MSPH Project/Thesis

The Master of Science in Public Health degree is the Division of Public Health’s academic/research-oriented master’s degree and; all MSPH students are required to complete and successfully defend a thesis/project prior to graduating. Students must:

1. choose a project or thesis that coincides with their research interests
2. create a supervisory committee which consists of faculty and/or experts in the specified research area
3. complete six credit hours of project/thesis (roughly 270 hours of effort)
4. write a paper in the format of a traditional thesis or a paper of publishable quality that is approved by the supervisory committee
5. present and successfully defend the thesis/project at a public seminar
6. submit for publication

BEFORE YOU START:

It is recommended that you start thinking about your research project or thesis your first semester. This will allow adequate time to gain rapport with faculty who will be on your supervisory committee, and develop research project/thesis ideas that align with your specific research interests.

FORM YOUR SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

To begin, you will want to identify potential faculty you would like to work with on your thesis/project. The supervisory committee form outlines which faculty you have selected to work with and must be turned into your academic advisor. The essential role of your supervisory committee is to provide feedback, guidance and mentorship on your thesis/project while also approving the research subject and judging your final defense.

Following University of Utah Graduate School Policy, “Master’s Supervisory Committees consist of three faculty members, the majority of whom must be tenure-line faculty in the student’s major department.” The committee Chair and one committee member must be tenure or tenure track from the Division of Public Health. If a member outside the Division of Public Health is desired, the potential committee member must hold a minimum of a Master’s degree and must have expertise specific to the research topic. The desired outside member must submit a CV to the academic advisor for the graduate school records.

Please see your academic advisor for further instruction on approved faculty for your Supervisory Committee.

IDENTIFY A THESIS/PROJECT TOPIC

The master’s thesis/project may be based on research involving primary data collection, but is often a secondary analysis of existing data to investigate a research question not yet evaluated
in a given study. The decisions about acceptable thesis/project content and organization reside with each student’s Supervisory Committee. There are examples of past theses/projects in the Division of Public Health.

**REGISTER FOR THESIS/PROJECT HOURS**

Before you can register for thesis/project hours you must set up your supervisory committee and turn in the supervisory committee form, with the appropriate signatures, to your academic advisor. At that time, a permission code will be provided to you that will allow you to register for PBHLT 6975/6977 – Thesis/Project Research -MSPH.

Please be mindful of registration dates to ensure adequate time to obtain all of the needed forms and permission code for registration. You must register for a total of 6 credit hours towards the thesis/project before graduation. Please note that it does not matter when you register for credits: this can be during or after you actually complete the necessary project hours. A total of 6 credits must be completed, but the 6 credits can be split up into multiple semesters as needed. **Please note: you must be registered for at least 3 credit hours, whether that be project/thesis credits; or an actual class; during the semester you defend your final project/thesis.**

**MSPH THESIS/PROJECT PROPOSAL APPROVAL**

Prior to starting the thesis/project, you must prepare a concept proposal that requires approval by your committee. Guidelines on what the concept proposal should cover can be found [here](#) or on the website under project/thesis forms with all other necessary forms. A copy of the final proposal will also be placed in your student file. Please return your proposal to your academic advisor. Your Supervisory Committee will determine if you are prepared to proceed to the formal thesis/project by signing off on the [committee research proposal approval form](#).

**PROJECT REPORT OR THESIS FORMAT**

After the approval of the thesis/project proposal, you are ready to develop your research under the direction of your committee. Any and all approval of the content of the thesis/project is an academic matter between you and your committee. The final project must produce a publishable quality paper, thus the formatting for each paper will be individual to the student and the journal to which you will submit.

Depending on the given project, IRB approval may be required in order to protect the rights and welfare of the research subjects involved. Once IRB approval is established, please complete the [IRB research proposal form](#) and return it to your academic advisor. Please note, if IRB approval is not needed, the completion of the IRB form is still required.

However, if you choose to complete thesis work instead of the research project, the form and distribution for the thesis and abstract as well as the use of restricted data are determined by The Graduate School and published in *A Handbook for Theses and Dissertations*, available in the
Thesis Office. The format of the thesis must be approved by The Graduate School thesis and dissertation editor, Room 302 Park Building. Please note, that the dates and deadlines below will need to be adjusted to the Thesis Office deadlines. Please see the graduate school calendar for more information.

**THESIS/PROJECT DEFENSE**

**PRE-DEFENSE**

Prior to scheduling the thesis/project defense it is strongly recommended to hold a pre-defense meeting with your supervisory committee. During your pre-defense, you will present your progress, so that the committee can determine whether sufficient progress has been made in order to schedule the defense.

**PUBLICIZE THE EVENT**

Before you can schedule your final defense, you must submit your final draft and PowerPoint slides to your entire committee. Once the committee agrees that you are approved to move forward with scheduling your final defense, you will work with your academic advisor to schedule the time, location, and public posting of the defense. Your supervisory committee must sign the defense date approval form before the defense announcement will be distributed. Please note, your supervisory committee must approve the final defense arrangements and have both your final draft and PowerPoint slides on hand before the announcement is publicized.

The date and time of the final defense must be widely publicized to the entire department at least ten business days prior to the date of defense. Please use this defense announcement to publicize your event and return this announcement to your academic advisor for distribution.

**FINAL DEFENSE**

For the final defense you must defend your thesis or project by satisfactorily introducing your research topic, covering your methods, results, strengths and limitations and your concluding findings. The oral presentation ranges between 30-35 minutes with questions to follow. A PowerPoint presentation is the most common platform used for sharing research findings.

