

Master of Public Health Program

DISSERTATION GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS

Introduction

One of the requirements for the degree of Master of Public Health is the completion of a dissertation. This is intended as a practicum, offering experience in investigating and/or solving a public health problem.

Aims:

The aims of the dissertation are to:

- Consolidate and extend the knowledge and skills acquired during the course work;
- Apply this knowledge and utilise these skills in a practical way in a public health setting;
- Develop skills in public health research, e.g. research planning and study design, data collection and analysis, recording and reporting evidence and identifying appropriate interventions or remedial actions; and,
- Assist the student to present the results and conclusions of their research in a public forum.

The Program expects the level or standard of a MPH dissertation to lie between that of an honours thesis and that of a research master thesis. It is expected that the dissertation will form the basis of a paper publishable in a major public health journal (e.g. the Australian Journal of Public Health).

Pre-requisite:

All students should normally have successfully completed their course work before enrolling for the dissertation. Students seeking exemption from this pre-requisite should apply to the Directorate in writing stating their case.

Students are expected to enrol at their 'home' university for this subject and are required to do so in the semester immediately following completion of course work.

Structure:

There is no formal staff/student contact structure for this subject. Students are expected to arrange regular meetings with their supervisors and/or mentors to discuss problems and progress.

The subject is worth 40 credit points at Griffith University, 48 credit points at Queensland University of Technology, and 8 units (2007) at the University of Queensland. These are all equivalent to one full-time semester's work.

Full-time students are required to submit their dissertation by 12 noon of the last Friday of the semester in which they have enrolled for this subject. Part-time students are required to enrol for two consecutive semesters and are required to submit their dissertation by 12 noon of the last Friday of the second semester.

Please Note: *Students wishing to submit past these deadlines will be required to re-enrol in the following semester and show cause to the Directorate, in writing, why this should be so.*

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Selecting a topic and developing a proposal:

Please refer to handouts titled “***GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF DISSERTATION PROPOSALS***” and “***FORMS TO BE SUBMITTED WITH DISSERTATION PROPOSAL***”.

All students are required to submit a dissertation proposal to the Directorate, following the guidelines provided and by the specified due date. It is essential that the supervisor adds his/her endorsement to the proposal using the supervisor checklist. The Dissertation Review Committee will then assess the proposal and, if no major revisions are required, will recommend ratification to the full Committee.

Students must follow the guidelines and attach the required paperwork to their submitted dissertation proposals. Students are advised to use the supervisor checklist (1 of 5 forms to be submitted with the dissertation proposal) to guide the completion of their proposals.

Students wishing to carry out their dissertations outside Brisbane should seek prior approval from their supervisor and the Directorate. Regulations concerning enrolment and submissions will apply regardless of location.

Initially many students enrolling in the MPH course will not have a clear idea of their dissertation topic. Full-time students are expected to begin discussions with their mentors during the first semester in order to explore possibilities and identify potential supervisors. Students should allocate time from early in the second semester for refining dissertation proposals so that they are ready to proceed as soon as the semester commitments are fulfilled. Part-time students are advised to initiate discussions with mentors and/or supervisors, at the latest, in the first semester of their second year.

Dissertation Format:

Dissertations will be considered in a variety of formats. The following are acceptable examples:

- Analysis and interpretation of a pre-existing data set of known good quality. The student should be conversant with all the practical aspects of the study including design issues and data collection methods used. The discussion and conclusions should be presented with due regard to data quality.
- Individual solutions to small-scale practical public health problems possibly identified by a local or regional health authority or other such organisation. This would involve all phases of the research process from hypothesis formation through to data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting.
- The development of a detailed research proposal incorporating a literature review and a critical appraisal of proposed methods including the design and trialing of questionnaires, validation of measures and study protocols. The dissertation is expected to include the proposal, as it would be submitted to a funding agency (e.g. NH & MRC) accompanied by a fuller account under the headings mentioned above. This would normally lead to an application for a research project grant.

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A critical literature review of an issue of substance. If the proposal includes review of policy, students are expected to choose a topic of major public health importance. This should include critical analysis of existing policy and make recommendations for its evaluation and revision. Another approach might be a meta-analysis of the determinants of, or the effectiveness of interventions against, a common disease problem.

