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Introduction to the Practicum and Studies Project Manual for the MSPH Program in Public Health Informatics

The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), the accrediting body for graduate programs in public health, requires students to complete a practicum. A practicum serves as a structured and significant educational experience that takes place in an agency, institution, or community under the supervision of site administrators and the guidance of the student's department. This experience is intended to give students the opportunity to develop professional skills in an actual public health practice setting. In addition, CEPH requires an integrative capstone experience for all advanced degrees. This capstone experience may take many forms, including a comprehensive examination, formal research paper, or a summary paper describing a practicum assignment. The MSPH program in Public Health Informatics (PHI) requires all students to conduct a Special Studies Project (SSP). The SSP is a capstone experience that integrates the content and skills associated with the professional practice of Public Health. This document describes the design, timing and details of the SSPH for the PHI program.

A. Overview of Special Studies Project

The practicum, with its documentation in the associated SSP, is the culminating experience in the PHI program. The purpose of the practicum and SSP is to provide a unique learning opportunity in which the student can demonstrate competencies in public health. This activity is one of the student's choosing. A practicum may occur in any applied information science setting related to public health. It may entail systems specification, design, development, or deployment. It should be consonant with the student’s career goals and be consistent with the intent of the PHI program. The SSP is then a critical evaluation of the practicum experience. This evaluation should contain a description of the motivating problem, the solutions considered, and the rationale for the chosen solution. It should also contain a description of the implementation of the solution accompanied by a critical appraisal of this implementation. Finally, the SSP should contain recommendations regarding future steps and implications.

The SSP is designed to be flexible and allow the student, working with faculty and professional mentors, to design a capstone experience that both demonstrates the student's mastery of a public health discipline, and is relevant to his or her short and long-term career objectives.

This document explains the SSP, defines the requirements for completion of the SSP, and contains copies of important SSP documents and forms.

B. Goal of the Special Studies Project

The practicum and association SSP requires the design, implementation, and critical evaluation of a project. The student applies the principles and methods learned in academic studies to the planning and implementation, analysis, and interpretation of the practicum and SSP. The student will be evaluated on the following criteria:
1. demonstration of a high level of ability in planning and implementing a project;
2. level of effort;
3. adherence to proposed time line for the study completion;
4. ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate public health literature and data; and
5. quality of written document.

C. Competencies Associated with the Special Studies Project

Completing the practicum and associated SSP will help you build capacity in a number of areas. Competencies are knowledge and skills expected for the practice of public health informatics.

At the completion of the practicum and SSP, the student will demonstrate competence in:

1. Selecting a problem appropriate for the profession of Public Health Informatics;
2. Stating the purpose and rationale for the project or activity that further clarifies the problem;
3. Reviewing literature and resources relevant to the problem;
4. Identifying appropriate questions;
5. Designing the project (outline the specific methodology and limitations);
6. Conducting the project;
7. Collecting and analyzing the data;
8. Interpreting the data accurately and writing recommendations or implications through interpretation of the collected data; and
9. Writing a descriptive document that complies with the specific format requirements and that details the project.

D. SSP Proposal Form

The purpose of this form is to formalize your thoughts about your practicum and SSP project. You should start thinking about your project seriously in the second semester of the program. (See Appendix B)

E. IRB

The Emory University Institutional Review Board is a research oversight committee charged with assuring, both in advance and by periodic review, that appropriate steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating as subjects in approved research studies. For more information and necessary forms, go to http://www.emory.edu/IRB/ (See Appendix C)

F. SSP Overview Table: the following table provides a visual review of the SSP.
### Introduction and Statement of and Context for the Problem
The statement of the problem should discuss the background and significance of the problem. Why is the student interested in a particular project? Assess the context within which the topic has arisen. Is the problem significant so that it warrants investigation? How is the problem related to the broader field of Public Health? This should be written in present tense.

### Review of the Literature
The literature review addresses the question of how the problem fits into the broader field of Public Health. The literature review provides a larger context within which the project can be placed. The literature review discusses what has and has not been discovered about the problem, gaps related to the problem, and justification for your project. All possible solutions to the problem should be described here. This should be written in past tense.

### Methodology
This chapter discusses the approach that was chosen to reach the objectives. It should contain a rationale for the selection of the chosen solution, or alternatively, why other solutions were rejected. It should describe in detail the approach that is taken. This should be written in past tense.

### Results
Presentation of the overview of the project in narrative and graphical forms. This should be written in past tense.

### Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations
Discussions of the findings as it relates to current policy or public health. The implementation of the solution should be critically evaluated. Recommendation should be made regarding the implementation as well as for future directions for this project. This should be written in present tense.

### G. General Procedures for Completing the Practicum and Special Studies Project
1. Enroll in INFO 595R for the semester in which the practicum is undertaken. Enroll in INFO 598R for subsequent semesters. Although it often takes more than one semester to complete the project, the student will be officially enrolled in the SSP during one semester. The SSP is four credit hours.

2. Select a relevant topic. You can obtain reports done by previous PHI students from the director of the PHI program for review.

3. Your SSP Field Advisor can be RSPH faculty, adjunct instructors, experts in the field in which you are conducting your SSP, or your workplace supervisor. The SSP field advisor acts as a resource person, assists in
defining the problem to be studied, helps provide access to information, and reviews drafts of the proposal and final document. The SSP field advisor should be educationally prepared at the master's degree level or have equivalent work experience.

4. Review the predetermined dates for the SSP completion and review these dates with field advisor.

5. Identify the following items and complete the SSP Proposal Form
   a. Field Advisor and Director of PHI program
   b. anticipated graduation date
   c. SSP title
   d. Project description
   e. Proposed solutions

Seek approval for the SSP proposal from your Field Advisor and Director of the PHI program. Both the Field Advisor and Director of the PHI program must sign the SSP Topic Proposal Form (see Appendix D). This form must be placed in the student’s file no later than the topic approval date (See Appendix F for deadlines according to graduation date). If the student makes changes in the project, an amended SSP Proposal Form must be signed and placed in the file. It is the responsibility of the student to negotiate all changes with the SSP Field Advisor. Failure to negotiate the changes can jeopardize the student’s timely completion of the MSPH degree.

6. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Human Investigations Committee should be obtained as necessary before the project is begun. If human subjects or personal data files are involved, approval by the Human Investigations Committee can be required. Obtaining permission from the Human Investigations Committee may take several weeks. This process may take longer if sensitive material is involved. The Director of the PHI program can assist you in deciding whether or not IRB clearance is required for your SSP. In some cases, the project that you are doing can be covered under a previous submission to the IRB or it might be covered under the IRB of a collaborating agency. In all cases, a signature from your SSP Field Advisor and the Director of the PHI program must accompany your IRB application. See Appendix C and visit the website www.emory.edu/IRB.

7. Write drafts of chapters 1-3 (introduction, review of literature, and methodology).

8. Implement the project. Throughout the project, the student should communicate with the SSP Field Advisor and apprise him/her of the progress of the project or activity.
9. Conduct the activity as described in the proposal.

10. Evaluate the activity.

11. Write a draft of the final document.

12. Submit the initial draft of the document to the SSP Field Advisor for review. Based upon the recommendations of the Field Advisor, the student will revise the document as many times as necessary.

13. The standard reference style for the SSP is American Psychological Association (APA) found in the American Psychological Association Style Manual 5th edition. However, if the student’s circumstances are such that a different reference style is appropriate, the student’s Field Advisor may give permission for the student to change the reference style. If a certain change in reference style is made, the student will be required to provide the Field Advisor with the necessary resources to evaluate the SSP. i.e. American Medical

For the sake of this SSP manual, reference will only be made to the APA Style Manual.

14. Prepare the final copy of the document and gain approval from Field Advisor and PHI program Director.

15. The Field Advisor and the Director of the PHI program must sign the approval page (see Appendix E) prior to binding the project. An original approval page should be signed for each copy of the SSP.

16. Have the final document bound. Binding is done in the Health Sciences Central Library and Technical Services (See Appendix D). You are required to make at least two copies, one for the library and one for PHI Department. The documents should be printed on at least 20-25% cotton paper and a signature pages must be included for each bound copy. The cost is ten dollars per document and needs to be paid upfront. The binding takes approximately four weeks. Arrangements need to be made for the bound documents to be picked up or mailed to one address for five dollars per copy. Make arrangement for pick up or mailing with the bindery. Your bindery receipt or a photocopy of it must be submitted to the ADAP for the PHI program to be cleared for graduation.

H. Field Advisor

This individual is a practicing public health professional who can provide the student with substantive, technical guidance. The field advisor acts as a resource person, assists
in defining the topic and problem to be studied, helps provide access to information, and reviews drafts of the proposal and final document.

I. SSP Formatting Guidelines

The final document consists of the following format:
(See Appendix E for an example)

Preliminary Materials

1. Title
2. Dedication and Acknowledgments
3. Approval Pages
4. Student Submission
5. Table of Contents
6. List of tables
7. List of figures
8. Abstract

Body of the Document

Each chapter, except chapter one, should include an introduction and summary paragraph.

Chapter I. Introduction

a. Background/Problem statement (general statement of the problem)
b. Significance Statement
c. Purpose Statement
d. Assumptions
e. Definitions of terms

Chapter II. Review of the Literature

a. Discussion of trends
b. Review of previous research
c. Summary of current status of the problem
d. Discussion of all possible solutions and their relative strengths and weaknesses

Chapter III. Methodology

a. Description of chosen solution
b. Rationale for solution choice
c. Limitations, if appropriate
Chapter IV. Results

a. Description of outcome
b. Discussion of findings pertinent to each objective
c. Other findings – what problems arose during the implementation of the proposed solution? How were these problems addressed?

Chapter V. Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

a. Summary/Overview of project
b. Conclusions
c. Implications for practice
d. Recommendations

References
Appendices

J. Establishing a Personal Timeline

While you have several people assisting you in the SSP, ultimately you are responsible for its timely completion. It is helpful to set a timeline for yourself early in the process to ensure you complete chapters and activities on time. Before setting your timeline however, keep these tips in mind:

1. Look over the entire SSP manual.
2. Begin to think of ideas for your topic.
3. Begin to contact potential field advisors.
4. Confirm field advisor and discuss ideas.
5. Get in touch with your faculty advisor to discuss ideas.
6. Set up meeting with faculty advisor.
7. Set up a tentative timeline and discuss options with your Field Advisor.
8. Take human subject certification test and submit application for IRB/HIC approval, if needed. (www.emory.edu/IRB)
9. Once you have a clear idea of you topic, get in touch with the reference librarian for the Health Sciences Library to start the literature search process.
10. Submit SSP Proposal Form with draft of purpose statement, research questions, and a brief outline of proposed methodology and data analysis plan to your faculty advisor.
11. Submit draft of chapters 1-3 to your Field Advisor.
12. Complete analysis of research question/hypothesis or goals and objectives and submit to committee.
13. Submit application for degree/graduation to Student Services.
14. Submit draft of complete SSP to Field Advisor and PHI Director.
15. Obtain signatures from your Field Advisor and PHI Director.
16. Make any changes to draft.
17. Submit final SSP document to the bindery in the Health Sciences Library.
18. Pick up bound copies of SSP from the bindery or arrange for them to be mailed to you at five dollars per copy (one address only).

K. Library Assistance

The Medical Library at Emory University is available to provide assistance throughout the SSP. In addition, many of the library resources can be made available to students via the Internet (http://www.emory.edu/WHSCL) and other forms of technology.

L. Academic Honesty

In accordance with University By-Laws, the President of the University has delegated to the Dean and faculties of each School the responsibility of designing honor and conduct codes for its students. This Code of Student Honor and Conduct in the School of Public Health and the procedures in cases of alleged misconduct were formulated by a committee appointed by the Student Government Faculty members appointed by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs have reviewed this document, and it has been approved by the Dean of the School.

