



COLLEGE OF POPULATION HEALTH

MPH Professional Paper Requirements

UNM College of Population Health
Master of Public Health Degree Program
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The MPH Professional Paper

The MPH Professional Paper involves developing and finalizing a technical manuscript based on an investigation using either primary or secondary data, a critical literature analysis, or a creative project using public health evidence. The paper may or may not include original data collection and can be presented as a case study, development of a research-based intervention or educational program, with an evaluation design, or policy analysis. This project typically examines or critically analyzes a well-defined public health issue or problem, spanning several semesters under the guidance of the professional paper committee. A professional paper requires a more detailed and extensive analysis of the issue or problem than a term paper. It is not simply a literature review, needs assessment, or chronology of work in the practicum. The resulting written product is an academically rigorous and professionally crafted scholarly manuscript. Master of Public Health (MPH) students are encouraged, though not required, to submit their professional papers to peer-reviewed public health, medical, or other scientific journals. It is the student's responsibility to define the content of the final manuscript and other components of the professional paper with their committee during the proposal semester.

In consultation with their faculty mentor and prospective chair, students may begin their professional paper and enroll for credit only after completing a minimum of nine core graduate courses with a GPA of at least 3.0 across all graduate coursework. Students must enroll in PH 596 MPH Professional Paper for one credit hour to complete a proposal for the project, identify their Professional Paper committee, seek IRB approval as needed, and begin data collection based on that approval. Additionally, in the following semester, they must enroll for two additional credits to conduct their research activities, finalize the professional paper submission, and complete an oral examination. The two professional paper semesters must be taken consecutively. While not required, it is advisable for students to take the PH 598 Practicum before enrolling in PH 596 MPH Professional Paper, as many students use their Practicum experience in their Professional Paper.

Samples of completed professional papers from previous MPH students are available for review with their MPH Program Director upon request. The range of topics covered in professional papers is extensive and reflects the diversity of the public health field and student interests.

The faculty mentor may or may not serve as the chair or be part of the committee. UNM Graduate Studies must approve all committee members for graduate instruction and participation on examination committees. Consult the [Professional Paper Guidelines](#).

The length of a professional paper typically ranges from 30 to 40 pages, but could include additional appendices of instruments used. However, it may be shorter if submitted to a professional journal (refer to the section on [Submitting a Paper for Publication](#)). Additional products associated with the professional paper may include the creation of educational materials with evaluation plans presented in writing or other media, as approved by the

student's committee. All professional papers must discuss the project's public health implications and recommendations for public health practice, and further research if applicable.

Two specific sections must be attached at the end of all professional papers. These include:

1. A summary of student reflections on their learnings based on their own histories and personal and professional experiences during the MPH.
2. A statement on competency attainment. These sections will add extra pages to the overall length of the professional paper, outside of what would be submitted to a journal. Refer to the Selection and Assessment of Competencies section for more information on competency attainment. PH 596 must be taken in consecutive semesters and can earn a maximum of three credit hours; any additional professional paper credits beyond three will not count toward graduation.

The Professional Paper and Oral Exam Committee

Students should discuss their ideas for the professional paper with their faculty mentor and prospective chair. The chair will assist the student in identifying other committee members with relevant expertise in the chosen project area. The student committee must consist of at least three faculty members, two of whom are primary faculty in the College of Population Health (COPH). Committee chairs must be [regular faculty members](#) who hold appointments in the COPH (consult the [COPH MPH Director](#)). While the faculty mentor is not required to chair or participate in the Professional Paper, they should be available for consultation with the student as needed. At the chair's discretion, adjunct faculty, faculty from outside the COPH, other experts in the field, and emeriti may serve on the committee, in accordance with UNM policies. All committee members must be approved for graduate instruction and service on examination committees by the Office of UNM [Graduate Studies](#).

Once the committee is selected, the student should discuss their ideas for the professional paper with the committee members before starting the proposal. Depending on the nature of the work required to complete the professional paper, committee members may recommend that other courses be taken.

Students must submit the list of committee members to the Academic Advising team as soon as the committee is formed.

Steps in Preparing the Professional Paper

The development of the professional paper should involve the following general steps (explained in detail later in this document):

First semester of Professional Paper

(Required 1 credit of PH PH596)

- Select a public health problem/issue to develop the professional paper.
- In consultation with your faculty mentor, select your Professional Paper committee. Its members will compose the master's examination committee for the oral exam. See the guidelines for committee members on the [Graduate Studies webpage](#).

