

# UC San Diego

## MPH Thesis/Capstone Handbook

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## Overview

The thesis/capstone, also referred to as the culminating experience, constitutes a significant part of the work toward a Master's degree and is the culmination of all other activities. Students have the option to complete a thesis or capstone project to satisfy this requirement. A student typically starts thinking about their culminating experience project (i.e. project) as early as their first year in the program, with the bulk of the work being completed during the second year. As part of the thesis/capstone, students will enroll in and complete a sequence of two independent study courses: FMPH 495 followed by FMPH 499.

Steps involved in completing the project are described below:

- Step 1: Choosing a Topic and format
- Step 2: Selecting an Advisor (Committee Chair) and Committee Members
- Step 3: Enrolling in FMPH 495
- Step 4: FMPH 495 - Preparing a Project Proposal
- Step 5: FMPH 495 Completion - Project Proposal Approval
- Step 6: Enrolling in FMPH 499 and Completing the Project
- Step 7: Oral Presentation (Optional)
- Step 8: Evaluation and Approval of the Final Project

### Step 1: Choosing a Topic and Format

It is the student's responsibility to identify their thesis/capstone topic. Students are encouraged to seek out multiple resources to help generate and define a thesis/capstone topic. Ways that students can accomplish this are by talking with faculty who have experience in their field of interest, conducting informational interviews with public health practitioners and researchers, talking with other students, and completing a literature review to identify gaps in the literature that need to be addressed. While students are encouraged to select a topic they are interested in, it should be noted that the choice of a thesis/capstone topic does not dictate an MPH graduate's career choices. The thesis/capstone is designed to be a demonstration of skills and knowledge gained from the core and concentration courses, including research and critical thinking skills, and all of those skills are translatable among an array of public health careers.

Students must also determine if they are going to complete a thesis or a capstone. For the **thesis** option, a student develops a research question, based on previous research on the topic, obtains and analyzes the data to address a research question, and discuss the findings in relation to the research question. A **capstone** project is typically more applied in nature and can involve work for a community partner to address a specific problem, a grant application to a funder, a policy analysis, or the production of some other specific applied work product.

There can be various reasons a student would select one or the other option, but some examples include:

- A student is working with a community partner who has a need that would be suitable for a student capstone (i.e. preparation of a grant proposal, development of training materials, conducting a needs assessment, designing an intervention, etc.)
- A student is working with a faculty member on a research project that would provide opportunities for primary data collection or data for secondary data analysis that would be suitable for a thesis project.

In some cases, it will be possible to use your practicum experience as a starting point for your thesis or capstone project. The thesis/capstone may build on work completed during the practicum experience, but the final project must be distinct from previously completed work products.

Items to consider when selecting a thesis vs. a capstone project include:

- What type of career do you hope to have (research based OR public health practice based)?
- Is there a standard in your concentration?
- Do you have access to a project that is clearly more research based or more applied?

## Step 2: Selecting a Chair and Committee Members

Students are encouraged to reach out to faculty whose research is of interest to them to inquire about potential availability to serve as a thesis/capstone chair. It is advisable that students spend some time beforehand reviewing the faculty member's previous published work to get a sense of what types of projects they work on and what their area of expertise is. Students are also encouraged to meet with their concentration lead to get help in identifying faculty to approach. Committee composition requirements for both the thesis and capstone committees are discussed below.

### Committee Composition Requirements

#### Thesis Committees

Per Graduate Division guidelines, the MPH thesis committees will consist of three faculty members, at least two of whom must have either primary or secondary appointments with the Herbert Wertheim School of Public Health and Human Longevity Science (HWSPH). A fourth member may be added as an additional committee member as specified in the Graduate Division membership table linked below. All rules set forth by the Graduate Division will be adhered to regarding the composition of the thesis committee.

The thesis committee chair must have one of the following titles: Professor Emeritus, Distinguished Professor, Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, or Adjunct (with conditions). If you would like an adjunct faculty member to serve on your committee, please consult with the MPH program coordinators as only certain adjunct appointments are eligible. There is a process to request an exception to the thesis committee membership rules for HS clinical professor and project scientist. In the past, Graduate Division has rarely granted these exceptions. Note: the committee chair does not need to have an appointment in the HWSPH as long as the other two committee members do.