The Emory University School of Public Health expects all members of its community to maintain academic integrity in their course of study and to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to a public health professional and consistent with the standards of Emory University.

1. Student Academic Honor The School of Public Health requires that all material submitted by a student in fulfilling his or her academic course of study must be the original work of the student.

2. Violations of Academic Honor Violations of academic honor include any action by a student indicating dishonesty or a lack of integrity in academic ethics. Violations in this category include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, or falsifying research data.

   a. Cheating includes but is not limited to seeking, acquiring, receiving, or passing on information about the content of an examination prior to its authorized release or during its administration, or attempting to do so. Cheating also includes seeking, using, giving or obtaining unauthorized assistance in any academic assignment or examination, or attempting to do so.

   b. Plagiarism is the act of presenting as one's own work the expression, words, or ideas of another person whether published or unpublished (including the work of another student). A writer's work should be
regarded as his or her own property. Any person who uses another writer’s work, in part or full, without proper acknowledgement is guilty of plagiarism.

3. Additional resources regarding plagiarism:
   http://www.ehhs.cmich.edu/~mspears/plagiarism.html
   http://www.hamilton.edu/academic/resource/wc/avoidingplagiarism.html
   http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/wts/plagiarism.html

4. Falsifying Research Data includes but is not limited to creating information not actually collected and altering information and/or data.

For more information about academic honesty at the Rollins School of Public Health, go to http://www.sph.emory.edu/studentservice/conductcode.html.
Chapter I Introduction

The Introduction answers the question:

What is the Problem?

The purpose of Chapter I is to describe the general public health problem of concern and define the specific problem to be addressed in the SSP. The background and conceptual framework for the study or activity is provided.

A. Outline of Chapter I

Chapter I should include the following elements:

1. Background
2. Problem statement
3. Purpose statement
4. Significance statement
5. Assumptions
6. Definition of terms

1. Background

The introduction should include a problem statement, purpose statement and significance statement. The statements should help the reader understand the problem, the background of the problem, its ramifications, any related social and economic cost associated with the problem, and its theoretical and practical significance for the field of Public Health.

2. Problem Statement

A problem statement is a logically constructed essay that clearly and succinctly "states" the problem that your SSP is intended to address. The purpose of a problem statement is to:

a. Provide a context for your research / project,
b. Persuade the reader, through logic and documentation, that there is a pressing need for the outcome of your project,
c. Define the problem driving your project in jargon-free, common sense language.
d. A problem statement should not assume prior highly specialized knowledge or vocabulary on the part of the reader. Use plain language and, if it is necessary to include them, define specialized terms.
Always define acronyms the first time they are used.

e. A problem statement is not a literature review. It is a good idea to use citations to document any assertions that you make but clarity, succinctness, and a dazzling display of logic are the real goals here — save comprehensive and detailed coverage of the issues under discussion for other sections of the paper.

f. A problem statement is not a statement of purpose. Do not say what you intend to do in your project. Simply describe the problem driving you to do the project.

g. A problem statement is not a methods section. Do not address project methods or objectives.

Your problem statement should move from broad to narrow. First, the broad implications for Public Health are described. Second, reference is given to the Public Health Problem. Third and fourth, a knowledge gap and the possible consequences of that knowledge gap are identified. Next, the researcher’s vision for how the world might be made different as a result of filling the knowledge gap is articulated. Last, a single paragraph should summarize the precise knowledge gap. This is the actual “statement of the problem” which has already been put into context and justified.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Please bear in mind that all research is about the production of knowledge or information. People can, and should be encouraged to use that information to improve the world but, ultimately, all you are delivering in your SSP is knowledge. Consequently, even if your project concerns the design, implementation, and/or evaluation of an actual activity, it is necessary that your problem statement, be concerned with the lack of information necessary to promote a desired action, not the action itself.

3. Purpose Statement

If you have written your problem statement clearly, it should leave the reader feeling that there is a genuine need for the information that your research/project will provide. As a result, a purpose statement should immediately follow your problem statement. That is, an explicit description of what you propose to do to fill the identified gap in knowledge. Many experienced public health researchers, upon picking up a SSP, will turn immediately to the purpose statement to see what the research/project is about.

A successful purpose statement will specify the broad goal(s) of the project. It should be followed immediately by a serial listing of project objectives that relate to the specific project activities you will conduct in order to accomplish the broad goal(s).

a. Avoid creativity, strive for simplicity.

b. A purpose statement is normally between one sentence and three paragraphs in length. Keep it simple
c. The purpose statement that you write for your proposal should be written in the future tense (as opposed to the present and past tense usage in your statement). The purpose statement should be rewritten in the past tense for your final SSP.

d. If your problem statement is well written, your purpose statement will not need to justify your purpose, the "why" should be obvious from the problem statement.

e. Literature should not be cited in the purpose statement.

4. Significance Statement

A successful significance statement will make it clear to readers how the world will be a better place if the knowledge you are creating in your project is applied — in short, why your project matters. As stated above, do not forget that all you are delivering in your SSP is knowledge. On the other hand, knowledge without action is a waste of the time spent creating the knowledge. As the sage "Anon." puts it, "To make a difference you must take action, no one cares about the win/loss record of the umpire." In short, a significance statement specifies why people should care about solving the problem and how people might put this new knowledge to work. Significance statements are future oriented.

a. Do not discuss methodology in the significance statement. This section isn't about "how," it is about "why".

b. The simple fact that a study has not been done before does not necessarily mean that it needs to be done. Similarly, the fact that a particular piece of knowledge does not yet exist does not mean that the world needs that knowledge. You will need to use some other reason than "because no one has looked into this before," to justify your project.

c. It is not out of the question to include citations in your significance statement as long as you do not go overboard and forget that this is not the literature review chapter. Citations are most justifiable in a significance statement when you are arguing for the theoretical importance of your work when you are saying how your work will expand the existing knowledge base in a meaningful way.

