



# AUGUSTA UNIVERSITY

**The Graduate School | College of Allied Health Sciences  
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences  
Master of Public Health Program**

## **MPH CAPSTONE MANUAL (MPHC 8999)**



**AU MPH Capstone Manual**  
MPHC 8999 (Capstone)

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### **Purpose of the Capstone**

The capstone course serves as the culminating experience of the MPH program. This culminating experience is one that requires students to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired in coursework and other learning experiences and apply it to analyzing and addressing a public health practice and research challenge.

The main pedagogical approach to accomplishing this goal is based on the capstone project, which provides students with an opportunity to integrate their theoretical and professional knowledge and skills with substantial research experience on a public health topic of a student's choice. The student's completed capstone project must demonstrate a high level of professional and educational competencies required for public health practice and research.

### **Goals of the Capstone**

After successful completion of the capstone course, the student should be able to:

1. Identify and discuss current and emerging topics and advancements related to core disciplinary domains of public health research and practice (including Health Services Administration, Social & Behavioral Sciences, Epidemiology, Biostatistics, and Environmental Health Sciences).
2. Integrate public health theories, concepts, models, and practices into specific research problems.
3. Understand and apply disciplinary knowledge and analytical skills to evaluate complex public health problems.
4. Collect, manage, and analyze a wide range of public health data to assess problems and factors affecting population health.
5. Interpret and communicate research outcomes and apply their relevance to specific public health areas.
6. Demonstrate proficiency in working with the knowledge base and research methods in chosen areas of concentration in public health.

### **MPH Competencies Reinforced**

The capstone course will reinforce the competencies of the MPH program provided in Appendix A: MPH Competency Model.

## **Prerequisites and Requirements**

### **Capstone Prerequisites**

Students must take Capstone Course (MPHC 8999) during their final semester in the program. This could be a fall semester or spring semester. The student is expected to contact MPH faculty during the semester preceding their capstone semester to develop and submit their initial proposal abstract. In addition to a Capstone advisor (*required*) from the MPH faculty, the student may consider contacting one or more appropriate external Capstone project members (*optional*), i.e., field experts in potential Capstone research areas. Under the guidance of the capstone advisor, the student should integrate and apply their knowledge and skills gained from the coursework and other didactic experiences to develop a research topic. The topic may be a public health issue or problem previously read about, lectured about, or observed during an internship. Students are required to submit their initial proposal abstract, approved by the advisor, to the Capstone coordinator. Capstone coordinator organizes class meetings and monitors overall students' progress. Students should submit proposal abstract by the end of the semester preceding the Capstone semester, i.e., by the end of November for a spring Capstone or by the end of July for a fall Capstone. A fuller version of the proposal is due within two weeks of the start of the Capstone (MPHC 8999) course.

### **Capstone Requirements**

Students must complete the following requirements to be successful in the Capstone course. Key deliverables are explained in more detail in later sections.

- Initial and full project proposals
- MPH Competencies Forms: five core domains, the interdisciplinary/cross-cutting competencies, and the concentration-specific competencies
- Remaining requirements during the Capstone semester:
  - ✓ Attendance in class sessions and participation in progress presentations
  - ✓ Timely and ongoing communication with their Capstone advisor (and Capstone members if applicable)
  - ✓ The Graduate Research Day poster presentation (for students graduating in the spring semester)
  - ✓ The MPH Research Day poster presentation (for students graduating in the fall semester)
  - ✓ Oral presentation and final report of the project

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Involved Parties**

To ensure a successful culminating experience with the Capstone project, the student is expected to take the initiative in identifying their research topics and the planning for the Capstone requirements in a timely manner, including the selection of the Capstone advisor and member (s). The Capstone advisor (*required*) and member (*optional*) should be selected based on their areas of expertise and experience related to the Capstone project. The student is expected to interact effectively with the following actors involved in the Capstone process:

- Capstone coordinator is to assist students in identifying an appropriate Capstone advisor, and to ensure that students make timely progress in the course and complete all the required Capstone components for a successful Capstone experience.
- Capstone advisor (*required*) is a faculty member in the MPH program. The Capstone advisor provides guidance and regular advising to the student as they make progress with the

Capstone project. The Capstone advisor is also responsible for bridging gaps in communication with student's Capstone project member (s) (if applicable).

- Capstone project member (optional) is an individual outside of the MPH program faculty who has proven expertise and extensive experience in the student's project subject area and is responsible for providing the student with guidance and advice on the subject matter of the project.