For detailed information about acceptable academic title, visit the Graduate Division's website:

<https://grad.ucsd.edu/academics/progress-to-degree/committees.html#Appointment-of-the-Master's-The>

## Capstone Committees

MPH capstone committees consist of two members, one of whom is from the HWSPH. One will serve as the chair and the second will serve as the second reviewer. The capstone committee chair must be a faculty member at UC San Diego and must have one of the following titles: Professor Emeritus, Distinguished Professor, Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, or Adjunct (with conditions). If you would like an adjunct faculty member to serve on your committee, please consult with the MPH program coordinators. The second committee member may either be a faculty member or a community public health professional. In addition, with permission of the committee chair, non-faculty academic members, including project scientists, research scientists, and post-doctoral researchers from within and outside the HWSPH can serve as the third committee member.

### Summary of Thesis/Capstone Committee Composition Requirements

	<b>Thesis</b>	<b>Capstone</b>
Number of committee members	3 (Max 4)	2 (Max 3)
Number of HWSPH Faculty	2	1
Chair	UCSD Faculty with applicable titles	UCSD Faculty with applicable titles
Exceptions to faculty titles	Rarely granted from Grad Division	Requests go through MPH program and are more likely to be approved
External community members	Not approved	Able to serve as second committee member
<b>Applicable Faculty Titles</b>		
Asst Professor Assoc Professor Professor Professor Emeritus Distinguished Professor Asst Adjunct Professor Assoc Adjunct Professor Adjunct Professor <sup>1</sup>	Can serve as chair or committee member	Can serve as chair or committee member
Teaching Professor	Teaching Professors of all ranks may serve as chair or co-chair with exception by Dean of Graduate Division; may serve as committee member	Can serve as chair or committee member
Project Scientist Asst HS Clin Professor Assoc HS Clin Professor HS Clin Professor	Must submit exception request to Graduate Division	Must submit exception request to MPH Program

<sup>1</sup> Adjunct professors must have full-time salaried appointments to serve as chair, otherwise must serve as co-chair with eligible faculty member.

## Step 3: Enrolling in FMPH 495

### How to enroll in FMPH 495

Students must submit a pre-enrollment form signed by their committee chair in order to enroll in FMPH 495: Master's Thesis/Capstone Independent Study. This form must indicate the name of the committee members, the research topic, and a brief description of the thesis or capstone project. The prerequisite for enrollment in FMPH 495 is the successful completion of FMPH 400, FMPH 401, FMPH 402, FMPH 403, FMPH 404, FMPH 405, and FMPH 406. Please discuss any exceptions to these prerequisites that you may need with the program coordinators. FMPH 495 should be taken no later than the quarter before you graduate. Students typically enroll in FMPH 495 during either the fall or winter quarter of their second year. One-year students typically enroll during the winter quarter of their first year. The MPH program coordinators will announce the deadline for submission each quarter in advance. Forms can be found here:

<https://ph.ucsd.edu/mph/current%20students/Forms.html>

## Step 4: FMPH 495 - Preparing a Project Proposal

Once the topic has been selected, the student will prepare a project proposal for approval by their committee chair. The project proposal should be approximately 10-15 pages and contain the following 5 deliverables:

1. Project outline
2. Timeline for completion of major project milestones
3. Brief Project Overview (1-2 pages)
  - A description of the public health problem to be studied
  - A description of the research question or proposed need project would fill
  - A description of the methods used to complete the project
  - A list of project deliverables
4. Project draft introduction section (including literature review) (5-10 pages)
5. A list of the MPH Program or concentration-specific competencies that will be demonstrated through the completion of the project. **Students must select a total of 3** (from either the MPH or concentration-specific concentration list). The 22 MPH competencies as described by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) are:

- 1: Apply epidemiological methods to the breadth of settings and situations in PH practice;
- 2: Select quantitative and qualitative data collection methods appropriate for a given PH context
- 3: Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming and software, as appropriate
- 4: Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy or practice
- 5: Compare the organization, structure and function of health care, public health and regulatory systems across national and international settings
- 6: Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community and systemic levels
- 7: Assess population needs, assets and capacities that affect communities' health

