Course Directors

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Course Description

MPH students are required to demonstrate proficiency in the application of the skills they acquire during their academic program through the Practicum (PubH 6014) and the Culminating Experience (PubH 6015). The two courses can be taken simultaneously or sequentially, in which case the Practicum would come first.

The Culminating Experience (CE) is a graded course which consists of four elements that focus on a practice activity: (a) Concept Paper, (b) Proposal/IRB Application, (c) Final Report, and (d) Oral Presentation. These elements are described in the Appendix—Guidelines for Culminating Experience Elements.

The Culminating Experience is a planned experience that requires a student to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired in coursework and to apply theory and principles in an experience that approximates some aspect of professional practice. The Culminating Experience will demonstrate the student’s mastery of the body of knowledge and proficiency in the program competencies. The CE in PCH will include a major written paper such as a thesis or applied research project, which presents the results of: a needs assessment, development and pilot testing of an intervention program or components of a program, development and implementation of community advocacy programs, evaluation of programs or policies, or development and evaluation of case studies. (please see your advisor for specific examples)

Course Prerequisites:
- PubH 6002 Biostatistical Applications for Public Health
- PubH 6003 Principles and Practice of Epidemiology
- PubH 6007 Social and Behavioral Approaches to Public Health
- PubH 6500 Planning and Administration of Health Promotion, Disease Prevention Programs Please see PCH Academic Advisor for program specific course prerequisites.

Course Co-Requisites:
- PubH 6014 Practicum
- PubH 6501 Evaluation of Health Promotion, Disease Prevention Programs
**Other Prerequisites:** Students must take the online training courses relating to research with human subjects (CITI) and personal health information (HIPAA). See Practicum Handbook for details: [http://sphhs.gwu.edu/practicum/download/Student%20Practicum%20Guidebook.pdf](http://sphhs.gwu.edu/practicum/download/Student%20Practicum%20Guidebook.pdf)

- Students must have completed the on-line SPHHS professional skills webinar, designed to assist students with preparing for their professional endeavors. See Practicum Handbook for details.
- Students must have attended a Culminating Experience Information Session or have met with their track’s CE course director to review the CE policies and procedures.
- If applicable, students must have submitted IRB paperwork before participating in the Culminating Experience.

**Course Objectives:** Upon completion of the culminating experience, students will be able to:

1. Identify and assess an issue that affects the public’s health and well-being. This information will be synthesized and used to postulate hypotheses and/or to identify appropriate strategies in order to evaluate the potential or actual impact of health problems/programs or policies.
2. Apply principles and methods of the ecological approach to design, plan, and conduct research or applications that may include observational and experimental designs, screening programs, public health surveillance, program design, implementation or evaluation.
3. Synthesize and analyze data and relevant literature to interpret findings in a theoretical framework, write a final report, and make an oral presentation.
4. Meet any additional specific requirements in their program area for the CE.

**Method of Instruction**
Students are actively involved in the integration of knowledge and skills gained in their MPH program under the supervision of the Culminating Experience Course Director and faculty mentor. The student’s progress in accomplishing the four basic elements of the course is tracked with the use of the Culminating Experience Tracking Form, which identifies the student, the activity, the practicum preceptor (if applicable), and the CE Faculty Mentor and serves as a form of certification that each activity has been completed and certified by the CE Course Director for his or her track.

**Methods of Evaluation**
Students will be assessed on how well they accomplish the objectives for the Culminating Experience through the evaluation of their: (a) Concept Paper, (b) Proposal/IRB Application, (c) Final Report, and (d) Oral Presentation. The Culminating Experience Faculty Advisor will complete evaluations of the student’s performance and submit these to the CE Course Director for the student’s track.
Grading Scale
The Culminating Experience will be graded as follows:
· Concept Paper — Required (Pass/Fail)
· Proposal — Required (Pass/Fail)
· Final Report — 75%
· Oral Presentation — 25%

Class Policy: Attendance/Participation
This is not a classroom experience, but one where students work semi-independently under the supervision of their preceptor (if applicable) and CE faculty mentor. The faculty mentor may be the student’s regular Advisor or may be another faculty member.

Academic Integrity
Please review the University’s policy on academic integrity, located at www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html. All graded work must be completed in accordance with The George Washington University Code of Academic Integrity.

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. Common examples of academically dishonest behavior include, but are not limited to, the following: cheating; fabrication; plagiarism; falsification and forgery of University academic documents, submitting the same work in more than one course without prior permission of both instructors, and facilitating academic dishonesty.

