Thesis/Capstone Information

What’s the difference between a thesis and a capstone?*
* Adapted from thesis/capstone language from Georgia State’s MPH Program

Generally speaking, for the thesis option, a student develops a research question, for which they develop a hypothesis based on previous research on the topic. The student then accesses data (either through primary or secondary data sources) and analyzes the data, usually with statistical analysis software, such as R or SPSS. The findings are then discussed as to whether or not they support the hypothesis. The thesis is designed to add new information to an existing body of research, so the student should seek out a topic or methodology that has not previously been explored. Additionally, the thesis is designed to be generalizable to a larger population, rather than just the sample used in the student’s data analysis, so an adequate sample size is also paramount. Ideally, the results of this work can be prepared for publication in a scientific journal.

A capstone project is typically more applied in nature. A capstone may or may not utilize systematic data analysis. There is usually an end-product that provides some sort of materials, guide, plan, or evaluation that can be used by the community, agency or group facing the issue or problem at hand. The length of the capstone can vary depending on the subject matter and methodology and should be discussed in consultation with your capstone advisor.

Examples of possible formats or designs for the capstone project are listed below:

- **Grant Proposal/Research Plan:** This example should include a clearly defined research question, the specific objectives of the proposal, review of literature, study design, methods of analysis, and implications of the work. The research question should be one that is encountered in professional work such as the evaluation of a public health intervention.
- **Research Report:** The report will address a specific public health problem. Students will collect, analyze and interpret data. The capstone components must include a proposed research question, project design and methods of data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and implication of findings.
- **Community Assessment:** Students will conduct an in-depth analysis of health factors of a defined population or community of interest.
- **Public Health Program Plan:** Students will design and develop a plan to implement a public health program. Management, fiscal, and ethical factors must be addressed. Students will develop instructions, procedures and manuals for the program.
- **Program Evaluation:** Students examine and evaluate the effectiveness and outcomes of a specific program.
- **Community Intervention:** Student designs and implements a community intervention.
- **Analysis of a Public Health Problem:** Students will conduct an in-depth analysis to assess a public health problem of interest. The capstone must describe the specific problem, its determinants and magnitude, and also include an assessment of the issue. Students are expected to include sections discussing methods of prevention and intervention.
- **Video:** Students may create a video documenting a public health issue for an organization.
- **Comprehensive Resource Directory:** Students create an extensive directory of resources related to a public health issue.
- **Training Manuals**
- **Website Development**
Capstone Requirements

- Identify two faculty members from the Family Medicine and Public Health department who will serve as your capstone project reviewers. One of these faculty will be your capstone advisor; the other will serve as your second reviewer.
- Complete capstone agreement with these faculty that addresses the following:
  - Goals of your capstone project
  - How you plan to execute your capstone project
  - How you will translate your project into a final written document
- Complete written capstone project report
  - A variety of formats can be used for this report – see the list of capstone projects above for examples of possible written project formats

Thesis Requirements

- Identify a thesis advisor. Thesis advisors must be Family Medicine and Public Health department faculty, and must hold one of the following titles:
  - Professor Emeritus
  - Distinguished Professor
  - Professor
  - Associate Professor
  - Assistant Professor
  - Note: If you would like an adjunct faculty member to serve as your thesis advisor, please discuss this with the MPH Program Coordinators, as this may be a possibility
- Identify two additional faculty to serve on your thesis committee. At least one of these two faculty members must be in the Family Medicine and Public Health department
- Submit a thesis proposal to your committee that includes the following:
  - Objective(s) of thesis
  - Scope of thesis
  - Methodology
  - Review of relevant literature
- Submit final thesis for review to your thesis committee

Recommended Thesis and Capstone Timeline

The timeline below assumes a student is attempting to complete their thesis or capstone by the end of Winter quarter of their second year. If you plan to graduate earlier or later than this, please adjust the timeline accordingly.

Winter Quarter, 1st year
- Start browsing faculty profiles. Reach out to faculty who’s research is of interest to you.
  - Set up meetings with faculty who can take on MPH students and/or have projects you could get involved with.
Spring Quarter, 1<sup>st</sup> year
- Nail down your thesis or capstone chair, and as much of your thesis or capstone committee as possible.
- Work with your committee chair on developing a thesis proposal or capstone agreement

Summer Quarter, 1<sup>st</sup> year
- No work necessarily needs to be done on the thesis or capstone during this time. However, you may consider doing the following during Summer quarter:
  - Enrolling in FMPH 495 (Master’s Capstone/Thesis Independent Study – Requires having thesis or capstone committee in place before registration)
    - Note: You can work on their thesis or capstone during the Summer without formally enrolling in FMPH 495; you just won’t receive course credit for your work
  - (Capstone only) Working with practicum site and capstone committee to brainstorm how to translate practicum experience into a capstone project
  - Finalizing thesis proposal or capstone agreement (if not done during Spring quarter)

Fall Quarter, 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- Enroll in FMPH 495 (if you didn’t take it during Summer)
- If thesis proposal or capstone agreement haven’t been finalized, these should be finalized as early in Fall quarter as possible
- Start working on thesis or capstone project (if you haven’t already)
- Depending on how far along you are, you may start writing your thesis or capstone project this quarter

Winter Quarter, 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- Enroll in FMPH 499
- Finish writing your thesis or capstone project
- You may defend or present your project, though you are not required to do so
- Get your committee to sign off on successful completion of your thesis or capstone project
  - This should be done at least 2 weeks before the end of the quarter
- Submit final written document to MPH program (email to: mphinfo@ucsd.edu)
- (Thesis only) Submit thesis manuscript and other required paperwork to Graduate Division (see https://grad.ucsd.edu/academics/preparing-to-graduate/dissertation-thesis-submission.html for details)

Spring Quarter, 2<sup>nd</sup> year
- It’s not uncommon for a thesis or capstone to take a little longer than anticipated to complete. If your work ends up extending into Spring quarter, you can:
  - Enroll in additional FMPH 499 units; or
  - Continue working on your thesis without enrolling in classes. If you do this, to graduate, you will have to pay:
    - A filing fee (currently $188)
    - A readmissions fee (currently $105)
- *(Thesis only)* See the timeline under Winter Quarter, 2nd year, for specifics about thesis submission requirements and timelines

**FAQs**

*When should I start thinking about my thesis or capstone project?*

Now! Students are strongly encouraged to identify a thesis or capstone advisor before the end of the first year of your MPH. If you have a project idea but aren’t sure who might be good to work with, we recommend talking to one of the MPH Program Coordinators or MPH faculty members—they can help you determine which faculty might be a good fit with your project.

*Can I use what I did for my practicum as my thesis or capstone project?*

Your thesis or capstone may build upon your practicum work. However, in many cases, it may be challenging to develop a thesis from your practicum work, as theses typically ARE MORE RESEARCH FOCUSED THAN MOST practicum projects. Also, please note that your thesis or capstone will need to be a scientific-style written product that will be more substantive than your final written product for your practicum.

*Do I have to defend my thesis or capstone project?*

Students are not required to have a formal defense. However, we strongly encourage students writing theses to defend their work. We also encourage students writing capstone projects to present their work to community stakeholders who could benefit from their capstone work.