- 8: Apply awareness of cultural values and practices to the design, implementation, or critique of public health policies or programs
- 9: Design a population-based policy, program, project or intervention
- 10: Explain basic principles and tools of budget and resource management
- 11: Select methods to evaluate public health programs
- 12: Discuss the policy-making process, including the roles of ethics and evidence
- 13: Propose strategies to identify stakeholders and build coalitions and partnerships for influencing public health outcomes
- 14: Advocate for political, social or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations
- 15: Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity
- 16: Apply leadership and/or management principles to address a relevant issue
- 17: Apply negotiation and mediation skills to address organizational or community challenges
- 18: Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors
- 19: Communicate audience-appropriate (i.e., non-academic, non-peer audience) public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation
- 20: Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content
- 21: Integrate perspectives from other sectors and/or professions to promote and advance population health
- 22: Apply a systems thinking tool to visually represent a public health issue in a format other than standard narrative.

**Concentration-specific competencies can be found here:**

**Epidemiology**

- Defining basic epidemiologic concepts and terminology, including study designs, sources of bias, risk and preventive factors, and principles of causation; calculating basic epidemiologic measures;
- Describing leading causes of mortality and morbidity by population, place, and time;
- Understanding how to analyze and make appropriate inferences from epidemiologic data;
- Explaining and applying epidemiologic methods in public health research and practice settings;
- Explaining the importance of epidemiology for informing scientific, ethical, economic, and political discussions of population health.

**Health Behavior:**

- An understanding of the physical, environmental, and social determinants of health and health disparities;
- The incorporation of theories and models from social, behavioral, and medical disciplines;
- The application of evidence-based approaches in evaluating and designing interventions that improve individual and public health.

**Public Mental Health:**

- Applying epidemiological methods to current public mental health issues;
- Assessing public health care systems in the context of specific mental illnesses among specific populations;

- Promoting prevention and developing interventions for mental health across the lifecourse;
- Evaluating public mental health interventions and programs to improve dissemination and implementation;
- Applying effective communication and management skills in engaging with stakeholders around addressing public mental health issues.

### **Technology and Precision Health**

- Identify new and emerging “precision” technologies and understand how they might affect existing public health policy and practice.
- Understand what new and traditional technologies need to be integrated to advance population and public health.
- Prepare students to work and collaborate with stakeholders from a range of sectors and disciplines, consistent with the multi-disciplinary nature of technology and precision health.
- Recognize the risks and unintended consequences of emerging technologies and how these can be mitigated (e.g., through education or appropriate policy, risk management, systems design, research, or regulatory frameworks).
- Become future leaders of the emerging interdisciplinary field of precision health through identification of opportunities for emerging technologies, data, and methods to promote population and public health.

### **Health Policy**

- Identify policies, laws, and regulations impacting health systems, the delivery of healthcare services, and health outcomes.
- Recognize the impact of policies, laws, and regulations on individual behaviors, community development, and overall health equity.
- Explain why health outcomes are so strongly related to income and race/ethnicity, and the role of disparities in public health outcomes.
- Evaluate the effectiveness, efficiency, and equity of health policies regulating the healthcare industry and impacting public health.
- Describe the long-run economic drivers of the healthcare system, the factors that influence consumer demand for health insurance and medical care, and to describe the factors that influence delivery of healthcare services.
- Summarize key health policies, laws, and regulations in at least one in-depth topic area through elective coursework.

## **Step 5: FMPH 495 Completion - Project Proposal Approval**

The student will submit the five deliverables of the project proposal to their committee chair for approval. Grading for FMPH 495 is on a satisfactory or unsatisfactory basis (i.e. S/U). In order to satisfactorily complete the course, students must submit all five deliverables for their committee chair approval. If not all deliverables are completed or if the committee chair determines that the deliverables are not completed satisfactorily, the student will receive an “Incomplete” grade. Once the student satisfactorily completes the project proposal deliverables, the grade can be changed to a “U” grade. This grade can be changed up until the end of the following quarter before it automatically



lapses to a “U” grade. Students who do not satisfactorily complete FMPH 495 will not be eligible to enroll in FMPH 499. Once the committee chair approves the project proposal, they fill out the MPH Thesis/Capstone Proposal Approval form and submit to the MPH program office.