**Capstone Timeline**

**Before Registering for Capstone Course MPHC 8999**

To be eligible to register for Capstone Course MPHC 8999, the student must attend a 1-hour required internship and capstone orientation session, offered by the MPH program in the spring and fall semesters.

**During the First Month of the Preceding Semester**

The student should plan the Capstone project; identify a Capstone advisor; communicate with the Capstone advisor to discuss research interest and develop an initial project proposal with a specific timeline of the project. Students are required to submit the initial project proposal by the end of the semester preceding the Capstone semester.

**By the End of First Month of the Capstone Semester**

The student is expected to submit a full proposal; complete the review of relevant literature; complete CITI training and email their certificate to the Capstone coordinator; Conduct data collection and preliminary data analysis.

**During the Second Month of the Capstone**

Perform full data analysis; prepare and submit a poster abstract for the Graduate Research Day or the MPH Research Day (depending on timing and semester) to the Capstone coordinator.

**During the Third Month of the Capstone**

The student is expected to finalize their project and present its outcome in a poster on the Graduate Research Day (for spring semester) or the MPH Research Day (for fall semester).

**By the End of Fourth Month of the Capstone**

The student is required to give an oral presentation and submit the final project report approved by the Capstone project advisor to the coordinator for the course record by the oral presentation day.

Requirements	Due date	
	Fall semester	Spring semester
Initial project proposal	November (preceding semester)	July (preceding semester)
Full proposal, CITI training, & Competency Forms	August/September	January/February
Research Day abstract	October	February/March
Research Day presentation	November	March
Final presentation & Final report	November	April

## **Capstone Project Key Deliverables**

### **1. Capstone Project Proposal (initial and full)**

A form for the initial project proposal is available in Appendix B, and the full project proposal should include the following sections:

- A. Introduction - background information of the research to provide the context of the project.
- B. Literature review
  - Subsections might address the need for assessing the topic as presented in the aims of your project, and the environment in which the project is important.
  - An analysis of the strength and weaknesses of the published literature is crucial.
- C. Goals/Objectives
- D. Methodology – study design, data sources, variables, and analytical framework. Note: Data analysis must be performed using one or more statistical applications.
- E. Significance/implications of the project from a public health perspective.

The initial project proposal must be approved by the Capstone faculty advisor prior to the Capstone semester. The student is responsible for making any suggested changes to the proposal based on the feedback of the Capstone faculty advisor, and (if needed) re-submitting the proposal in a timely manner. The approval of the initial proposal **MUST** occur before the end of the preceding semester of the Capstone course.

### **2. MPH Competencies Forms**

The student is required to discuss how the proposed project would address core competencies as well as other relevant competencies (in interdisciplinary cross-cutting and concentration) outlined in Appendix A.

### **3. Periodic Progress Presentations**

Students are required to participate in a monthly presentation session to report on their Capstone progress. The presentation must be reviewed and approved by the Capstone faculty advisor prior to the class presentation. The presentation should include:

- Key activities conducted or completed during the period
- Status of and progress on stated objectives
- Progress towards the overall project goals

### **4. Poster Presentation**

It is required to participate in a poster presentation of the Capstone project at the Graduate Research Day (for spring semester) or the MPH Research Day (for fall semester).

### **5. Oral Presentation**

Students are expected to give an oral presentation of their projects at the end the Capstone semester during a virtual event. Each student will be given 15 minutes for their presentation and an additional 5 minutes for a question-and-answer session. All MPH students and faculty members as well as Capstone mentors will be invited to the presentation.

### **6. Capstone Final Project Report**

Students are required to write a professional report that describes the entire Capstone project.

- A full-length report presenting your novel approach to public health topics. This is accomplished by a thorough quantitative/qualitative assessment of the topic's characteristics, associations, and applicability.
- The final report should be written in a scientific research paper format and the length should be around 2,500 words, double-spaced, APA format, exclusive of the abstract, figures, tables and references.

