



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH & HEALTH POLICY

The Public Health Culminating Experience

HANDBOOK
for the
Capstone Project

(last updated: 8/12/2025)

www.sph.cuny.edu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Culminating Experience	3
Introduction	3
Competencies	3
Evaluation and Grading	3
CUNY HRPP/IRB Approval	4
Part I: Writing Assignment	5
Capstone Paper	5
Format and Structure of the Capstone Paper	6
Submitting the manuscript for review	8
Grading the manuscript	8
Final submission of manuscript	9
Response letter	9
Master's Essay Option	9
Part II: Presentation	10
Oral Presentation	10
Powerpoint Tips	11
Poster Planning and Preparation	11
Other Poster How-To's	11
Resources for Posters	12
Part III: The Portfolio/Reflection	13
Purpose of Portfolio	13
Review and Evaluation of the Portfolio	13
Components of the Portfolio	13
APPENDIX	16

The Culminating Experience

Introduction

The Capstone Handbook was developed for CUNY SPH students who are completing the MPH or MS degree programs.

The Capstone course (PUBH 698) consists of a mostly self-directed seminar that allows students to apply experiences gained during their graduate program and synthesize their learnings into a major writing project (“Capstone Project”). Data or information collected or project experience gained during fieldwork may serve as the basis for the writing project. Students are expected to use a combination of synthesized evidence, theoretical models, and empirical research to answer a public health research question or practice problem using interdisciplinary perspectives.

Three major deliverables are required: the writing assignment (Part I); the presentation (Part II); and the portfolio/reflection (Part III). This handbook describes each of these assignments and their components. Guidelines, resources, and other helpful information are also presented. Capstone faculty must approve the deliverables so students are advised to review the course syllabus, pay close attention to class announcements, and regularly consult capstone faculty and attend office hours.

Competencies

Through the major assignments of the capstone course, students demonstrate they have synthesized core public health competencies prescribed by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) and concentration-specific competencies developed by the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy (CUNY SPH). The list of both core and concentration competencies can be found under each program on the [CUNY SPH website](#).

Students work with their faculty advisors/Capstone instructors to identify a minimum of three competencies (at least one from the core competencies and at least one from the concentration competencies) that are relevant to their Capstone Project and aligned with the student’s academic and professional goals. We recommend that each student identify three to five core and concentration competencies.

Evaluation and Grading

A faculty member from the student’s concentration has primary responsibility for guiding the student through the Capstone Project. This faculty member assigns the final grade for the course and may consult on the grade with the second reader of the final paper, who can make a non-binding suggestion.

	Written Assignment	Presentation	Portfolio
1 st reader	Faculty member in student’s concentration	All capstone faculty members	Faculty member in student’s concentration
2 nd reader	Faculty member outside the student’s concentration		

Assignment	Grade Weight
Major writing assignment	70%
Oral or poster presentation of the major writing project	15%
Portfolio (required in order to earn a grade for the course)	5%

Attendance, meeting deadlines, and participation	10%
<i>Total</i>	100%

CUNY HRPP/IRB Approval

Students who plan to conduct research for their Capstone must obtain CUNY Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval **before beginning any human subjects research (HSR)-related activities** (e.g., conducting interviews, focus groups discussions, administering surveys, accessing and analyzing data). HSR can involve both primary (e.g., collecting data) and secondary (e.g., using an existing dataset) research activities.

If you are uncertain whether your Capstone project qualifies as HSR and requires CUNY IRB approval, please complete the SPH Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Office's [HSR Assessment Form](#). An SPH HRPP representative will review your entry and advise whether IRB approval is needed and on next steps.

Please be advised that your Capstone research might require CUNY IRB approval even if:

1. You will be working on the same research project as you did for your Fieldwork and the SPH HRPP Office previously determined that the project was not HSR and CUNY IRB approval was not needed;
2. You will be working on a research project at an external (non-CUNY) organization that has already received IRB approval.

Students will need to submit a copy of the HSR determination and/or IRB approval as part of the class, in addition to including it in their portfolio.

Please contact the SPH HRPP Office (hrpp@sph.cuny.edu) with any questions. More information on HRPP/IRB requirements can be found on the [SPH HRPP Office's website](#).

Part I: Writing Assignment

Students complete either a Capstone Paper or a Master's Essay. Both are described below:

Capstone Paper

There are two types of capstone papers students may choose: a research project that is based on original research and data analysis, and a practice paper that is based on work conducted during the Applied Practice Experience (e.g., fieldwork).

Research Project: Students conducting a research project (data collection and analysis) identify a problem to be studied, systematically review the literature associated with the problem, collect primary or secondary data (see below) about the problem (quantitative and/or qualitative), analyze the data in order to either answer research questions or support or refute a pre-selected hypothesis, discuss the results and make appropriate recommendations including consideration for future research, and present conclusions based on the study.