d. Do not reproduce the problem statement in the significance statement. In all likelihood, the reader will have read your problem statement less than five minutes previously and the repetition will come across as boring, stilted, uninspired, condescending, or all of the above. That goes for the rest of the document too. Nowhere in your SSP should you repeat exact sentences, paragraphs, or logical arguments. If you put them in the right place, you only have to say them once.

e. The biggest challenge in writing a significance statement for your
proposal is that you do not yet know your findings. Ironically, this is a Catch 22 because even after you do know your findings (such as when you are preparing the final version of your SSP), you should write the significance statement as if you don't know them yet.

f. Don't let your arguments about the possible application of your knowledge appear as bias. It will make the reader question the integrity of your data collection and interpretation methodology.

g. The major distinction between the significance statement in Chapter I and the "implications" section in Chapter V is that, by the time that your reader gets that far, the findings have been spelled out and you can be very specific about their application to the world of public health.

This information is adapted from materials produced by Dr. Thomas Valentine, Department of Adult Education, University of Georgia, Athens, GA, USA January 1990 and by Kimberly Sessions, EdD September 2001

6. Definition of terms

All terms with ambiguous meanings are operationally defined in the context of the study. The meanings of many terms vary when they are used in different contexts or in the same context by different researchers. Terms like community, adolescent, self esteem, drinking, exercise, and curriculum all seem to convey a precise meaning when, in fact, they will vary in definition by when, where, and by who uses them. Once the terms are defined in Chapter I, the author of the SSP is stating to all readers that throughout the entire document, the terms will convey the same meaning unless otherwise noted. The terms that need defining include those terms that are used in the SSP title, purpose, significance, problem, unique aspects of the problem to be studied, and methods.

B. Ethics in Research

The RSPH requires that all material submitted by a student fulfilling his or her academic course of study must be the original work of the student. Violations of academic honor include any action by a student indicating dishonesty or a lack of integrity in academic ethics. Violations in this category include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, or falsifying research data.
Chapter II

Review of the Literature

The Review of the Literature answers the questions:

What has and has not been discovered about the problem?

The review of the literature (ROL) synthesizes previous research to facilitate an understanding of the problem up to the present. It provides the preface for the present research problem and allows the student to justify the importance of the present SSP project. Sources of literature include historical and recent publications, vital statistics, data from relevant agencies, communications from experts, etc. The chapter includes specific discussion of the nature of the problem such as, descriptions of agencies involved with the problem, research studies which have investigated the problem, summaries of reviews of the problem, and the relevance of the problem to your target population. Discuss findings of other studies in past tense yet their conclusions and recommendations in the present tense. A thorough yet concise ROL will generally range from 8 to 15 pages.

A. Outline of Chapter II

Chapter II should include the following elements:

1. Introductory paragraph
2. Body of ROL
3. Summary of current problem and study relevance
4. Review of potential solutions and their relative strengths and weaknesses

1. Introductory paragraph

State outline of ROL and justification of literature selected.

2. Body of ROL

Organize by subheadings. Ensure a logical flow both between and within each subheading. Organizational options include: 1) older to recent work; 2) weaker to stronger work; or 3) vague to specific work. End each subsection with a few specific summary statements.
3. **Summary of current problem and study relevance**

Summarize the current status of the problem and how your study builds upon the literature reviewed. State specific, detailed, overall strengths and limitations of the literature. End with a couple of **concise** statements on how your proposed project will address these and build on the literature.

4. **Review of potential solutions and comparative strengths and weaknesses**

For the problem assessed in the practicum, there will likely as not be several potential solutions. In this section you will review these potential solutions and describe the relative strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

**B. Critiquing the Literature**

The process of researching the literature is time-consuming. However, you can become more efficient by planning a research strategy in advance. Take the time to learn how to access and use literature databases correctly such as Medline, Psychlit, and ERIC. Conduct well planned searches. Consult a research librarian on choosing appropriate search terms.

It is also a good idea to record references and summaries of articles and books as you review them. This will save you the time of having to re-read many sources. If outlined properly, previously reviewed items can also be quickly skimmed for gaps. Consider creating a “Review Guide” for you to use in critiquing papers that includes the following:

1. Title:
2. Reference:
3. Summary:
4. Purpose:
5. Methodology:
6. Strengths:
7. Weaknesses:
8. Main points relevant to SSP:

**C. Forgotten Sources for the ROL**

When conducting a review of literature, we instinctively turn to traditional sources such as research journals and books. However, less-traditional sources are useful, sometimes critical, to framing the full scope of a problem. Consider searching government documents for census data, publications from government offices, hearing transcripts, and relevant legislation and judicial rulings.

Professional associations may also be a good source of current information. Attend annual conventions. Abstracts from presentations are available for review through
the library or by request from the specific agency.

D. Non-traditional Sources

As we become immersed in the information age, e-mail communications and the Internet are gaining in popularity. Methodologies for citing these sources vary in the literature. APA has established some general guidelines for use of on-line information (1994) *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association: Fourth Edition* (see pp. 218-222).

If you plan to utilize and search the Internet, keep the following tips in mind:

1. Keep records of the search engine you used (Yahoo, Altavista, Excite, etc.) and how many matches were found.

2. Critically evaluate the source. Look at the address of the site and send e-mail to the webmaster to verify the source. Addresses are found at the bottom of the screen and can be deciphered as follows:

   http:// = this is the beginning of all addresses indicating the programming language used for the site.

   www = indicates a World Wide Web site.

   Letters following http://www indicate the name of the source. For example, http://www.emory.edu tells you that Emory maintains the page. Sometimes pages branch into subsections: http://www.sph.emory.edu or http://www.sph/emory.edu indicates that you are accessing sph (School of Public Health) a subsection of the Emory page. The last three letters of the address indicate the type of organization. For example, http://www.emory.edu indicates that you have accessed an educational institution. Other extensions include .gov (government), .com (commercial) .org (private organization) and .mil (military).

