School of Public Health

Instructions for Completing the Required Culminating Experience

(2 credits)

Updated May 2014
Introduction

Every student must complete a satisfactory Culminating Experience to earn the MPH degree. The Culminating Experience builds upon the practical Field Experience and requires a student to integrate knowledge acquired in the classroom and in the field.

A student may choose one of two options for completing the CE:

- A major analytic paper or
- A project (usually related to the Field Experience)

Each option requires that the student apply skills from across the curriculum and demonstrate integration of knowledge in the five core areas of public health (epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, social and behavioral science, health policy and management). After acceptance of the final paper or project report by the departmental faculty, the student makes an oral presentation on his or her work during which overall faculty question him or her to assess mastery of core MPH competencies.

NOTE: If a student does not complete the CE by the end of a semester, s/he must continue to register for the CE (and pay) each semester until successful completion of the CE.

Meeting the CE requirement with a paper

Most students fulfill the requirement through submission of a major analytical paper, usually related to the completed Field Experience. The paper is a professional document similar to a major review article or book chapter in the public health press. The topic chosen should provide a comprehensive discussion of the key aspects of the issue. The content of the paper must demonstrate integration and application of principles in epidemiology, biostatistics, health policy and management, environmental health, and social and behavioral health. There are specific deadlines in the semester for submission of work products:

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The writing should be clear, concise, and compelling at a level intelligible by an educated layperson rather than by a specialist in the given topic. The faculty advisor is not responsible for text-editing drafts or for correcting errors in spelling, syntax, or grammar. Many students benefit from studying Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style* before and while they are writing their papers. Many find this brief on-line module developed by the NIH helpful: [http://plainlanguage.nih.gov/CBTs/PlainLanguage/login.asp](http://plainlanguage.nih.gov/CBTs/PlainLanguage/login.asp).

Most students need to make several revisions in their work before the faculty accepts the paper. It is vital, therefore, that the student maintain a rigorous self-discipline and maintain a weekly schedule with sufficient time for work on the paper.

The typical length is about 3000-5000 words double-spaced pages, including complete references. Use a size-12 font, page numbers, one-inch margins on all sides, and header with your name and the title of the paper. The final document must be printed on one-side of letter-sized paper along and submitted with an electronic copy in Word. While each department may have more specific guidelines, in general the format is as follows:

A. Title page, including names of the student-author, the advisor, the department, and the date.

B. A structured abstract, not exceeding 180 words, not including headings, with up to four headings following the AMA Manual of Style, 10th edition ([http://www.amamanualofstyle.com//oso/public/index.html](http://www.amamanualofstyle.com//oso/public/index.html)).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall or spring semester</th>
<th>Summer semester</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>End of 2nd week</td>
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<td>End of 8th week</td>
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<td>End of 12th week</td>
<td>End of 6th week</td>
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<td>In 14th week</td>
<td>In 7th week</td>
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</table>
C. Headings, in a consistent pattern, using no more than three outline levels, brief sentences, and no acronyms or question marks
D. References, in the AMA style, verified with PubMed
E. Tables, figures, and images, of professional quality with titles and content that are fully comprehensible without reference to the main text
F. Reproduced material must be identified as such with an appropriate reference.

The student must secure permission to use copyrighted material.

The outline of the content of paper will vary with topic. A typical outline would be:

A. Title and abstract
B. Public health significance of topic
C. Critical review of the literature
   1. Predictive factors (risk and protective)
   2. Intervention methods
   3. Unresolved issues
D. Discussion including recommendations
E. References (JAMA format, http://jama.amaassn.org/misc/ifora.dtl#References)

Meeting the CE requirement with a project (research or service)

Meeting the CE requirement with a project requires the student to plan ahead and begin preparation at least one and often more semesters before actually registering for the CE. Students secure permission for a project as early as possible from their advisors. During or before the Field Experience, the student must develop a specific proposal and complete all aspects of the Downstate Investigator Education Program for certification by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (http://research.downstate.edu/irb/training.htm).

The preparation of the proposal typically requires several months. Many stakeholders – the site, the faculty advisor, often a research mentor, and the IRB -- need to review and approved the proposal. The involvement of each takes time. IRB approval usually requires at least one month and often much longer if revisions are required. The student is responsible for planning the work carefully with his or her faculty, for preparing all the required forms for the IRB, submitting the forms, and following up on the status with the IRB. Implementation of the proposal can begin only after IRB approval or declaration of exempt status has been received in writing.

Registration for the CE should take place only after IRB approval or declaration of exempt status. Students who do not complete their project in one semester may be eligible for a grade of Incomplete, as described above.