Layout of the Dissertation:

- The dissertation must be printed on only one side of A4 paper.
- MS Word for Windows point size 12 (or its equivalent) should be used.
- The report must be double-spaced throughout with the exception of the references and appendices.
- It should not be less than about 75 pages and not exceed 125 pages excluding appendices and references. This translates into a dissertation of between 15,000 and 25,000 words.
- The margins on all four sides should be at least 3cm wide.
- Appendices should be kept to a minimum and are intended for questionnaires and similar materials.
- Please do NOT use footnotes.

At the beginning of the dissertation there should be, in the following order:

- Title page with the title of dissertation; author's name and statement that "This report is submitted in partial requirement for the award of the Master of Public Health at Griffith University/Queensland University of Technology/ University of Queensland" (as appropriate).
- An abstract not exceeding 2 pages, which should include the major findings of the study and should be completed by including three to five appropriate 'key words' (**in bold type**).
- A signed statement of originality, stating that the dissertation has not been submitted for credit for any other degree or part thereof.
- Acknowledgment.
- List of contents which should include the title of each chapter and subheadings within each chapter. The inclusion of greater detail (i.e. sub-sub-headings) is at the discretion of the student.
- List of tables. Titles of tables must be self-explanatory.
- List of figures. Titles of figures must be self-explanatory.
- List of acronyms and abbreviations.
- Glossary of non-English language words.

Tables and figures may be placed in the text, or they may be placed together at the end of the relevant chapter, or at the end of the report. All tables and figures must be clearly and logically labelled and identified in lists at the beginning of the dissertation and referenced in the text; e.g. (see Figure 1), or 'Table 1 shows...'

The convention for displaying figures and tables is that titles for the tables are positioned above the table, whereas titles for figures are positioned below the figure.

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Contents of the Dissertation:

The dissertation should be presented in accordance with the following example:

- Introduction.
- Literature review.
- Aim(s) and Objective(s) of the study.
- Methodology.
- Results of the study.
- Discussion of results which should include an interpretation of the results and their relationship to the aims and objectives.
- Recommendation for action and further research.

References:

All cited materials should include bibliographic details. Each University has a preferred method of referencing. See your supervisor for specific instructions.

Preparation of Reports:

Students are reminded to back up their computer files regularly, daily if necessary, to avoid the problems associated with accidental loss.

The dissertation should be printed on a laser printer or on one of equivalent quality (not dot matrix). Students are reminded that the printing of dissertations is their responsibility. The three Universities provide computing and printing services which are available to students. (GU, through Faculty of Environmental Sciences; QUT, Computer Services; UQ, the Prentice Centre.)

Initially, three soft-bound copies (including one original) of the dissertation must be submitted by the due date. These should be accompanied by the “**READINESS OF DISSERTATION FOR EXAMINATION JOINT DECLARATION**”, signed by the Supervisor. This form approves submission and gives the names of two examiners who should have agreed to examine the dissertation. (Forms available from the Directorate.)

Of the three submitted soft-bound copies, the original and a maximum of one other will be returned to the student with the examiners’ comments. The third copy will be returned (if requested) after submission of the final, hard-bound versions.

Assessment of Dissertation:

Following submission of the dissertation, copies will be sent to two examiners who are independent of the supervisory process. The examiners reserve the right to ask a student to attend an oral examination, if deemed necessary, in the semester following submission, or whenever convenient.

Hardbound Copies of Dissertation:

If no amendments are stipulated by the examiners then copies (non-returnable) should be hard bound (green for GU, maroon for QUT and blue for UQ). The number of copies required differs slightly between Universities. UQ and Griffith require three copies. QUT requires four copies. Students should retain one unbound copy of the final version of their dissertation for their own use.

100 Word Summary

Please provide an electronic version of a 100-200 word summary of your dissertation for the Website. It is recommended that you follow the following steps when developing your dissertation proposals:

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1. Initial discussions with mentor/subject coordinators about suitable subject area/topics for dissertation.
2. Preliminary literature search and development of broad outlines for a proposal.
3. Further discussions with mentor about proposal and identification of suitable supervisor(s) (**Please Note:** If a principal supervisor is not a member of the academic staff of the student's home university, then a co-supervisor should be sought who is.)
4. Further development/refinement of proposal with supervisor(s).
5. Submission to Dissertation Review Committee, via Directorate, **accompanied by supervisors' written endorsements, completed forms 1 to 5 (including the ethics forms).**
6. Review by Dissertation Review Committee.
7. Application to appropriate ethics committee (if relevant and not already submitted).
8. If proposal is approved, the Dissertation Review Committee will confirm approval and recommend enrolment.