3. BE AWARE OF LINKS. Many web sites will provide you with links to related web sites. The link sites may also have their own links and so on. Users can easily jump sites without realizing it. Be careful that you cite the correct source by checking the address at the bottom of the screen.

4. If possible, print out web pages as secondary documentation. This is always important, as information is constantly changed or moved.

5. Web sites change frequently. Unlike journal articles, you cannot always access archival editions because hard copies may not exist. **Be sure to record the date**
for the information you plan to report. Try e-mailing the site webmaster to request hard copies of reports or other documents from their organization that may not be included on the web site.

6. Treat e-mail communications as personal communication for documentation purposes.

7. Refer to the most recent APA publications manual for suggested citation methods.
Chapter III Methodology

The Methodology answers the question:

How was this project accomplished?

The purpose of Chapter III is the description of the actual steps undertaken to implement the SSP. This chapter is generally organized and presented in the chronological order of events. When the student is writing the proposal, this section is the plan for conducting the study or activity. Special attention should be given to the Emory University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Clearance process.

A. Outline of Chapter III

Chapter III should include the following elements:

1. Introduction
2. Detailed description of the solution
3. Rationale for choice of solution
4. Limitations, if appropriate

1. Introduction

2. Detailed description of the solution

This section describes the procedures of the project of the SSP. If you are conducting a project, this chapter describes the approach used to reach the goals and objectives.

3. Rationale for choice of solution

In the previous chapter, you presented alternative solutions proposed for the project. In this section, you provide a justification for the given approach that you have selected for implementation.

4. Limitations

Limitations set the boundaries for a project. Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that are beyond your control. Example: The convenience sample decreases the generalizability of the findings.
Delimitations are factors, that you set, that narrow the scope of the project.

Example: This study will involve only second-year medical students at Emory School of Medicine.

In writing the limitations and delimitations section, do the following steps:

a. Identify potential weaknesses inherent in the methodology. List the reasons.

b. Identify how your project will be limited in scope. List several reasons.
Chapter IV

Results

The Results Section answers the question:

Were Your Hunches Correct?

Chapter IV organizes the project results or outcomes around the goals. Chapter IV will focus on a description of the finished product. This is the explanation of the product you ended up with.

A. Outline of Chapter IV

Chapter IV should include the following elements:

1. Introduction
2. Description of outcome, in particular the findings pertinent to each objective
   Other findings – what problems arose during the implementation of the proposed solution? How were these problems addressed?

1. Introduction

2. Description of outcome
   This section consists of a description of outcome results. Use project objectives to present major results. Enhance your narrative with tables and charts. Describe the results of each hypothesis, research question or major objective. Summarize information in the narrative. Provide graphical depictions of the data.

3. Other findings
   Present unexpected findings in this section. Did any problems arise during the course of reaching the project objectives? How did you address or overcome these problems?
Chapter V

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations Section answers the question:

What do these outcomes tell us?

Chapter V allows the researcher to identify and discuss the major findings. In essence, Chapter V is the most critical chapter of the SSP because this is the place where master level students have the freedom to critique their work. In Chapter V, students first compare their work in relationship to the content of the previous four chapters. Students need to use the background provided in their course of study in the PHI program to decide what is important to include and to demonstrate their fuller understanding of the meaning of the SSP and its application to the profession of public health. It is important to note, however, in Chapter V students may not introduce new concepts that are not previously addressed in the previous four chapters.

A. Outline of Chapter V

Chapter V should include the following elements:

1. Introduction
2. Summary of study
3. Conclusions
4. Implications for Practice
5. Recommendations

1. Introduction

2. Summary of study

A brief summary of the problem, methodology, results, and conclusion is given.

3. Conclusion

This is a discussion of the major accomplishments of the project. The conclusions are summary statements that restate the project objectives as met or unmet in light of the steps undertaken in the project.
4. Implications

Implications are consequences to public health theory or practice should the conclusions become widely accepted. Possible applications of the findings to the field of Public Health may be discussed. Talk about specific implications for the organization or program the project is done through, if appropriate.

5. Recommendations

Recommendations are those suggestions for action or study that would further clarify or validate the outcomes of the project. In light of the implementation of the solution, what problems were encountered? How were these problems resolved? What would you have done differently with your current level of knowledge? What are the future directions for this activity?
Other SSP Documentation *(copies of these pages are in Appendix E.)*

1. **Abstract.** All SSPs are required to have an abstract of the study or activity. An abstract is a brief summary (350 words or less) of the major components of the project, including the purpose of the study or project, the methods and procedures, the outcomes, and the conclusions and implications. An **executive summary** is an expanded version of the abstract. The abstract is typically written last after completion of the chapters of the SSP document.

2. **Appendix.** Anything not included in the text of Chapters I - V and is important for the understanding of the design, implementation, or conclusions of the SSP should be attached as an appendix. All instruments (i.e. cover letters, consent forms, relevant project materials, etc.) used for collection of information should be included here. All appendices must have references within the text of Chapters I-V. A list of appendices is included as a part of the table of contents at the front of the document.

3. **References.** The reference list includes all cited references in the SSP. The format for referencing documents, articles, personal communications, etc., is detailed in the APA Style Manual.

4. **Tables and Figures.** All tables and figures included in Chapters I-V should be referred to within the text. All tables and figures cited from other sources need a reference citation. The tables and figures should follow as soon as appropriate in the text. Tables and figures can be within the body of the text or on separate pages without text. Where they are placed is determined by their size and by their ease for referencing. The format for tables and figures is given in the APA Style Manual. A List of Tables and a List of Figures are included as parts of the Table of Contents at the beginning of the final document.

5. **Table of Contents.** The table of contents lists all the major typical areas of the document with the referent page numbers. All tables, figures and appendices have separate listings in the table of contents.