Students with Disabilities
If you feel you may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, please contact me privately to discuss specific needs. Please contact the Disability Support Services Office at 202.994.8250, Suite 242 Marvin Center, http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodation.

Student Responsibilities

1. Each student has an advisor. You may work with that person as your CE Faculty Mentor or you may choose another faculty mentor. If you work with another mentor, please notify the CE course director for your track and get approval.

2. The Practicum and the CE can be completed in tandem. If the student wishes to combine these two activities, it is the responsibility of the student to meet with the Practicum Director and the student’s regular Academic Advisor to formulate how the two experiences will be combined BEFORE the start of the Practicum.

3. The student may choose to have separate activities for the practicum and CE. If the
Practicum and CE activities are unconnected, it is the responsibility of the student to work with the CE course director for his or her track and the CE Faculty Mentor (if different) to develop a plan of completion.

4. Before beginning the CE, students must fulfill certain requirements. The student must attend a Culminating Experience Information Session in a semester preceding the semester in which s/he plans to complete the CE.

5. The student should register for the CE during her/his last planned semester at GWU SPHHS (after receiving approval for the concept paper and the proposal). Note: you may not conduct a study or gather data prior to approval or you will be asked to begin anew. You may also not use data collected as part of your regular employment.

6. Prior to registering for the CE, the student will develop a concept paper in which the student plans to complete the CE. This paper should describe the work that will be done for the CE as well as how the work will be carried out. See Appendix for Concept Paper template.

7. The Concept Paper will be reviewed by your CE faculty mentor to assess the appropriateness of its scope and its feasibility. Once the Concept Paper is approved the student will expand the Concept Paper into a Proposal which requires the approval of the CE faculty mentor and Practicum Site Preceptor (if applicable). See Appendix for Proposal guidelines.

8. At this point in time, CE students only have to submit their CE proposals to the IRB if you intend to publish your work. Please discuss the IRB issues with your CE faculty mentor prior to making a decision. If you intend to submit to the IRB, it is the responsibility of the student to assemble the IRB submission to be reviewed and approved by the CE Faculty Mentor and Practicum Site Preceptor (if applicable). Students are not permitted by the IRB to serve as a Principal Investigator so your CE Faculty Mentor has to be listed as the PI. You are then listed as staff.

9. It is the responsibility of the student to produce a Culminating Experience Final Report. The CE Final Report represents the final written deliverable for completion of the CE in the MPH program. The CE Faculty Mentor must receive an advanced draft of the report four weeks before the student intends to make the Oral Presentation. A copy of the CE report should also be sent to the CE Course Director for your track for review.

10. Once the CE Faculty Mentor authorizes the student for presentation, the student should schedule the Oral Presentation. Students are encouraged to invite their Site Preceptors (where applicable) to their Oral Presentations.

11. The student should provide the GW Faculty Mentor with a copy of the PowerPoint presentation two weeks before the scheduled date of the Oral Presentation for review.
Appendix
Guidelines for Culminating Experience Elements

1. Title Page
A Title Page must be included with each of the written documents (Concept Paper, Proposal, and Final Report) and submitted to your CE Course Director and CE Faculty Mentor. The proper format of the Title Page should be:

Culminating Experience TITLE of Project

DATE

Protocol Approved by
The George Washington University Institutional Review Board IRB

(if applicable)

Submitted by: Student Name Contact Information

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Public Health Degree [INSERT MPH Program]
Department of Prevention and Community Health
School of Public Health and Health Services
The George Washington University
CE Course Director
CE Faculty Advisor
(or Faculty Mentor, if person is not your regular advisor)

2. Concept Paper: 1-3 pages double-spaced (including references)
Please follow this template by maintaining the headings of each section. The concept paper should emphasize the public health issue, objectives, and methods to be implemented in the CE. It mirrors the outline for a full proposal.

a. Background
Presentation of the public health issue that is proposed to be the focus of the CE. A brief review of the public health significance and justification of need for the activity to be carried out (e.g., gaps in service, research area)

b. Objectives
Clear statements of the principal health objective(s) and behavioral objective(s) your program/project would be assessing if you were planning an intervention.

c. Specific Aims
What are you actually going to be doing for your CE and how do those specific aims fit into developing a program with health and behavioral objectives. For example, if your CE included the aim of developing focus groups, that would be considered needs
assessment work prior to development of a program intervention. Perhaps you will be
developing and testing a survey instrument to collect information for program planning.
Perhaps you will be evaluating a program that already exists.
d. Methods
For each specific aim, what methods will you use? A methods section should include:
Project design, main questions, sample and sampling plan, types of data to be collected
and instruments to be used, procedures for data collection (including human subjects
protections), data analysis plan, plan for dissemination of results. Remember that if one
of your aims is to review literature on the subject, a literature review has to have
appropriate methods.
e. Timeline for the CE project or activity.
f. Public Health Courses
Courses completed thus far that have served as preparation for completion of the CE.
g. References

