



Columbia University  
**MAILMAN SCHOOL  
OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

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Department of Sociomedical Sciences

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**MPH and MS Student Handbook  
2014 - 2015**

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**Department of Sociomedical Sciences  
MS and MPH Students Handbook: Table of Contents**

<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>General Information and Resources</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Advisement .....	4
Financial Aid .....	4
Accessing Information.....	4
Campus Shuttle Service .....	5
Campus Escort Service.....	5
<b>Academic Affairs</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Registration Process .....	5
Cross Registration .....	6
Pass/Fail.....	6
Holds .....	6
Add/Drop.....	6
Course Waivers .....	6
Transfer of Credits .....	7
Incomplete Grades .....	7
Leave of Absence / Inactive Status .....	7
Filing for Graduation.....	7
<b>Learning Objectives</b> .....	<b>8</b>
Learning Objectives: Mailman School of Public Health.....	8
Learning Objectives: Department of Sociomedical Sciences .....	9
<b>Degree Requirements</b> .....	<b>11</b>
MPH Degree Requirements.....	11
Columbia MPH (52 credits minimum) .....	11
Accelerated Program (42 credits minimum).....	13
Master’s Thesis .....	13
Required Examinations and Certifications.....	14
Practicum Requirement.....	14
Masters Dual Degree Programs.....	15
MS Degree Requirements .....	16
<b>Practicum</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Introduction.....	17
General Objectives .....	17
Roles and Responsibilities.....	18
Preceptor.....	18
Student.....	18
Prior to the Practicum .....	18
Finding a Practicum Placement.....	19
Practicum Scope of Work Form.....	19
During the Practicum .....	20
Following the Practicum.....	20

<b>The Master's Thesis.....</b>	<b>21</b>
Introduction.....	21
Planning your Thesis .....	21
The Thesis Course .....	24
<b>Writing the Thesis Proposal.....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Writing the Thesis .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>1. Review Article.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2. Research Proposal.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>3. Needs Assessment Proposal .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>4. Program Evaluation Proposal .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>5. Intervention Proposal.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>6. Research Report.....</b>	<b>43</b>
 <b>Academic Advising.....</b>	 <b>47</b>
 <b>Appendix A Department of Sociomedical Sciences Thesis Faculty Sponsors.....</b>	 <b>49</b>
<b>Appendix B Frequently Used Contacts.....</b>	<b>53</b>

## **Overview**

In 1968, the Columbia University School of Public Health became the first institution in the country to offer a graduate degree in Sociomedical Sciences (SMS). What began as a collaborative research project on rural health care in 1956, spearheaded by a physician, an epidemiologist, and a sociologist, evolved over a decade's time into a formal doctoral program. Dr. Jack Elinson, first head of SMS, coined the term "sociomedical sciences" to incorporate the social sciences of sociology, anthropology, economics, history, political science, and social psychology into a multidisciplinary study of health and medicine.

Today, the SMS faculty is broadly involved in both research and teaching, applying social science theory and methodology to public health issues. Research projects are focused on such topics as sociocultural aspects of drug use, adolescent health, the role of social supports and social networks, well-being and disability in older people, the organization of health care and program evaluation, stress and coping, prejudice and discrimination, health disparities, the social impact of AIDS, preventive health behavior, and sexuality and sexual orientation.

Within SMS, four degrees can be pursued: The Master of Public Health (MPH), the Master of Science (MS) and the Doctor of Public Health (DrPH)--all conferred by the Mailman School of Public Health--and the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), conferred by the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Doctoral graduates do research, teach, and/or assume advanced administrative positions. MPH graduates work in public health agencies, service delivery systems, participate as members of research or health promotion teams, or use the degree to complement such professional careers as nursing, law, medicine, social work, urban planning, occupational therapy, or international affairs. The MS degree is of particular interest to mid-career professionals with health related interests in fields such as nursing, medicine, health policy, bioethics, journalism, and law; post-doctoral students seeking to enhance their training by gaining additional analytic tools for public health policy making; and students seeking preparation for further study in a doctoral program.

## **General Information and Resources**

The Department of Sociomedical Sciences is located on the 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> floor of 722 West 168th Street (212-305-5656). Dr. Lisa Metsch is the Chair of the Department of Sociomedical Sciences and Dr. James Colgrove is the Deputy Chair for the Master's Programs, MPH and MS degrees. Dr. Robert Fullilove is the Practicum Director, responsible for the practica of all the MPH students. Andrea Constancio, MSW is the Department Academic Coordinator. She is responsible for all academic affairs related to the MPH, MS, and doctoral programs including admissions, academic progress, practicum, and graduation. Her door is always open, so feel free to come by at any time, if you have questions about SMS programs, for help getting through the Columbia bureaucracy, or just to say "hello!" Her phone number is 212-342-0287, and her e-mail address is ac995@columbia.edu.

## ***Advisement***

Upon admission to SMS, each student is assigned a faculty academic advisor. The advisor is responsible for guiding the student's progress through the program. The faculty advisor assists the student in planning a program to meet his/her needs and professional interests.

There are some areas in which Ms. Constancio, the Academic Program Coordinator, is the most appropriate person to consult with. For example, she is knowledgeable about the rules and facilities of the University and serves as a resource person to both students and faculty.

Students should meet with their advisors at least once a semester to plan for the semester, discuss general progress, and update plans for the future. During the first semester, students should meet with their faculty advisors to begin planning for the practicum and master's thesis (see relevant sections of this handbook for more information about advisement, practicum, and the master's thesis).

Student advisement is an important and integral part of the master's study. We recommend that students take an active role in developing a relationship with their advisor and adhere to the suggested schedule of consultation meetings (once per semester). We try to match student and faculty advisor as best we can at the beginning of the student's tenure, but sometimes there may be a need to change in a student-advisor match. Students who need such a change, or who otherwise need help in managing their advisement, are encouraged to contact Dr. James Colgrove.

## ***Financial Aid***

Students who need financial aid should first contact the Financial Aid Office in the Mailman School of Public Health (212-305-4113, sphfinaid@columbia.edu). The types of student aid available, including loans, awards, and work-study employment, are outlined on the school web site.

Fellowships and grants from government agencies and private foundations are available for graduate students. The amounts awarded, eligibility for the awards, and the basis for selecting recipients vary. Students interested in exploring these funding possibilities should consult with the Office of Financial Aid.

## ***Accessing Information***

The following is a brief overview of how students may access information through computers at Columbia. Because this is a rapidly expanding information system, students are advised to become familiar with resources and assistance available at the Health Sciences Library and Columbia University Information Technology (CUIT). Many demonstration sessions are scheduled throughout the year at the Health Sciences Library and students are urged to attend them.

The department sends important information including program announcements and job

postings for students via email. E-mail accounts are free to all Columbia University faculty, staff and students. The Columbia University Network ID (UNI) is issued by CUIT. To activate e-mail, and for other computing information, at the main Columbia web page ([www.columbia.edu](http://www.columbia.edu)), click on "E-mail and computing." Vital information, official communications, and program updates are communicated to students via their Columbia email and department listservs. *Students are strongly encouraged to provide an alternate email address for message copies.*

Available on the Columbia home page, under "Students," are quick links to schedules of classes, schedules of finals, grades, registration holds and bulletins, all which can be accessed with a Columbia UNI through Student Services Online (SSOL), <https://ssol.columbia.edu>. The Mailman School of Public Health has a web page at [www.mailman.columbia.edu](http://www.mailman.columbia.edu) and SMS has its own departmental page within the school's home page.

Students can access any scholarly information and reference materials through Columbia Libraries website, [www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb).

### ***Campus Shuttle Service***

A free campus shuttle bus service is available between the Medical Center campus, the Morningside campus, and Harlem Hospital. A valid Columbia University identification card is required. The shuttle runs between 6AM and 11PM. For up to date information about this and other shuttle bus services operated by Columbia University please check the Transportation Web site at [www.columbia.edu/cu/transportation/](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/transportation/).

### ***Campus Escort Service***

Students may call the Security Office (212-305-8100) for escort service between all Health Sciences facilities, or to their cars.

## **Academic Affairs**

### ***Registration Process***

Registration for classes is held at the beginning of each semester and at the beginning of each summer session. You will receive information about these registration periods from the Office of Student Affairs. We will keep you informed of changes in registration procedures.

Each semester, course schedules for the entire university are published online in the Directory of Classes. The Mailman School of Public Health publishes a separate course schedule available online at [mailman.columbia.edu/academics/courses](http://mailman.columbia.edu/academics/courses).

Many courses require permission. In these cases, a note in the Mailman School online course listing will indicate who should be contacted for permission. Students who register without permission may be dropped from the class even after having registered for it.

All students should register through the Medical Center campus registrar. Dual degree students should consult with their academic advisor and/or the Academic Program Coordinator about cross-registration and residency credits. Students should note that semester start and end dates, as well as holiday schedules, may not be the same for all schools of the University, so please consult the calendars for each school.

### *Cross Registration*

Students may take courses offered in many schools in the university, but their registration must be processed through the school in which they are enrolled. Students should first consult with their advisor and the Academic Coordinator. Cross registration is conducted on paper, during the change of program period.

### *Pass/Fail*

Up to 6 credits of course work may be taken for Pass/Fail with the approval of the instructor and the advisor. No core courses or required courses may be taken for Pass/Fail.

### *Holds*

The Office of Student Affairs may prevent a student from registering for classes by placing a hold a student's registration. Examples of "holds" include academic holds for incomplete courses, library holds for outstanding materials and/or fees, Bursar's Office holds for any money owed, or Health Services holds for failure to comply with immunization requirements. If your registration is held, you will receive a notice from the Registrar's Office before registration. Holds on registration must be cleared before you will be allowed to register. To clear the hold, you must settle the outstanding obligation(s) that caused the hold.

### *Add/Drop*

Changes in your class schedule may be made during the Add/Drop period, usually occurring the first 2 weeks of classes. There are no extra charges for adding and/or dropping courses during this period.

### **Course Waivers**

Students may request a waiver or exemption from a course requirement if they believe that they have satisfactorily completed a graduate-level course that is of comparable rigor and scope to that of the required SMS course. Students initiate this process by submitting a written request that identifies the SMS course to be waived and describes the prior course that is the basis for the request. Students should attach to the statement a syllabus for the prior course and transcript indicating the final grade for this course and submit a signed and dated written request along with the supporting material to the Academic Program Coordinator.

### ***Transfer of Credits***

Up to 6 transfer credits may be granted to MPH degree candidates for appropriate graduate level courses. Courses must be appropriate to the student's degree program, meet Mailman School academic standards and be approved by the department. The courses must have been completed within the preceding five years at an accredited institution and not have been counted toward another degree. The grading should be ordinal (a letter grade) and the grade earned should be B+ and higher. Online courses taken during the period in which a student is matriculated at the Mailman School are not eligible for transfer. Please consult with the Academic Program Coordinator about applying for transfer credit.

### ***Incomplete Grades***

There is no automatic grade of *Incomplete*. Students are expected to complete all course assignments and exams on schedule by the end of a semester. An incomplete grade (IN) may be given only when a student has met the attendance requirement but certain course assignments have not been completed for reasons satisfactory to the instructor. The instructor may grant an extension for a specific period of time, typically not more than several weeks. Students must complete a "Request for Incomplete" form in the Office of Student Affairs and have the faculty sign the form. After the student has submitted the materials required to complete the work for the class, the instructor will process a change of grade from IN to a letter grade. If the student has not completed work within one year from the end of the semester of registration, the IN grade will be converted to *Unofficial Withdrawal* (UW), defined as "student did not complete attendance and/or assignments, but failed to withdraw." A grade of UW will not be changed to a passing grade. In most cases a student will have to register for the course again to complete the course.