Recommended time for steps 1-3: Semester 1 for FT students

Recommended time for steps 4-8: Semester 2 for FT students

Year 2 for PT students

Please Note:

- **Do not under-estimate the time required to develop a proposal. Allow eight to twelve weeks.**
- Students are advised that if changes are recommended to be made to proposals there may be delays between steps 4 and 5 and between steps 6 and 8.
- In addition, conditional approval by the Dissertation Review Committee may be made pending recommended changes or ethical approval.
- Students are advised that they may be asked by their supervisors or subject coordinators to present their proposals during elective subject class sessions or at specifically designated sessions.

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Below is a guide to the steps involved in the development of the dissertation proposal and the average time required for each step. It is applicable for a full-time student who intends to enrol in the first semester of the year following completion of all coursework.

Semester 1 (Feb to April):

Develop ideas based on coursework experience, work experience, topic of personal interest or suggestions by others. Discuss preliminary ideas with mentor, other academics or supervisor at workplace.

(2-4 weeks)

Semester 1 (April to June):

Work on rough outline of proposal, including preliminary literature search/review; discuss selection of supervisors with mentors or others.

(2-4 weeks)

Between semesters (June/July) or in Semester 2 (July/Aug):

Develop first draft of proposal and discuss feasibility with any proposed collaborators.

(4-6 weeks)

By early September:

Show first draft to supervisor(s) and discuss modifications. Contact appropriate institutional ethics committees.

(2-4 weeks)

October:

Make final amendments and give final draft to supervisor for comments and endorsement. Submit to ethics committee(s) where appropriate.

(2-4 weeks)

Mid-November:

Submit proposal to your MPH Coordinator.

Early December:

Prepare to make amendments to proposal if indicated by reviewers.

December/January:

Enrol at "home" university and start work on dissertation.

For enrolment in semester 2:

Proposals must be submitted by the end of May.

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Format for dissertation proposal:

- Name:** On every page.
- Title:** The title should accurately yet succinctly describe the nature of the proposed study.
- Introduction/Background:** (maximum two pages) Provide a critical and concise outline of the subject to be covered by the dissertation and indicate how this study will contribute to the subject.
- Goals/Objectives:** State clearly:
- the overall goals of the proposed dissertation;
 - specific objectives which may include statements of specific hypotheses and research questions.
- Research plan:** (maximum two pages)
- Summarise the research design and methods, ensuring that the qualitative or quantitative methods relate directly to the aims and specific objectives described above.
 - Where appropriate include details of research strategy, study population, sampling methods and sample size, the main variables to be measured, how these will be measured, considerations of sources of error and of confounding and a summary of data collection methods and proposed data analysis.
 - If data are to be collected by questionnaire or interview, students are **not** expected to produce a completed instrument with the proposal but **are** expected to indicate what data will be collected with that instrument. It is understood that the development of the instrument, including appropriate pilot testing, is part of the supervised work to be undertaken as part of the dissertation.
 - If the study proposed is an intervention, describe its rationale and methods of evaluation.
 - If the proposal is in the form of a critical literature review of a major public health issue, students should include a critical analysis of existing national or state policy and conclude with recommendations for its evaluation and revision.
- Potential public health benefits:** (maximum one paragraph) State the public health benefits that can be expected from the proposed study. These may be direct or following application of the results or recommendations. In addition, state how you intend to provide feedback, in the form of results or recommendations, to concerned persons or organisations.

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Ethical implications:

(maximum one paragraph)

- If the study proposes research involving humans, **clearance is required** from the most appropriate Ethics Committee.
- If students are proposing to conduct studies involving collaboration with institutions or organisations, they are expected to provide documentary evidence of agreed collaboration and, where appropriate, gatekeeper ethical approval (through IEC).
- The requirements of the three Universities differ and students are advised to seek clarification from the MPH co-ordinator or their supervisor or the university ethics officer in the first instance.
- If personal information is to be sought from individuals their written consent (and that from their doctors, if appropriate) must be obtained.
- Confidentiality of data must be assured at all times. Students should state the methods by which this is to be done.
- All information sheets and consent forms used in MPH dissertation research should be on MPH headed notepaper and should include the name and contact number of the supervisor in addition to that of the student.
- In addition to an explanation of the objectives and methods of the study, the letter of introduction should emphasise that participation is voluntary and that you guarantee the confidentiality of the data.