- *Primary data* collection and analysis for the capstone project is usually in the context of an ongoing study, but it is also possible for highly motivated students to initiate an original study.
- *Secondary data* analysis is research using an existing dataset or published data.

Note that CUNY IRB approval is required before you begin any primary or secondary research activities. Refer to the section on CUNY HRPP/IRB Approval for more information.

Practice Paper: Students may elect to write one of the following types of practice papers

- Policy analysis – Students conducting a policy analysis analyze the public health implications of a current or proposed policy. The paper could include perspectives on economics and financing, need and demand, politics/ethics/law, or quality/effectiveness. Conclusions should be based on the analysis.
- Evaluation of an existing program – Students evaluating an existing program provide a description of the program, explain the purpose of the evaluation, describe the methods and procedures used to evaluate the program, identify the logistics of carrying out the evaluation, and present the results of the evaluation.
- Written plan for a program – Students creating a plan for a new program conduct a needs assessment, create a program mission, goals, and objectives, develop an intervention, describe how the program will be implemented, and explain how the program would be evaluated.
- Grant proposal – Students writing a grant proposal for a public health initiative identify the problem for which the grant would be used, explain the significance, list the hypotheses/questions to be answered, review the literature associated with the problem, create goals and objectives, methods, create a timeline and budget, and explain how the intervention would be evaluated.
- Manual – Students creating a manual for a public health initiative demonstrate the need for the manual, create goals and objectives for the manual, create a table of contents, develop the content for the manual, describe how the manual will be used, and explain how the manual would be evaluated.
- Systematic review of the literature – Students conducting a systematic review define a study question, create a strategy to search for and identify appropriate literature, read, and review the literature, extract the appropriate information from the literature, summarize the findings, discuss the findings including making recommendations, and present conclusions based on the systematic review. Students selecting this option must follow standard guidelines for conducting a systematic review, such as STROBE or PRISMA. For more information on this option, [refer to the AJPH](#). The exact dates, including day, month, and year of the search period should be reported in the Methods, while just the years can be reported in the abstract. An annex with the full search string should be included, including any Boolean operators (“AND”, “OR” and “NOT”) employed.

Students conducting a practice project identify a problem to be studied, review the literature associated with the problem, and then present a comprehensive analysis or plan for implementation. For completed projects, students discuss the results or outcomes of the project, make recommendations in the Discussion section, and present conclusions and recommendations based on the project. For written program plans where implementation has not yet occurred, a detailed evaluation plan must be included in the paper.

Format and Structure of the Capstone Paper

The Capstone paper will take the form of a peer-reviewed journal article, such as articles that appear in the Research and Practice section of the *American Journal of Public Health (AJPH)*. The main text of the capstone paper **must be 3000 to 4500 words in length**, excluding the word count of the abstract, references, tables, boxes, and figures. There will be a title page and a structured abstract (IMRC), followed by the main text, references and then at least three display items: tables, boxes, or figures (one to a page). If there is an appendix, it is placed at the very end. Grammar, quality of writing, illustrations and overall presentation are considered when the paper is being evaluated. The paper follows the outline below.

1. Title page (Do not use punctuation in the title)
2. Structured abstract (230-250 words – call this section “Abstract”)
3. Introduction including the incorporated literature review (which covers background information), project rationale and problem statement, and ending on the aim of the project (700-900)
4. Methods/project description/process (750-1050)
5. Results/project outcomes (450-700)
6. Discussion (including limitations, future research, recommendations) (750-1400)
7. Conclusions (150-200)
8. References (minimum 20 articles from peer-reviewed journals, Vancouver style)
9. Display items: Tables, boxes, figures (minimum 3)
10. Appendices, if applicable

Title page: Include title of the project (bolded but do not use punctuation in the title), student’s name, CUNYFirst number, email address, name of capstone professor, date of submission, abstract word count, and text word count as well as the competencies. Do not use a large format font, multiple colors or other decorations on the title page.

Structured abstract (250 words maximum): Summary of key points. The abstract should have four sections and briefly describe: 1) Introduction: the background and aim of the paper; 2) Methods: the methods utilized; 3) Results: a summary of the main findings; 4) Conclusions (based on your results). Instructions for developing a structured abstract are available from the National Library of Medicine via [this link](#). There are no references in the abstract. The sections should only be: Introduction (including the aim of the project), Methods, Results, Conclusions (IMRC). Like with an article, the Capstone Project should list 5-7 keywords after the abstract or just before it. Keywords should not repeat words used in the title. An abstract cannot exceed the maximum word count of 250 and is ideally at least 230 words. Keywords are not included in the abstract word count.