Students who have three or more incompletes will not be allowed to register for the next semester of classes (see *Holds*). Registration will be held until they clear their records of the incompletes.

### ***Leave of Absence / Inactive Status***

Leave of absence or medical leave must be approved by the Academic Program Coordinator and by Lillian Morales (212-305-8690, lm31@columbia.edu), Associate Director of Academic Standards and Academic Record in the Office of Student Affairs (OSA). A student who takes a leave that extends beyond 2 years will be required to re-apply for admission through the Office of Admissions. Re-admission applications are available online at the Mailman School of Public Health's web site for prospective students. Contact the Office of Admissions at 212-342-5127 for more information about re-admission.

### ***Filing for Graduation***

Degrees are granted by the university three times a year: October, February and May. The precise dates vary from year to year. Check the academic calendar for dates.

Students may file an application for graduation when they anticipate fulfillment of all degree requirements by the graduation date.



Applications for graduation must be filed with the Mailman School of Public Health's Office of Student Affairs. The filing deadlines are absolute. They are published each year in the academic calendar. It is the student's responsibility to file for graduation on time.

Acceptance of a graduation application is conditional. Students who filed for graduation but failed to complete required work will not graduate. The next time they file for graduation, they will have to complete all degree requirements before re-application for graduation will be accepted. In addition, students may be charged for extended registration.

The extended residence registration course for master's programs allows students who have completed all coursework to remain active with a part-time status for one additional semester.

In order to give students access to the resources they need to complete remaining coursework in this extended semester, students will be required to register for a zero credit course that will be charged at \$500. It will activate (or reactivate) a student's UNI and provides virtual library and facility access. However, it will neither provide access to financial aid nor to housing ([mailman-handbook.com/2011/node/198](http://mailman-handbook.com/2011/node/198)).

## **Learning Objectives**

The MPH degree in Sociomedical Sciences (SMS) trains students to apply theories and methods of social and behavioral sciences to address public health issues. Students are provided with the knowledge to understand the the social determinants of health and the skills to apply this knowledge in the analysis and formulation of public health programs and policies. These general goals are reflected in specific learning objectives for MPH students developed at the school, department, and certificate levels.

### ***Learning Objectives: Mailman School of Public Health***

Upon satisfactory completion of the MPH degree, all graduates will be able to demonstrate a broad knowledge and skills base in the core areas of public health, with particular emphasis in a selected field of public health, and will be able to:

- Apply epidemiologic methods to the measurement of disease rates, prevention of infectious diseases, and the development and evaluation of health programs and policies;
- Apply statistical methods of estimation and hypothesis testing and explain the basics of correlation and regression for the purpose of analyzing the health of populations;
- Analyze how environmental contaminants (chemical, physical and other exposures) interact with biological systems and their effect on human populations for the purpose of evaluating risk reduction strategies;
- Assess the impact on health policy options of social, political, technological, economic and cultural forces, and apply basic management techniques to address organizational challenges to providing health care;
- Examine public health issues and responses from a social and behavioral sciences

- perspective and explain social, cultural, political, economic, and behavioral determinants of disparities in health status among population sub-groups; and
- Demonstrate knowledge and skills for effective practice in their selected field of study.

### ***Learning Objectives: Department of Sociomedical Sciences***

Upon satisfactory completion of the MPH program in SMS, graduates will be able to:

- Analyze the relationships of social, cultural, political, economic, and behavioral factors to health and disease outcomes
- Use theories and methods from the social and behavioral sciences to address public health issues through program development, policy formation, and advocacy.
- Select and employ appropriate research methodology from the social and behavioral sciences:
  - Collect appropriate data to understand determinants of health and disease
  - Apply appropriate social indicators to describe population health
  - Assess strengths and limitations of various sources of data
  - Assess strengths and limitations of various approaches to research and evaluation;
  - Conduct qualitative and quantitative data analysis
- Demonstrate proficiency in written, oral and visual communication.



## **Degree Requirements**

### ***MPH Degree Requirements***

There are four components to the MPH experience: coursework, advisement, practicum and the Master's Thesis. Each component contributes to the student's professional development. Within the Department the MPH degree is offered in two formats, Accelerated MPH (1-year) and Columbia MPH (2-year). The new programs offer integrated interdisciplinary school-wide curriculums. Columbia MPH and Accelerated MPH students spend their first semester immersed in the School's Core curriculum.

#### ***Columbia MPH (52 credits minimum)***

##### *Mailman Core (16.5 credits)*

The Core is built around six studios (listed below), which represent the core areas of knowledge in the field of public health. Additionally, cross cutting competencies are imbedded throughout the semester, ranging from systems thinking, public health biology to program planning and beyond.

The Columbia Core Studios:

- 1) Foundations of Public Health (P6020)
- 2) Research Methods and Applications (P6031)
- 3) Biological and Environmental Determinants of Health (P6040)
- 4) Social, Behavioral, and Systems Approaches to Public Health (P6051)
- 5) Global and Developmental Perspectives, Programs, and Policies (P6052)
- 6) Health Systems (P6060)

It is through this integrated experience that students achieve the foundational and interdisciplinary knowledge necessary to move forward in the MPH program.

##### *Integration of Science and Practice (ISP) (3 credits)*

In addition to the Core, Mailman students will take the case-based Integration of Science and Practice (ISP) course. The mall group ISP sessions bridge the gap between what you traditionally learn in a classroom and the real-world experience of working as a public health professional.

##### *Leadership and Innovation (1.5 credits)*

Lastly, all Mailman students also receive intensive leadership training through the Leadership and Innovation (L&I) course in the spring semester which focuses on teamwork, leadership, and innovation in public health. Students will learn how to work effectively in both large and small teams while embracing the complexity and diversity of working in complex systems and organizations as a window into true public health practice.

Incoming students should note that the School registers students for their first semester

core courses. In subsequent semesters, students will use Student Services Online (SSOL) to register for department, certificate, and elective courses.

### ***SMS Core Curriculum (12 credits)***

In addition to completing the Mailman School core, SMS student must take four department core courses (3 credits each) that provide an overview of the field of Sociomedical Sciences and the application of social sciences to public health.

1. **P6728 Health Promotion Theory, Research and Practice**  
-- or --  
**P8745 Social and Economic Determinants of Health**
2. **P8796 Quantitative Research Design for the Social Sciences**
3. **P8785 Qualitative Research Methods in the Social Sciences**
4. One course only in the area of Public Health Practice or Politics, Policy, & Ethics

#### **Public Health Practice**

P6712 Health Advocacy  
P8705 Evaluation of Health Programs  
8717 Urban Space and Health  
P6775 Health Communication  
P8741 Structural Approaches in Global Health  
8771 Community Based Participatory Research

#### **Politics, Social Policy, and Ethics**

P8709 Sexuality, Gender, Health and Human Rights  
P8725 Global AIDS  
P8746 Persuasion & Coercion in Public Health  
P8747 Ethics of Public Health  
P8757 Global Politics of Aging  
P9740 Privacy, Policy, Surveillance

### ***Certificate Program***

The balance of the required credits (52 minimum) for the MPH degree consists of certificate-specific requirements and electives. Every student in the two year Columbia MPH program enrolls in a Certificate program which provides training in a focused area of expertise - in addition to the student's departmental discipline - and leads to a Columbia University approved credential.

The 20-plus certificate programs have been developed in consultation with public health employers and other key stakeholders and reflect today's most sought-after skills and knowledge.

Many certificates focus on interdisciplinary topics such as global health, chronic disease, or aging, while some offer advanced level training in one particular area such as biostatistics or healthcare management.

### *Elective Courses*

A *certificate elective* may be any relevant course not already taken for required credit. Some certificates specify a selection of courses from which the student must choose certificate electives, referred to as ‘selectives.’

*General Elective* may be any graduate level course taken in or outside of the Department. General electives may be taken at other schools of the University. Within Columbia University most graduate level courses are indicated by course numbers of 4000 or higher. If students are unsure if the course is graduate level they should consult with the Academic Program Coordinator.

### *Tutorials*

A tutorial is an individualized course of study in which a student works with a faculty member in a less structured setting than a classroom course. One-to-one student/faculty tutorials may include, for example, participation in major research or other projects, small individual projects, pilot projects, literature review, and field experience. A tutorial may be taken for one, two, or three credits depending on the amount of work it entails. No more than 3 credits of tutorials may be applied toward the degree credits.

Students interested in taking a tutorial must complete the Tutorial Form and submit it to the Academic Program Coordinator no less than 72 hours prior to the last registration day of the semester.

### ***Accelerated Program (42 credits minimum)***

Mailman School of Public Health’s Accelerated MPH is an intensive, one-year program designed for highly motivated professionals seeking to enhance their career with a degree in public health. The curriculum is similar to the innovative curriculum of the 2-year Columbia MPH but completed in one year (Fall, Spring, Summer). The profile of a typical Accelerated MPH student is an individual who has earned a doctoral degree (such as an MD, DDS, PhD, DNSc, EdD), an MD student mid-way through their study, or an individual who as has several years of work experience. Students in this program do not earn a certificate.

There is a 45 credit limit on tuition across this three semester program (Fall/Spring/Summer). Any courses taken over the 45 credit limit must be paid for on a per credit basis. The summer courses as described in the program plan are included in the flat tuition rate but must not exceed 45 credits.

### ***Master’s Thesis***

Students are required to register for 0-credit Master’s Thesis Proposal and Master’s Thesis courses. The Graduate Schools of Public Health’s Council on Education for Public Health describes the thesis as “an important culminating experience that requires students to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired in coursework and other learning

experiences and to apply theory and principles in a situation that approximates some aspect of professional practice.”\* The Department of Sociomedical Sciences has developed a thesis guide to help students in planning and executing the thesis (see *Thesis* section of this Handbook).

### ***Required Examinations and Certifications***

The following examinations and certifications are required of all students.

#### *Human Subjects Protection (IRB) Training*

All SMS students are required to pass a certification exam on Human Subjects Protection Training. Study materials and the certification exam are available on line at <https://www.rascal.columbia.edu/>.

Login with your UNI and password. From the “Training Center” go to “Course Listings” and select “TC0087 - Human Subjects Protection Training.” For more information on the Columbia Institutional Review Board Human Subjects Review Committee, please visit the IRB website ([www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/irb/about.html](http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/irb/about.html)).

Students should obtain certification in their first or second semester as it is required for work on Mailman School of Public Health projects. Human Subjects Protection Training certification is a prerequisite for the Practicum and Master’s Thesis.

#### *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)*

SMS students are required to pass the HIPAA certification exam. To take the HIPAA training course and certification, log on to [www.rascal.columbia.edu](http://www.rascal.columbia.edu) then login to the “Training Center” and within “Course Listings,” select training module “TC0019 (HIPAA: Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act Training Course).”

### ***Practicum Requirement***

Within the Department of Sociomedical Sciences, Accelerated Program students must complete 140 hours. Students in the CMPH Certificate program must devote a minimum of 280 hours to her/his practicum (see details in the *Practicum* section of this Handbook).

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\* *Accreditation Criteria, Graduate Schools of Public Health, Council on Education for Public Health amended January 2002, pg. 9-10.*

## ***Masters Dual Degree Programs***

The Mailman School offers dual degrees with 10 schools across the University through our MPH program. Applicants seeking admission to dual degree studies must apply separately to each of the two collaborating schools and must meet the admissions requirements of each. Once both schools grant admission to their individual degree programs, the student may begin an integrated dual degree program. Dual-degree students can begin their coursework at the Mailman School or the partner school.

Dual-degree students are required to take 39 public health credits. Most of these students will complete the majority of their program in their first year of residence at the Mailman School and complete some requirements in their second year (when students are in residence at partner schools). The requirements in year two potentially include some coursework and the student's capstone/thesis.