*Please note, the last day to defend your project is two weeks before the last day of finals week. Per the Graduate School, you must be registered for at least three credit hours during the semester you defend.*

Common misconceptions of defense requirements include, printing of a student’s manuscript for their committee members; and/or serving of light refreshments. These are not requirements set by the Division of Public Health or the Graduate School and, thus, are not required during the final defense.

**FINAL APPROVAL**

After the thesis/project defense, the Committee indicates on the Report of the Final Examination form whether the student has passed or failed. All committee members who are present at the examination should sign the form. In cases where the Supervisory Committee does not feel that the student has passed the defense, the committee will make appropriate recommendations for further courses, reading or research to address the deficiencies.

The final project must produce a publishable quality paper that is submitted to the supervisory committee with a copy given to the academic advisor in order to be considered finished. The final paper is due two weeks after the student’s defense date or no later than the last day of finals week. Failure to submit the final paper within that time frame will result in delay of graduation.
JOURNAL SUBMISSION

Before your project/thesis is deemed complete you will need to inform your academic advisor which journal you submitted your final paper for publication. Your supervisory committee can help determine appropriate journals for submission. Please notify your academic advisor by email of the name of the journal(s) for your student record. This must be submitted by the last day of finals week.

- **AUTHORSHIP CRITERIA:** Authorship of a student’s MSPH project will usually include the student as first author, followed by the supervisory members, including chair. However, fewer or additional authors is perfectly reasonable.

- You must upload the PDF proof of the submitted manuscript along with code and dataset/variables (de-identified and as allowed via IRB approved protocol) enabling reproducibility of the results to a uBox folder shared by you and the faculty advisor. Furthermore, if you fail to adhere to the mutually agreed timeline for alternative journal submissions, you will forfeit your role as first author, and the faculty advisor can assume leadership in getting the manuscript successfully published.

TIMELINE FOR SUBMISSION OF FORMS/FINAL REPORT:

- **SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE FORM:** The Supervisory Committee form must be submitted to the academic advisor before the start of a student’s thesis/project and before a permission code will be given to register for thesis/project hours. It is highly encouraged to start forming the supervisory committee two semesters before the anticipated graduation date.

- **RESEARCH PROPOSAL:** The research proposal must be submitted to the supervisory committee for approval in order to proceed with the student’s research. The research proposal then must be returned to the academic advisor as soon as the research proposal is approved, or no later than the student’s defense date.

- **COMMITTEE RESEARCH PROPOSAL APPROVAL FORM:** After the supervisory committees support is given to the student’s research proposal, the approval form must be returned to the academic advisor. The official last day to submit the form is the student’s defense date.

- **IRB RESEARCH PROPOSAL FORM:** Depending on a student’s project, IRB approval may be required. Please note, if IRB approval is not needed, the completion of the IRB form is still required. This form must be submitted to the academic advisor after the IRB approval is granted (or not needed), but no later than the student’s defense date.

- **MSPH DEFENSE DATE APPROVAL:** Before the final defense can be scheduled the student must submit both the final draft of their paper and their PowerPoint slides to their supervisory committee. The committee approves the defense arrangements by completing the Defense Approval Form. The approval form must be submitted to the academic advisor before the defense announcement will be distributed. Once the committee approves to move forward with the scheduling of the final defense, the student will work with the academic advisor to schedule the time, location, and public posting of the defense.
• **Defense Announcement:** The date and time of the final defense must be widely publicized to the entire department at least ten business days prior to the date of defense.

• **Report of Final Examination Form:** Once a student has passed, the supervisory committee will sign off on this form. Please return this form to the academic advisor as soon as it is complete or no later than the last day of finals week during the semester the student plans to defend.

• **Final Written Research Paper:** The research paper is due two weeks after the student’s final defense date or no later than the last day of finals week. A printed copy or emailed PDF must be submitted to the student’s supervisory committee and academic advisor after all edits are made. Failure to submit the final paper will delay graduation.

• **Journal Submission:** Before the project/thesis is deemed complete the student must inform the academic advisor which journal they submitted their final paper for publication. This must be submitted by the last day of finals week.

• **Note:** All project/thesis forms must be returned to the academic advisor before the project/thesis can be deemed complete. Failure to do so may delay graduation.

**Checklist and Timeline for Final Defense**

• Schedule planning meeting with chair of supervisory committee within the first two weeks of the semester the student plans to defend. This meeting will map out a timeline for completion.

• Assign deadlines for submitting paper draft throughout the semester, under the direction of supervisory committee chair
  - Continue as deemed necessary

• Prepare for final defense

• Assign deadline for final draft and PowerPoint slides to be submitted to committee for final review and preparation for final defense (this must be submitted to committee before defense can be scheduled)

• Finalize defense date and time (the students’ academic advisor can help with scheduling a room)
  - Make sure the final defense date is within the deadline set by the Division
    - The last day to defend is two weeks prior to the last day of finals week

• Submit defense announcement to the academic advisor for distribution
  - Make sure the defense announcement is submitted 10 business days prior to the students defense date

• Prepare for, and defend final project

• Make any necessary edits to final paper and submit final draft to supervisory committee and academic advisor (**Please note:** the last to submit final draft of the paper is two weeks after the student’s defense date, but no later than the last day of finals week)

• Submit paper to journal