Introduction: This section includes the background including significance of the public health issue you are studying. This relates to the background of the paper (citing relevant literature – the “literature review” should not be a separate section), including a statement of the problem, and the specific aims of the study (the latter two are not separate sections and the Introduction ends with the aim. The literature cited should contain scientific evidence from a variety of text and electronic sources including limitations of the research findings; relevant and appropriate information sources; and interpreted scientific information. Even if it is innovative, the paper should be presented so that it is related to an existing body of knowledge or work on the subject with review of the literature, and identification of the gap to be addressed by this paper. The statement of question you will address should integrate an understanding of the health status of the population; determinants of health and illness; factors contributing to health promotion; influencers of the use of health services; and/or policy and apply that understanding to the issue of interest. Variables relevant to public health are selected and defined. **The research question, i.e., the aim of the**

Capstone project, should be clearly, concisely, and coherently stated at the very end of the Introduction section.

The language here and throughout your paper should be scientific and technical. Some tips are to use “probably” instead of “likely” and “effect” or “influence” instead of “impact.” Reserve “significant” for statistical significance, avoid contractions when you write, and define any abbreviations at first use.

Methods & materials: For research projects, a clear description of the methods or methodological model and theory (where applicable) that another public health professional might be able to use to replicate the findings. Replicability is a key concept to remember when writing the Methods section. Any previously published procedures should be referenced in the reference section. Main definitions should also go in the Methods and materials section, or, exceptionally, in the Introduction if it can be justified. Report your IRB (e.g., for HSR) approval (including month/year) or if you were exempt and who exempted you in the Methods section of the body of the paper (i.e. not the abstract).

For practice papers, present the design of the project: Describe the project procedure in the sequence in which the project segments will be performed. Describe each method or approach to be utilized, the population participating in the project, and the project site. Provide information about the relevant institutional resources available to help complete your project. Provide a logic model.

Results: Present the collected data and analysis. Alternatively, utilize the relevant methodological model (and theory where applicable) to present and describe the finding of the assessment, or the plan for the service program, education campaign, or program evaluation.

Discussion: Provide key findings/results drawn from the data and analysis, along with future directions, suggested future research, and policy recommendations. The discussion should start with the aim and main findings in layperson’s language and then discuss the project findings, including unexpected results, and relate these to existing knowledge and evidence on the topic, including by amply referencing key studies. Any difficulties encountered or recommendations for further study should also be included and discussed. If the student has completed an assessment, education or program plan, or evaluation project, he/she should highlight and summarize the significant issues. Include a short section on ethical considerations if relevant. Limitations of the research or project should be addressed in this section (for example, in a section with an italicized sub-heading: “*Limitations*”). A brief presentation of next steps/future directions should be included.

Conclusions: Conclusions are short and should be based on evidence and relevance to the findings to public health practice. The core and concentration competencies of public health that have been identified should be synthesized in a concise manner. The Conclusion section is not focused on hypothesizing or discussing results, which is done in the preceding Discussion section. There are no references in the Conclusion section.

References: Statements of fact in the text should be referenced and cited in the bibliography. Pertinent journal articles and other key texts such as reports and books should be cited. Referencing key publications demonstrates mastery of the relevant literature and proper attribution of facts.

The Capstone paper must include references to at least 20 peer-reviewed articles published in scientific journals. Additional non-peer-reviewed sources can be referenced, avoiding newspaper and magazine articles. Unless otherwise instructed, use the *AJPH* style for all capstone papers, which is the same style used by the *Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA)*. Refer to the *AMA Manual of Style, 10th edition*. This means providing Vancouver (numbered, starting with “1” in superscript) style references. Do not use “ibid.” The reference list, which should be at the end of the paper, after the Conclusion, starts with the first reference you cite in your Introduction (and is not an alphabetical list). All website references should include the date accessed.

Display Items (Tables/Boxes/Figures): A minimum of three display items as part of the main text of the project (i.e. not as appendices) is required. Do not insert them in the body of the text.

Note that inserting and attempting to place these items in Word is time-consuming and can cause formatting problems. Most journals require these items to be sent separately from the text. Typesetters at the journal integrate these items for publication.

- Each table or figure should be numbered (not lettered) and have a clear title and short description if relevant. Please ensure that sufficient information is provided so that the tables/figures can be understood standalone. Students using photographs or large files are advised to make the file small enough to be transmitted by email.
- Please ensure that any figures copied from other sources are fully referenced and redrawn – do not just copy a figure from another source unless you have written permission, which must be submitted as an appendix. This can usually be done by re-formatting using the compress function. If this fails, make a special arrangement with the capstone faculty member. Make sure the text and images are clear and that at least a font size of 11 is used. All display items must be mentioned in the appropriate place in the body of text (e.g., “See Figure 1.”).