### *Registration and Tuition for Dual Degree Programs*

- All students in the dual-degree programs will spend a consecutive Fall and Spring semester at Mailman earning a minimum of 32 credits through a flat-fee tuition model.
- All students will earn an additional seven credits in either the summer of their first year or in year two as a cross-registrant (or a combination of both). Some of these credits may be added to the Fall and Spring semesters of the first year.
- Certificate programs are not available to dual-degree students.
- All dual-degree students will pay a flat-rate tuition charge, based on the accelerated program rate.
- Dual-degree students, when registered with Mailman, will need to register for PUBH P0005—Mailman Dual Degree.
- There are 21 Mailman-wide credits (including our core), which cannot be substituted. (Courses from partner schools that counted towards the completion of the Mailman core will no longer be permitted.) With prior planning and prior-permission, Mailman department course requirements can, on occasion, be substituted for partner school courses, but the total number of PH credits (39) is not reduced.

It is extremely important that dual degree students seek guidance from the program coordinators and academic advisors in both programs and the Director of Student Services in the Mailman School of Public Health. Students must be careful to both register for the correct number of credits in each school and to complete all program requirements for each school. Dual degree students must consult with and get approval from Andrea Constancio before registration.

Master's thesis and practicum experiences usually can be coordinated between the two programs so that they may be used to satisfy requirements for both programs.



## **MS Degree Requirements**

The MS degree with a concentration in History & Ethics is designed for students interested in applying historical analysis to public health practice and policy making but who do not seek a professional public health degree (MPH). The curriculum focuses on American public health and medicine in the twentieth century. It emphasizes the ethical, legal, and policy debates surrounding efforts to control infectious and chronic diseases; the influence on health policy of civil society actors such as activists, advocates, and non-governmental organizations; and the evolving standards of professional practice or both public health and medicine.

The course of study consists of thirty credits and a master's thesis, and can be completed either full-time (two semesters) or part-time (three or more semesters). MS students are required take three Department core courses (9 credits) that provide an overview of the field of Sociomedical Sciences and the application of social sciences to public health in each of the following areas: Theory, Methods, and Policy/Practice/Advocacy (see list below), and Epidemiology (3 credits). In addition, students must complete 15 credits toward the core MS requirements (see below) and are permitted one general elective (3 credits). No required courses may be taken for Pass/Fail. No more than 3 credits may be taken in tutorials (see 13).

<b>SMS Department Core: 9 credits</b>	<b>MS Core Requirements: 15 credits</b>
<p><b><u>Theory courses (3 credits)</u></b>            P8701 Social Dimensions Aging            P8704 Medical Sociology            P8736 Theories and Perspectives on Sexuality &amp; Health            P8755 Medical Anthropology            P8767 Health Psychology            P8745 Social &amp; Economical Determinants</p> <p><b><u>Methods courses (3 credits)</u></b>            P8705 Evaluation of Health Programs            P8777 Survey Research Methods            P8785 Qualitative Research Methods            P8786 Ethnographic Methods            P8796 Quantitative Research Design</p> <p><b><u>SMS Electives (3 credits)</u></b>            P6712 Health advocacy            P8709 Sexuality, Gender, Health &amp; Human Rights            P8725 Global AIDS            P8741 Structural Approaches in Global Health            P8771 Community Based Participatory Research</p>	P8746 Coercion & Persuasion in Public Health P8747 Ethics of Public Health P8757 Global Politics of Aging P8773 Social History of American Public Health P9740 History & Policy: Privacy & Surveillance

## **Practicum**

### ***Introduction***

All MPH students in accredited schools of public health in the United States must complete “a planned, supervised and evaluated practice experience (as part of their) public health professional degree program.” For the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University, the length of time for this practice experience, or practicum, is required to be equivalent to one full term semester. Within the Department of Sociomedical Sciences (SMS), Accelerated Program students must complete 140 hours. Students in the MPH Certificate program must devote a minimum of 280 hours to her/his practicum. MPH Certificate students who are working full-time in the field of public health, in an area related to their program certificate, the practicum time requirement is decreased to 140 hours.

The practicum should provide the opportunity to apply the concepts and methods of social science and public health learned in the classroom to actual public health problems. During the practicum, a student works under the guidance of a supervisor (Practicum Preceptor) who agrees to orient, supervise, and evaluate the work of the student.

The settings of student practica vary by program and certificate. The acceptable content of a practicum is flexible to meet a diverse range of student interests, educational needs, professional objectives, and career goals. However, in all cases the practicum experience must be consistent with the academic goals and objectives of the Mailman School and the Department of Sociomedical Sciences.

Robert Fullilove, EdD ([ref5@columbia.edu](mailto:ref5@columbia.edu)) is the Practicum Director. He is available to help guide students through the process of finding and completing a practicum.

### ***General Objectives***

The practicum provides an opportunity to apply material learned in class and to develop professionalism. The practicum will allow the student to:

- apply classroom knowledge in a real-world setting;
- experience the nature of work in his/her specialized area of training;
- carry out a project useful to an organization or group
- develop and refine professional public health skills;
- gain confidence, competence, and satisfaction in completing projects
- develop insight into personal skills and attributes;
- learn additional skills;
- meet regularly with a qualified Practicum Preceptor who can both guide the student’s experience in a specific area of interest and serve as a role model and/or mentor;
- attend meetings and seminars to learn about the work of other relevant organizational/project personnel;

- explore opportunities for master’s thesis topics based upon the needs of the organization or project and individual interests (Note: It is encouraged, but not mandatory, that the practicum serve as the basis of the thesis);
- obtain job references from public health professionals who can speak to the student’s abilities in an applied context; and
- obtain a position with the organization or group when relevant openings are available upon graduation.

***Roles and Responsibilities***

The agency, program, project or individual that agrees to accept a student for a practicum experience also assumes an educational role. Someone at the agency must be identified as the Practicum Preceptor, who agrees to help arrange the student's experience and define activities that will meet the objectives of both the student and of the agency/project. The roles and responsibilities for students and preceptors are outlined below:

<i>Preceptor</i>	<i>Student</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the scope of the practicum with student;</li> <li>• Determine the need for any special training or certifications (HIPAA, IRB.);</li> <li>• Develop a schedule with the student;</li> <li>• Schedule regular meetings to chart development and progress;</li> <li>• Include the student in meetings or seminars related to the practicum area;</li> <li>• Clarify to whom student should report if preceptor is not available;</li> <li>• Review and sign the Practicum Summary Report at the end of the practicum.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for background reading or other information prior to meeting with preceptor;</li> <li>• Discuss the scope of the practicum;</li> <li>• Clarify with the preceptor whether the work will be independent or in collaboration with others;</li> <li>• Clarify to whom she or he should report if preceptor is not available;</li> <li>• Discuss how time should be allocated and hours recorded;</li> <li>• Comply with time commitments whether or not preceptor is on site;</li> <li>• Discuss work schedule and progress with the preceptor on a regular basis;</li> <li>• Document involvement in the project (e.g., project activities, data collection, meeting minutes) in a data/record notebook if applicable;</li> <li>• Complete any special training required.</li> </ul>

***Prior to the Practicum***

When selecting a practicum, students should consider the following: their enrollment status (full-time or part-time), expected graduation date, course load, and the nature of the proposed practicum. Most full-time MPH students will complete their practicum in the summer between years 1 and 2 (e.g. 35 hours/week x 8 = 280 hours). However, other arrangements are acceptable: a practicum may be carried out over a semester during the

academic year, or over a full calendar year (e.g. 7 hours/week x 40 weeks = 280 hours), depending on the student's schedule and the needs of the sponsoring organization. Although the practicum can be completed at anytime during the two-year program, it is recommended that students complete all or a large portion of their practicum prior to beginning work on their master's thesis in the third semester. There are increased opportunities for the practicum experience to catalyze the thesis experience for those who complete their practicum before the third semester.

Many factors influence a student's final practicum selection. Although it is helpful to have specific interests already in mind, the practicum also affords a great opportunity to explore areas of potential interest. Some students use this time to learn more about areas they may be considering for a career.

As students are balancing their areas of interest, family commitments, geographic and financial constraints, it may help to consider some of the following:

- How geographically mobile am I? Do I want to do a domestic or an international practicum? Must my practicum be in NYC?
- What do I envision myself doing after graduation?
- Do I want to use my practicum as a possible future job placement and, if so, in what job or agency do I envision myself working after graduation?
- What skills would I like to practice in my practicum? What would I like to learn?
- Do I have career goals that include further academic pursuits, such as obtaining a PhD or other advanced degree?
- Do I want to do a practicum that offers the possibility of a publication or presentation at a scientific session?
- How important are financial consideration, such as whether my practicum must be paid?
- Do I want to do my thesis as an extension of my practicum?

### ***Finding a Practicum Placement***

There are many ways to find a practicum placement. Students may contact a faculty member or an organization with which they would like to work. Students can search [Mailman CareerLink](#) the Career Services search engine, for paid and unpaid internships and should also review the Friday OCS Announcements for featured internship opportunities.

Students can also get ideas for potential practica by reading previous students' practicum agreement forms and summary reports, available on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor. Occasionally, email announcements of available practica are sent to the student listserv. Students may discuss options with the Practicum Director, Robert Fullilove, and students should also discuss the timing and general goals for their practicum with their advisor.

### ***Practicum Scope of Work Form***

Under the direction of the Mailman School Office of Educational Programs (OEP) the

Integrative Practicum Experience (IPE) is a school-wide initiative to centralize resources and support for students completing their practicum.

Once the practicum agency and project have been identified and agreed upon, it is the student's responsibility to submit the Scope of Work (SoW) Form via the online SoW Database. The objectives and activities of the practicum should reflect as many of the core competencies of SMS and the student's certificate as possible. These objectives should be initially outlined in the form by the student with input from the practicum preceptor.

The IPE Team has created multiple tools to assist in this submission process, including "How To" guides for students, faculty and practicum administrators. You can find all of these guides on the IPE CourseWorks website, located here: [https://courseworks.columbia.edu/portal/site/PUBHP6085\\_001\\_2014\\_3](https://courseworks.columbia.edu/portal/site/PUBHP6085_001_2014_3)

4 Steps to Complete the Scope of Work form:

Step 1: Student Completely Answers all Questions in the Form

Step 2: IRB Review

Step 3: Faculty Advisor Approval

Step 4: Final Review and Approval from Departments, as needed

### ***During the Practicum***

Once a student begins the practicum, the preceptor who coordinates and supervises the student's work is responsible for seeing that the specific objectives and activities agreed upon in the practicum agreement are being carried out according to schedule. The preceptor orients the student to the agency and project and meets with the student on a regular basis to monitor the student's progress. During the practicum, the student is responsible for performing according to the practicum agreement and for fulfilling the usual responsibilities of punctuality, accountability, and appropriate department and initiative expected of all public health professionals. If there are any problems or concerns the Practicum Director is available to meet with the student and/or the student's preceptor. If for any reason the student or the preceptor is unable to fulfill his or her responsibilities according to the practicum agreement, plans and activities for the practicum may be changed or modified with the approval of the advisor and the practicum preceptor.

### ***Following the Practicum***

After completion of the practicum, SMS students are required to login to the practicum scope of work tracking database and file for completion. In addition, near the end of the practicum the program coordinator will send out links to the student and preceptor to complete a brief evaluation of the practicum experience.

Students should file their completion as soon as possible after the practicum has ended and should not wait until the period of review of graduation requirements as this can cause delays.

# **The Master's Thesis**

## ***Introduction***

The master's thesis is the capstone requirement of all master's students in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences. The thesis is intended to reflect the training you have received in the department and demonstrate your ability to design, implement, and present professional work relevant to your major field of interest.

