The purpose of the Master of Public Health Project (MPH) is to provide the student with an opportunity to integrate all academic coursework and practical experience into an independent project. This serves as the capstone experience for Health Policy and Management students. The MPH project may be a research study, a literature-based analytical study or a community- or organizational-based project, involving planning, implementing and/or evaluating. A 3-credit project is required of all MPH candidates.

1. **Credits**: Three credits of Independent Study-MPH Problem (PH696D). Students will typically be enrolled into this course during the last semester of the student’s curriculum. Students cannot directly enroll into this course; the faculty advisor notifies the departmental office.

2. **Supervision**: The MPH project is directed by one HPM faculty, although students are strongly encouraged to have a 2-person committee. Any member of the HPM graduate faculty may serve as the major supervisor. Additional committee members may be added, including those outside the Department of Public Health, or School of Public Health and Health Sciences, if desired. All committee members shall be members of the graduate faculty.

3. **Procedure**: The student should contact a faculty member to determine their interest in the proposed project and their ability to serve as the Chair of the MPH Committee. Students are encouraged to discuss ideas for their project with all relevant faculty. Many students develop projects as a result of an interest developed in a course, or as a result of an internship experience. Students will write a proposal (described below), which must be approved by the supervising faculty at least two months before the oral presentation of the final project. The proposal is considered a study contract between the supervising faculty and the student, and serves to provide overall direction to the completion of the project. The student and the supervising faculty should carefully identify the completion process, including frequency of meetings and the revision process.
Proposal. The project proposal must be typed in the same format as that required for a master’s thesis including a signature page. (See Typing Guidelines for Master’s Theses and Doctoral Dissertations available at the Office of Degree Requirements, 534 Goodell). or at umass.edu/gradschool/students_typing_guidelines.htm.

The proposal should include the following sections, which may be modified for the requirements of the specific project.

a) Background statement that outlines the context of the problem to be studied and at least a brief outline of pertinent literature and a state of the art summary on the topic to be addressed. It is expected that this section will define the conceptual or theoretical background for the study project, as well as identifying relevant literature supporting the topic. This section should serve as the outline for the literature review to be contained in the final project.

b) Statement of the question(s) to be raised, problem(s) to be solved, and the objective(s) of the study. This section serves as the overall purpose of the project.

c) Methodology outline or description. This is the central feature of the proposal and should be completed carefully. This section should make explicit how the question(s), problem(s) and objective(s) stated in section (b) are to be carried out. This includes identifying relevant measures for variables; the design of the study or project; the method of data collection; description of the study site (if appropriate); and /or how is a program to be instituted and/or evaluated. The method of analysis of information gathered as part of the project process should be identified. This section should conclude with identification of anticipated limitations or challenges that may be encountered.

d) Human Subject protection. This section should indicate the procedures which will be used to insure confidentiality and protection of the privacy of the subjects. An informed consent statement should be included if primary source data are being collected. This section should also indicate whether an outside, institutional Review Board (IRB) is approving the project. Data collection from human subjects or from confidential records, may not proceed until an IRB approval has been obtained. In most cases, any study using data collected from human subjects should be reviewed by the SPHHS IRB. The form may be obtained from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Institutional Review Board. The form is available at: http://www.umass.edu/research/comply/IRBsubmission.html. The approved form should be included with the proposal.
e.) Significance. There should be some thoughtful comment that explains the importance of the anticipated outcome, such as its contribution to program effectiveness, meeting community needs, professional development, its collection and annotation of existing literature, its validation of an instrument, etc.

f.) References. A complete list of sources cited in the proposal should be included and cited in an academically appropriate fashion.

5. Final MPH Report: A final written project report is required, which is an expansion of each of the sections identified above. This includes a complete analytical literature review which provides the academic framework for the project. The methodology section should be modified to describe the actual process used, including any challenges that required a change from the proposal. The report should also include a description and analysis of relevant findings, a more extended summary of limitations and any recommendations or conclusions that arise as a result of the project. The final report is to be typed in the same format as that required for a master’s thesis (see: Typing Guidelines for Master’s Theses and Doctoral Dissertations available at the Office of Degree Requirements, 534 Goodell) and is to be reviewed and approved (signed) by the supervising faculty and also by the Graduate Program Director, after the final oral presentation. An electronic pdf copy must be filed with the Division of Community Health Studies: it does not have to be submitted to the Graduate School.

6. Final Oral Presentation. When the HPM graduate faculty serving as the major supervisor feels that MPH project is complete, an oral presentation is scheduled. The purpose of this presentation is to provide an opportunity for the student to share the result of this experience with the faculty and other students. Part of the oral presentation will be devoted to identification of how this independent project has provided an integration of the student’s entire curriculum in Public Health. This presentation is not an oral defense, nor an oral exam, but rather an opportunity for the student to demonstrate both depth and breadth of the knowledge gained through the MPH program. The student is expected to present the key elements of the project, including the overall purpose, data and methods, results, limitations and the significance of the results within the context of the field of public health. Since the MPH and the oral presentation is a capstone experience, the student is expected to relate this particular project to the field of public health, as well as to health policy and management itself. Questions are asked by all present. After the question period, the committee meets alone in executive session to discuss the student’s performance, as well as the quality of the project, and then informs the student of the result.
Graduate School regulations require that all members of the committee must be present for the presentation to be held. Each committee member should receive a final properly formatted copy of the MPH paper at least two weeks prior to the presentation. All Department of Public Health faculty and students are invited to the presentation, along with any relevant individuals selected by the student and the supervising faculty. The Graduate Program Director must be notified at least two weeks prior to the project presentation as to date, time, place, title of project and members of the committee so an announcement of the presentation may be sent out to all faculty and graduate students in the Department of Public Health. Although minor revisions may be suggested as a result of the oral presentation, the presentation should not be scheduled until the project is completed to the satisfaction of the student and the supervising faculty. The student should bring to the presentation the cover sheet for the supervising faculty to sign. All signatures should be in black ink.

**Grading the MPH project.** The Committee Chair (i.e., HPM graduate faculty serving as the major supervisor) is responsible for submitting the grade for the MPH project. It is important that this be done promptly after the oral presentation so the student can graduate.

**Important Note:** The Graduate School has time guidelines as to when all material for a May date on the diploma, which is usually in late April. If this deadline is not met, the diploma will be dated in August. All students are strongly encouraged to complete their oral presentation at least by the end of May, ensuring an August date on the diploma. Students who wish to have a May diploma, must be able to complete all requirements, including the oral presentation by mid-April.