Schedule of work broken down by task:

Specify a realistic timetable for the proposed study, showing the start and finish dates and time periods for each task or section of the study.

Please Note: Do not underestimate the time required for writing up. In particular, for supervisor review, revisions, editing, formatting and printing allow a minimum of three weeks.

Funding Source (if applicable):

If the study requires additional resources, in particular, external funding, state the sources of these and whether they have been guaranteed.

Supervisors (s') Endorsement(s):

Proposals must be submitted after comments and endorsement(s) of the dissertation supervisor(s). The appropriate forms for endorsement should be attached.

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Please complete this page and the next 4 pages

Name:

Address:

Phone: **e-mail:**

Student Number: **Home University:** QUT GU UQ

Co-investigators: (if any)

Supervisors:

Principal: **Position:**

Address:

Phone: **e-mail:**

Co-supervisor: **Position:**

Address:

Phone: **e-mail:**

Mentor:

Topic/Title: (typed)

Abstract: (typed in no more than 150 words)

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Supervisor Checklist for Dissertation Proposals

Is the topic of the proposed dissertation relevant to the practice of public health?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Does the introduction provide a critical and concise outline of the topic?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Is(are) the goal(s) clearly stated in terms of intentions and outcomes?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Are the objectives specified to a sufficient extent as to define the research question(s) or hypothesis(es)?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Are the research strategies and specific methods appropriate and adequate to achieve the goals and objectives? This includes an assessment of data quality and availability.	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Does the title accurately describe the proposed study?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Are the expected public health benefits clearly stated?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Are the mechanisms of result/recommendation feedback identified?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Have the ethical aspects of the proposed study been adequately addressed?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Is the student's original contribution to the subject identifiable?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Has the work of others been identified and acknowledged?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Is the work schedule by task laid out with date targets?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Is the proposed study feasible in the time frame identified by the student?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Is the proposed study equivalent to one semester's full time work?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY
Have all the required forms been included with the submission?	<input type="radio"/> YES <input type="radio"/> NO <input type="radio"/> PARTIALLY

Further comments:

Signed _____

Date _____

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GUIDELINES FOR DISSERTATION SUPERVISORS

With the increasing number of students who have completed the coursework component of the MPH and are preparing for their dissertations, it has been suggested that a set of guidelines be produced for supervisors with the following objectives:-

1. To provide a uniform approach to supervision across the three universities and the many non-university health sector staff involved in the supervisory process.
2. To assist busy supervisors in the assessment of dissertation proposals before they are submitted to the Program for review.
3. To ensure a high standard of proposal by making the development process an educational exercise for the student.

This document should be read in conjunction with the following:

1. Dissertation Guidelines for Students;
2. Guidelines for the Development of Dissertation Proposals (incl. Forms to be submitted with Dissertation Proposal; and
3. Guidelines for the Examination of Dissertations.

The core of these guidelines is a checklist style of form which supervisors are asked to complete and sign. This is to accompany the submission of a student's dissertation proposal. Supervisors are also expected to be familiar with the requirements and guidelines for students and examiners as detailed in the above documents.

The following dates are the agreed deadlines for submission of dissertation proposals for review:

Intended enrolment in semester 1:	Middle of November of the previous year
Intended enrolment in semester 2:	End of May of that year

Duties of supervisors during the period of the student's enrolment:

In addition to the usual role of academic supervision, supervisors are expected to:

1. Collaborate with the co-supervisor(s) in developing areas of responsibility.
2. Inform in writing to the university coordinator and MPH directorate of any problems or intended change of enrolment status.
3. Advise in writing to the MPH Directorate and university coordinator when the dissertation is ready for submission for examination.

In consultation with the university coordinator, advise the Directorate of two suitable examiners for the dissertation (including a minimum of one examiner from the student's home university and one of external origin). This should include a verbal agreement from the proposed examiners.

On completion of the first phase of the examination process, supervise any changes requested by the examiners. Once these have been completed, advise in writing, the university coordinator and the Directorate in order to initiate the process of recommendation for graduation.

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READINESS OF DISSERTATION FOR EXAMINATION JOINT DECLARATION

(To be submitted with 3 soft-bound copies of draft dissertation for examination)

The MPH Directorate requires the submission of a joint declaration of readiness of dissertation for examination signed by the student and the supervisor/s. The dissertation cannot be released for examination until such a declaration is received.