In consultation with your committee chair, select two MPH foundational competencies and one concentration competency that your paper will address. Create a timeline for developing the proposal and the paper. Prepare a written proposal and an outline of the paper. Obtain your committee's approval of the proposal. If the proposed study involves human research subjects or the analysis of secondary data collected from human subjects, submit an IRB application to the Human Research Protection Office (HRPO). Note: For the application to be accepted by HRPO, a regular faculty member, such as the chair of the Professional Paper, must act as the PI. Determine if other approvals (e.g., Tribal, school district) are needed and seek those approvals as necessary. If the proposed study involves data transfer from entities outside of UNM, work with your committee chair to ascertain whether a data use agreement (DUA) is required. Obtain UNM, HRPO, and any other necessary IRB approvals or DUAs. Begin data collection after receiving IRB approval and start data analysis once a DUA is in place, if required. Experience indicates that professional papers may take three semesters due to delays in IRB approval, and the semester for the oral exam is shorter.

Second semester of Professional Paper

(required 2 credits of PH596)

- Complete the proposed study.
- Write the professional paper.
- Receive and incorporate feedback from your committee chair.
- Submit a draft of the professional paper to the committee at least once a month to ensure progress.
- Receive and incorporate feedback from committee members.
- Prepare an oral presentation of the work.
- Present the work to the committee and other interested persons.
- Pass the Oral Examination and revise the paper as necessary based on feedback from the committee at this stage.

MPH Foundational Competencies

The MPH professional paper must include a discussion on how the student integrated and synthesized the two selected MPH Foundational Competencies and one concentration-specific competency. Once the professional paper proposal is written and approved, these elements are reviewed and discussed with the committee chair and other members.

The professional paper contains a section titled “Competency Attainment.” In this section, the student describes and evaluates the extent to which they have demonstrated mastery of the three selected competencies. They provide specific examples of how these competencies were achieved. Additionally, students must outline any challenges faced with each selected competency and reflect on how they addressed these challenges.

The Professional Paper Proposal Approval Process

The Proposals **must be submitted** and subsequently approved by the Professional Paper Committee by the following deadlines to move forward to the next step:

- Graduation in Fall Semester: one month **before the end** of the Summer Semester.
- Graduation in Spring Semester: one month **before the end** of the Fall Semester.
- Graduation in Summer Semester: one month **after the beginning** of the Spring Semester.

Contents of the Proposal

The professional paper proposal must contain the following sections:

1. Title Page
 - a. Title
 - b. Student's Name
 - c. Names of Professional Paper members (indicate Chair)
2. Rationale
 - a. Introduction to the public health problem (literature review)
 - b. Significance for public health practice/gaps being addressed
3. Background: Discuss why the proposed topic represents a public health problem, what is currently understood about this issue, the goals of the paper, gaps it aims to fill, and the specific research questions, objectives, or aims it will address, along with any hypotheses.

4. Selection of MPH Foundational and Concentration Competencies
 - a. List of selected MPH foundational and concentration-specific competencies to be addressed during the project.
5. Methods
6. Data collection (primary, secondary, and/or searching strategies for analytical papers based on literature reviews). An analytical approach is applied in any paper (epidemiology, interventions, case studies, analytical reviews, systematic literature reviews, etc.). If the study involves working with human subjects, the HSC Human Research Protection Office (HRPO) approval number or letter granting exempt status limitations must be included. If a DUA is required, it must also include the student's Role in the Project.
7. Timeline
8. References
9. Appendix (e.g., consent form, questionnaires, previous publications)

Within two weeks of receiving the proposal, the committee will decide and provide written notification to the student regarding their decision, along with signatures on the **Professional Paper Approval form** ([Appendix 1](#)). The review will assess strengths and weaknesses while evaluating the appropriateness of the proposed topic and timeline for the committee members. If the chair and other committee members believe that additional faculty expertise is necessary, extra faculty members may be invited to join the committee. The written response will address any concerns and may require a revised proposal. Students are encouraged to submit their proposals before the stated timeframe.

The student should submit the signed **Professional Paper Approval form** along with a copy of the proposal to the MPH Senior Academic Advisor or directly to the MPH Professional Paper chair.