## Step 6: Enrolling in FMPH 499 and Completing the Project

Students enroll in FMPH 499 once they have completed FMPH 495 while they are working on their thesis/capstone projects (i.e. the prerequisite for enrolling in FMPH 499 is the successful completion of FMPH 495). FMPH 495 and FMPH 499 are designed to be taken as a sequence. FMPH 499 is a 2-unit course that can be taken up to a total of 3 times for a maximum of 6 units. FMPH 499 should be taken the quarter you graduate. For example, if you plan to graduate in Winter Quarter Year 2, FMPH 495 should be taken in Fall Quarter Year 2, and FMPH 499 should be taken in Winter Quarter Year 2. Grading for FMPH 499 is on a satisfactory or unsatisfactory basis (i.e. S/U). In order to satisfactorily complete the course, students must either complete their thesis or capstone project or make significant progress towards completing their thesis or capstone project.

### Grading for FMPH 499

- If the student has made sufficient progress towards their thesis/capstone, the committee chair may decide to assign an “S” grade for quarter. Per program requirements, students only need to successfully complete 2 units of FMPH 499. The FMPH 499 grade is separate from thesis completion since at the end of it all, the committee will still need to agree when the thesis is completed and a Final Report Form needs to be filed with the Graduate Division.
- Alternatively, an “Incomplete” grade could be assigned and the grade can be changed by the end of the following quarter before it automatically lapses to a “U” grade. The official Academic Senate regulations on the “Incomplete” grade - <https://senate.ucsd.edu/Operating-Procedures/Senate-Manual/Regulations/500#B>

## Step 7: Oral Presentation

Students are encouraged to present the results of their thesis or capstone projects at the end of the year at the thesis/capstone presentation seminar. Although participation in this event is **voluntary**, students are encouraged to participate to take advantage of this valuable opportunity to gain experience presenting in front of peers and faculty. In addition, while participation is not required by the MPH program, the thesis/capstone chair may make the presentation mandatory for the students they mentor. Presentations should be approximately 10 minutes in length, similar to a typical presentation made at a scientific conference.

## Step 8: Evaluation and Approval of the Final Project

In order to earn approval of your final project, it must meet the following guidelines:

- Significance of the public health problem is clear

- Background is sufficient to understand the topic
- Literature is adequately reviewed
- Methods are clear and appropriate
- Results are described to reveal insightful and important patterns, differences, or similarities in the data. (Thesis only)
- Clearly states a persuasive interpretation of significant results in relation to the research question. (Thesis only)
- Situates interpretations of results in relation to high-quality, credible, and relevant literature in the field, and suggests persuasive and specific potential broader significance of study. (Thesis only)
- Contribution of the project to the stakeholder/organization is clear (Capstone only)
- Public health implications of the project are clear (Capstone Only)
- Writing and/or other materials is clear, well organized and free from errors
- Project clearly addresses all **three competencies** as described in the project proposal

## Formats of Thesis and Capstone Projects

### Thesis

The ultimate goal of the thesis is to add new information to an existing body of research on an important public health topic. Additionally, the thesis is designed to showcase rigorous quantitative and/or qualitative methods to answer the research question. It is strongly encouraged that the results of this work can be prepared for publication in a scientific journal.

### IRB Approval

Thesis projects that utilize data or information about human subjects must have Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the UC San Diego Human Research Protections Program (<https://irb.ucsd.edu/Home.FWx>). For projects with existing data, students must check with their faculty advisor to confirm that IRB approval has been previously obtained. Students working on projects analyzing secondary data sources or who will collect new data from study participants will require a review by UC San Diego's IRB. Students should discuss the importance of IRB review with their faculty mentor and ensure their project undergoes the appropriate review. **PLEASE NOTE: IRB approval can take 2-3 months and will typically add a quarter onto your thesis/Capstone timeline. It should be undertaken no later than the summer quarter in-between first and second year.**

### Writing the Thesis

Students completing a thesis must follow UC San Diego's Graduate Division formatting guidelines. More information can be found here: <https://grad.ucsd.edu/files/academics/BlueBook%202019-20%20updated%2011.12.19.pdf> Please note that these guidelines update yearly.

### Format for Traditional Thesis

The traditional thesis is written in four chapters: Introduction, Methodology, Results, and Discussion/Conclusion.

- Initial pages. Use Roman numerals when assigning page numbers to the initial pages, until the body of the thesis begins.