Appendices: Supplemental material, set off by page breaks, can be added following the Display Items. Examples of appendix materials are questionnaires, data collection instruments or checklists, or data too lengthy to be published with the paper. This material must not make the paper too lengthy to email.

For guidance on the use and reporting of AI, please see your syllabus or contact your course instructor.

Students should use the following checklist to determine that their manuscript is ready to be submitted. You should also review the Capstone Paper Evaluation Rubric in Appendix 1.

Yes	No	Objective
		There is a Title Page with title of the project (bold, no punctuation), name, CUNYFirst number, email address, name of capstone professor, date of submission, abstract word count, text word count, and list of the core and concentration competencies.
		The Structured Abstract provides a summary of the key points of the paper in the Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusion (IMRC) format. It adheres to the specified word count (230-250 words) and includes 5-7 keywords.
		The Introduction demonstrates the significance of the public health issue. A literature review is included as part of the Introduction (not as a separate section), and the aim of the paper is included at the end of the Introduction.
		The methods are clearly described, are aligned with the scope of the project, and demonstrate the approach that will be utilized.
		The results are presented clearly and supported by Display Items if appropriate.
		The discussion relates the findings to the existing literature, identifies strengths and limitations, and describes any implications for public health, including relevant recommendations and next steps.
		The conclusion is short, based on the results, and synthesizes the core and concentration competencies.
		There are at least 20 peer-reviewed references. All statements of fact receive citations, and references adhere to the AMA/AJPH formatting conventions, using the Vancouver (numbered, superscript in the text) style.
		A minimum of three Display Items are included and are placed after the references, each on its own page.

Submitting the manuscript for review

- Margins should be 2.54 cm on all sides.
- The suggested font and size is Calibri 11.
- Add a blank line between paragraphs, no indentation.
- Do not number sections
- The document should be submitted with the following file name: Last name_First name_Capstone_Course number_Date
- Submit the manuscript as a single file to facilitate distribution and storage. Consider 4 or 5 megabytes as the maximum file size for email transmission and distribution. If the file is too large and cannot be emailed using the college email system, it is the student's responsibility to make the document email friendly (see below).
- The paper should be ready to be disseminated on the date it is due, whether as an upload or shareable file (refer to your course syllabus).

Note: Some departments may follow a different protocol. If this is the case, it will be communicated to you by your Capstone faculty member on the syllabus and/or in class announcements. *It is your responsibility to review these.*

- The subject line in your transmitting emails should be "Capstone Paper: *Last name First name_Capstone_Course number_Date.*"
- Any revised papers should be transmitted with a subject line "Capstone Paper revised: *Last name First name_Capstone_course number_date*"

Grading the manuscript

The penultimate draft of the written assignment is reviewed by the Capstone faculty and a second reader. Reviewers complete an evaluation rubric that uses this scale to evaluate the points listed below; the complete rubric can be found in the appendix.

Final submission of manuscript

The penultimate draft of the paper that has been evaluated by the second reader will be returned to the student. Guided by suggestions and comments made by both the first (the capstone instructor) and second reader, the student makes final revisions to the paper and composes a response letter that includes a point-by-point response to the second reviewer. The letter and final draft of the paper are submitted together to the capstone faculty member, who grades it after reading it one last time.

Response letter

The response letter clearly states all changes made in the manuscript in response to the concerns expressed by the second reader (reviewer). A justification must be provided if the student disagrees with any of the reviewer's suggestions. There is no page limit for the response letter. The appendix contains a template for a response letter. *Please use this style when composing your own response.*

Master's Essay Option

A master's essay is a paper that reports on original research, with the general expectation that the finished product is of publishable quality, meets professional standards, and is useful to some external audience (e.g., journal readers, practitioners, advocates, other researchers).

Students who choose the essay option must submit a detailed proposal to the capstone faculty member by the end of the semester preceding the semester in which the student expects to enroll in the capstone course (that is, one

semester in advance). The proposal should be 2 to 4 single-spaced pages and should outline and describe the project and include the names of the master's essay mentor and one or more additional reviewers. If the essay falls in the category of research report, the plan must include background and significance, hypothesis, data and methods. The capstone faculty member reviews the plan, assesses whether the proposal is expected to be of publishable quality, and approves/disapproves it.

Students writing a master's essay must follow the guidelines for the particular journal to which they expect to submit the manuscript. Every journal has an online Information for Authors section that describes in detail requirements for style of the main text, length of the manuscript, references and artwork.

Students are strongly encouraged to submit their master's essay for publication. Advisors can be co-authors on the paper, but generally, the student is expected to be the first author. Student and advisor should discuss and agree on the publication plan, co-authorship possibility, and order of co-authors before submission of the master's essay proposal, and should ensure that the final authorship follows IJCME guidelines. No matter the type of major written work the student chooses to do, a summary of the work will be presented in a lecture format or as poster. Part III of this handbook provides the specifics on the two means of communicating their work to others.