Preparing the Professional Paper

The professional paper manuscript must be written in a format suitable for examination and review. This means that documentation of the research or inquiry process must be provided in a manner that allows others to follow the line of reasoning and evaluate the work's credibility. Students are encouraged to use [reporting guidelines](#) when appropriate:

Sections of the Professional Paper

These content areas are required in each professional paper:

1. Title Page
2. Abstract

3. Introduction: Explain why the proposed topic is a public health problem, outline the paper's goals, hypotheses/questions, and the specific objectives or aims the paper will address.
4. Background: Present the literature review and search strategies and identify gaps in the literature that the paper addresses.
5. Methods:
6. If the proposed project is based on primary data collection, detail the conceptual approach, study design, sampling design, other relevant methods, data collection, and analytical and data analysis approaches (quantitative or qualitative).
7. If the project is based on secondary quantitative and/or qualitative data, describe the other methods used (discourse or content analyses, systematic or nonsystematic reviews, search strategies, etc.) and the analytical approach.
8. If the project is not based on data but involves program or curriculum development, describe the methods used to develop the program/curriculum, evaluation methods, and expected results. Results: Results must be clearly and concisely described. Tables and figures may be included but are not required.

Discussion: Relate the study's findings to the existing literature reviewed and illustrate how the data or issues analyzed connect to the original study question(s). Address public health implications, recommendations, and study limitations.

Self-Reflection: As part of your culminating experience, compose a short self-reflection (up to 650 words) on your growth as a public health professional throughout the master's program.

Discuss the following: 1) what you've specifically learned from your professional paper experience and the implications of this knowledge for your future public health practice, research, or policy work; 2) what you've learned more generally from the program and how this knowledge impacts your future public health practice, research, or policy work; 3) how your values and background (family, racial/ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, self-described identity) may influence your public health career.

Competency Attainment. For more information on competency attainment, see [Appendix 2](#), "MPH Professional Paper Selection and Assessment of Competencies."

If the paper is submitted to a peer-reviewed scientific journal, the titles of each area and the order in which they are presented may vary. The student should ensure that all committee members are aware of the planned journal's authorship guidelines.

The manuscript shall be typed and organized in a style that follows one of three professional organizations:

1. American Psychological Association 7th Edition – Publication Manual for the Psychological Association, Seventh Edition 2020
2. American Public Health Association – What AJPH Authors Should Know is printed on the front pages of each month's American Journal of Public Health issue.
3. American Medical Association – Manual of Style: [A Guide for Authors and Editors. 11th Edition](#).

Current editions of these style manuals are available online through [Purdue OWL](#), [UNM Citation](#), [Zotero](#), [Mendeley](#), or [EndNote](#). With prior advice and approval of the student's committee, other professionally recognized guidelines may be followed if the paper is submitted to a journal that requires a different style (e.g., American Journal of Epidemiology, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, etc.).

Students are encouraged to read a paperback copy of The Elements of Style, Fourth Edition by William Strunk Jr., E. B. White, et al.

Submitting a Paper for Publication

Students who submit their professional papers for publication are strongly encouraged to consult the authorship guidelines of the target journal or those provided by the American Journal of Public Health, the Journal of the American Medical Association, or the New England Journal of Medicine.

Authorship will be determined based on the criteria set forth by [ICMJE guidelines](#): The issue of authorship should be discussed frequently and early with the student's Professional Paper Committee. Authorship eligibility and author order often cannot be finalized until the manuscript is completed. Nevertheless, the student and the committee should agree on how to make these decisions at the appropriate time.

Announcement of Master's Examination

Once the final draft of the professional paper has been submitted to the Professional Paper Committee members, the student should schedule the oral presentation using the [Announcement of Examination](#) option at least two weeks before the presentation. The form lists the Master's Examination (professional paper) committee members and the examination date. Additionally, the student and committee chair should arrange an appropriate time and place for the presentation, whether in person or virtually. The MPH Senior Academic Adviser will also assist in this process. The University requires, at a minimum, the presence of all official committee members of the primary faculty. If any Master's Examination Committee members cannot attend, the oral presentation must be rescheduled.

OGS Links: The OGS page illustrates the [Master's Degree Roadmap and Guidelines](#). It also outlines the UNM Master's exam for the Plan II process. COPH adheres to this process: "[Pass Master's Exam](#)."

Completing the Oral Presentation and Master's Examination

As mentioned above, the oral presentation should be scheduled only after all significant work and writing on the professional paper manuscript are complete, and the chair and committee members have received the final draft and had the opportunity to review and provide feedback. Two hours should be allotted for the presentation. An announcement regarding the oral presentation will be sent to the MPH community, and the event will be open to the public. The presentation itself should last 30 to 40 minutes, followed by a question-and-answer session.