- Abstract not counted or numbered
- Title page: number “i” is assigned but not typed
- Approval page: number “ii” is assigned but not typed
- Acknowledgments optional; if used, it should be listed in the Table of Contents.
- Author’s Statement required, but not numbered.
- Table of Contents may have more than one page
- List of Tables used if necessary
- List of Figures used if necessary
- Body of Thesis. These pages are numbered with Arabic numerals beginning with “1”. All Chapters must begin on a new page.
  - Chapter I – Introduction
    - Include the study purpose and research questions and related literature review
  - Chapter II – Methods and Procedures
    - Include a description of study instrument, recruitment of study participants, ethical considerations (e.g., IRB approval and informed consent process), and methods of data collection and analysis.
  - Chapter III – Results
    - List results of data analysis and includes relevant tables
  - Chapter IV – Discussion
    - Include interpretation of results, study limitations, suggestions for future research, and a conclusion
  - References
  - Appendices

### Format for Manuscript Thesis

The manuscript format can be used when a manuscript prepared for publication is incorporated as a chapter into the thesis. The manuscript will be prepared according to the guidelines of the journal to which the manuscript will be presented. The student should reach out to their committee for guidance on the manuscript format, as these may vary by concentration.

- Initial pages. Use Roman numerals when assigning page numbers to the initial pages, until the body of the thesis begins.
  - Abstract not counted or numbered
  - Title page: number “i” is assigned but not typed
  - Approval page: number “ii” is assigned but not typed
  - Acknowledgments optional; if used, it should be listed in the Table of Contents.
  - Author’s Statement required, but not numbered.
  - Table of Contents may have more than one page
  - List of Tables used if necessary
  - List of Figures used if necessary
- Body of Thesis. These pages are numbered with Arabic numerals beginning with “1”. All Chapters must begin on a new page.
  - Chapter I – Background

- This should provide additional context and include a more thorough literature review than is possible to fit within the word limitations of the journal article (Include references at the end of this chapter).
- Chapter II – Manuscript in style of journal
- Chapter III – Discussion
  - Include more extensive interpretation of results, study limitations, suggestions for future research, and conclusions than can be included in a journal article.
- Appendices

## Capstone

A **capstone** project is typically more applied in nature. A capstone may or may not utilize systematic data analysis but should be written for a specific target organization or community. 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 chair.

**Acceptable 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. This work product should be written with a specific funder or organization in mind.
- **Community Needs Assessment:** Students will work with a community partner to plan and conduct a needs assessment and develop an action plan based on the findings of the needs assessment.
- **Public Health Program/Community Intervention Plan:** Students will design and develop a plan to implement a public health program or community intervention. Management, fiscal, and ethical factors must be addressed. Students will develop instructions, procedures and manuals for the program/intervention.
- **Policy Analysis:** Students will select a public health problem of interest to them and identify and analyze proposed solutions to address the problem utilizing a policy analysis framework.
- **Other work products commissioned by a community organization such as development of a video, training materials, or comprehensive resources document will be considered on a case by case basis.**

Some examples of previous **Capstone** projects include:

- “Evaluation of UCSD’s Integrated Behavioral Health and Primary Care Pilot” a project to develop, implement, and evaluate the Whole Person Healthcare Clinic Pilot.
- “Chronic Pain Intervention Utilizing Telehealth and Digital Technologies in a Rural Community,” a research plan for a proposed research project in rural Wyoming.
- “Analysis of Policy Options to Expand Refugee Mental Health Screenings,” a policy analysis of options to address mental health in San Diego’s refugee population.

## Required Format for Capstone Project

Each complete capstone project must include the following two elements:

1. Capstone report
2. Capstone work product

While the formats of capstone projects will vary, each capstone project must include a report that includes the following items:

- Executive Summary (paragraph that summarizes everything below)
- Background section and problem statement that clearly identifies the public health problem to be addressed
- Methods section that describes the process for completing the project
- Description of specific deliverables (i.e. describe the capstone project)
- Dissemination plan that indicates how the work product will be used
- Public Health Implications of the capstone project
- A reflection on how the project addressed the public health competencies as described in the project proposal

Note: If any of these items are already included in the capstone work product itself, you may re-use this information in the report.

## Tasks for Completing Thesis or Capstone

The following tasks should be completed during the Quarter in which the thesis or capstone will be completed.

