Advice for the Final MPH Paper in Health Policy and Management  
(Revised December 14, 2012)

The Health Policy and Management final paper is a requirement of the MPH capstone. Its purpose is to allow students to demonstrate mastery of health policy and/or management concepts as they integrate learning with practice. The ability to critically evaluate and synthesize a specific public health issue should be evident.

Topic of Study

The capstone paper will focus on a meaningful analysis of a particular topic area and should be determined in consultation with your advisor. The topic need not be linked directly to the practicum and you will not need to include in-depth discussion of the practicum in this final paper or the presentation. It may be a more efficient use of time to link the topic area for this capstone analysis with the practicum. In fact, the analysis for the final paper can be the deliverable from your practicum experience. It is okay to do a practicum on one topic and a capstone paper on a different topic.

Type of Paper

The type of paper you choose will depend on your area focus (policy or management) and your interest area and future career goals. While this project will be the outcome of your independent work, you should work closely with your advisor, and potentially your second committee member, starting from the conception of this paper to make sure you are meeting the goals of this paper and demonstrating your MPH competence. Many formats are possible such as a policy analysis, a policy proposal, a strategic plan, a case study, an organizational evaluation, a cost-effectiveness analysis or a survey.

Format of Paper

This paper must be written for a particular target journal. Provide the formatting instructions for the journal you are targeting for this paper in Appendix 1. Ensure that the paper complies with these instructions. Do not copy the style you see in the published journal itself because the format of submitted papers is different.

Some general guidelines common in most journals are:

- Length: 12-15 pages not counting references, tables, figures, and appendices
- Text: double-spaced, one font, one size throughout
- Tables and figures are to be inserted into the text where they are cited
- 1” margins
- No footnotes
- Same font
- Headings and subheadings as appropriate

Advice for Success

Successful students will:

- Demonstrate their ability to access, use and properly cite public health literature
- Display critical analysis skills as they identify gaps or conflicts in the literature and related research
- Show they understand how public health data can be collected, collated, interpreted, disseminated and acted upon
- Reflect on policy and/or management challenges and opportunities as they explain how their new knowledge should be used within multidisciplinary and multitiered health systems
- Communicate clearly, logically, precisely, concisely and effectively
- Try to include information related to core HPM competencies
**HPM Competencies**

When possible, students should seek to incorporate the HPM competencies and show mastery of these competencies as applied to a specific topic area. Our competencies are:

1. Identify the main components and issues of the organization, financing and delivery of health services and public health systems in the US;
2. Describe the legal and ethical bases for public health and health services,
3. Discuss the policy process for improving the health status of populations,
4. Apply the principles of program planning, development, budgeting, management and evaluation in organizational and community initiatives.
5. Apply principles of strategic planning and marketing to public health,
6. Apply quality and performance improvement concepts to address organizational performance issues,
7. Apply "systems thinking" for resolving organizational problems,
8. Communicate health policy and management issues using appropriate channels and technologies
9. Demonstrate leadership skills for building partnerships.

**Suggested outline**

The following outline provides guidance on how to structure and present this paper. The type of study you select will impact on the structure of the paper, so modify this format in consultation with your advisor as required. Bear in mind that following this outline will result in a paper that is potentially publishable. Publications are empowering and good for careers.

1. **Title Page**
   - Upper half: Title of paper, date, word count, author and contact details, target journal
   - Lower half: Structured Abstract (not more than 200 words)
     - Introduce the study with brief background material and state the purpose
     - State the basic methods (e.g., selection of study subjects, analytical methods)
     - State the main findings (giving specific effect sizes and their statistical significance)
     - State the principal conclusions and their importance
2. **Introduction (~2-3 pages)**
   - Introduce the specific policy and/or management topic and contextual background information
   - Explain the significance of this issue by presenting information from the literature
   - Describe critical challenges and important policy and/or management gaps in the literature
   - Clearly state the purpose of the paper (investigate a gap and provide new information)
3. **Methods (~2 pages)**
   - What was the process of the analysis?
   - What was the setting in which the work was undertaken?
   - Sample size considerations, participant selection, statistical methods, ethics, etc.
4. **Results** *(length depends on the amount of data and its presentation)*
   - Present research findings and their analysis
   - Present graphical and tabled presentation of data
5. **Discussion (~3 pages)**
   - Discuss the importance of the results without repeating the results in detail – use new summary tables or figures if complicated comparisons are necessary
   - Compare findings to the literature, but do not introduce new ideas
   - Describe the public health implications and challenges
   - State limitations of the study
   - Make policy and management recommendations for research and practice
6. **References** *(generally >10, but this depends on the type of paper – check the journal)*
   - Cite and reference using *author instructions* from the desired ‘target journal’ for this paper
7. **Appendices**
- Include other background information, copies of your data collection instrument, etc.