6. **Preliminary Pages.** The preliminary pages include those pages of the document that are uniform for all these within the MSPH-PHI program. These include:

   1. Title
   2. Dedication and Acknowledgments
   3. Approval Pages
   4. Student Submission
   5. Table of Contents
   6. List of tables
   7. List of figures
   8. Abstract
Writing the Special Studies Project

This section includes tips on writing style and formatting specifications for writing the SSP. It will discuss application of the appropriate style to the SSP. In addition, it will describe how to turn your SSP into a journal article and presenting your SSP at a public health meeting.

A. Tips on Writing Style

Use proper grammar and verb tenses. Spell out fractions and numbers that begin a sentence. Use technical writing style.

Maintain continuity through transitional links:

- time links: then, next, after, while, since
- cause-effect links: therefore, consequently, as a result
- addition links: in addition, similarly, moreover
- contrast links: however, conversely, although, but

Keep verb tense same through a chapter:

- Introductions: present tense
- Literature review: past tense
- Description of the proposed procedure: future tense
- Description of the completed procedure: past tense
- Discussion of results: present tense
- Conclusions from results: present tense

The research proposal is a formal and objective account of the research project and should be written in the third person. Avoid “I,” “our,” “you,” etc.

Each pronoun should refer clearly to its antecedent noun.

- Pronouns must agree in number with the nouns they replace. (e.g., “the control group improved its score”)
- Pronouns must agree in gender with the nouns they replace. Note: Use “who” for humans, “that/which” for all else.

Acronyms are usually not used except in cases where they are often substituted for the original work (e.g., NIH for National Institutes of Health). However, the first time you use the word, write it completely followed by the acronym in parentheses. Abbreviations that are shortened spellings of words are not used (e.g., mg. for milligrams).

After writing the SSP, review the outline for critically evaluating research in Appendix F.
to determine if you have been comprehensive and thorough in the presentation of your research project.

B. Formatting and Specifications for the SSP

1. The margins must be 1 1/2 inches on the left and 1 inch on the right. The narrative should begin 1 inch down from the top of the page and end 1 inch from the bottom.

2. The original of the final report should be typed or printed (double-spaced) on twenty-pound weight bond paper. There should be no strike-overs or white out used within the original copy. If printed, the print should be letter quality, not dot matrix. The size of the font should be no smaller than 12 points.

3. Upon completion of the final written and approved document, the student has the SSP committee members sign and date the original document. When all signatures are affixed to the original document, this signifies that the student has completed the SSP requirement for the MSPH degree. You must have at least two copies of the SSP bound: one for the Health Sciences Library and one for the Department library.

C. Style Manual

For the written presentation of your Special Studies Project (SSP), you are required to use an academically recognized style manual. The following manual is recommended:

D. Turning the Special Studies Project into a Journal Article

Often PHI students want to prepare the SSP for publication following graduation. The prospective publisher may require the use of a manual and guidelines other than those listed above. If you want to use a manual other than the recommended one, you will need the approval of your SSP advisor.

The purpose of a SSP is to demonstrate the research and writing skills of a graduate student, while the purpose of a journal article is to communicate and contribute knowledge to the profession. The journal article must be concise. The length of the statement of the problem and review of the literature are short. However, the results and discussion are longer because they are often the areas of greatest interest to the readers.

Here are some practical guidelines to follow in turning a SSP into a journal article.

1. Search the journal titles for several that match your SSP topic. An easy way to help pick a journal is to search the SSP bibliography to find the journal that publishes the most on your topic.

2. Copy the author guidelines or write away for the guidelines. Most journals have the author guidelines in each issue. If you do not find them, write to the editor of the journal to request a copy. Many journals have the guidelines online at their website.

3. Review guidelines. Pay close attention to the format, style manual, and word restrictions.

4. Review other current articles in the journal for style and format.

5. Search for parts of the SSP to condense (background, theory, review of the literature, analysis, results, conclusions) or omit (definitions of terms, some analyses).

6. Follow guidelines for number and format of figures and tables.

7. Write first draft.

8. Edit and review by yourself and other authors.

9. Revise article.

10. Review final article with the author guidelines in hand.

11. Write letter to the editor and get all authors’ signatures on letter.
12. Wait for a letter of receipt from the editor of the journal. If you do not hear from the editor within a month, then call to determine if the article has been received.

13. If you are not successful on your first attempt, try again.

Additional References


E. Presentation of Special Studies Project at Professional Meetings

Presentations at professional meetings allow for participants to stay contemporary in their field. These presentations provide you with an opportunity to share your research and develop good presentation skills.

The presentation may be a panel presentation, poster presentation, or roundtable discussions. Usually, presentations last from 10 to 20 minutes. Poster presentations last from 1 to 1-1/2 hours. Roundtable discussions last from 15 to 20 minutes.

To be considered for the meeting agenda, the presenter submits an abstract of the presentation to the convention review board by a given date. The abstract includes a statement of the study objectives, descriptions of the procedures, and results, conclusions, and implications.

For examples of submitted abstracts, look in the final program of past professional meetings of APHA and AAHE.

The convention review board reviews the abstracts and later sends letters of acceptance. In the letter of acceptance, you are given a date, time, and location of the presentation.

To prepare, you should use graphics programs such as PowerPoint to show the main points of the research. Remember to use the health education principles of concise information with large, readable fonts. Bring handouts that describe your presentation. You may also have a sign-up sheet for participants to request more information or copies of the survey instrument.
Here is an example of an abstract for professional meeting.

**EVALUATION OF GEORGIA INFORMATION NETWORK FOR PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS (INPHO) THROUGH QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) initiated the Information Network for Public Health Professionals (INPHO) to build an infrastructure for the exchange of communication and information among public health workers. In December 1992, the Robert W. Woodruff Foundation funded a three-year grant to pilot the INPHO network in Georgia. Georgia INPHO is a statewide electronic information system designed to give public health practitioners in local health departments, Georgia’s 19 health districts, and the State Division of Public Health offices access to timely, authoritative health information and to serve as a mechanism for efficient communications.