Part II: Presentation

In addition to producing a major written report, all capstone students present an overview of their capstone project to fellow classmates, preceptors, academic advisors, capstone faculty members, mentors and other interested parties. This presentation occurs during the last weeks of the capstone semester. During the spring term, the presentations coincide with the school's annual research day. Students choose to present a summary of their work in either a lecture or in a poster format.

Please refer to the course syllabus and class announcements for more information about the format that you will be expected to use.

Oral Presentation

Presentations must not exceed 8 minutes--with an additional 2 minutes of time allotted for questions. The format for the oral presentation must include the following:

1. Title
2. Overview/Outline
3. Introduction/background
4. Project Methods
5. Results/Findings
6. Discussion
7. Conclusion
8. References
9. Acknowledgments

Organization is key when giving a successful 8-minute talk. Time is extremely limited so you need to know exactly what you want to convey and what information is necessary to convey it. The talk should have no more than **10-12 slides** - that means less than one minute on average to talk about each slide. And don't load more information onto one slide just to have fewer slides (aim for a font size of at least 16).

Start with a clearly defined problem and progress through the talk in a logical manner. State a question/ problem ("I was interested in the following question..."). How did you go about answering it? ("This is the strategy I used

to answer the question...”) What did you find? (“These are my results...”) What do the findings mean? (“This is how I interpreted the results...”)

Do not linger on the introduction and/or summarize the entire history of the field. Minimize time on background information in order to present methods, results and discussion. You should provide enough information to give a general understanding of why you are asking the question you are asking. The introduction should last no more than 1-2 minutes and consist of **1-2 slides**.

Data should be the bulk of your talk. The point of giving the talk is to present your data. Therefore, spend as much time as possible doing so. Do not be afraid to jump right into the data – limiting the use of transition slides allows for a smoother presentation. You do not need to go into extreme details of the methods used unless it is absolutely critical for proper interpretation of the data. If people are curious about how you did something, they will ask. Data should be limited to **3-6 slides** and last 4-6 minutes.

Have data tables or graphs and explain them. But, show only relevant data - anything more will just confuse the audience. Help the audience by ‘walking through’ each table or figure with a pointer. If you say “look only at this column” then take the other columns out!

The conclusion is the part of the talk in which you interpret your results in light of the question posed at the beginning of the talk. An effective conclusion can fit onto **1 slide** and be stated in 1-2 minutes. *Don’t end the presentation with “That’s all.”*

Do not go over the allotted time. Presentations should be no more than 8 minutes long. Also use the time wisely, and don’t make the presentation too short.

Breathe and relax. You are only presenting for 8 minutes, so remember--you know more about your topic than anyone else in the room. **Don’t worry** if you make a mistake.

Practice! Practice! Practice! This cannot be stressed enough. Go through the talk at least 2-3 times before actually giving it. You will be surprised how long it will be the first time around. Practice out loud, including with others, and edit the talk until you can do it in less than 8 minutes. Many times, the presentation takes longer than you think it will. This will give you breathing room for questions and any technical difficulties.

PowerPoint (PPT) Tips

1. Have one main point per slide. Do not show a collection of assorted data. Do not use more than 4 or 5 bullets per slide.
2. Try to use a font that is 24 point or larger for readability on a small screen.
3. Make slides simple, clear, and easy to understand. If the audience is trying to figure out what the slide is showing, then they are not paying attention to what you are saying. You may use any design template in PPT -- but make sure that it is not too busy and does not distract the audience from the words/data on the slide.
4. Expand margin lines of text boxes in order to increase font size for readability, but not to gain more space to add more information on the slide.
5. Slides should be free of nonessential information- other data will only distract and confuse. Do not show a table with comprehensive data; just show the important stuff. Save the rest for the paper!
6. Avoid using full sentences; use phrases and key talking points as a prompt for you to say more.
7. Avoid abusing PPT animation. A successful talk should rely on data, not PowerPoint prowess. More often than not, animation is distracting and sometimes even condescending.
8. Use sans-serif fonts for greater legibility. No gradient backgrounds (light backgrounds and dark text always works best). Most people use white background since colors show best (some use white/yellow text on a blue background. Use common sense with visual contrast: For example, no black text on blue background.
9. Use notes portion of PPT to remember facts and things that you would like to point out for each slide. Remember to print out the notes of your presentation. **DO NOT READ YOUR NOTES TO THE AUDIENCE.**