### Thesis Students

- Email the MPH Program Coordinators at [mphinfo@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:mphinfo@health.ucsd.edu) **and schedule a meeting** no later than the end of Week 1 to initiate processing of two electronic forms.
  - Application to Candidacy
  - Thesis Constitution Form
- Attend a Thesis Submission and Formatting Workshop hosted by the Graduate Division (Dates publicized by the MPH program coordinators as they are scheduled by Graduate Division)
- Schedule and attend preliminary appointment with Sara Miceli at the Graduate Division
- Schedule and attend final appointment with Sara Miceli at the Graduate Division
- Communicate completion of the final thesis to the MPH Program Coordinators via email and they will initiate the Final Report Form via DocuSign. The Final Report Form must be signed by all Thesis Committee Members and the Program Director by the last day of the completing Quarter and submitted to the Graduate Division.

### Capstone Students

- Email the MPH Program Coordinators at [mphinfo@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:mphinfo@health.ucsd.edu) **and schedule a meeting** no later than the end of Week 1 to initiate processing of the Degree and Diploma Application (DDA)

- Communicate completion of the final capstone to the MPH Program Coordinators via email and submit the Capstone Final Report form and copy of the final capstone project by the last day of the completing Quarter.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The UCSD Academic Calendar can be found here:  
<https://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/resources/academic/calendars/2021.html>

## Suggested timeline for completion of thesis/capstone project

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

*General Public Health concentration students may work directly with MPH program leadership to determine a proposed timeline.*

<b>First Year</b>	
<i>Fall Quarter</i>	
<i>Winter Quarter</i>	
<i>Spring Quarter</i>	-Browse faculty profiles and reach out to faculty whose research is of interest to you. --Attend Thesis/Capstone Info Session #1
<i>Summer Quarter</i>	-Determine thesis/capstone chair and as much of your committee as possible. -Work with your committees on developing a thesis/capstone project idea. -Determine if Practicum site has suitable thesis/capstone opportunity -Attend Thesis/Capstone Info Session #2
<b>Second Year</b>	
<i>Fall Quarter</i>	-Enroll in FMPH 495 -Complete outline of project -Complete drafts of the introduction and literature review -Submit approved thesis/capstone proposal
<i>Winter Quarter</i>	-Enroll in FMPH 499
<i>Spring Quarter</i>	-Enroll in FMPH 499 or pay a filing fee in lieu of registration (~\$188) -Follow deadlines set forth by the Graduate Division to ensure all appointments and paperwork is completed in a timely manner. The MPH Program Coordinators will run Degree Audits for students scheduled to complete their thesis/capstone. -Application to Candidacy for all thesis students are due by the end of Week 3 -Degree and Diploma Application for all capstone students are due by the end of Week 5.

Please note: if you are completing your thesis/capstone in a quarter you are not registered in classes, you will pay a filing fee in lieu of registration (~\$188). An additional readmit fee (~\$120) may be assessed depending on when you were last registered. Fees will be automatically assessed when final paperwork is submitted to the Graduate Division at the end of your graduating quarter.

## Student and Committee Roles

### Student Responsibilities

- Select a thesis/capstone topic
- Secure a thesis/capstone committee chair
- Work with committee chair to select remaining committee members
- Work with committee chair to refine thesis/capstone topic to ensure feasibility of project
- Draft thesis/capstone proposal and receive approval from committee
- Develop timeline for completion of project
- Complete enrollment request for FMPH 495/499 courses
- Submit an application for approval to the University's IRB, if applicable
- Stay on track with the committee's agreed-upon timeline, submitting drafts by their due dates
- Remain in regular communication with the committee chair
- Give committee members a minimum of 2-week turnaround time on any specific requests to review project progress
- Follow and complete Graduate Division tasks the quarter you are completing thesis/capstone

### Committee Chair Responsibilities

- Assess the student's proposed topic and skill level to independently carry out the proposed analysis. Provide feedback and suggestions for modifications or resources to ensure that the student will be able to successfully complete the project.
- Communicate expectations to the student early in the process.
- Work with the student to establish a realistic timeline for completion, ensuring that it allows for sufficient time to receive committee members' feedback and approval, and hold student accountable to the timeline.
- Determine if and what kind of IRB approval will be required, and supervise student submission of IRB approval documents, if necessary.
- Provide timely feedback throughout the process
- Ensure that the committee members provide their feedback on the draft(s) and approves the final version in accordance to the set timeline.
- Monitor student's progress to complete the thesis/capstone by the quarter deadline. If the student is not adequately prepared, the student should continue their progress in the following quarter.
- Attend the thesis/capstone presentation, if student is participating
- Submit grades for each quarter student is enrolled in FMPH 495/499 courses
- Approve the final document of the Thesis/Capstone to be uploaded to eScholarship.