Writing the thesis is an essential experience that furthers your career development. Employers seek in potential employees with an MPH or MS degree the ability to analyze data, write articles and reports, and design studies, needs assessments, and/or health promotion interventions. If you plan to continue your academic studies, developing expertise and demonstrating your ability as a writer are two important skills required of doctoral candidates. A well-written paper is a great asset that you can bring with you to a job interview or include in an application for further study. The thesis should demonstrate your ability to think clearly and convey your thoughts effectively and thereby provide an example of your understanding and insight into a substantive area in which you have developed expertise.

## ***Planning your Thesis***

Students who complete the degree in two years should begin exploring ideas for a thesis no later than their second semester. If you plan to complete the degree requirements in two years, you must have a thesis sponsor by early in the fall semester of your second year, when you will register for the thesis proposal course. Ideally, students use the practicum experience as a basis for the thesis, although this is not required.

### ***Selection and Role of the Thesis Sponsor***

Toward the end of your first year (for students completing the degree in two years) you should identify a general thesis topic and a member of the SMS faculty as a potential thesis sponsor. The role of your thesis sponsor is to provide guidance and feedback to you throughout the research and writing of the thesis.

It is the student's responsibility to approach a faculty member and get her/his agreement to serve as a thesis sponsor. A list of eligible faculty members and their research topics is included in the appendix to this Handbook. You may need to approach more than one faculty member if the first one or two you approach cannot serve as your sponsor (e.g., because they are already working as sponsor of other students' theses or because they are otherwise unavailable).

In rare cases you may wish to consult and otherwise involve other faculty or non-faculty individuals as advisors for your project. Including other advisors in the thesis process should be done with the permission of the thesis sponsor. However, only the faculty designated as thesis sponsor is responsible for approving the proposal and grading the final project.

You should schedule, as soon as possible, ongoing meetings with your thesis sponsor, where you obtain regular feedback during the process of preparing your thesis. Early planning for these meetings is important because you and/or your sponsor may have planned trips out of the city. It is your responsibility, not your thesis sponsor's, to ensure that a sufficient number of sessions are scheduled.

When a student and sponsor have agreed to work together, the student should write a memorandum summarizing the discussion and the student's understanding of the agreement between her/him and the sponsor. Some issues to discuss and address in the memo are:

1. Schedule of student-sponsor meetings
  - a) Are there times when sponsor or you are not available to meet due to travel or other obligations?
2. When should written drafts be handed in?
3. How would communication take place? Preference for written comments, in-person discussions, emails exchange, etc.
4. If thesis work is done on sponsor's research data (if another researcher's data, same questions apply to him/her)
  - a) What data will be available to student?
  - b) When will data be available to student?
  - c) Does sponsor approve that the thesis will be written by student and she/he would be the sole author on the thesis? How would later publication be handled? Student should first author? Would sponsor be co-author?
5. Sponsor's other expectations from student
6. Student's expectations, special needs, and requests

It is also recommended that you participate in a study group with one or more other students and use the group format to ensure that you are making progress toward finishing your thesis on time.

### ***Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of the Thesis***

All research involving human subjects must be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review. An IRB review may involve an exemption, an expedited review, or a full review. Remember that even an expedited review can take several months to conclude. Only the IRB, following a review of the research protocol, may grant an exemption. That is, neither the faculty sponsor with whom you are working nor you can make the determination that your project is exempt. If you believe that your project should be exempt, you must apply to ask the IRB for an exemption.

The following are examples of the types of theses that REQUIRE review by the Columbia IRB:

- Collection of data using human subjects using quantitative or qualitative research methods, including interview of few respondents, focus groups, etc..

- Analysis of previously collected (also called "secondary") data
- Collection or analysis of data from human subjects even if the IRB has already the study (even if it is your sponsor's project).
- Analysis of data from human subjects that was already collected and approved by another institution's IRB, even an institute where you work(ed) or where you are doing (did) your practicum

The following is an example of a thesis that would NOT require IRB approval:

- Research activities that involve only the analysis of de-identified data within a publicly available dataset need not be submitted to the IRB for review or for a determination that the project falls into an "exempt" category. For examples of publicly available datasets see links at the CU library website at [www.columbia.edu/acis/eds/dset\\_guides/health.html](http://www.columbia.edu/acis/eds/dset_guides/health.html)

In May 2012 Columbia University released new guidelines on students as researchers. Any student considering conducting human subjects research for her thesis should consult these guidelines to determine the appropriate steps to take for IRB review.

### ***Submission of IRB protocols***

An IRB protocol must have a Principal Investigator (PI). The Columbia University Medical Center IRB does not permit students to be listed as the PI on an IRB protocol. Theses that are submitted to the IRB need to be submitted with the Columbia University faculty member who is the Sponsor listed as the PI on the IRB protocol. The students should be listed as an Investigator.

In the protocol, the project should be identified as thesis research that you are conducting under faculty mentorship.

The IRB review process can be complex and lengthy, so any theses that may require IRB approval should be started as soon as possible. If you seek to work on a thesis project that may require an application to the IRB, you should discuss your project with your thesis sponsor before beginning the process and obtain her/his agreement to serve as the PI on your project.

All personnel listed on the protocol (including students) need to have passed the Human Subjects Protection Training exam and the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act Training Course (HIPPA) exam.

Submission of IRB protocols and correspondence with the IRB is conducted on-line using the university's research administration system, RASCAL (see <https://www.rascal.columbia.edu/>). At the RASCAL website, click on "Human Subjects (IRB)," and "Create a Protocol." Under "Rascal Human Subjects" you can also click on "Helpful IRB Information," for a comprehensive archive of information and frequently asked questions.



## ***The Thesis Course***

All MPH and MS students are required to register for their thesis as a yearlong, two-part course, P8707 and P8708 for 0 credits each semester. The course aims to lead students through the process of writing the thesis: from developing ideas and writing the thesis proposal (due during P8707) to completing the thesis (due at the end of P8708).

P8707 and P8708 do not have weekly class meetings throughout the semester. Instead, there are a limited number of sessions early in each semester. Most of the work on the thesis is done by the student individually and in collaboration with her/his thesis sponsor. The purpose of registering for the course is to provide students with guidance and resources via the Courseworks site and periodic meetings.

### ***SMS Thesis Proposal (P8707) Fall Semester***

In the fall of their second year, students will register for a 0-credit course entitled *SMS Thesis Proposal (P8707)*. The aim of the work in this semester is to complete a thesis proposal. By mid-November, the student should submit a hard copy of the proposal, approved and signed by the thesis sponsor, to the Academic Program Coordinator. Students who have fulfilled this requirement will receive a grade of Pass. If a proposal has not been approved by the end of the semester, the student will receive a grade of credit pending (CP). Students may get a CP grade only with written permission of the thesis sponsor. Permission must be sent to the Academic Program Coordinator before the last day of classes. If the student has not completed the work, and the CP grade has not been changed to a Pass grade by the beginning of the Spring semester, the students will not be eligible to register for P8708 in the spring semester and her/his graduation will be delayed.

### ***SMS Master's Thesis (P8708) Spring Semester***

In the spring of their second year, students will register for *SMS Master's Thesis (P8708)*, a 0-credit course. Successful completion of P8707 is a pre-requisite for registering for P8708. The aim of the work in this semester is to complete the thesis. The letter grade the student receives for the thesis will be the grade the student receives for P8708.

### ***Formatting the Thesis***

- Font: Use a standard typeface, such as Arial, Helvetica, Palatino Linotype, Georgia, or Times New Roman, and a font size of 11 points or larger (use font size 12 for Times New Roman). All text color must be black.
- Line spacing: 1.5
- All pages must be 8.5 x 11
- Page Margins: 1" all around.
- Figures and Tables: You may use a smaller type size but it must be in a black font color, readily legible, and follow the font typeface requirement. Color can be used in figures, but any text in the figures should be in black type.
- Section Headers: Begin each text section with a section header.

### ***Depositing the Completed Thesis***

After the thesis sponsor has approved the final version of the manuscript, the student should deposit two copies of the thesis.

- One hard copy of the thesis is given to the thesis sponsor. The sponsor will read and assign a final grade to this copy.
- One electronic copy is uploaded to the Courseworks site via drop box.

No signature is required on either of the copies. However, you must have your sponsor's verbal or email approval that the thesis is ready to submit.

### ***Copy for the Sponsor***

- A copy submitted to the thesis sponsor
- Title page should include:
  - title
  - student's name and certificate
  - thesis type (e.g., review article, research report)
  - sponsor's name
  - the following note: "Department of Sociomedical Sciences, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University, In partial fulfillment of MPH degree requirements, for graduation [graduation month and year]"
- Sample cover pages are posted on Courseworks.
- If the thesis reports on research involving human subjects, the page following the title page should include a statement about IRB approval, including protocol number or, if exempt, reasons for exemption.

### ***Electronic Copy***

- Uploaded to the Courseworks site using the dropbox function
- Either PDF or MS Word is fine
- Name the file using the following format: lastnameMPHthesis.pdf (or .doc or .docx).

### ***Policy on Late Submission***

All copies of the thesis must be submitted following the formatting instructions and by the due date. If the approved thesis is not submitted on time, the students will receive a grade of incomplete and his/her graduation will be delayed.

### ***Grading of the Thesis***

Unlike like past years in which each thesis was read by sponsor and a blind reviewer, beginning fall 2014 the thesis will be read and graded only by the student's sponsor. No second reader will be assigned. The sponsor will grade the thesis based on the following criteria:

- How well defined is the topic of discussion/research problem/theoretical issue?
- How well-developed and appropriate are the theoretical/conceptual frameworks?
- How well-developed is the literature review (i.e., are the relevant sources on the

topic cited and discussed)?

- How well-supported/convincing are the discussion points, inferences and conclusions?
- How well-organized, well written, and readable is the thesis?
- How innovative and sophisticated is the overall thesis and the presentation of arguments?
- Are there other strengths and weaknesses?

***Outstanding Thesis Award***

Each year the department gives an award for outstanding SMS master's thesis based on the judgment of a blinded panel of faculty reviewers. The award is presented to the student at the Mailman School student awards ceremony at the May commencement.

## Writing the Thesis Proposal

During P8707, you will work toward preparing a thesis proposal. Your thesis proposal should consist of the following:

1. Cover page: The title of your thesis, the type of thesis (e.g., literature review), your name, your certificate, your projected date of graduation, and the name and signature of your thesis sponsor (the signature is required to indicate that the Sponsor has approved the final proposal).

2. Description of project (approximately 2-3 pages):

a. Statement of the problem: A general statement of the issue to be addressed.

b. Background and significance: Briefly sketch the basis for the proposal, the existing knowledge on the topic, the theoretical framework, and the importance of the project for public health in general and your area of specialization in particular.

c. Specific aims: State concisely and realistically what the proposed project is intended to accomplish, such as the hypotheses to be tested, the product to be produced, the theory to be reviewed.

3. Project plan and timeline (approximately 2-3 pages):

a. Provide a brief description of the proposed project, including the target population(s) or sample(s) to be used, theory to be applied, the areas to be covered, program components, proposed methods, and data analysis plan (if you plan on using data).

b. Include in the project plan a timeline when tasks will be completed.

Examples of thesis proposals will be available on the *Courseworks* page of P8707.

## Writing the Thesis

Writing is a skill that everyone can improve. There are many guides that are helpful. For writing research papers see, for example, Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., & Williams, J.M. (2008). *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. An excellent resource of review articles is *The Handbook of Research Synthesis* by H. Cooper & L. Hedges (eds.), (1994). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

In writing, think about your audience. An effective essay is one that argues a point. Imagine that you are arguing your point to a class or to friends. Write in a formal (social science) style. Use simple language. Avoid jargon. Use terms consistently.