The Behavioral Sciences and Health Education department of Rollins School of Public Health has been conducting an evaluation of Georgia INPHO to determine its role in the delivery of public health services in Georgia. The evaluation involves a triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods. This presentation will focus on the use of qualitative methodology to collect information on program impact from public health professionals at the state and district levels. It will describe the development of protocols for the focus groups and in-depth interviews, the methods of facilitating the focus groups and interviews, data coding/analysis procedures, and the reporting of qualitative data. Using the Georgia INPHO experience as an example, this presentation will demonstrate how qualitative research methods may be used to collect information to help improve and strengthen a public health program.
Appendix A

Supplemental Readings (SR)

SR1: Mistakes Sometimes Made in Reviewing Research Literature

SR2: Review of the Literature Guide

SR3: Mistakes Sometimes Made in Critically Evaluating Research
SR1: Mistakes Sometimes Made in Reviewing Research Literature

1. The student carries out a hurried review of the literature to get started on the project. This usually results in overlooking previous studies containing ideas that would have improved the student’s project.

2. The student relies too heavily upon secondary sources.

3. The student concentrates on research findings when reading research articles, thus overlooking valuable information on methods, measures, etc.

4. The student overlooks sources other than scientific journals, such as newspapers, popular magazines, expert opinion, other researchers, etc.

5. The student fails to define satisfactorily the topic limits for the literature review. Searching too broad an area often leads to discouragement or poorly defined research protocols. Searching too narrow an area can result in overlooking many articles that are peripheral to the research topic but contain information that would help in designing a better study. Focusing only on literature that supports the set hypothesis instead of looking at more diverse findings related to the topic and/or research questions/hypothesis.

6. The student copies bibliographic data incorrectly or incompletely and is later unable to locate the reference or cite it properly.

7. The student fails to use all relevant narrow descriptors when conducting a computer search.

SR2: Review of the Literature Guide

Steps in writing a review of the literature:

1. Develop an outline (a structure to give the presentation a meaningful organization). Begin with the major topics (descriptors) and then organize the subtopics. Make sure you plan to review literature on ALL your variables. Review in great depth studies which examined two or more of your variables. Review in less depth those that examined only one of your variables.

2. Research articles should be summarized in your own words. Avoid stringing together series of quotations.

3. The summaries should include information about the sample (including sample size), data collection procedures, findings, and conclusions.

In addition, the following items should be included in the review of the literature:

1. The similarities and differences between the present study and studies conducted by other researchers.

2. The weaknesses and shortcomings (limitations) of their studies.

3. Anticipation of how your study will fill in the gap.

Conclude the review of the literature section with a summary or overview of the problem defined in your study. Point out what has been studied and the adequacy of previous research in this area. Also, point out the gaps or deficiencies in the literature pertaining to your problem.

SR3: Mistakes Sometimes Made in Critically Evaluating Research

1. The researcher gives equal weight to good and weak studies.

2. The researcher fails to pull together evidence from all related studies in order to get an overall understanding of the state of knowledge.

3. The researcher fails to weigh the possible effects of sampling bias in appraisal of the reported research results.

4. The researcher overestimates the importance of research findings that are statistically significant but have no practical significance.

5. The researcher does not detect important errors and then repeats these errors in own research.

6. The researcher overlooks situations that permit observer bias to occur.

Appendix B

SSP Proposal Form
MSPH Program in Public Health Informatics
Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University
Special Studies Project Proposal Form

Name of Student: ________________________________________________________

Name of SSP Field Advisor: _______________________________________________

Name(s) of others on committee (if any) : ____________________________________

Anticipated graduation date: ______________________________________________

Draft SSP Title: _________________________________________________________

Purpose of SSP: Objectives:
________________________________________________________________________

Proposed solution:
________________________________________________________________________

Implementation plan:
________________________________________________________________________

SSP Milestone: The major milestone for the SSP project are as follows:
   Topic Approval to advisor Draft of SSP to all committee members
   Draft of Chapters 1-3 to advisor Application for Graduation
   Bindery Complete Analysis of Research
   Commencement Ceremony

I have read and agree to abide by the SSP project deadlines that correspond with
my anticipated graduation date in appendix G for the above SSP milestones.

Signatures:
________________________________________________________________________
Student              Date

________________________________________________________________________
SSP Field Advisor       Date

________________________________________________________________________
Vicki Hertzberg, PhD              Date
Public Health Informatics Director
Appendix C

Institutional Review Board Information
The Emory University Institutional Review Board is a research oversight committee charged with assuring, both in advance and by periodic review, that appropriate steps are taken to protect the rights and welfare of humans participating as subjects in approved research studies.

All information for the IRB process can be found at www.emory.edu/IRB. All student in the CMPH program are required to take the online course and quiz to become Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) certified.

Students should use the Social, Humanist, and Behavioral forms (SHB-IRB) for non medical projects.

To access the Social, Humanist, and Behavioral form go to the IRB homepage. From the IRB home page click on “Forms” and select the “SHB-IRB From” from the list of options. This is a new form has just been added as an option in August of 2002 and should be used for nonmedical protocols.
Appendix D

MSPH in PHI SSP Binding Procedure
You may drop off your SSP between 9:00 am and 5:00 pm Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday at the Bindery Desk in the Health Sciences Central Library and Technical Services. **The Bindery Desk does not accept SSP projects on Thursdays.**

- It is your responsibility to provide all copies of your SSP that you want bound. If you want four copies bound, please bring four copies to the bindery. You must submit original signatures in INK for all of the SSP copies you want bound **in addition to the two required copies.** The Health Science Library keeps one copy and the PHI program needs one bound copy.

- Binding costs $10 for each copy. The Health Sciences Library will accept checks payable to Emory University or exact cash payments. You must pay for all copies before they can be bound.

- Turn-around for binding is approximately four weeks. Rush binding can be accommodated, but it is more expensive.

- All SSPs are bound in blue covers. The complete title and author's name appears in gold lettering on the front cover. The author's name and as much of the title as possible appears in gold lettering on the spine.