### Committee Member Responsibilities

- Read, advise on, and sign the FMPH 495/499 forms
- Agree upon a realistic timeline for completion, as guided by the committee chair



- Advise the student to take on a REALISTIC project for which the committee has sufficient expertise to supervise.
- Read the student's drafts and provide timely feedback, as guided by the committee chair
- Advise on specific aspects of the thesis/capstone in which the committee member has expertise
- Work with committee chair to assess the student's progress and readiness to complete the thesis/capstone by the proposed quarter deadline
- Attend the thesis/capstone presentation, sign the approval form, and provide feedback and suggestions for edits to the final document, if necessary

## FAQs

- [Can a practicum experience transition into a thesis/capstone project?](#) **Yes, potentially,** but it must be separate from the project that was completed during the practicum experience. Students should have intellectual ownership of the project and should meet with their practicum site supervisor to determine if there is a project that would be suitable for a thesis research paper or capstone applied project. In addition, students should meet with their concentration lead to confirm it is appropriate.
- [Is a "team science" project suitable for a thesis/capstone project?](#) **Yes,** much of public health is conducted using "team science." Therefore, it is acceptable for MPH students to participate in "team science" projects as long as they have carved out a specific contribution that they can point to as being their own. While it is acceptable for the data collection and analysis to be completed by collaborators, the student must take responsibility for writing up the results and the first draft of the manuscript for a thesis project.
- [Can students use materials that have been created previously for another course as part of their capstone/thesis?](#) **Yes, with some limitations.** We encourage students to engage in projects that build off of other work they have been engaged in. Please note, work for the thesis/capstone must build off of this other previous work, and not simply recycle it. In addition, students should work with their thesis/capstone chair to ensure that their proposed project will meet the above criteria.
- [Should students attempt projects with advanced data or statistical analysis techniques?](#) As previously mentioned, the thesis is a "culminating experience." This means that it is intended to be a demonstration of what students have already learned from their MPH classes and articulated in the MPH core and concentration competencies. If the student's thesis/capstone topic requires an advanced statistical analysis that they were not taught during their MPH coursework, students will need to receive prior approval from their committee chair to ensure that they will have access to the appropriate expertise through the members of their committee. Students should generally not attempt an analysis that they have never learned and that is beyond the scope of their MPH training.

- **Can a thesis project use qualitative analysis?** Yes, but students that want to use qualitative methods to answer their research question should be aware that qualitative analysis is its own rigorous methodology and should not be used without appropriate exposure to the methodology. Although students are exposed to qualitative methods in FMPH 403, any student that wants to use qualitative methods for their thesis/capstone project should enroll in FMPH 491: Qualitative Research Methods during Fall or Winter Quarter (depending on when it is offered). In addition, students should check with their thesis chair that they (or another committee member) have the expertise to provide mentorship in qualitative methods.
- **Is it a Capstone or a Thesis?** In most cases, projects will clearly be either a Thesis (i.e. traditional research project) or a Capstone (applied project, not in a traditional research format). In some cases, there will be projects that could go either way. For example a policy scan of legislation mandating insurance coverage for fertility preservation services could be written up as a journal article (thesis) or as a policy brief for an advocacy group (capstone). In addition, a write-up of an implementation of a substance use disorder treatment program could be written up as a journal article for a research audience (thesis) or as a public health program protocol for a community partner (capstone). Often times your intended audience will drive the format of the project. In general, the student and Chair should meet to determine which format best suits their objectives. Note: a project that is formatted as a traditional research paper (i.e. a thesis) should not be submitted as a Capstone project to circumvent the University's strict guidelines related to thesis projects. **A capstone project is NOT a traditional research project.**

## Other Resources and Important Contacts

- MPH Program Coordinators: [mphinfo@health.ucsd.edu](mailto:mphinfo@health.ucsd.edu)
- UC San Diego Writing Hub: <https://writinghub.ucsd.edu/for-grad-students/index.html>
- Sara Miceli, Academic Advisor in Graduate Division: [smiceli@ucsd.edu](mailto:smiceli@ucsd.edu)