### **Reference Style**

The thesis must use a standard reference and citation style such as the *American Psychological Association's Publication Manual* or the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Consult with your thesis sponsor about which style you should use.

### **Appendices**

Appendices are not required but maybe appropriate for your thesis. Material included in an appendix might include questionnaires, scales, interview schedules, maps, and photographs. Appendices should be included after the reference section. There is no limit on the number of appendices or the number of pages in the appendices.

### **Acceptable Thesis Formats**

The thesis may be in one of the following formats:

1. A Review Article
2. A Research Proposal
3. Needs Assessment Proposal
4. A Program Evaluation Proposal
5. An Intervention Proposal
6. A Research Report

The following sections provide guidelines for each format.

#### **1. Review Article**

##### **Overview**

Writing a review article consists of selecting a problem, reviewing what is currently known in the scientific literature, and building an argument that will lead to a set of suggestions and recommendations. Review articles typically fall into one of the following categories:

Theoretical reviews focus on the theoretical underpinnings and frameworks around a particular issue, develop an argument that constructively critiques current thinking, and propose alternative ways or frameworks for analyzing the issue.

Methodological reviews focus on a particular method or methodology for research, evaluation, or intervention on a specific research problem, discuss the strengths and limitations of the method, and offer a critique and suggestions for future work.

Research reviews focus on scanning findings from research on a particular issue, summarizing findings, analyzing trends discovered in the summary, and suggesting new research directions in the field.

Policy reviews focus on analyzing the impact of a specific policy or set of policies in certain populations, and suggesting arenas for advocacy and points of intervention.

In a review article, you must be economical. Even if you have many interesting ideas, concentrate on one or two major themes. Introduce the theme or themes early on, preferably in the first paragraph (e.g., “In this essay I will argue that...”). Use a title and headings to help your reader move along through your essay. These will make it clearer when you move to the next step of your argument, or from one topic to another.

Often, the most important part of the writing process is in the editing stage. You are unlikely to come up with a finished product on your first draft. Allow yourself the freedom to write unreservedly, but then edit your work closely. Even if you didn’t start out with a clear structure, outline your essay after it is written. This also provides an opportunity for you to add headings if you didn’t start out with them. Make sure your arguments are built logically and coherently. Careful editing will help you to see where you drift from a main argument, or where a second argument needs an introduction. Don’t hesitate to remove passages if they distract from the main theme(s) of your essay. Even if these extrinsic arguments are interesting, it is better to be coherent and stay on topic. You may expand on such passages in another essay or place them in a footnote.

Provide proof for your statements and arguments. Imagine your readers are a jury in a court of law. What is your reasoning? Where is your evidence? In the social sciences, we use and cite sources of both ideas and facts. But remember, evidence may be of mixed validity – use it critically. Don’t just say, for example, “youth have unsafe sex because of low self-esteem.” Be clear when you are mentioning this as a fact based upon research evidence by citing the source of the information. If instead you are proposing this as a hypothesis, let your readers know. If the hypothesis is someone else’s, cite the source. Furthermore, you will help the reader assess the evidence you provide by qualifying it. Is there overwhelming evidence for this assertion, or is it merely suggested by one study? Is the evidence convincing to you? It is more than all right if you don’t know the answer to everything. Raise questions. Discuss problems.

Draw conclusions and take sides. Your review article should reflect your own thinking. Take care not to be simplistic or overzealous. Complex problems often have complex, somewhat conflicting, or even bewildering conclusions. This makes them interesting.

Of the six possible thesis formats, the review article is the most flexible in its structure and organization. The structure of a review article will depend in part upon the content of the material that you collected for it. Its organization depends on the ways that you want to build your argument. In general, however, your review article should contain the components listed below. The length of these sections will vary; the overall length of a review article should be between 25 and 30 pages.

### ***Abstract***

Content: The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of your research problem, objectives, and research design. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

Length: 200 to 400 words

### ***Introduction***

Introduce the central issue or topic of your argument, state the significance of the issue or topic, and present an overview of the overall manuscript.

### ***Argument/Subtopics***

Divide the second part of your essay into the different subtopics that will allow you to build the argument that you are trying to articulate in your paper. Here you need to be strategic and creative in efficiently conveying the elements of your argument. Subheadings are very useful in delineating the different subtopics. You may want to elaborate a progression in your argument that starts from the basic points and moves through to the more elaborated ones.

### ***Discussion/Final Concluding Remarks***

In the concluding part of your argument, you ought to summarize the primary points of your general thesis, advance any new directions, and provide recommendations or suggest approaches you have come up with after analyzing this body of information.

### ***Literature Cited***

Use the reference style consistent with the writing style of the thesis.

## **2. Research Proposal**

### ***Overview***

Writing a research proposal consists of developing a set of arguments that illustrate the public health relevance at the theoretical and/or programmatic level of the topic of investigation, and presenting a convincing methodology to investigate the issue. This type

of research proposal may be designed from multiple methodological perspectives, including but not limited to quantitative studies such as surveys and secondary data analysis, historical studies such as those using archival data, and ethnographic and other types of qualitative studies.

There is no single formula for writing a proposal that will assure approval and subsequent funding. Nonetheless, there are general tips that may assist you and targeted resources that are available to guide you in writing proposals. Consult the Courseworks page for resources on writing research proposals. For example, the “Quick Guide for Grant Applications” by the National Institutes of Health offers specific tips on writing the different sections of a research proposal for funding at this government agency.

## ***The Structure of a Research Proposal***

### ***Abstract***

Content: The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of your research problem, objectives, and research design. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

Length: 200 to 400 words

## ***Research Protocol***

### ***Section 1: Specific Aims***

Content: In this section, you should describe: the research problem, the overall purpose of the study; the specific objectives of the study (i.e., what you explicitly want to investigate), the hypotheses (if applicable), and the implications of the study. For example, an excerpt from an on-going study at the National Institute for Child Health and Development is provided below:

Research Problem	Understanding the impact of social inequalities on health has become a public health priority in the new millennium. Social, political, and economic factors now are acknowledged to be “fundamental causes” of disease that
Overall Purpose	affect behaviors, beliefs, and biology. Throughout industrialized countries, lower socioeconomic status (SES) has been clearly linked to poorer health. Additionally, SES gradients in adolescent health have been documented in both the United States and Europe. The goal of the study is to investigate the population-level impact of SES on adolescent health in the United States. That is, we seek to determine the population attributable risk (PAR) for lower education and lower household income on adolescents’ physical and mental health. We hypothesize that lower household income will have substantial population-level effects on two major public health problems of youth:
Specific Objective	
Hypothesis	



depression and obesity.

Source: Goodman, E., Slap, G. & Huang, B. (2003). The public health impact of socioeconomic status on adolescent depression and obesity. *American Journal of Public Health*, 93 (11): 1844-1850.

Approximate length: 1 page.

### **Section 2: Background and Significance**

Content: This section provides a literature review. Here the goal is to present: 1) a detailed description of the research problem, including the magnitude, scope, and significance of the research problem that you have elected to address; 2) the key findings in the scientific literature regarding your research problem; 3) how your study will contribute to the existing knowledge gained from prior findings; and 4) the theoretical perspective that your study is guided by (e.g., social learning theory, social constructionism) and your reason for selecting it.

Approximate Length: 5 pages.

### **Section 3: Preliminary Work (if relevant)**

Content: In this section, you should describe the findings from prior studies that you have conducted or have been involved with. Do not repeat findings mentioned in the prior section. This section allows you to argue why you and/or your team will be capable of conducting the proposed study. Since your research experience may be limited, we suggest keeping this section particularly short, or do not include it at all if it does not make sense to do so.

Approximate Length: 2 pages.

### **Section 4: Research Design**

Content: This is the part of the proposal where you need to be the most creative. After you select a specific research problem, you need to decide upon the most effective design for investigating it. Therefore, you need to determine which of the following sub-sections to include and the approximate length of each:

Overview of Research Design: Briefly describe the overall approach of your study. If it has phases, describe these, too (e.g., household survey of clients of the Visiting Nurse Services of New York).

Source(s) of Data: Depending upon the type of study that you are designing, you should include as many of the following sub-sections as necessary:

Sample: In writing this sub-section, try to answer the following questions: What is the general study population from which you are planning to draw your sample? Who are you selecting to participate in your study? Who is not eligible? In other words, what

are the inclusion and exclusion criteria for your study? What are the reasons for your selection criteria? How many people do you plan to include in the study? What are the reasons for your sample size? How much power does your study have to detect an effect? What are your estimates of participant attrition? How do you plan to recruit research participants? Be very specific. For example, Latina women between the ages of 60 and 75 who reside in upper Manhattan, New York City will be recruited.

**Archival Materials:** In writing this sub-section, try to answer the following questions: Which archives do plan to visit? What are your reasons for selecting these archives? What type of materials will be included as part of the study? Which materials will be excluded?

**Secondary Data Sets:** In writing this sub-section, try to answer the following questions: What is the data set that you have selected for your research? How were the data collected for the selected data set? What are the benefits and limitations of the data set?

**Research Setting:** Describe in detail the geographical and/or social community that you have selected for your study and the reasons for your selection.

**Data Collection Method(s):** Present a general overview of the method(s) you selected, your reasons for selecting it, and how this is going to be implemented in your data collection. If your research proposal only concentrates on secondary data analysis, you should focus this section on the types of measures that you are going to use in your analysis.

**Analytical Methods:** Specify the types of methods that you are going to use to analyze your data (e.g., logistic regression, historical trends, content analysis) and the reasons for your selection.

**Data Management:** How are you going to organize the collection and storage of data? You should include a timeline or timetable for the 12 months of the project period.

Approximate length: 12 pages.

### ***Section 5: Feasibility***

**Content:** In this section, you ought to consider the feasibility of the proposed study. Discuss the resources that will be needed to implement the research project. It is very important that is possible and practical to conduct the study. Take into consideration the resources needed to complete the study. If these exceed the benefits of the study, it is unlikely that it will be funded. As part of the feasibility section, include a timetable to show when and how the different components of the research study are going to be implemented.

**Ethical Concerns:** Discuss the most salient ethical concerns related to your research proposal, whether or not these relate to human subject research or broader ethical implications of your research study, and what mechanisms you propose to use to address them. While you are not expected to write a Protection of Human Subjects Protocol for an Institutional Review Board, you must write at least one Informed Consent Form.

Approximate Length: 1-2 pages.

## **Section 6: Discussion**

Content: In the discussion summarize and review the aims and methodology of the proposed research addressing mainly how well this proposal addresses the main issues and questions raised in the background and significance and specific aims sections. The most important part of this discussion is a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the study. All studies have limitations. Here you can show that you understand your proposed study's limitations and discuss why the study is valuable despite its limitations.

Approximate Length: 5 pages

## **Literature Cited**

Use the reference style consistent with the writing style of the thesis.

# **3. Needs Assessment Proposal**

## **Overview**

Writing a needs assessment proposal is very similar to writing an evaluation or research proposal. A needs assessment proposal may focus on examining health related needs (and assets) in a particular target population or community or it may be conducted in preparation for an intervention program. Needs assessment proposals are divided into three main components, namely: the abstract, the needs assessment plan, and the references.

## **Abstract**

Content: The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of the significance, purpose, objectives, and methods of your needs assessment study. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

Approximate Length: 1 page

## **Needs Assessment Plan**

### **Section 1: Background and Significance**

Content: This section is dedicated to your literature review. Here the goal is to present: 1) a detailed description of the significance of conducting a rigorous needs assessment in the area that you have selected; 2) key findings in the scientific literature and reports from secondary data; 3) discussion of how your study will contribute to the already existing knowledge base from prior findings; 4) theoretical perspectives and conceptual models you are using to frame your needs assessment; 5) what is particularly innovative and significant about your proposal. Remember to be concise.

Include a logic model diagram, particularly if you use the Intervention Mapping or the PRECEDE approach to guide your needs assessment.

Approximate Length: 5-7 pages.

## ***Section 2: Evaluation Design***

**Content:** This is the part of the proposal where you need to be the most creative. After you select a specific topic for your needs assessment, you need to decide upon the most effective design for investigating it. Therefore, you need to determine how much detail to present in each of the following subsections and whether other subsections are needed to describe additional aspects of your proposal:

**Overview** – Start this section by stating the purpose, objectives and research questions of your needs assessment. Summarize the needs assessment design/approach to be described in detail in later sections (use of primary and secondary data, approach to working with stakeholders, quantitative/qualitative/mixed methods etc.).

**Target Population** – Describe the target population/community and setting for your needs assessment.

**Stakeholders** – Discuss who the key stakeholders are and how you plan to involve them in the needs assessment. If you propose a working group or an advisory committee, discuss their role and activities.

**Secondary Data** – Describe what secondary data sources you plan to use and how you plan to analyze them. Specify statistical techniques you plan to apply.

**Primary Data** – Describe your proposal for collecting and analyzing primary data. This is typically a major section in the proposal with its own subsections for each method. Include information about your sampling and recruitment approaches and proposed instruments.

**Indicators** - Identify and define the specific indicators of need you are going to use, and your reasons for selecting these indicators.

**Analytical methods** - Specify the methods that you are going to use to analyze your primary data (e.g., logistic regression, time series analysis, analysis of variance [ANOVA], and content analysis) and the reasons for your selection. Discuss your strategies for using the data to describe and prioritize needs.

**Data management** - Describe how are you planning to organize the collection and storage of your data.

**Assets/Capacity Assessment** – Capacity, assets and resources are increasingly recognized as an important counterpart of needs when conducting assessments of

communities and target populations. The extent of incorporating assets in a needs assessment ranges from inclusion of a simple resource listing to utilizing a community based participatory approach to explore building blocks already present in communities. Describe your plan for assessing assets, capacity and resources. Some of this content may be incorporated under other sections above.

Ethical concerns - Discuss the most salient ethical concerns related to your needs assessment proposal, whether or not these relate to human subjects research or broader ethical implications of your study, and the mechanisms you propose to use to address them. You are not expected to write a Protection of Human Subjects Protocol for an Institutional Review Board.

Limitations – Discuss methodological and other limitations of your plan. Include discussion of threats to internal and external validity and how those are addressed.

Use and Dissemination of Findings – Discuss plans for including stakeholders in interpretation of the results, disseminating the findings, and ensuring that the needs assessment findings will be used and translated into action.

Approximate Length: 15-18 pages.

### ***Section 3: Feasibility***

Content: In this section, you ought to discuss the feasibility of conducting the needs assessment that you propose. The viability of the study is a very important component of your proposal. Take into consideration that if the resources necessary to complete the study exceed the actual benefits, it is unlikely that such a study will be funded. As part of the feasibility section, include a timetable to show when and how the different components of the study are going to be implemented.

Approximate Length: 1-2 pages.

### ***Literature Cited***

Use the reference style consistent with the writing style of the thesis.

## **4. Program Evaluation Proposal**

### ***Overview***

Writing an evaluation proposal is very similar to writing a research proposal. An evaluation proposal typically focuses on assessing the effects of or the impact of a particular program, event, program, or intervention. Evaluation proposals are divided into three main components, namely: the abstract, the evaluation protocol, and the references.

## **Abstract**

Content: The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of your evaluation problem, objectives, and evaluation design. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

Length: 200 to 400 words

## **Evaluation Protocol**

### **Section 1: Specific Aims**

- Content: In this section, you ought to describe the overall purpose, specific objective(s), and implications of the evaluation. For example, below please find an excerpt from an ongoing study at the National Institute for Child Health and Development:

Evaluation Problem	Unintentional injuries are the leading cause of death among U.S. children and a major cause of childhood morbidity. Most injury morbidity and mortality occur in the home or automobile, and may be decreased through the use of preventive safety practices. The
Overall Purpose	purpose of this evaluation is to determine the effectiveness of tailored injury prevention information provided in the primary care setting on parent adoption of injury prevention practices. Initial
Specific Objective	investigation demonstrated the potential feasibility and effectiveness of a computer-tailored information approach to the provision of injury prevention
Implications	education during well-child visits. The objective of this evaluation is to test the impact of the delivery of concurrent tailored parent and physician information on (1) physician-parent communication during the well-child visit regarding injury prevention behaviors and (2) subsequent parent adoption of new safety practices. This evaluation will inform the potential development and use of strategies employing tailored communications for pediatric injury prevention in the primary care setting.

Source: Research Study: Pediatric Injury Prevention Health Communications Study (Principal Investigator: Dr. Nansel) at the Prevention Research Branch from the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development ([www.nichd.nih.gov/about/despr/prbrsh.htm](http://www.nichd.nih.gov/about/despr/prbrsh.htm)).

Approximate Length: 1 page.

### **Section 2: Background and Significance**

Content: This section is dedicated to your literature review. Here the goal is to

present: 1) a detailed description of the evaluation problem and the significance of conducting a rigorous evaluation of the problem that you have selected; 2) the key findings in the scientific/evaluation literature regarding ways to evaluate your selected problem; 3) a discussion of how your study will contribute to the already existing knowledge base from prior findings; 4) the theoretical perspective from which your evaluation design emerged; and 5) any conceptual innovations in the approach of your evaluation. Remember to be concise.

Approximate Length: 5-7 pages.

### ***Section 3: Evaluation Design***

Content: This is the part of the proposal where you need to be the most creative. After you select a specific evaluation problem, you need to decide upon the most effective design for investigating it. Therefore, you need to determine how much detail to present in each of the following subsections and whether other subsections are needed to describe additional aspects of your proposal:

Overview of evaluation design - Briefly describe the overall design/approach of your evaluation (outcome vs. process evaluation, pre-post study vs. field experiment, quantitative vs. qualitative vs. mixed methods, etc.) and your reasons for selecting it.

Target Program - Describe the program/intervention that you plan to evaluate, its components, target population (e.g., urban youths), setting, key stakeholders and expected goals. Include an evaluation logic model.

Evaluation Questions and Data Sources – Outline key questions your evaluation study seeks to answer and briefly introduce what data sources will be utilized.

Indicators - Identify and define the specific indicators that you are going to use in your evaluation, and your reasons for selecting these indicators.

Data collection methods - Describe the methods and strategies that you are going to use to assess the indicators of the proposed evaluation. For each data collection method/strategy, present a general overview, your reasons for selecting it, and how it is going to be implemented in your data collection. This is where you can include details on the study design, sampling, instruments etc.

Analytical methods - Specify the methods that you are going to use to analyze your data (e.g., logistic regression, time series analysis, analysis of variance [ANOVA], and content analysis) and the reasons for your selection.

Data management - Describe how are you planning to organize the collection and storage of your data.

Validity - In this part of your proposal, you ought to identify the issues of internal and external validity of your evaluation design, and discuss the ways that you are

going to address them in your evaluation.

Ethical concerns - Discuss the most salient ethical concerns related to your evaluation proposal, whether or not these relate to human subjects research or broader ethical implications of your evaluation, and the mechanisms you propose to use to address them. You are not expected to write a Protection of Human Subjects Protocol for an Institutional Review Board.

Use and Dissemination of Findings – Discuss how you plan to work with key stakeholders to engage them in the evaluation and to facilitate use of the findings.

Approximate Length: 15-18 pages.

#### ***Section 4: Feasibility***

Content: In this section, you ought to discuss the feasibility of conducting the evaluation design that you propose. The viability of the evaluation is a very important component of your proposal. Take into consideration that if the resources necessary to complete the evaluation exceed the actual benefits, it is unlikely that such an evaluation will be funded. As part of the feasibility section, include a timetable to show when and how the different components of the evaluation are going to be implemented.

Approximate Length: 1-2 pages.

#### ***Literature Cited***

Use the reference style consistent with the writing style of the thesis.

## **5. Intervention Proposal**

### ***Overview***

Anyone who will be responsible for helping individuals or communities change health risk behavior, initiate health-promoting behavior, change environmental factors, and/or manage chronic illnesses must be able to design effective programs and develop plans to implement, evaluate, and sustain these programs. Writing a Master's Thesis about planning a health promotion program to produce health outcomes frequently focuses on changing behavioral and/or environmental conditions. But the most immediate impact of a program is usually on well-defined determinants of the specific behavior(s) and related environmental conditions.

There are a number of recognized program planning models that can be used to design health promotion programs. While planning models are technical by design, it is important for you to avoid using technical language in your thesis whenever possible. The guidelines provided below have been adapted from work by Bartholomew, Parcel, Kok and Gottlieb in their book *Planning Health Promotion Programs: An Intervention Mapping Approach (3rd*



*edition*), San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010. In using this model, you will note that a number of the key elements you will need to address have already been described in the sections on writing a Research Proposal, Needs Assessment Proposal, and Evaluation Proposal.

### ***Executive Summary***

Content: In this section, you should succinctly describe: the health and quality of life problem that you are addressing and its importance; the behaviors and environmental conditions that contribute to the problem; past approaches and gaps in addressing the problem; the target audiences and settings for your program; the theoretical basis, scope and sequence of your program; and, how your program will be implemented, evaluated and sustained. The executive summary is the last thing you should write and the first thing that you should present to key stakeholders.

Approximate Length: 2-3 pages.

### ***Mission Statement***

Content: Describe the general focus of the program and the philosophy behind it. An example of a mission statement is provided below:

“The proposed multilevel, community-based intervention, Self-Management through Access to Resources, Training, and Support (SMARTS) aims to empower stroke survivors in Northern Manhattan to reduce their vascular disease risk, enhance local care delivery systems and community resources to better support survivors’ efforts, and reduce the incidence of second stroke in this population. The multifaceted program outlined in this intervention proposal will give stroke survivors the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and self-efficacy to access community resources, navigate the health care system, and adhere to their treatment and behavior change goals, thereby reducing their risk of a second stroke. In addition, in order to facilitate and support individual behavior change, the proposed program will enhance health care delivery and increase community capacity as they apply to secondary stroke prevention.”

### ***Background and Significance***

Content: This section is devoted to your literature review. Here the goal is to present: 1) a detailed description of the health and quality of life problem, including its magnitude, scope, and significance; 2) key findings in the scientific literature regarding determinants of the problem; 3) a critical analysis of programs that have been tested to influence the health problem; 4) gaps in the intervention literature that your program will attempt to fill; and 5) the potential significance your program could have on the health status and quality of life of your target audience and the contribution it could make to existing knowledge.

Approximate Length: 5 pages.

## **Method**

Content: In this section explain the importance of developing theory- and evidence-informed programs, taking an ecological approach to assessing and intervening in health problems. Describe the program planning model you used to plan your health promotion program and your justification for using this planning model. Describe the target audience for your program and the community in which they live.

Succinctly explain the steps in the program planning model you used to plan your program and how you applied each step. If you used Intervention Mapping, this would involve explaining Steps 1 through 3. After describing how you applied each step, you can refer the reader to your appendices for details related to each step.

Using Intervention Mapping, Step 4 should be the main focus of your thesis. Specifically, you should describe the setting(s) for your program and specify your program theme (and sub-themes) and why you selected this theme (and sub-themes). Describe the scope and sequence of your intervention including examples of what program materials/products will be developed/adapted and how these will be delivered. Also, discuss the specific strategies you will use to gain your target audience's attention and help them process information centrally and the strategies you used to achieve cultural appropriateness throughout your proposed intervention.

In Step 5, discuss the purpose and importance of having a program adoption, implementation, and sustainability plan. Explain your plan and how you developed it.

Identify the specific program planning model that you used to design your program and explain why you chose this model over others.

Explicitly describe how you applied each step or phase of your planning model in designing your program and planning for its implementation and sustainability. For example, if you chose to use Intervention Mapping as your program planning model you would need to describe how you applied each of the six steps, and their required tasks, to designing and implementing your program.

Approximate Length: 15-18 pages excluding logic models and tables required when using the Intervention Mapping program planning model. These should go in the appendices.

## **Evaluation Plan**

Your proposal for a health program must include a plan for evaluating the program. The evaluation can be a process and/or outcome evaluation and should be both quantitative and qualitative in nature.

Your evaluation plan should be guided by a concern for maximum rigor under feasible and realistic conditions. Take into consideration that many program grant requests for

proposals do not set aside separate funds for evaluation. Therefore, the resources needed to conduct the evaluation should be realistic and your design should reflect these resources.

Content: Briefly describe the overall design/approach of your evaluation and your reasons for selecting it.

Describe your program's goals and specific objectives.

Identify and define the specific indicators that you are going to use in your evaluation, and your reasons for selecting these indicators.

Describe the methods and strategies that you are going to use to assess the indicators of the proposed evaluation.

Identify issues related to internal validity, construct validity, and external validity of your evaluation design, and discuss the ways that you are going to address them in your evaluation.

Specify the methods that you are going to use to analyze your data (e.g., logistic regression, historical trends, analysis of variance [ANOVA], content analysis) and the reasons for your selection.

Describe how you are planning to organize the collection and storage of your data. You need to include a timeline or timetable for the program in the appendices.

Discuss any ethical concerns related to your evaluation plan, whether or not these relate to human subjects research or broader ethical implications of your evaluation and the mechanisms you propose to use to address them.

Approximate Length: 4-5 pages.

### ***Implications and Recommendations***

Content: Finally, discuss the implications and contributions of your health program to the at-risk population.

Approximate Length: 1-2 pages.

### ***Literature Cited***

Use the reference style consistent with the writing style of the thesis.

## 6. Research Report

### **Overview**

Writing a research report is similar to writing a review article, except in a research report you have conducted the empirical research to address the research questions that a review article would discuss. A research report should be attempted only after you are familiar with the research area, have access to research data (that you collect yourself or that has been collected by others), and are confident in your ability to analyze the data and present it in a research report.

### ***The Structure of a Research Report***

In addition to an abstract and reference list, research reports are divided into four main components: the introduction or literature review, the methods, the results, and the discussion.

### ***Abstract***

Content: The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of your research problem, objectives, research design, research findings, and conclusions. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

Length: 200 to 400 words

### ***Introduction/Literature Review***

Content: Introduce the central issue or topic of your argument, state the significance of the issue or topic, and present an overview of the overall manuscript. Describe the research questions that the research aims to address and what hypotheses will be tested.

This section provides a literature review. Here the goal is to present: 1) a detailed description of the research problem, including the magnitude, scope, and significance of the research problem that you have elected to address; 2) the key findings in the scientific literature regarding your research problem; 3) how your study will contribute to the existing knowledge gained from prior findings; and 4) the theoretical perspective that your study is guided by (e.g., social learning theory, social constructionism) and your reason for selecting it. Remember to be concise.

In this section, you should describe: the research problem, the overall purpose of the study; the specific objectives of the study (i.e., what you explicitly want to investigate), the hypotheses (if applicable), and the implications of the study.

Divide your introduction into the different subtopics that will allow you to build the argument that you are trying to articulate in your paper. Here you need to be

strategic and creative in efficiently conveying the elements of your argument. Subheadings are very useful in delineating the different subtopics. You may want to elaborate a progression in your argument that starts from the basic points and moves through to the more elaborated ones. Also, introduce here any topic that touches on some of the main arguments that your discussion covers. You will have to start your writing with the introduction so that you build main arguments of the research, but then revisit the introduction to cover any new issues that have been raised by your research results.

Approximate length: 4-5 pages

## **Methods\***

**Overview of Research Design:** Briefly describe the overall approach of your study. If it has phases, describe these, too (e.g., household survey of clients of the Visiting Nurse Services of New York).

**Source(s) of Data:** Depending upon the type of research that you conducted. Some of the sections that are often included are:

**Sample:** In writing this sub-section, try to answer the following questions: What is the general study population from which your sample was drawn? Who is not eligible? (what were the inclusion and exclusion criteria for your study?) How many people were included in the study? How were participants recruited into the study (e.g., random sampling technique)?

**Archival Materials:** Which archives did you visit? What were your reasons for selecting these archives? What type of materials were included as part of the study? Which materials were excluded?

**Data Collection Method(s):** Present a general overview of the method(s) for data collection, and/or the procedures used (e.g., personal interview, focus group).

**Instruments used:** Describe the instruments or measure used in the study.

**Analytical Methods:** Specify the types of methods that you used to analyze your data (e.g., logistic regression, historical trends, and content analysis) and the reasons for your selection.

Approximate length: 5-6 pages

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*\* Some of the tips provided here were adopted from instructions developed by David R. Caprette (caprette@rice.edu), Rice University available at [www.ruf.rice.edu/~bioslabs/tools/report/reportform.html#methods](http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~bioslabs/tools/report/reportform.html#methods)*

## **Results**

In text, describe each of your results, pointing the reader to observations that are most relevant.

Provide a context, such as by describing the question that was addressed by making a particular observation.

Describe results of control experiments and include observations that are not presented in a formal figure or table, if appropriate.

Depict analyzed data in figures (graphs), tables, or in text form. But avoid repeating a description of the same findings in these different modes. If results are presented in a table, they do not need to be repeated in the text. You should refer to the table and describe highlights of the results presented there. In text, refer to each figure as "figure 1," "figure 2," etc. ; number your tables as well (see the reference text for details).

Do not discuss or interpret your results, you will have the opportunity to do that in the Discussion section.

Approximate Length: 6-8 pages (results sections for quantitative studies are typically shorter than for qualitative studies).

## **Discussion**

The purpose of the discussion is to provide the reader with an integration and interpretation of the results and provide conclusions that address the research aims presented in the introduction.

Begin with a description of the results. What did you find, how your findings related to the research aims you set up at the introduction. Which findings, if any, are clear and straight-forward? Which findings are equivocal? Interpret your findings responsibly and honestly. Do they provide good evidence for answering the research questions? Do they open more questions? How are your results different from your hypotheses?

What do your results tell us about the theory you used to understand the issues under investigation? Do they support the theory? Are they consistent with the theory?

Describe limitations of your study. The most relevant limitations are those that threaten the interpretation of your results in the way that you have. What possible other explanations are there that may have explained your results? Perhaps a bias in the sample or an imperfect measure led to results that are spurious? Every study has its limitations. A good discussion is one that provides insight into the study results by taking into account potential alternative interpretations and biases.

How do your results fit in with the literature on the topic you studied? Are your results completely at odds with what others have found? If so, why is that? Why should the reader trust your results, interpretations, and conclusions?

What new questions come to mind in view of the research results and discussion? What future studies would you recommend be done, or what future studies would you be interested in conducting to forward our understanding of the research questions?

What is the significance of your findings? What is the significance to the specific area of investigation and, more generally, to public health? Are there any implications for prevention or intervention design?

In interpreting your results and in discussing them or their implications to public health do not exceed your findings. Do not conclude with statements that could have been made even if you did not present your findings. Especially avoid presenting clichés and truisms as conclusions or recommendations of your findings.

Approximate length: 6-8 pages

### ***Literature Cited***

Use the reference style consistent with the writing style of the thesis.

## Academic Advising

### *Introduction*

Academic advising is an important part of your education in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences. Your advisor guides you in planning your academic program in view of your intellectual and professional goals. The following are answers to some common questions students have regarding the role of the academic advisor and the kind of issues to discuss with him/her. Andrea Constancio, the Academic Program Coordinator, is available to discuss with you any additional questions you may have about academic advising, and she can address any problems that may arise.

In your first meeting, you and your advisor should plan the academic program you will follow after you complete the first-semester Mailman core. The length of your program will depend upon the number of courses you plan to take each semester (fall and spring), including summer sessions (A and B).

E-mail your advisor during the first two weeks of your first fall semester and request a time to meet for 30 to 45 minutes. Before the meeting, read this handbook and the information sheet for your certificate.

At the meeting, be prepared to discuss the following items:

- The certificate you are in and why you selected it.
- What certificate you will choose if you entered the program as “undecided.”
- When you plan to graduate.
- How many courses per semester you are planning to take after you have completed the first-semester school-wide core. In general, full-time students are advised to take 4 to 5 courses depending on certificate; part-time students are required to take a minimum of 2 courses per semester.
- Whether you plan to take any summer courses. Summer course offerings are limited at the Mailman School. Therefore, you should investigate appropriate elective course offerings at other schools within the university.

Begin the meeting by telling your advisor about your background, interests and future career goals. You and your advisor should go over your planned course of study. Although there are many courses that are predetermined by the requirement for the school, SMS, and your certificate, you should discuss these in the context of your career plans and interest.

You may want to focus your discussion with the advisor on issues beyond course requirements to include the following:

- Elective courses: The number of elective courses available to you depends on your certificate. To choose appropriate elective courses, think about your current interests and future career plans, and ask your advisor for his/her recommendations.
- Practicum: Start to think about the skills you will need for your future career. Some



of these skills cannot be developed through course work alone. The practicum should be an opportunity to develop such skills. Ideally, the practicum project should form the basis for the master's thesis.

- Thesis: Discuss the thesis type and thesis topics that make most sense based on your interests and career goals. Many students do not know what topic they may want to work on for a thesis at this point, but talking about it with your advisor can help you choose a topic when you need to (by the end of the first year). You can also discuss with your advisor how to go about finding a topic. Your advisor will also be able to help you choose one or more possible thesis sponsors when the time is right to begin contacting possible sponsors (toward the end of the second semester).
- Employment opportunities: Whether you plan to work part time during your matriculation at SMS or thinking about employment after you graduate, your advisor is a good person to discuss employment opportunities. He/she may know of projects at the school or beyond that you may be able to become involved with. You may also want to discuss what kind of employment may be most beneficial in terms of your academic and career plans.
- You should return to these topics in your next meeting with your advisor.

You should consult with your advisor or the Academic Program Coordinator each semester before registering for your classes. You can email the list of courses you plan to take each semester; your advisor can approve the list via email. If you are not following the plan you and your advisor agreed upon, you need to email your advisor and the Academic Program Coordinator to explain the reasons for the requested changes.

You should also stay in contact throughout the semester and email or call him/her with any questions, concerns, or changes in your agreed-upon course of study.

**Appendix A**  
**Department of Sociomedical Sciences**  
**Thesis Faculty Sponsors**

**Abraido-Lanza, Ana (afl7)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Psychology). The health of Latino populations in the United States; socioeconomic status and health; breast and cervical cancer screening; acculturation theory; psychological adjustment to chronic illness, especially arthritis; psychological thriving; social support and coping with illness; social roles and identity theory; health disparities between Latinos and non-Latino whites.

**Aidala, Angela (aaa1)**, Associate Research Scientist (PhD - Sociology). Micro (individual dispositions, beliefs, choices) and macro (cultural systems, economic structures) interlinkages in the etiology and impact of drug use, health, and illness behaviors; the family and intergenerational relations; research methodology.

**Bayer, Ronald (rb8)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Political Science). Ethical and social policy issues in health; AIDS and screening for AIDS.

**Caton, Carol (clc3)**, Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences (in Psychiatry) (PhD - Sociology). Epidemiology of homelessness, drug use, and severe mental illness, psychosocial and family studies of people with severe mental illness; evaluation of community mental health and substance abuse treatment programs.

**Colgrove, James (jc988)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH), History of vaccination; history of government responsibility for public health; the relationship between individual rights and communal responsibilities from the 19th century to the present; the role of the law and other forms of coercion in public health; ethical issues in public health; harm reduction and substance use policy.

**Fairchild, Amy (alf4)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). Program in the History of Public Health & Medicine: history and ethics of public health policy (AIDS, TB, immigration, surveillance, harm reduction); history of race and disease.

**Fullilove, Mindy (mf29)**, Professor of Clinical Psychiatry and Clinical Sociomedical Sciences (M.D.). Relationship between the structure of cities and the health of populations.

**Fullilove, Robert (ref5)**, Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (Ed.D). AIDS epidemiology effects of racism on health; educational achievement; drug abuse and AIDS risk behaviors.

**Garcia, Jonathan (jg2320)**, Associate Research Scientist (PhD - Sociomedical Sciences). Social, political and cultural determinants of health disparities; sexual and ethnic/racial minority sexual health; religion and health; global health; social movements; institutional and community responses to HIV; social dimensions of biomedical prevention; qualitative methods and ethnography.

**Gooden, Lauren (lkg2129)**, Assistant Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Epidemiology). Areas of HIV testing and prevention; HCV prevention and treatment; and access to and engagement in care.

**Hatzenbuehler, Mark (mlh2101)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology). Mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations; the influence of laws

and social policies (e.g., anti-bullying policies, same-sex marriage policies) on LGB health; structural forms of stigma and discrimination; measuring stigma, prejudice and discrimination in health disparities research; social/ecological determinants of health among stigmatized populations; biopsychosocial processes linking stigma and health.

**Hernandez, Diana (dh2494)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Sociology). Areas of poverty and social inequality; race, ethnicity and immigration; health, law and public policy and qualitative methods and evaluation.

**Hirsch, Jennifer S. (jsh2124)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Anthropology and Population Dynamics). Gender, sexuality, and reproductive health; U.S.-Mexico migration and transnational communities; HIV/AIDS (heterosexual transmission, cultural and political-economic approaches); the application of anthropological theory and methods in public health; faith-based approaches to public health.

**Klitzman, Robert (rlk2)**, Associate Professor of Clinical Psychiatry (in Sociomedical Sciences) (M.D). Disclosure of HIV status; disclosure and privacy of genetic and other health information; physician-patient communication and relationships; bioethics; cultural and policy responses to epidemics; communication of gay men and lesbians with health professionals; use of club drugs among gay men.

**Kunzel, Carol (ck60)**, Associate Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences and Dentistry (PhD - Sociology). Clinician behavior; social-behavioral models of clinical decision-making; diffusion of innovation; adherence to clinical guidelines; early oral cancer detection; access of HIV+ patients to dental care; sociology of the professions.

**Lekas, Helen-Maria (hl11)**, Associate Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Sociology). The impact of class, race and gender on health issues; vulnerable populations, such as, the poor, homeless persons, substance users and those with a mental illness; living with chronic illness with a focus on HIV, cancer and mental illness; ethnography and other qualitative methods.

**Link, Bruce (bgl1)**, Professor of Epidemiology (in Psychiatry) (also Sociomedical Sciences) (PhD). Socioeconomic status and health, the stigma of mental illness, violence and mental disorders; homelessness and health, public conceptions of mental illness.

**Messeri, Peter (pam9)**, Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Sociology). Relationship between health promotion and primary group structure; etiology of drug use; evaluation of HIV/AIDS service delivery program; interorganizational theory; evaluation of community level health and disease prevention interventions; health services research; tobacco control.

**Metsch, Lisa (lm2892)**, Stephen Smith Professor and Chair of Sociomedical Sciences (Ph.D. - Sociology). Health promotion research, social policy research, social/structural interventions, health services research in primary care settings, substance abuse policy research, women's health, public health interventions in oral health care settings. Multi-level intervention development, implementation, and evaluation for moving persons at risk and living with HIV across the HIV treatment cascade/HIV care continuum.

**Murrman, Marita K. (mkm27)**, Associate Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (Ed.D. - Health Education). Multi-level program/intervention design; competency-based curriculum design and evaluation (for programs in the U.S. and South Africa);

health promotion and disease prevention; TB and HIV/AIDS; public health workforce development.

**Nathanson, Constance (can2002)**, Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Sociology). Comparative cross-national politics and sociology of public health; health-related social movements; gender and sexuality; gender and health outcomes; reproductive health; sociology of health and medicine.

**Oppenheimer, Gerald (go10)**, Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - History; M.P.H. Epidemiology). History of HIV/AIDS; history of public health; history of epidemiology, particularly heart disease epidemiology; history of social medicine; history of race and research.

**Parker, Richard (rgp11)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Anthropology). Medical anthropology; international health; gender and sexuality; HIV/AIDS; reproductive health and reproductive rights; social movements and community health; Brazil, Latin America and the Caribbean, South Africa, United States.

**Pereyra, Margaret (mrp2177)**, Assistant Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (DrPH). Access to and utilization of health services, with focus on HIV primary care; HIV screening in non-traditional settings; quantitative methods and applied statistical data analysis.

**Phelan, Jo (jcp13)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Sociology). Social and economic inequalities in health and mortality; public attitudes and conceptions about mental illness and homelessness; stigma; social impact of the genetics revolution.

**Rosner, David (dr289)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (also History) (PhD - History). History of public health; history of urban health; race and mental health; occupational and environmental disease; health in New York City; history of hospitals and medical care.

**Rothman, Sheila (smr4)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (in the Center for the Study of Society and Medicine) (PhD - History). Public health genetics; use of race and ethnicity in population genetics; risks and benefits of genetic enhancement; decision-making in organ transplantation; history of tuberculosis and confinement; history of death.

**Schrimshaw, Eric (es458)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Psychology). Social relationships and health/well-being; social support and conflict; disclosure and concealment of stigmatized identities; sexual relationships and risk behaviors; adaptation to living with HIV/AIDS; gay, lesbian, bisexual adolescent health and development; behaviorally bisexual men; qualitative and quantitative methodologies.

**Shelton, Rachel (rs3108)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (ScD- Society, Human Development & Health; MPH). Understanding and addressing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic-based disparities in cancer screening and preventive health behaviors; adherence and decision-making regarding HPV vaccine, colorectal, breast, prostate, and cervical cancer screening; development, evaluation, and dissemination of cancer prevention/control interventions, particularly for low-income and medically underserved populations; Lay Health Advisor and Patient Navigation programs; role of social, cultural and contextual factors (e.g. racial discrimination, medical mistrust, social networks) in influencing health behaviors and outcomes.

**Siegel, Karolynn (ks420)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (also Social Work) (PhD - Sociology). Psychosocial oncology; psychological adjustment to chronic or life threatening illness; AIDS;

childhood bereavement; stress and coping; illness and mental health; aging.

**Sivaramakrishnan, Kavita ( ks2890 )** Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - History) Global health history; international health and politics of disease surveillance, history of public health and society in south Asia; population health politics; historical and comparative perspectives on age and aging; health and volunteering across cultures; history of chronic disease in colonial and contemporary settings, WHO and history of social determinants of health; non western medicine and traditions of ethics, healing and professionalization

**Sommer, Marni (ms2778)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (DrPH). Gender and sexuality; global health; adolescent health; qualitative and participatory research methods; intersection of puberty and girls' education; Tanzania, Eritrea, sub-Saharan Africa.

**Stadler, Gertraud (gs2334)**, Associate Research Scientist in Sociomedical Sciences (PhD – Psychology), health psychology, individual and social regulation of behavior change with focus on diet, physical activity, and treatment adherence, situational influences on mental and physical health, digital health interventions, longitudinal methods.

**Staudinger, Ursula M. (ums2103)**, Director, Aging Center; Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and Psychology (PhD - Psychology). Opportunities and challenges of increases in average life expectancy; lifespan psychology; positive plasticity of aging (e.g., cognition or personality); aging in the work context; resilience in old age; the development of wisdom over the life span.

**Valera, Pamela (pv2155)**, Assistant Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Social Work). Cancer-health disparities; HIV prevention; prisoner reentry and community reintegration; health equity in ethnic and sexual minority populations; community-based participatory research; and qualitative methods.

**Wilson, Patrick (pw2219)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Psychology), community psychology, HIV/AIDS prevention and health promotion in ethnic and sexual minority populations, ecological-level influences to mental and physical health, and program evaluation and community research.

## Appendix B Frequently Used Contacts

<b>Sociomedical Sciences, Administration</b>		
	305-5656	
<b>Lisa Metsch</b> , PhD, Department Chair		lm2892@columbia.edu
Maria Enriquez, Assistant to the Chair	305-1077	me2002@columbia.edu
<b>James Colgrove</b> , PhD, Deputy Chair for MPH Program	305-0561	jc988@columbia.edu
<b>Robert Fullilove</b> , EdD, Practicum Director	305-0195	ref5@columbia.edu
<b>Andrea Constancio</b> , MSW, Academic Program Coordinator	342-0287	ac995@columbia.edu
<b>Office of Student Academics Affairs / Student Life</b>		
	305-3927	
<b>Marlyn Delva</b> , EdD, Associate Dean	305-3067	mmt22@columbia.edu
<b>Eric Ratner</b> , MA, Director	342-3717	emr2211@columbia.edu
<b>Lillian Morales</b> , Associate Director, Records and Standards	305-8690	lm31@columbia.edu
<b>Cheryl Keise</b> , Assistant Director Student Affairs	305-0541	crk2108@columbia.edu
<b>Elizabeth Hutzler</b> , Student Engagement Coordinator	342-4174	eah2165@columbia.edu
<b>Carlos Correa</b> , Coordinator of Student Affairs	342-4550	cc3665@columbia.edu
<b>Tabaitha Rodriguez</b> , Administrative Clerk	305-6965	tr2217@columbia.edu
<b>Office of Student Financial Services: Financial Services</b>		
	305-4113	
<b>Joseph Korevec</b> , PhD, Director	302-8698	jk2960@columbia.edu
<b>Farah Burnett-Rodriguez</b> , Associate Director	305-1029	fb2173@columbia.edu
<b>Nayadet Diaz</b> , Financial Aid Officer	304-5267	nd2394@columbia.edu
<b>Charles Liriano</b> , Administrative Clerk	305-4113	cl2281@columbia.edu
<b>Office of Career Services</b>		
<b>Heather Krasna</b> , Director	305-1548	hk2778@columbia.edu
<b>Liz Sung</b> , Assistant Director, Career Advising & Programs	342-3600	kas2124@columbia.edu
<b>Asha De Costa</b> , Career Services Coordinator	342-3600	cd2594@columbia.edu
<b>CUMC Resources</b>		
Center for Student Wellness	304-5564	
<a href="http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/students/wellness/">www.cumc.columbia.edu/students/wellness/</a>	304-5560	
Office of Disability Services	304-7029	disability@columbia.edu
Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action	854-6795	
<a href="http://eoaa.columbia.edu/contacts">eoaa.columbia.edu/contacts</a>		
Office of the University Chaplain	854-6242	chaplain@columbia.edu
Ombuds Office	304-7026	ombuds@columbia.edu
Student Health	305-3400	
<a href="http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/student/health/">www.cumc.columbia.edu/student/health/</a>		
Student Services for Gender-Based & Sexual Misconduct	854-1717	