Poster Planning and Preparation

1. The preparation *process takes longer than you think*, so get started early. Write introduction and methods now!
2. See the Poster Template in the Resources tab of the Course Blackboard page. The standard poster size is 36" x 48". Review text and poster approach with advisor and other major collaborators.
3. Look for illustrations or photos to shorten needed text. They may be reproduced from books or slides via color photocopy.
4. Preparing a poster is very different from preparing a paper. Your main objective in preparing text for this presentation is to edit it down to concise language. Use bullets and numbers to break text visually and aid you in the interactive use of your poster.
5. A suggested title format is 90 point Helvetica or a sans serif font, use bold as this reads better from a distance. Sub titles should be 72 point.
6. Divide your title information into: Title; Name(s); Program; CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy.
7. Within the poster presentation space divide information into - Introduction; Methods; Results; Summary; Acknowledgments (optional). References are not necessary and can be produced in handout form to reduce needed space.
8. Other poster text should be 18 pt; space and a half; bold. Never use smaller than 14 pt print. If your poster is legible when printed on A4 paper and held at arm's length, then it is about right.
9. Spell-check and proof text very carefully before your final print out.

Other Poster How-To's

- **Organization:** Use headings to help readers find what they are looking for (practicum setting, objectives, results, conclusions, etc.). Most experts suggest a columnar format: top to bottom, left to right. The width of the poster should be greater than its height. Use pleasing and balanced arrangement of graphics, text, colors. Remember that people prefer shapes in the golden ratio, and tend to look at the top right corner.
- **Less is more:** Keep the verbiage to a minimum. Again, this is not simply pages of text. All text should be in fonts large enough to be read from 3-6 feet away (minimum font size: 18 pt). Titles should be in larger font sizes to be read from far away. Use simple fonts (e.g., Arial, Helvetica) and do not use more than 2 types.
- **Colors:** Use a theme of 2-3 colors; avoid overly bright (neon) colors. Dark colors on a light background are easiest to read.
- **Graphics:** Use graphics (simple charts, tables, graphs) and photos as appropriate. Not only do pictures help tell the story, they also help attract the audience.

Resources for Posters

Designing conference posters (2015):

<http://colinpurrington.com/tips/poster-design/>

Hess G, Tosney K, Liegel L. Creating effective poster presentations (2013):

<http://www.ncsu.edu/project/posters/>.

Kirkeby K. Preparing professional scientific posters (n.d.):

<http://www.ce.umn.edu/~smith/supplements/poster/guide.htm>

Reynolds G. *Presentation Zen. Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*, 2nd ed. Berkeley: New Riders: 2011.

Part III: The Portfolio/Reflection

Purpose of Portfolio

- To provide an opportunity for self-assessment indicating how you achieved core and concentration-specific competencies through courses and practicum, community service, and paid volunteer work experience.
- To demonstrate that you have attained at least entry-level public health competencies in the core public health areas. In other words, the portfolio is a method for faculty to assess educational outcomes.
- To provide information that will be used by the Council on Education in Public Health (CEPH) to assess the curriculum's effectiveness in providing students with the opportunities necessary to become competent in the core public health areas and in specialized areas.
- The portfolio is intended to be a useful career tool for you. With the portfolio, you should be able to promote yourself by showcasing your professional development, skills, experience. Your portfolio organizes critical information for potential employers while it showcases your accomplishments and abilities.
- Because learning and development are a continual part of professional life, a portfolio remains useful to you throughout your career. Keeping copies of your completed portfolio forms can help you demonstrate to yourself (and others) the paths you have taken and assist you in determining future growth and career directions.

Review and Evaluation of the Portfolio

The portfolio is submitted as a component of the capstone course and must be submitted to earn a grade. The capstone course is taken during the last or next-to-the-last semester of your graduate degree training. Students have the option to submit the portfolio as a manuscript, or as an e-portfolio through online platforms such as WordPress, Sway, etc. You are encouraged to keep a copy for yourself and update it as you continue with your professional and scholastic endeavors.

Students should begin work on the portfolio as soon as possible and review it with their academic advisor or capstone faculty member. You are responsible for reviewing the components and ensuring that all are met. Courses and other learning experiences should be selected to strengthen competence in specific areas.

Components of the Portfolio

1. Title page

This page contains general information for each student including full name, contact information, and concentration area.

2. Table of contents

Insert a table of contents to make the portfolio easy to search.

3. Professional mission statement

State your public health focus and your expertise, and how you expect to promote yourself as a public health practitioner. Write this as a concise statement of your individual, focused purpose in your public health career and the specific contribution you hope to make.

Reflect on your goals and how your unique knowledge, skills, and experience will help you reach those goals. Also, reflect about what you have to offer professionally as a public health practitioner and what specific contribution you can make to the public health field.

- Communicate these thoughts in a concise professional statement that reflects your goals, focus and skills, and the contribution you expect to make to public health. Be as focused and specific as possible. “To improve the public’s health” is neither focused nor specific; everyone with an MPH wants to do that. Distinguish yourself from the others by indicating your specific area of focus and the specific way in which you hope to improve the public’s health. You may want to consult the following resources which describe how to write an effective professional mission statement:
 - State your professional mission and goals.
 - Reflect on those mission and goals. As you reflect, you may find that you have refined your mission and goals over time.
 - Discuss the extent to which you have realized your mission and achieved your goals.
 - Suggest future actions you might take to further realize your mission and goals.