Please complete details below, sign and return to the Administration Officer (MPH Program).

Student Name:

Student Address:

.....

.....

Dissertation Title:

.....

.....

Examiners: (the two examiners should have indicated their willingness to examine the thesis within six weeks)

1. Name: **Phone:**

Address: **email:**

.....

2. Name: **Phone:**

Address: **email:**

.....

We the undersigned declare that the dissertation detailed above is ready for examination for the award of the Master of Public Health degree.

Student: **Date:**

Principal Supervisor: **Date:**

Co-Supervisor: **Date:**

For Office Use Only:

Date received by AO Date sent to

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(MPH):..... examiners:.....

Examiners are requested to refer to the accompanying document “*DISSERTATION GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS*”, which should be read in conjunction with these guidelines.

The dissertation is the equivalent of one semester's full time study and is worth 40 credit points at Griffith University, 48 credit points at Queensland University of Technology and 8 units at the University of Queensland. Students have, on average, 18 - 20 weeks to prepare their dissertation.

As a guide to examiners, it is suggested that the level and standard of the dissertation is between that of an honours thesis and that of a research masters thesis. Whilst the size of the dissertation may not be as substantial as the above theses, it is hoped that the majority of dissertations will form the basis of a paper publishable in a refereed journal such as the Australian Journal of Public Health or its equivalent.

Examiner's Report

Examiners are requested to provide a written report and to complete the Examiner's Report proforma. Under University regulations these may, upon request of the supervisor or student, be made available to students. If examiners wish to make confidential comments concerning a dissertation they are asked to submit them separately to the Centre and mark them "Strictly Confidential"

The report should cover the following points:

1. Degree of relevance of topic to public health
2. Originality: is the student's original contribution to the subject identifiable? Has the work of others been identified (adequately referenced) and acknowledged?
3. Does the dissertation represent the equivalent of one full time semester's work? Does it conform to the layout guidelines?
4. Has the dissertation addressed the aims of the subject as stated in the "Dissertation Guidelines for Students"?
5. Are the layout and contents of the dissertation presented in an adequate and logical manner?
6. Are the aims and objectives of the dissertation clearly stated?
7. Does the background section adequately represent the state of current knowledge and has it been adequately referenced?
8. Are the methods of the study the most appropriate for the stated objectives?
9. Are the results presented in a clear and logical format?
10. Does the discussion summarise the results and critically review them in the light of existing knowledge?
11. Are the conclusions and recommendations logical with the results and discussion? Do they contribute to the body of knowledge of that subject? If so,

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to what extent? To what extent do they contribute to public health knowledge and practice?

Examination Grades

Examiners are requested to recommend one of the following grades to the Examination Committee:

1. Pass: (the dissertation be accepted without modification)
2. Pass: after minor corrections (the dissertation be accepted subject to minor revisions which can be supervised internally)
3. Pass: provisional (the dissertation not be accepted until major revisions have been made, and subsequent re-assessment by examiners)
4. Fail: (the dissertation not be accepted)

In addition, examiners are asked to advise the Centre whether an oral examination is recommended to complete the assessment process. If so, they are asked to indicate which topics should be included for oral assessment.

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EXAMINER'S REPORT - MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH

(To be completed after reference to notes provided for the guidance of examiners)

Examiner:..... **Candidate:**.....

I am willing to have my identity revealed to the supervisor o YES NO o

I am willing to have my identity revealed to the candidate o YES NO o

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION ON DISSERTATION

After examination of the above dissertation (and the supporting papers, if any) I recommend:

Tick one only:

- (i) PASS: (that the dissertation be accepted without modification)
- (ii) PASS, after minor corrections: (that the dissertation be accepted subject to minor revisions)
- (iii) PASS, provisional: (that the dissertation not be accepted until major revisions have been made, and subsequent re-assessment by examiners)
- (iv) Oral examination be required
- (v) FAIL: (that the dissertation not be accepted)

In marking a detailed report on the dissertation, comments and suggestions should be full enough to enable the University to gauge the quality of the dissertation. Comments should follow the points indicated in the ***“GUIDELINES FOR THE EXAMINATION OF DISSERTATIONS.”***

Guidance for any revision or textual correction referred to in the examiner's summary recommendation should be included. When the recommendation is made that the candidate be allowed to revise and resubmit the dissertation, it is particularly important to give sufficiently specific indications of the nature of the required revisions.

.....

Examiner's Signature

Date:.....