- The bindery takes about 1/8 of an inch off the margin when binding your SSP. With regards to paper, the SSP for the PHI program can be on regular typing/printer paper. However, one copy must be on AT LEAST 20lb., 25% cotton paper for the library.
Appendix E

Other SSP Documentation
THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT OF TEENAGERS INVOLVED IN THE FAMILY PLANNING OUTREACH PROGRAM AT DEKALB COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

BY

Charlotte Neal McKinney B.A., Wayne State University, 1974
(list all degrees here)

A report submitted to the Public Health Informatics Program The Rollins School of Public Health of Emory University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Science in Public Health 2005
THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT
OF TEENAGERS INVOLVED IN THE
FAMILY PLANNING OUTREACH PROGRAM
AT DEKALB COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

APPROVED

First Name, Field Advisor    Date

Vicki Hertzberg, PhD
Public Health Informatics Director    Date

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In presenting this report as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I agree that the School of Public Health shall make it available for inspection and circulation in accordance with its regulations governing materials of this type. I agree that permission to copy from, or to publish, this report may be granted by the professor under whose direction it was written when such copying or publication is solely for scholarly purposes and does not involve potential financial gain. It is understood that any copying from, or publication of, this report which involves potential financial gain will not be allowed without written permission.

Signature of Student       Date
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

(optional)

Many students choose to thank committee members, faculty, family, friends and others who have supported them during the process. This can be done either in narrative form or in bullets.
Appendix F

Outline for Critically Evaluating Research
A. Statement of the Problem and the Purpose

1. What is the general problem?
2. In which ways is the problem clearly and/or unclearly stated?
3. What is the significance and/or scope of the problem? (i.e., how does the author justify addressing this problem?)
4. In which ways is the purpose of the study clearly and/or unclearly stated?
5. What does the researcher hope to achieve with the study?
6. Are the goals and objectives clearly stated and meet the SMART criteria?

B. Review of the Literature (ROL)

1. Is the ROL specific to the purpose of the study? How?
2. Is the ROL timely and comprehensive of prior research?
   a. Does the ROL contain at least some current (less than 3 years old) studies?
   b. Is the ROL largely based on prior work of one or more of the current authors?
3. Does the author clearly identify how his study fits into the ROL (especially recent developments in the area)?
4. What are best practices in the problem area or for projects addressing that problem?

C. Research Hypotheses or Questions

1. What are the hypotheses or questions?
2. Are the hypotheses or questions grounded in previous research (e.g., ROL) and/or theory?
3. What are the variables? If relevant, identify which are the independent, dependent, and nuisance/confounding variables.
4. Hypotheses: How well are the hypotheses stated?
   a. Hypotheses should state an expected relationship between two or more variables.
   b. Hypotheses should be testable.

   Questions: How well are the questions stated?
   a. Questions should clearly define the variables and their expected relationship.
   b. Questions should focus on outcomes not methods.

D. Sample

1. What is the target population and sample?
2. Discuss the appropriateness of the sample for the study.
3. Is the sample large enough?
4. Do the sampling procedures result in bias in the sample? If so, discuss
possible sources of bias.

E. Methodology

1. What type of research design is used?
2. If applicable, are the treatments described in sufficient detail (i.e., could you replicate the study? How or how not?)
3. If applicable, are there weaknesses in the treatments that could affect the results (i.e., threats to validity, Type I or II error)?
4. Are the data collection instruments clearly described? If applicable, is the sensitivity/specificity or the reliability reported?
5. How appropriate was the data collection instrument in answering the research hypotheses or questions?
6. How is the project conducted? What formative work/pilot was involved in the project? What methods ensure that the project was correctly implemented?

F. Data Analysis

1. Are the results of the statistical tests or the descriptive measures reported clearly? (e.g., Is the level of significance stated? Confidence intervals? Test values?)
2. Do the results that are reported relate (flow from) the hypotheses or questions?
3. Are appropriate statistical tests or descriptive measures used?
4. Is there consistency between the content of the tables and their description in the text?
5. Are the findings of practical significance? What were unexpected outcomes?

G. Conclusions, Implications, Recommendations

1. What are the conclusions?
2. Are the conclusions supported by the data (e.g., Does the researcher over-conclude? Are conclusions related to the hypotheses or questions?)
3. Does the researcher suggest implications or recommendations for the practitioner? Is so, are they grounded in the research and practical?
4. Does the researcher suggest implications or recommendations for future researchers? If so, are they grounded in the research and practical?
5. What is the value of the project and its outcome?
6. How does this project impact public health and what are the lessons learned?

H. Overview

1. Was the overall presentation of the study easy to understand? (e.g., Did it
1. Did the text flow well? Was grammar correct?
2. Did the overall presentation remain focused?
3. Was there any overall evidence of bias in the researcher’s language?
## IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER SSP MILESTONES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First meeting with Program Director to Discuss potential projects</td>
<td>Early in 2nd semester of Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Direction</td>
<td>By the end of 2nd semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic Approval</td>
<td>First month of 3rd semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First draft of complete SSP due to</td>
<td>First month of 4th Semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bindery receipt to ADAP</td>
<td>First day of the Month of graduation May 1, August 1, December 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commencement Ceremony</td>
<td>May of the academic year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date to apply for graduation without late fee assessment</td>
<td>Sept. 1 for Fall graduation January 1 for Spring July 1 for Summer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE: IF YOU DO NOT MEET THE ESTABLISHED DEADLINES, IT WILL AFFECT YOUR GRADUATING AT THE END OF THE INTENDED SEMESTER.**
Glossary of Terms

**Abstract** A summary of the contents of the SSP.

**Delimitation** Any factor that narrows the scope of the study.

**Dependent variable** A variable that is the result of the independent variable.

**Hypothesis** A statement about the relationship among the variables of the study.

**Independent variable** A variable that influences the dependent variable.

**Limitation** Any factor related to the theory or methodology that weakens the study.

**Reliability** The extent to which a measure yields consistent results.

**Sample** The group selected from a population in a study.

**Validity** The extent to which an instrument measures what it claims to measure.