4. Résumé

This section contains your professional résumé.

Minimum requirements include:

- A. Name
- B. Contact information
- C. Education completed
- D. Public health and other relevant work experience (in chronological order)
- E. Honors and awards (in chronological order)
- F. Special skills

The [Career Development Office](#) offers counseling and guidance for writing résumés, as well as other professional services. There are many sites on the internet with instructions for preparing résumés.

5. Experience in public health

This section provides documentation and evidence of commitment and experience in the field of public health.

Minimum requirements include:

- A. Certification of human subject research training (a valid CITI certificate should be submitted – if it has expired you should refer to the [CITI Program website](#) and complete the HSR for Social & Behavioral Faculty, Graduate Students & Postdoctoral Scholars refresher course and submit that certificate)
- B. CUNY IRB approval letters and/or HSR determinations for your Fieldwork, Capstone, or another CUNY-related research project (as applicable)
- C. A chronological list of all the public health experiences you have had. Include dates, agency name & address, your supervisor’s name, credentials & title, your title, and responsibilities. Use these section

headings: Paid professional experience; Volunteer experience; Practicum experience; Other Relevant experience

6. Core competencies

In this section, indicate the extent to which you have acquired the core competencies required of all graduates of public health programs, available [on the School's website](#). Explain how you believe you have acquired each core competency. Your statement for each competency may be as long as needed.

Where possible, provide in an appendix documentation that illustrates how you know the competency has been achieved, such as your written (or other) response to an assignment in a particular course, a letter acknowledging your paid or volunteer activity, a certificate of completion for a CE course, and so on. When you are attaching documentation, indicate in your statement the name of the document so we know what to look for in the appendix.

7. Concentration-specific competencies

Each concentration has its own competencies, available [on the school's website](#). These concentration-specific competencies specify the skills graduates need to have in order to receive the master's degree. In this section of the portfolio, you will provide documentation and evidence of competence in your specific program. Explain how you know you have acquired each concentration competency. Your statement for each competency may be as long as needed.

Where possible, provide in an appendix documentation that illustrates how you know the competency has been achieved, such as your written (or other) response to an assignment in a particular course, a letter acknowledging your paid or volunteer activity, evidence of membership in a professional organization related to your concentration area, a certificate of completion for a CE course, and so on. When you are attaching documentation, indicate in your statement the name of the document so the faculty member who is reviewing your portfolio knows what to look for in the appendix.

8. Community service

This section provides documentation and evidence of community involvement and service outside of the academic environment. Include at least two examples of community involvement.

9. Practicum

This section provides documentation and evidence of the student as a reflective public health practitioner. The description of the practicum may include aspects of your employment in a healthcare, public, occupational, or environmental health agency.

Minimum requirements include:

- A. List of practicum placements. For each, provide dates, preceptor information (name, credentials, title), your responsibilities, and tangible products of the practicum experience.
- B. Reflections about your practicum experiences, including:
 - Reflections on the extent to which your course work prepared you for the practicum experience.
 - Reflections on the quality of on-site supervision you received during your practicum. Was someone generally available to answer your questions and provide feedback (even if you didn't seek it)? Discuss the usefulness and value of the feedback you received.

- Reflections on challenges or problems you encountered during the practicum and how they were addressed. What technical or human obstacles did you encounter? Were there any deviations from your original plan or expectations for the practicum (for better or worse!). Discuss things you hoped to get out of the practicum experience, but didn't.
- Reflections on the overall quality of the practicum. Were there particular skills, knowledge or lessons that you acquired unexpectedly? Explain. Was the practicum a good educational experience – why or why not? How did it provide you with a better sense of the skills needed for employment in the profession? Discuss recommendations for improving your practicum experience. What were the most valuable lessons you learned? Explain why you would or would not recommend that other students conduct practicum with the same department or agency.

10. Other

Use this section to present and discuss other topics that have contributed to your professional development. Some examples of additional areas include leadership activities, conferences attended, non-credit courses completed, and track-specific competencies attained outside of your specific area. Where possible, provide in an appendix documentation supporting these.