The proposal represents an expansion of the approved Concept Paper, including a literature
review. In addition to the above elements, which should be described in greater detail, a
scientific abstract using standard American Journal of Public Health format should be
included after the Title Page.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Review
Students must work with their CE Faculty Mentor to decide whether to submit a formal
application to the Office of Human Research (OHR). If working with sites other than GWU,
students may also need IRB approval from that site. A student may also need to work with his
or her Practicum Director and Preceptor (if the CE is combined with the Practicum) to determine
the type and process of IRB review that will be needed for completion of the Culminating
Experience. OHR has a Blackboard course which has forms and worksheets to assist students.
Once an IRB submission has been prepared, the student will submit the paperwork to the GW
Academic Advisor for review and approval signature (with departmental chair signature if
necessary), and the package should then be submitted to the Office of Human Research for
review and signature.

The IRB is a committee mandated by federal law to protect the rights and welfare of human
subjects participating in research activities. The IRB achieves its primary function, protecting
the rights and welfare of subjects participating in research, by educating researchers.
For Human Subject Research course requirements, please consult the SPHHS Practicum
Handbook:
http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/download/Student%20Practicum%20G
uidebook.pdf

Other institutions with their own IRBs: Students will sometimes work with institutions other
than GWU that have their own IRB. The general rule is that students still have to complete an
IRB submission for GW once the IRB used by the site has approved the project. Students
should include the other IRB’s documentation of project approval.

For students conducting research at Children’s National Medical Center (CNMC), submissions are made directly to the CNMC IRB. There is no need for a submission to the GW IRB because there is an agreement between the two institutions and the CNMC IRB will notify the GW IRB of any submissions.

The Final Report follows the outline of a published research paper, and represents the final written deliverable for completion of the CE in the MPH program. It should include the following elements:

1) Title Page

2) Abstract
Summary of the project which includes a brief statement of purpose, the methods, results and conclusions. Most abstracts are 300 words or less. Abstracts should contain no thoughts that are not already in your report.

3) Background
This section provides a discussion of background of the research topic, synthesis of previous research, significant findings and gaps in previous research methods and/or findings. Sections include:
   a. Literature Review
   b. Public Health Significance
   c. Health and Behavioral Objectives
   d. Specific aims
   e. Theoretical or Conceptual Framework

4) Methods
This section describes: the project design, the study sample (including how the sample was recruited and sample selection criteria), variables to be measured, data sources, instruments and tools employed (including interview protocols or other forms, and procedures for data collection (including IRB protections), qualitative and quantitative analysis of data.

5) Results
This section provides a description of the data and the principal findings of your project. The description, analysis and evaluation of the data should include tables/figures presenting the data, statistical results and significance (if quantitative).

6) Discussion
This section is critical. The goal here is to interpret your results or findings. What do your results mean? How are the results similar or different from what other researchers have found previously? What accounts for why your findings are similar or different from previous
findings? What were the limitations of your study (problems or obstacles encountered) that may have influenced the findings?

7) Conclusions and recommendations
Describe the important findings of the research. Describe the implications for public health practice or research if appropriate. Discuss further directions for research, future public health practice or education for clients, consumers, or communities.

8) Dissemination of results to what audiences and by what means.

9) References
A list of all references cited in the text of the paper. Use either APA or AJPH/AMA formats.
HINT: Review any APHA or JAMA journal research reports for further examples of writing style and format.

9) Appendices: e.g., data collection instruments, curriculum developed, communication materials

At least four weeks prior to the scheduled presentation date, the student must provide an advanced draft of the CE final report to her/his GW Academic Advisor. After review, the final paper should be submitted.

5. Oral Presentation Guidelines
Students are expected to prepare a concise, 10 minute oral presentation using PowerPoint slides. The basic outline of the talk should include a Title Slide, Background, Hypotheses or Objectives, Methods, Results, Summary, and/or Conclusions, Recommendations, and Acknowledgements. The number of slides presented should be limited to about 10 to 15, as each slide takes about one minute to present. Each presentation will be followed by a 10-15 minute question and answer session with Department faculty and other students.

The student has the option to provide the GW Advisor with a copy of the PowerPoint presentation two weeks before the scheduled date of the Oral Presentation. See Appendix.