This report is a substantial writing project and includes the following:

- Introduction
- Background
- Goals/Objectives
- Methods
- Results
  - Subsections might address outcomes of each analysis of corresponding data in an orderly and logical manner as well as overall findings, including illustrative materials such as graphs, charts, and maps.
- Interpretation/Evaluation of Results
  - Measures of degree to which the study met its goals and provides the desired benefits and the extent to which it may be used in target audiences. Examples include utilization and performance statistics.
- Discussions
  - Subsections might address a contrast summary of study results and published literature, evaluation, lessons learned, and future plans.
- Summary and conclusions
- References

## **Method of Evaluations**

### **Evaluation Criteria**

All final Capstone deliverables, including the poster, oral presentation, and final paper, will be assessed based on the student's ability to integrate core competencies and concentration-specific competencies through the project, and to demonstrate the attainment of those competencies. Correspondingly, all final evaluation rubrics for the Capstone are designed to ensure the student's integration and attainment of core and concentration competencies. (Appendix B contains a full set of Capstone evaluation forms and rubrics for reference).

### **Advisor Evaluation of the Project**

At the end of the project, the Capstone advisor is required to complete an evaluation of the project they advised.

### **Final Grading by Capstone Coordinator**

The final grade will be determined by the Capstone coordinator in consultation with the Capstone faculty advisor (and the Capstone mentor, if applicable). The following criteria will be used in evaluating the performance of the student:

- Initial proposal abstract
- Full project proposal
- Seminar attendance and participation
- Poster presentation
- Oral presentation
- Final project report
- Competencies forms

The final grade will be calculated using the sum of scores achieved from the above components. The grade-point distribution will be as follows:

A =	100 – 90%
B =	89 – 80%
C =	79 – 70%
D =	69 – 60%
F =	59% and below

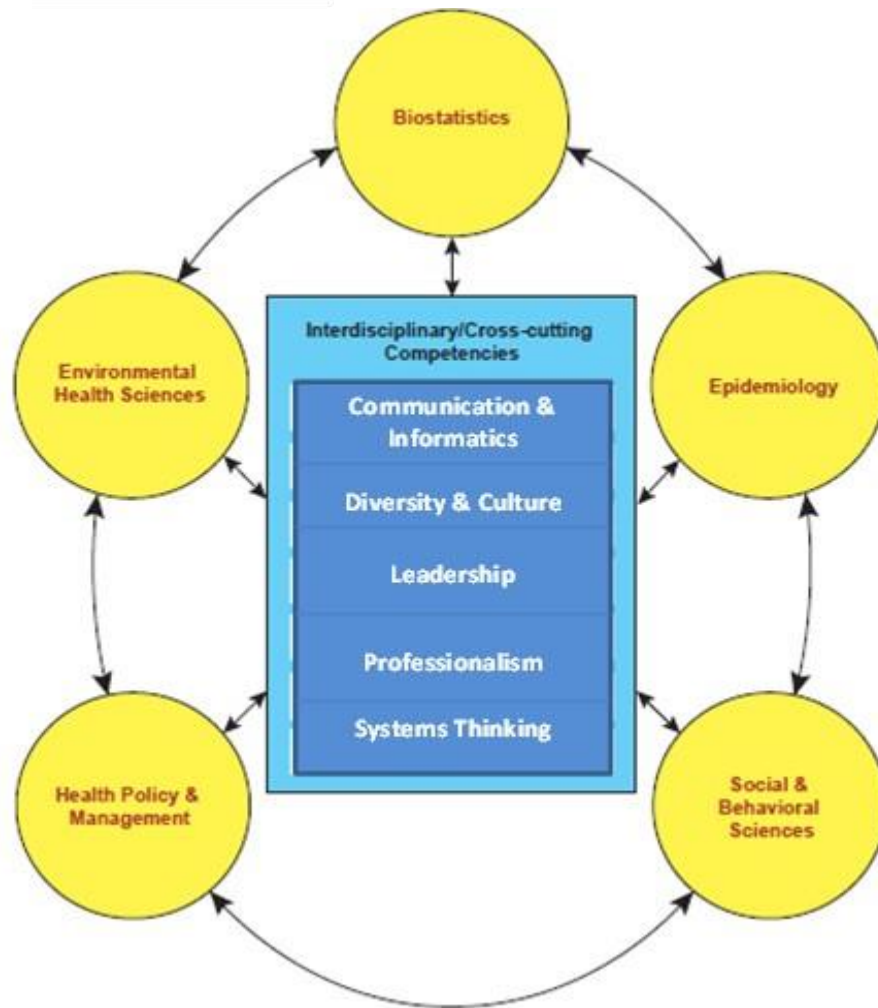


# **APPENDIX A**

## AU MPH Program Competency Model

# Master of Public Health (MPH) Program

## Core Competency Model



**Adapted From: ASPPH Education Committee (2006).** Master's Degree in Public Health Core Competency Development Project; Version 2.3. Supported under a cooperative agreement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) through the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPPH) Grant Number U36/CCU300430-23/24.