Students should be prepared to respond to questions from committee members and other audience members. These questions will primarily focus on the content of the Professional Paper, though the committee may also ask about other MPH core competencies or specific concentration competencies relevant to the topic.

Grading

After the presentation, the committee will meet separately and then discuss their evaluation of the presentation and written work with the student.

The committee will sign an online [Report of Examination Form](#), which states whether the student “passed” (with or without distinction), “conditionally passed,” or “failed.”

Pass: If a student receives a “pass,” they may still need to make minor revisions to the Professional Paper, which must be finished based on questions and recommendations provided during the oral exam. The final typed copy with revisions must be submitted to the committee chair by the end of the semester.

Pass with Distinction: The committee may also award a “passed with distinction” based on the examination. To pass with distinction, both the professional paper and the student’s oral exam must demonstrate exemplary 1) written and oral presentation skills, 2) coverage of the student’s professional paper topic, 3) understanding of the broader public health context of the topic, and 4) knowledge of the MPH core courses and the student’s concentration competencies.

Conditional Pass: If a student receives a “conditional pass,” the committee chair notes the conditions that must be met by the student on the examination form sent to Graduate Studies. These usually involve significant revisions to the paper.

There are two options for resolving the conditional pass: 1) a student who plans to graduate in the same semester as the exam must resolve the conditional pass by the posted deadlines for submission of examination results (Nov. 15, April 15, July 15), or 2) a student who delays graduation to the following semester must resolve the conditional pass by the examination deadlines for that semester. In this second option, if a student completes the conditions noted

by the committee and these are approved after the deadline for submission of examination results for the semester of the examination, and before the last day of the semester, they will not need to pay for an additional credit to graduate in the following semester (see UNM Graduation Courtesy Policy below). If a student finishes the significant revisions after the end date of the semester of the examination, they will need to pay an additional credit hour in the following semester. All conditional passes must be resolved by the examination deadlines for the semester following the semester of the examination. Once the committee approves the conditions for the conditional pass, a memo will be submitted to Graduate Studies stating that the student has met the conditions and passed his/her exam.

Fail: If a student does not pass the examination, the program may recommend a second examination, which must be taken within one calendar year from the date of the first examination. The master's examination can only be attempted twice. A second failure leads to the termination of the student from the program.

Revisions of Professional Paper: The Professional Paper Committee may require revisions to the professional paper manuscript before granting final approval. The committee chair will collaborate with the student to clarify the necessary revisions and will approve the final version once those changes have been satisfactorily addressed. The number of revisions likely needed after the oral presentation will be reduced if the student has worked closely with all committee members throughout the research and writing process and has incorporated feedback provided at all stages.

Summary of Deadlines and Forms

Students must understand and monitor UNM and COPH requirements and due dates at all times while completing the requirements for the Master of Public Health degree. Semester deadlines are available on the [Office of the Registrar's website](#). It is the student's responsibility, not that of the chair or members of the Professional Paper, to ensure that the general University requirements and due dates for graduation are met. Students planning to graduate should consult UNM Graduate Studies to ensure they understand the requirements and deadlines.

ALL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (except for classes in which students are currently enrolled) MUST BE COMPLETED BY November 15th (Fall), April 15th (Spring), and July 15th (Summer), or graduation will be delayed.

Incompletes: Must be removed and the grade recorded by the following dates, or graduation will be delayed until satisfied:

- For Fall Graduation, the first day of the Fall Semester
- For Spring Graduation: First day of the Spring Semester
- For Summer Graduation: First day of the Summer Semester

Program of Studies (POS) and Notification of Intent to Graduate (POS): Due to the Manager of Academic Advising, an entire semester in advance of graduation - by the following deadlines:

- Fall graduation: June 15th
- Spring graduation: September 15th
- Summer graduation: February 15th

The POS may be submitted at any time after completing 12 credit hours. However, it must be approved before a student can take their master's exam.

Professional Paper Proposal: The professional paper proposal should be submitted to the MPH Professional Paper by:

- Fall Semester: one month **before the end** of the Summer Semester.
- Spring Semester: one month **before the end** of the Fall Semester.
- Summer Semester: one month **after the beginning** of the Spring Semester.

Deadlines for Report of Examination: Documentation of the completion of the Master's Examination (e.g., Report of Examination form - [Appendix 1](#)) must be submitted by the committee to the UNM Graduate Studies by the following dates to allow graduation:

- November 15th to allow graduation at the end of the Fall Semester.
- April 15th to allow graduation at the end of the Spring Semester.
- July 15th to allow graduation at the end of the Summer Semester.