APPENDIX

Contents

Appendix 1: Capstone paper evaluation rubric

Appendix 2: Response letter template

Appendix 3: Oral presentation evaluation rubric

Appendix 1: *Capstone Paper Evaluation Rubric*

Student's Name _____

Degree MPH in _____ or MS in _____

Title of paper _____

Category of paper: Practice Project Report Research Project Report Policy Analysis Grant

Proposal Written Plan for a Program Evaluation of an Existing Program Manual Systematic Review of the Literature

Reviewer _____ **Date** _____

Competency Identified	Foundational/Core	Concentration

<i>Integrative Learning Experience Rubric</i>	Instructor Feedback	Excellent	Good	Fair	Failing
Structured Abstract (3 points) Summary of key points (250 words maximum; clearly describes project background, aim, methods, results, and conclusions.					
Introduction, including the Literature Review (5 points) Effectively enables reader to anticipate the paper; provides background information; subject matter is well-researched and documented; organization; clear aim at the end of the introduction. The literature review is not a stand-alone section.					
Methods (5 points) Includes description of how study aims were operationalized including: protocol, sampling, instrumentation, measures, and analytic plan; provides reader with clear understanding of procedures/process.					

<p>Evidence and Results (5 points)</p> <p>Items presented support thesis; results align with methods, are clear and without error. A minimum of three Display Items (included after the references) are included and are well labeled and easy to understand.</p>					
<p>Discussion, including Limitations and Recommendations (5 points)</p> <p>Main findings are well discussed, including with references where appropriate; implications suggested, consideration of limitations provided (weaknesses, strengths of study design, data collection, etc.); evidence of critical thinking including recommendations, suggested future research, and next steps as appropriate.</p>					
<p>Conclusions (1 point)</p> <p>Concise conclusions are provided based on the paper's findings. No references.</p>					

References (1 points) Peer-reviewed, scientific references cited in the text; correct referencing style (Vancouver) in body of text and bibliography; minimum of 20 peer-reviewed articles					
Overall Paper Presentation and Content Structure (4 points) Paper is focused and well-organized; basic mastery of written English (grammar, syntax, word usage); effective use of headings and subheadings; Display Items such as tables, graphs, maps, diagrams used effectively and correctly (e.g., labels, axis defined).					
Synthesis of Competencies (2 points) A minimum of three competencies (<i>more than</i> one foundation/core + one concentration competency) identified; final project/paper demonstrates effective synthesis and integration of these competencies; collaborative experiences achieve this by each student, individually					

Appendix 2: Response Letter Template

[Insert date here]

Dear Dr. *or* Professor *or* Ms. *or* Mr. [insert 1st & 2nd readers' last names]:

Re: Revisions to capstone paper, "[insert title of your paper]"

Thank you for your comments and suggestions on my manuscript. They were helpful and enabled me to improve the quality of my paper. The following pages contain point-by-point responses to your remarks. *My responses are in italics and after each of your suggestions.* I start each response with "**RESPONSE.**" I also use **yellow highlight** for additions, and ~~strikethroughs~~ for deletions. For example: "In accordance with the suggestions of the Reader, **[insert changes you made according to suggestions]**

I hope that you find the revisions in the manuscript and accompanying responses are satisfactory.

Yours sincerely,

[insert your name, degrees & title, if appropriate]

-----new page -----

Responses to the comments of Reader #2

1. [insert 2nd reader's 1st comment: if the comment is lengthy, copy and paste it here directly from the reader's letter]

RESPONSE: [insert your response]

2. [Insert 2nd reader's 2nd comment: copy and paste it here directly from the reader's letter]

RESPONSE: [insert your response]

3. *...and so on for every comment made by the second reader.*

Appendix 3: Oral Presentation Evaluation Rubric

Student's name _____ Reviewer _____

Degree MPH in _____ or MS in _____ Date _____

Title of presentation _____

Category of work presented (circle one): Practice Project Report Research Project Report Policy Analysis Grant
Proposal Written Plan for a Program Evaluation of an Existing Program Manual Systematic Review of the Literature

Oral presentation components	Max score	Score	Comments
Title	0		
Background and Significance	10		
Project Description and Methods	40		
Results or Project Outcomes	20		
Discussion and Conclusions	10		
Recommendations	10		
Overall presentation style and demeanor	10		
Total	100		

Evaluation of Capstone Oral Presentation

1. Title of presentation _____
2. Brief background and significance of research/project
 - a. Public health scope of problem
 - b. Importance of project to public health community and knowledge
3. Methods or Project description (data collection, etc.)
 - c. Sample
 - a. Data collection or description of processes (practice paper)
 - b. Analytic framework
4. Results or project outcomes (Include at least 2 tables for a research project or at least 1 table for practice paper)
 - c. Table quality and ability to convey results
 - d. Explanation of results
5. Discussion of results and Conclusions drawn from research or project
 - d. Analysis, synthesis and interpretation of results
 - e. Limitations and strengths
 - f. Draws conclusions about results
6. Recommendations (which can include but not limited to additional research, policy and/or practical implications)
7. Overall presentation style and quality
 - g. Speech quality
 - h. Graphics
 - i. Timing
 - j. Response to questions