning contract. The mid-practicum interim evaluation assesses the progress achieved to date, whether there is any need to adjust overall deliverables and addresses any major performance concerns. The mid-term evaluation is filled out by the student, reviewed by the supervisor, and signed by both prior to submission.

The final evaluation needs to be more detailed than the interim evaluation and should explicitly refer to the practicum's learning objectives and the deliverables' fulfillment. Any gaps in the student's preparation for the practicum should be noted since this provides important feedback on the adequacy of the coursework component of the program.

A recommendation for pass/fail is provided by the field-based practicum supervisor. The Program Director assigns credit based on the assessment by the field-based practicum supervisor and the review of any practicum products. Students identified as requiring additional work to pass the practicum will be assigned standing deferred by the Program Director.

Both the interim and final evaluations are filled out by the student and submitted to the Program by the student. Prior to the student filling out the evaluation, it is imperative that they meet with the supervisor to discuss the content. Once the content of the evaluations has been finalized the student can submit the evaluation. MPH program staff will review for any discrepancies, and the Program Director will then provide the final approval.

#### **Practicum deliverables (i.e., what to expect from the practicum) will include the following:**

- Presentation to other students in PUBHLTH 708 - Leadership and Applied Public Health course.
- Preparation of a written Capstone report for the practicum host organization to be evaluated by MPH faculty.

The evaluation of the practicum experience by the student is critically important as it provides important feedback to the Program Director regarding the suitability of the practicum experience at that site. To ensure receipt of all evaluations, the Program Director will withhold a mark/assessment for the practicum until all required documents have been received.

The final practicum and practicum student evaluation forms will be submitted to the Program by the practicum supervisor. The final practicum report (capstone) will be finalized and submitted in PUBHTLH 708.

## 4.0 Capstone Paper

### 4.1 Guidelines: How to Complete the Capstone Paper

Students completing the practicum-based MPH master's degree must complete the Capstone paper as part of their degree requirements.

### 4.2 Purpose

The purpose of the Capstone paper is to demonstrate individual mastery of learning across the courses a student has taken in the MPH Program. The paper can be linked to the student's practicum experience, or a public health topic approved by the Program Director. Students are encouraged to consult with the Program Director at the beginning of the course PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health, to finalize practicum paper topics.

The paper should not involve the collection or analysis of primary data, the conduct of research with subjects or the design of a research protocol. It is a paper, not a thesis. If the student has considered ethics in the practicum project (including preparing an ethics review proposal), they can discuss it in this report. The capstone paper submitted must be the student's own work and not written by the supervisor.

### 4.3 Format and Grading

The paper must be 10 to 15 pages, excluding references and appendices, double-spaced using 12-point font and one-inch margins. There is no reason that your paper cannot be used for another purpose afterwards (e.g., publication of a paper on the topic or integrated into the introduction of a new research grant that you plan to write).

### 4.4 Example

Review a small area of research (e.g., health benefits and concerns of the flu vaccine), write a critique of the methods used and suggest what needs to be done to develop better information in this area.

### 4.5 Timing

The paper will be written during the course PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health, in the second year for full-time students and the final term for part-time students.

### 4.6 Steps for Completing this Requirement

1. Review full instructions for the Capstone report given in PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health. **Keep note of the due date of your paper.**
2. Submit your completed paper by the deadline provided in the PUBHLTH 708: Leadership & Applied Public Health course (final year of study).

#### Other Guidelines:

Feedback to the student about whether they passed or failed will usually occur approximately two weeks after the receipt of the paper. If the paper is deemed unsatisfactory, one rewrite will

be allowed within a two-week period after formal written notification to the student from the Program Director. A pass/fail decision on the rewrite will be made by the same reader, and feedback will be given within one week.

The Capstone paper, like most final papers for courses, must be written solely by the student. Ensure that references are made appropriately and avoid any suggestion of plagiarism. Please read McMaster's [Academic Integrity Policy](#) and review the resources on the [Academic Integrity](#) webpage.