UNM Graduation Courtesy Policy

If the Master's Examination is not completed within the specified time frame, students have two options: (1) They can petition the Manager of Academic Advising for an extension to fulfill all degree requirements on or before the last day of that term, and they are not required to register for the subsequent (graduation) term; (2) They can postpone their Master's Examination to the following semester. However, [UNM Graduate Studies regulations](#) require students to be enrolled and complete a minimum of one hour of graduate credit in the term they fulfill their degree requirements. The degree program must submit the student's name on the proposed graduation list for the actual graduation term.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Professional Paper Proposal Approval Form

This form will be used when a student has received approval for the professional paper proposal from their committee.

Date:

Name:

Banner ID:

Daytime Phone Number:

Paper Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

Concentration:

CHC ☐

Clinician ☐

Epidemiology ☐

HSSP ☐

Paper Title: Click or tap here to enter text.

Committee Signatures:

Chair:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Member:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Member:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
Member:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.

Student Signatures:

Student:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.
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Appendix 2:

MPH Professional Paper Selection and Assessment of Competencies

Your MPH professional paper must include a discussion of how you integrated and synthesized specific competencies. To do this, you must select a minimum of two MPH Foundational Competencies and one concentration-specific competency you will meet through your MPH professional paper. These are listed at the end of this document. Review your selection of the competencies with your committee chair and members.

In your professional paper, include a section called “Competency Attainment.” In this section, describe and evaluate the degree to which you have demonstrated mastery of your three selected competencies and how you synthesized these competencies into your paper. Provide specific examples of how you mastered these competencies. Describe any challenges you encountered with each selected competency and explain and reflect upon how you addressed these challenges.

Student Signatures:			
Student:	Click or tap here to enter text.	Date:	Click or tap to enter a date.

Community Health Concentration Competencies

1. Apply appropriate practice-based approaches, theory and planning models and sound research methods for developing, implementing, managing, evaluating, and disseminating community health Interventions.
2. Assess community and population needs and assets and readiness for change at the individual, interpersonal, community, institutional and policy levels in order to develop public health interventions and evaluation frameworks.
3. Integrate participatory approaches into research and practice to facilitate community engagement and self-determination.
4. Identify and embrace community resources and strengths and act with cultural respect and humility.
5. Analyze social and cultural issues associated with health communication and develop community and stakeholder-appropriate public health communication strategies for different audiences and sectors

Epidemiology Concentration Competencies

1. Apply the appropriate statistical methods for various epidemiologic study designs and identify and evaluate bias, confounding, and effect modification.
2. Integrate epidemiologic and biostatistical knowledge in the critical evaluation of public health literature, including the use of theories of causation and criteria for causal inference and identification of demographic, behavioral, social, and environmental factors influencing population health.
3. Identify and be able to access sources of public health data, such as vital statistics records, disease registries, other surveillance databases, census data, national surveys, and medical records.
4. Demonstrate skills in data processing, cleaning, merging, and other aspects of data management.
5. Analyze and interpret epidemiologic measures of occurrence and association using basic statistical tests and models and summarize and present the findings.
6. Demonstrate ability to consider aspects of diversity, equity, inclusion, and access when designing studies and collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data.

Health Systems, Services and Policy Concentration Competencies

1. Apply theoretical and methodological approaches to the analysis of health policies, health systems, and health care services.
2. Identify, map, and analyze key intersectoral stakeholders and their roles in local, state, tribal, national, and international health policies, health systems and health care services.
3. Identify important issues affecting international health policies, health systems, and health care services.
4. Access, analyze, interpret, and translate health systems, population, and policy databases.
5. Demonstrate the ability to apply qualitative and quantitative methods to critically analyze evidence related to populations, public health systems, services, and policies.
6. Apply principles of leadership, ethics, and management to guide decision-making and foster collaboration with inter-disciplinary professionals, healthcare stakeholders, communities, and policy makers.

Public Health Clinician Concentration Competencies

1. Analyze effective health policy and advocacy efforts and summarize the processes and champions that led to their success
2. Demonstrate the requisite knowledge, skills, mentors, and organizations that support career-long involvement and success in shaping health policy and practicing advocacy.
3. Develop communication skills in speaking and writing to reach stakeholders.
4. Critically examine core principles and skills needed for effective public health leadership.
5. Apply political, administrative, ethical, and cultural knowledge in evaluating health programs and policies.