Section 1

**MPH “Core and Interdisciplinary Cross-Cutting” Competencies**

## **FIVE Disciplinary Core Competency Domains (and Learning Objectives)**

<b>Biostatistics</b>	<b>Epidemiology</b>	<b>Health Management &amp; Policy</b>	<b>Health Promotion [Social &amp; Behavioral Sciences]</b>	<b>Environmental Health</b>
Describe the role biostatistics serves in the discipline of public health.	Identify key sources of data for epidemiologic purposes.	Identify the main components and issues of the organization, financing, and delivery of health services and public health system in the US.	Describe the role of social and community factors in both the onset and solution of public health problems.	Describe the direct and indirect human, ecological and safety effects of major environmental and occupational agents.
Describe basic concepts of probability, random variation and commonly used statistical probability distributions.	Comprehend basic ethical and legal principles pertaining to the collection, maintenance, use, and dissemination of epidemiologic data.	Describe legal & ethical bases for public health and health services.	Identify critical stakeholders for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health programs, policies, and interventions.	Describe genetic, physiologic and psychosocial factors that affect susceptibility to adverse health outcomes following exposure to environmental hazards.
Distinguish among the different measurement scales and the implications for selection of statistical methods to be used based on these distinctions.	Describe a public health problem in terms of magnitude, person, time and place.	Evaluate the policy process for improving the health status of populations.	Identify basic theories, concepts, and models from a range of social and behavioral disciplines that are used in public health research and practice.	Describe federal and state regulatory programs, guidelines, and authorities that control environmental health issues.
Apply descriptive techniques commonly used to summarize public health data.	Evaluate the strengths and limitations of epidemiologic reports.	Apply principles of program planning, development, budgeting, management, and evaluation in organizational and community initiatives.	Identify individual, organizational and community concerns, assets, resources and deficits for social and behavioral science interventions.	Specify current environmental risk assessment methods.
Apply basic informatics techniques with vital statistics and public health records in the description of public health characteristics and in public health research & evaluation.	Calculate basic epidemiology measures.	Communicate health policy and management issues using appropriate channels and technologies.	Apply evidence-based approaches in the development and evaluation of social and behavioral science interventions.	Specify approaches for assessing, preventing, and controlling environmental hazards that pose risks to human health and safety.
Interpret results of statistical analyses found in public health studies.	Communicate epidemiologic information to lay and professional audiences.	Demonstrate leadership skills for building partnerships.	Specify multiple targets and levels of intervention for social and behavioral science programs and/or policies.	Explain the general mechanisms of toxicity in eliciting a toxic response to various environmental exposures.

**FIVE Interdisciplinary Cross-Cutting Competency Domains (and Learning Objectives)**

<b>Communication &amp; Informatics</b>	<b>Diversity &amp; Culture</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Professionalism</b>	<b>Systems Thinking</b>
Describe how the public health information infrastructure is used to collect, process, maintain, and disseminate data.	Discuss the importance and characteristics of a sustainable diverse public health workforce.	Describe the attributes of leadership in public health.	Embrace a definition of public health that captures the unique characteristics of the field (e.g., population-focused, community-oriented, prevention-motivated and rooted in social justice) and how these contribute to professional practice.	Identify characteristics of a system.
Describe how societal, organizational, and individual factors influence and are influenced by public health communications.	Use the basic concepts and skills involved in culturally appropriate community engagement and empowerment with diverse communities.	Engage in dialogue and learning from others to advance public health goals.	Apply evidence-based principles and the scientific knowledge base to critical evaluation and decision-making in public health.	Explain how systems (e.g. individuals, social network, organizations, and communities) may be viewed as systems within systems in the analysis of public health problems.
Apply legal and ethical principles to the use of information technology and resources in public health settings.	Differentiate among availability, acceptability, and accessibility of health care across diverse populations.	Demonstrate team building, negotiation, and conflict management skills.	Apply the core functions of assessment, policy development, and assurance in the analysis of public health problems and their solutions.	Explain how the contexts of gender, race, poverty, history, migration, and culture are important in the design of interventions within public health systems.
Demonstrate effective written and oral skills for communicating with different audiences in the context of professional public health activities.	Cite examples of situations where consideration of culture-specific needs resulted in a more effective modification or adaptation of a health intervention.	Apply social justice and human rights principles when addressing community needs.	Distinguish between population and individual ethical considerations in relation to the benefits, costs, and burdens of public health programs.	Analyze inter-relationships among systems that influence the quality of life of people in their communities.
Use information technology to access, evaluate, and interpret public health data.	Develop public health programs and strategies responsive to the diverse cultural values and traditions of the communities being served.	Use collaborative methods for achieving organizational and community health goals.	Appreciate the importance of working collaboratively with diverse communities and constituencies (e.g. researchers, practitioners, agencies and organizations).	Analyze the effects of political, social and economic policies on public health systems at the local, state, national and international levels.