Final project report

The format of the report will vary somewhat with the type of work completed and the specific topic. The format would typically be shorter than the analytic, similar to an article in the American Journal of Public Health section Research and Practice. Two common outlines would be:

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Research

A. Title and abstract
B. Public health significance
C. Literature review
D. Specific aims (must be specific and measurable)
E. Methods including study subjects, measurements, study design, instruments, analytic plan, and sources of support
F. Results
G. Discussion, including limitations
H. References (JAMA format, http://jama.ama-assn.org/misc/ifora.dtl#References)

Intervention

A. Title
B. Public health significance
C. Evidence-base for efficacy of proposed intervention
D. Goal and time-specific, measurable objectives
E. Methods including collaborators, site, target population, strategies, materials, and sources of support
F. Evaluation: methods of measuring the attainment of stated objectives
G. Discussion including recommendations
H. References (JAMA format, http://jama.ama-assn.org/misc/ifora.dtl#References)

Grading of the paper/report

This is a two-step process. 1) The student submits the paper to the faculty advisor. The advisor reviews the paper and recommends any changes to the student. The student makes the necessary revisions and returns it to his/her advisor. 2) If the advisor deems the paper acceptable, then s/he submits it to the departmental chair for review and final approval. The chair, upon reading the paper, may either determine the paper to be acceptable or requires revisions. If revisions are required, then the paper is returned to the faculty advisor who then returns it to the student with comments on needed revisions. Note that the paper will be graded on a pass/fail basis. (See below for the sheet used to record the evaluation of the paper.) Once the paper is deemed acceptable by the chair, the oral presentation may be scheduled.

The oral presentation

Each student will present his or her Culminating Experience to the faculty, peers, and invited guests usually in the last week of the semester, after the paper has been accepted. The student takes the first fifteen minutes to present the work, usually with a
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slide presentation of no more than twelve slides that have been previously reviewed by the faculty advisor. The standard recommendations for slides are:

- No more than five lines per slide
- No more than five words per line
- All text clearly legible to all audience members

Detailed data tables are usually best distributed as handouts rather than displayed in slides.

The student should face the audience throughout the presentation and should not read the slides aloud, but rather elaborate on each point after the audience has had time to view the slide. The faculty members attending then question the student to assess whether the student has successfully integrated and applied the core disciplines of public health in the Culminating Experience. (See below for the sheet used to record evaluation of the oral presentation.) The decision of the faculty takes place in a closed meeting immediately after the presentation. Students who are deemed to require additional work to demonstrate integration and application of the core disciplines receive a written statement from their departmental chair within a week on what deficiencies need correction for receiving a passing grade on the oral presentation.
Evaluation Form Culminating Experience Final Paper

Student name _________________________________ Track ____________________

The Culminating Experience provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to integrate and apply information from each of the five core public health disciplines.

**Biostatistics:**
Does the paper

1) Correctly interpret the results of statistical analyses found in public health studies? YES NO N/A

2) Apply descriptive techniques commonly used to summarize public health data? YES NO N/A

**Environmental Health:**
Does the paper

1) Identify and/or analyze environmental influences on risk factors and disease, including the magnitude and distribution of exposures and adverse health outcomes, and the role of contributing factors? YES NO N/A

2) Specify approaches for assessing, preventing and controlling environmental hazards that pose risks to human health and safety? YES NO N/A

**Epidemiology:**
Does the paper

1) Describe a public health problem in terms of magnitude, person, place and time? YES NO N/A

2) Apply the basic terminology and definitions of epidemiology? YES NO N/A

3) Review and critically evaluate epidemiologic literature relevant to the topic of the integrative project? YES NO N/A

**Health Behavior:**
Does the paper

1) Describe if and how social and/or behavioral factors influence the topic being explored? YES NO N/A

2) Incorporate relevant theories, concepts and models of social YES NO N/A
3) Discuss evidence-based strategies as appropriate?  YES  NO  N/A

**Health Services Administration:**

Does the paper

1) Address appropriately the organizing, financing and delivery of healthcare services or public health systems?  YES  NO  N/A

2) Address any policy concerns relevant to the topic?  YES  NO  N/A

3) Discuss program planning or evaluation as relevant to this topic?  YES  NO  N/A

4) Discuss relevant partnerships?  YES  NO  N/A

The student’s overall level of integration: □ Inadequate □ Adequate □ Excellent

If inadequate, corrective action recommended:

________________________________________________________________________

(Signature)  (Print Name)

________________________________________________________________________

(Department)    (Month) (Day) (Year)

DECISION OF THE DEPARTMENTAL CHAIR:

□ Paper accepted

□ Paper returned for revisions

________________________________________________________________________

(Signature)  (Print Name)

________________________________________________________________________

(Month) (Day) (Year)
# Evaluation Form, CE Oral Presentation

Student __________________________     Date ________________

The advisor will record the consensus of the attending faculty present (attach sign-in sheet).

## Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Were the goals, objectives (or aims), and methods clearly stated?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was the public health significance clearly and accurately articulated?</td>
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<td>Was the existing body of knowledge summed up accurately?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Were the implications and limitations of the work summed up well?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Was the presenter knowledgeable and fluent in discussing the topic?</td>
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<td>Did the presenter respond effectively to questions posed?</td>
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<td>Was the relevance to urban and immigrant health clearly articulated?</td>
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## Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>N/A</th>
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<tr>
<td>Was the presenter audible and comprehensible?</td>
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<td>Were any visual aids used well and appropriately?</td>
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## Comments:

**Summary:** Has the student met the requirement for a CE oral presentation?    YES     NO

If NO, corrective action indicated:

________________________________________________________________________

Signature of advisor __________________________     Print name __________________________     Month/Day/Year __________________________

*Instructions for completing the required Culminating Experience*