<p>Use informatics methods and resources as strategic tools to promote public health.</p>		<p>Develop strategies to motivate others for collaborative problem solving, decision making, and evaluation.</p>		<p>Assess strengths and weaknesses of applying the systems approach to public health problems.</p>
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**Section 2**

**MPH “Concentration-Specific” Competencies**

## **MPH – Health Informatics (HI) Concentration**

<b>Health Informatics concentration competencies</b>
Appropriately select and utilize information technology tools and resources.
Strategically utilize health information technology to promote public health.
Integrate multiple sources of data & information to create new knowledge, and support decision making in public health.
Compose, develop, and manage information technology systems.
Apply the principles of good database design.
Apply healthcare standards and regulations effectively in health care facilities to achieve full integration and exchange of organizational health information system
Apply informatics principles in managing IT projects.
Integrate informatics research findings into public health practice.



## MPH – Health Management (HM) Concentration

<b>Health Management concentration competencies</b>
Describe the main characteristics, components, and issues of the organization, financing, and delivery of health services and public health systems in the U.S.
Understand the process of achieving an organization's mission and goals, and utilize strategic, technical, and interpersonal skills to advance population health.
Articulate the principles of leading organizational change, including assessment and measurement of organizational change efforts.
Apply appropriate statistical tools, techniques and procedures to health management and policy.
Develop public health programs and strategies responsive to the diverse cultural values and traditions of the communities being served.
Demonstrate a high standard of ethics, sound professional practice, social responsibility, and community stewardship.

# **Appendix B**

## **Capstone Evaluation Forms and Rubrics**

## MPHC 8999 Capstone Project Initial Proposal

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Capstone Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

Capstone Member: \_\_\_\_\_  
**(Optional)** (Print Name) (Signature) (Date)

Project Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of Project Proposal (max. 300 words)

Turn in by [Date] \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.

If you are using primary data, this form is due by [Date] ] \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_.

Please email this form by the deadline to the Capstone coordinator.

## MPHC 8999 – Capstone Project Competencies Assessment

You are required to provide self-assessment indicating how you would achieve core and concentration-specific competencies through your Capstone project. This will provide information about how your project activities are related to the knowledge and skills you will need to demonstrate to show your proficiency upon the completion of the project (see Appendix A for detailed information about the MPH competency model).

### **Core Competency Domains**

Please select at least three core competency domains from below that are most relevant to your project and describe how the project would help you attain these competency areas. The description of each selected competency domain should be limited to 200 words. Check the boxes below for any competency domains you submit the descriptions.

- Biostatistics
- Epidemiology
- Health Management & Policy
- Social & Behavioral Sciences
- Environmental Health

Please note that, for core competencies not selected for providing descriptions in the beginning of the semester, you are required to submit an essay in 200 words for each core competency at the completion of your project (by the oral presentation deadline), reflecting your thoughts and experiences in the context of your project.

### **Interdisciplinary/Cross-cutting Competencies**

Please describe with specific examples how you would demonstrate your attainment of competencies in at least two of the following areas through your project:

- Communication and Informatics
- Diversity and Culture
- Leadership
- Professionalism
- Systems Thinking

### **Concentration-Specific Competencies**

Please describe with specific examples how you would become skilled and competent in at least two of the concentration-specific competencies of your concentration through your project.

Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the following core competency: **Biostatistics**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:
- Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria
  - Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the following core competency: **Epidemiology**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:
- Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria
  - Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the following core competency: **Health Management & Policy**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:
- Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria
  - Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the following core competency: **Social & Behavioral Sciences**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:
- Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria
  - Exceeds the criteria

Comments:



Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the following core competency: **Environmental Health**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:
- Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria
  - Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the **Interdisciplinary/Cross-cutting Competencies**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:  Does not meet the criteria  
 Meets the criteria  
 Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

Student Name:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My Capstone project ensures achieving the **Concentration-Specific Competencies**

Description (max. 200 words)

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

- Approval:  Does not meet the criteria  
 Meets the criteria  
 Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

## Competency Essay

*(Must be submitted by the oral presentation deadline)*

Student Name:

Advisor:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

My thoughts on and experiences with the project in the context of the **Core Competency**

Description (max. 200 words)

## **MPHC 8999 Capstone Progress Report (Semester, Year)**

Student Name:

Capstone Advisor:

Project Title:

Date:

The progress report must include the following:

1. Research activities you have conducted during the past two weeks.
2. Key outcomes of these activities related to your research goals and objectives
3. Planned activities for the next two weeks.
4. Statistical tables and analysis may be attached, if needed.

Description (max. 250 words)

**MPHC 8999 Capstone Final Grading Rubric  
(Semester, Year)**

Student Name:

Capstone Advisor:

Concentration:

Project Title:

Date:

1. Evaluation of Competencies Achieved
2. Evaluation of Poster Presentation, Oral Presentation, and Final Paper

# 1. Evaluation of Competencies Achieved

## Core Competencies

- Biostatistics
  - Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria                      OR                       Essay provided
  - Exceeds the criteria
  
- Epidemiology
  - Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria                      OR                       Essay provided
  - Exceeds the criteria
  
- Health Management & Policy
  - Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria                      OR                       Essay provided
  - Exceeds the criteria
  
- Social & Behavioral Sciences
  - Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria                      OR                       Essay provided
  - Exceeds the criteria
  
- Environmental Health
  - Does not meet the criteria
  - Meets the criteria                      OR                       Essay provided
  - Exceeds the criteria

## Interdisciplinary/Cross-cutting Competencies

- Does not meet the criteria
- Meets the criteria
- Exceeds the criteria

## Concentration-Specific Competencies

- Does not meet the criteria
- Meets the criteria
- Exceeds the criteria

Comments:

## Evaluation of Poster Presentation, Oral Presentation, and Final Paper

<b>Poster Presentation (50 points)</b>	
1. The poster was easy to read, logical, and properly formatted	/10
2. The argument was clear	/10
3. The depth of analysis and insight was appropriate	/10
4. The conclusions were clear and supported by the data	/10
5. The presentation was professional and informative	/10
<b>Oral Presentation (50 points)</b>	
1. The information was presented in a logical sequence and relevant	/15
2. The depth of analysis and interpretation was appropriate	/10
3. The conclusions were clear and supported by the data	/10
4. The presentation was professional and effective	/15
<b>Final Project Paper (100 points)</b>	
1. The introduction provided sufficient background, context, and idea development	/20
2. The literature review was thorough and appropriate	/20
3. The methodology, analysis, and scope were appropriate	/20
4. The results were adequate for the purposes of the study	/20
5. The conclusions and discussions were well developed and the writing was effective and professional	/20

### Comments:

<b>Poster</b>	<b>Final Project Paper</b>
9 – 10 points— Excellent	18 – 20 points – Excellent
8 – <9 points – Good	16 – <18 points – Good
7 – <8 points – Fair	14 – <16 points – Fair
0 – <7 points – Poor	0 – <14 points – Poor



# **Appendix C**

## **Examples of Past Capstone Project Topics**

- A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of counseling to promote exclusive breastfeeding
- Quality of care in management of diabetes in the U.S.
- Relationship of health insurance and poverty to weight status in youth
- Is time the only reason Americans are not exercising enough?
- Assessing the use of adjuvant chemotherapy for stage III colon cancer patients
- Faith at work: overcoming negative health outcomes through the use of spiritual healing and prayer
- Disaster preparedness in American homes
- Analysis of artificial sweetener consumption linked to consumer behaviors and health risk factors
- The impact of geography, education level, and income status in regards to cigarette smoking among obese adults in the United States
- Patient- and family-centered care – quantifying the results: comparison study of two intensive care units at an academic medical center
- Impact of delayed childbearing on fetal mortality: compared by education level
- Understanding health literacy: evaluating prevalence and patient socio-demographic factors
- Health information exchange: alliance to better care
- The association between smoking and arthritis prevalence and severity: A cross-sectional survey study
- Prediction of driving in individuals with relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis