

# Department of Sociomedical Sciences

Master's Student Handbook  
2025-2026

**Department of Sociomedical Sciences  
MS and MPH Students Handbook**

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**Disclaimer**

The information contained in this handbook is correct for the academic year 2025-26. The most up-to-date version can be found at [www.mailman.columbia.edu/people/current-students/academics/student-handbooks](http://www.mailman.columbia.edu/people/current-students/academics/student-handbooks)

Although the degree and academic requirements in place normally will not change within any given academic year, Mailman School and departmental policies are reviewed and updated regularly. The Department of Sociomedical Sciences reserves the right to make changes at any time with appropriate notice to the community (e.g., email notification).

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## Overview

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In 1968, the Columbia University School of Public Health became the first institution in the country to offer a graduate degree in Sociomedical Sciences (SMS). Dr. Jack Elinson, the first chair of SMS, coined the term "sociomedical sciences" to incorporate the social sciences of sociology, anthropology, economics, history, political science, and social psychology into a multidisciplinary study of health and medicine.

The Department of Sociomedical Sciences is dedicated to addressing the social forces that influence health. Our research, teaching, and service are premised on the idea that to understand patterns of illness in society and to create effective programs that improve population health, it is essential to account for the broad contextual factors that structure people's actions, and to weigh the ethical and political factors that shape policy debates.

Sociomedical Sciences draws upon a diverse range of analytic methods and conceptual frameworks from the social and behavioral sciences and humanities, including sociology, anthropology, psychology, health education, health promotion, history, and political science. Using these tools, our faculty and students explore a wide array of public health issues including sexuality, aging, obesity, urban health, HIV/AIDS, homelessness, tobacco and drug use, healthcare access, mass incarceration, occupational and environmental health, immigrant health, global mental health, and public health workforce development. Our work emphasizes the critical importance of factors such as socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, and geography in determining health vulnerabilities.

**Professor James Colgrove** is the Interim Chair of the Department. **Professor Christian Gloria** is the Deputy Chair of Master's Programs. **Charmagne Jones** is the SMS Academic Associate Director, Academic Programs. She is responsible for student advising, academic programming, APEx advising, doctoral grant administration, and the department's DEIA Committee. **Katherine Plummer** is the Program Coordinator. She assists with student advising, academic programming, and Apex/Scope of Work department approval.

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## Academic Affairs

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The information and resources provided in this handbook focuses primarily on SMS program requirements. Students should refer to the [Mailman Student Handbook](#) for school policies and procedures.

### **Registration**

For registration information including Late Registration, Registration Holds; Change of Program; Vergil Registration, Add/Drop Courses; Cross Registration, please visit: <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/academics/registration>

### **Courses: Required, Selectives, and Electives**

Students should review their respective academic plans to ensure they are taking classes necessary to complete their degrees as prescribed. This includes department required courses and certificate requirements. MPH students may find their academic plans in the online [Certificate Requirements database](#) or on their [Stellic profile](#) (provided after certificate selection). It is important to note some certificate courses are set with very specific prescribed and sequential course plans, while the department

requirements may be satisfied in semesters 2 thru 4. Students in the MS degree program can find their requirements listed on page 5-5

**Selectives** refer to department or certificate required courses in which a student selects from two or more courses.

**Certificate Elective** is a course that is applied toward the student's certificate and that has not already been taken for required credit. Some certificates specify a selection of courses from which the student must choose electives and other certificates are open and flexible and have a wide range of options for electives.

**General Elective** is any graduate level course taken in or outside of SMS. General electives may be taken at other schools of the university. Within Columbia University most graduate level courses are indicated by course numbers of 4000 or higher.

### ***Tutorials***

A tutorial is an individualized course of study in which a student works with a faculty member in a less structured setting than a classroom course. One-to-one student/faculty tutorials may include, for example, participation in major research or other projects, small individual projects, pilot projects, literature review, and field experience. A tutorial may be taken for one, two, or three credits depending on the amount of work it entails. No more than 3 credits of tutorials may be applied toward the degree credits.

Students interested in taking a tutorial should first obtain a faculty member's agreement to serve as the instructor. The student then must complete the Tutorial Form and submit it to the Academic Director prior to the last registration day of the semester.

### ***Pass/Fail (P/F)***

The P/F grading option is not available for required courses. The P/F grading option may be eligible for select courses with permission from the instructor and the student's advisor. Please review Mailman Student handbook for policy and process.

### ***Course Waivers***

Students may request a waiver or exemption from a course requirement if they believe that they have satisfactorily completed a graduate-level course that is of comparable rigor and scope to that of the required SMS course. Students initiate this process by submitting a written request that identifies the course to be waived and describes the prior course. Students should attach to the statement a syllabus for the prior course and transcript indicating the final grade for this course and submit a signed and dated written request along with the supporting material to the Academic Program Coordinator.

**Academic Advising**

| Advisor Type                        | Role                                                                                                                                                                                               | Frequently Asked Question (FAQ)                                                                                                                  |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Faculty Advisor</b>              | Provides counseling related to research and/or career interests; advises on APEx competencies; reviews and approves APEx proposals.                                                                | <i>"Who should I talk to about my career path?"</i>                                                                                              |
| <b>MPH Certificate Faculty Lead</b> | Oversees a specific certificate; advises students on certificate-related course requirements and planning.                                                                                         | <i>"Does this course meet this certificate requirement?"</i>                                                                                     |
| <b>Program Advisor</b>              | Guides overall course planning and academic progress. <u>Charmagne Jones</u> advises all students and handles administrative or logistical aspects of the program.                                 | <i>"Who can help me make sure I'm meeting all program requirements?"</i><br><br><i>"Which office should I reach out to for ___ information?"</i> |
| <b>Apex Advisor</b>                 | While the Office of Field Practice is the go-to resource for all items Apex, <u>Katherine Plummer</u> supports any inquiries on department APEx requirements, Scope of Work, Completion form, etc. | <i>"Where do I submit my Scope of Work?"</i>                                                                                                     |

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**Degree Requirements**


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**Master of Science Competencies**

The MS degree in SMS trains students to apply social science theories, concepts, and methods with a focus on public health research and discovery. The program offers coursework in anthropology, ethics, history, and sociology, along with a wide range of public health topics and methods. Students can customize a program that reflects a particular SMS discipline and will have applied trainings in quantitative and qualitative research methods. Prior research coursework and experience are required for admissions.

Upon satisfactory completion of the MS program in SMS, graduates will be able to:

- Analyze public health challenges using social and behavioral science concepts, theories, and methods.
- Develop theory-driven research questions grounded in epidemiological concepts and methods to study them.
- Employ ethical considerations and frameworks, including a working knowledge of the major categories of IRB review of human subjects research, to shape research design.
- Conduct quantitative and/or qualitative research to investigate the influences of sociomedical

sciences on public health.

- Create proficient written, oral and/or visual communication suitable for a variety of diverse audiences and differentiated for their needs.

### ***MS Degree Requirements***

The course of study consists of 30 credits, including a master's capstone research project, and is designed to be completed in either full-time (two semesters) or part-time (three or more semesters). This program is appropriate for individuals seeking intensive research experience in Sociomedical Science fields and preparation for doctoral study in the social sciences; those who are interested in public health training but do not wish to pursue an MPH; mid-career professionals with health-related interests in fields such as nursing, medicine, health policy, bioethics, journalism, and law; and postdoctoral students seeking to enhance their training.

No required courses may be taken for Pass/Fail. No more than 3 credits may be taken in tutorials. The table below lists the required and selected courses for this 2023-24 academic year, and a sample course plan for one-year MS follows.

| <b>Course</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Credits</b> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| P6025 Introduction to Public Health (online module)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 0              |
| P6400 Epidemiology (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 3              |
| P8719 SMS Master's Capstone (SP)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 3              |
| P8745 Social and Economic Determinants of Health (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 3              |
| P8750 Race and Health (F)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 3              |
| <b>Methods Selective 1 - choose one (3 credits):</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | 3              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P8911 Sociomedical Sciences Applied Quantitative Research Methods (F)</li> <li>• P8912 Sociomedical Sciences Applied Qualitative Research Methods (F)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                              |                |
| <b>Theory Selective - choose one (3 credits):</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 3              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P8736 Theories and Perspectives on Sexuality and Health (F)</li> <li>• P8741 Structural Approaches in Global Health (SP)</li> <li>• P8755 Medical Anthropology (F)</li> </ul>                                                                                                                 |                |
| <b>Methods Selective 2- choose one (3 credits):</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | 3              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P8705 Evaluation of Health Programs (SP)</li> <li>• P8771 Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) (SP)</li> <li>• P8786 Ethnographic Methods (SP)</li> <li>• P8792 Dissemination &amp; Implementation (SP)</li> </ul>                                                                   |                |
| <b>SMS Selective- choose one (3 credits):</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 3              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P8746 Coercion &amp; Persuasion (SP)</li> <li>• P8747 Ethics of Public Health (SP)</li> <li>• P8709 Gender, Sexuality, Health, and Human Rights (SP)</li> <li>• P8762 Community Health &amp; Chronic Disease</li> <li>• P8794 Society, Health Equity and Health Communication (SP)</li> </ul> |                |
| <b>SMS Elective:</b> any SMS course not already taken for department requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | 3              |
| <b>General Electives:</b> (may include graduate-level courses outside of Mailman)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | 3              |

| FALL 2025                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | SPRING 2026                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• P6025 Introduction to Public Health</li> <li>• P6400 Epidemiology</li> <li>• P8745 Social &amp; Economic Determinants</li> <li>• P8750 Race and Health</li> <li>• <u>Methods Selective 1 (choose one):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ P8911 SMS Applied Quantitative Research Methods</li> <li>▪ P8912 SMS Applied Qualitative Research Methods</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Theory Selective (choose one):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ P8736 Theories Perspectives Sexuality &amp; Health</li> <li>▪ P8755 Medical Anthropology</li> </ul> </li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>SMS Selective (choose one):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ P8746 Coercion &amp; Persuasion</li> <li>▪ P8747 Ethics of Public Health</li> <li>▪ P8709 Gender, Sexuality, Health, Human Rights</li> <li>▪ P8794 Society, Health Equity &amp; Health Communication</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Methods Selective 2 (choose one):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ P8705 Evaluation of Health Programs</li> <li>▪ P8771 CBPR</li> <li>▪ P8786 Ethnographic Methods</li> <li>▪ P8792 Dissemination &amp; Implementation</li> </ul> </li> <li>• P8719 SMS Master's Capstone</li> <li>• SMS Elective</li> <li>• General Elective</li> </ul> |

### ***Master of Public Health Competencies***

The MPH degree in SMS prepares students to create programs and policies that address the social determinants of health. Students are provided with the knowledge and skills to apply theories, concepts, and methods from the social and behavioral sciences to improve the health of individuals and communities. These general goals are reflected in specific learning objectives for MPH students developed at the school, department, and certificate levels. Upon satisfactory completion of the MPH program in SMS, graduates will be able to:

- Apply concepts, theories, and/or methods from the social and behavioral sciences to address public health challenges through program and/or policy development
- Explain relevant mixed-research methodologies and assess reliability and validity of measures used in research to study theory-driven research question
- Identify, collect and/or analyze qualitative/quantitative data through methods including in-depth interviews, focus groups, ethnography, participant observation, R programming, and/or inferential statistical analysis.
- Communicate research and program findings through recommendations and limitations that are appropriate for varied audiences and sectors.
- Employ ethical and culturally competent frameworks in research design and conduct

### ***SMS MPH Degree Requirements***

Within SMS, the MPH degree is offered in four formats: the Columbia 2YR MPH with Certificate, Dual Degree; Accelerated (one-year), and Four+1. All programs require coursework, APEx, and a thesis or capstone. The following table provides course requirements for each of the MPH programs following their Core semester.

| 2YR MPH                                                                                                                                                  | Sem             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b>THEORY SELECTIVE – choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P6728 Health Promotion Theory, Research & Practice <u>or</u><br>P8745 Social Determinants of Health | <b>Spring 1</b> |
| <b>METHODS REQUIRED (3 credits):</b>                                                                                                                     | <b>Spring 1</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                |                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| P8774 Introduction to SMS Research Methods                                                                                                     |                            |
| <b>METHODS SELECTIVE– choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P8911 Applied Quantitative Research Methods<br>P8912 Applied Qualitative Research Methods | <b>Fall 2</b>              |
| <b>SMS ELECTIVE (3 credits):</b><br>SMS Elective – any SMS course not already taken for department or certificate requirements.                | <b>Any</b>                 |
| <b>THESIS – (3 credits):</b><br>P8707 SMS Thesis Proposal (1cr/fall) and P8708 SMS Thesis (2cr/spring)                                         | <b>Fall 2 and Spring 2</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <b>DUAL DEGREE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <b>Sem</b>                 |
| <b>THEORY SELECTIVE – choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P6728 Health Promotion Theory, Research & Practice or<br>P8745 Social Determinants of Health                                                                      | <b>Spring 1</b>            |
| <b>METHODS REQUIRED (3 credits):</b><br>P8774 Introduction to SMS Research Methods                                                                                                                                     | <b>Spring 1</b>            |
| <b>SMS ELECTIVE (3 credits):</b><br>SMS Elective – any SMS course not already taken for department or certificate requirements.                                                                                        | <b>Spring 1</b>            |
| <b>METHOD SELECTIVE– choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P8911 Applied Quantitative Research Methods *<br>P8912 Applied Qualitative Research Methods<br><i>* taken in final year while in residence at partner school *</i> | <b>Fall 2</b>              |
| <b>THESIS – (3 credits):</b><br>P8707 SMS Thesis Proposal (1cr/fall) and P8708 SMS Thesis (2cr/spring)<br><i>* taken in final year while in residence at partner school *</i>                                          | <b>Fall 2 and Spring 2</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                                         |               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>ACCELERATED MPH</b>                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Sem</b>    |
| <b>THEORY SELECTIVE – choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P6728 Health Promotion Theory, Research & Practice or<br>P8745 Social Determinants of Health                       | <b>Spring</b> |
| <b>METHOD REQUIRED (3 credits):</b><br>P8774 Introduction to SMS Research Methods                                                                                       | <b>Spring</b> |
| <b>METHOD SELECTIVE– choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P8705 Evaluation of Health Programs<br>P8771 CBPR<br>P8772 PH Interventions<br>P8792 Dissemination & Implementation | <b>Spring</b> |
| <b>REQUIRED (3 credits):</b><br>SMS Elective – any SMS course not already taken for department or certificate requirements.                                             | <b>Spring</b> |
| <b>THESIS – (3 credits):</b><br>P8719 SMS Master’s Capstone (3)                                                                                                         | <b>Spring</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                   |                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>FOUR+1</b>                                                                                                                                     | <b>Sem</b>              |
| <b>THEORY SELECTIVE – choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P6728 Health Promotion Theory, Research & Practice or<br>P8745 Social Determinants of Health | <b>Fall 2 or Spring</b> |

|                                                                                                                                                                           |                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>METHODS REQUIRED (3 credits):</b><br>P8774 Introduction to SMS Research Methods                                                                                        | <b>Spring</b>           |
| <b>METHODS SELECTIVE– choose one (3 credits):</b><br>P8705 Evaluation of Health Programs<br>P8771 CPBR;<br>P8772 PH Interventions<br>P8792 Dissemination & Implementation | <b>Spring</b>           |
| <b>SMS ELECTIVE (3 credits):</b><br>SMS Elective – any SMS course not already taken for department or certificate requirements.                                           | <b>Fall 2 or Spring</b> |
| <b>THESIS – (3 credits):</b><br>P8719 SMS Master’s Capstone (3)                                                                                                           | <b>Spring</b>           |

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### **APEX (Applied Practice Experience) / Practicum**

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The APEX, is often referred to as the practicum and these terms are used interchangeably. All MPH students must complete a planned, supervised, and evaluated practice experience as part of their program requirements. Within SMS, students in the Columbia MPH (two-year), Dual Degree, and Four+1 programs complete a minimum of 240 hours, while students in the accelerated MPH (one-year) complete 140 hours.

The APEX should provide the opportunity to apply concepts and methods of social science and public health learned in the classroom to actual public health problems. The acceptable content of a practicum is flexible to meet a diverse range of student interests, educational needs, professional objectives, and career goals. In all cases the practicum should satisfy at least **3 Mailman competencies, 2 SMS competencies, and minimum time commitment (240 – MPH, 140 – Accelerated)**. Students can find detailed information on practicum requirements, practice-based products, and competencies in the Apex Resource Guide provided by The Office of Field Practice.

### ***Roles and Responsibilities***

The agency, program, project or individual that agrees to accept a student for a practicum experience also assumes an educational role. Someone at the agency must be identified as the Practicum Preceptor/Supervisor, who agrees to help arrange the student's experience and define activities that will meet the objectives of both the student and of the agency/project. The roles and responsibilities for students and preceptors are outlined below:

| <i><b>Student</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <i><b>Preceptor/Supervisor</b></i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask for background reading or other information prior to meeting with preceptor;</li> <li>• Discuss the scope of the practicum, clarify whether the work will be independent or in collaboration with others;</li> <li>• Discuss how time should be allocated and hours recorded;</li> <li>• Clarify to whom they should report if preceptor is not available;</li> <li>• Complete any special training required</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Define the scope of the practicum with student;</li> <li>• Determine the need for any special training or certifications (HIPAA, IRB.);</li> <li>• Develop a schedule with the student;</li> <li>• Schedule regular meetings to chart development and progress;</li> <li>• Include the student in meetings or seminars related to the practicum area;</li> <li>• Clarify to whom student should report if preceptor is not available;</li> </ul> |

As students are balancing their areas of interest, family commitments, geographic and financial constraints, they may pursue a practicum that is full-time or part-time. Most full-time MPH students will complete their practicum in the summer between years 1 and 2. However, other arrangements are acceptable: a practicum may be carried out over a semester during the academic year, or over a full calendar year depending on the student's schedule and the needs of the sponsoring organization. Since the practicum is an opportunity to apply the concepts and methods of social science and public health learned in the classroom, practicums may begin towards the end of the students second semester.

Many factors influence a student's final practicum selection. Although it is helpful to have specific interests already in mind, the practicum also affords a great opportunity to explore areas of potential interest. Some students use this time to learn more about areas they may be considering for a career.

### ***Practicum Scope of Work Form***

The practicum scope of work (SOW) form is an important tool for planning your practicum and meeting the School's requirements for engaging in a structured and approved practicum process. It is **mandatory** for all students to develop a practicum SOW in collaboration with the practicum organization, and to get the **completed SOW approved before the start of the practicum**. Your practicum stipend will be disbursed only after the approval of your SOW. SOW form is completed online.

Once the practicum organization and project have been identified and agreed upon, it is the student's responsibility to submit the online SOW. The objectives and activities of the practicum should satisfy at least **3 Mailman competencies, 2 SMS competencies, and minimum time commitment (240 – MPH, 140 – Accelerated)**.

### ***Following the Practicum – Scope Of Work (SOW) Completion Form***

After completion of the practicum, all Mailman students are required to file the **SOW completion form on the [SOW website](#)**. With the authorization of the preceptor, students should submit (upload) two practice-based products they helped develop (i.e. survey instrument, evaluation plan, policy brief, curriculum) as a supplement to the OFP Completion Form. SMS students will present a reflection of their Apex experience via an SMS Apex Spotlight and/or by presenting at the SMS Apex Symposium.

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## Master's Thesis or Capstone

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### ***Introduction***

The master's thesis or capstone is the culminating requirement of all master's students in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences. The thesis is intended to reflect the training that you have received in the department and demonstrate your ability to design, implement, and present professional work relevant to your fields of interest.

Writing the thesis is an essential experience that furthers your career development. Employers seek public health professionals who can analyze data and evidence, write articles and reports, and design studies, needs assessments, and/or health promotion interventions. If you plan to continue your academic studies, developing expertise and demonstrating your ability as a writer are two important skills required of doctoral candidates. A well-written professional paper is a great asset that you can bring with you to job interviews or include in applications for doctoral studies. The thesis must be written in English.

### ***Selection and Role of the Thesis Sponsor***

Toward the end of your first year (for students completing the degree in two years) you should identify a general thesis topic and a member of the SMS faculty as a potential thesis sponsor. The role of your thesis sponsor is to provide guidance and feedback to you throughout the research and writing of the thesis.

You will be contacted in mid-August by the department asking you to further think about the type of thesis you would like to write and 3 to 4 SMS faculty you would like to be your sponsor. A list of eligible SMS faculty members and their expertise/interests and descriptions of the SMS thesis types will be included in this e-mail. This information is also included in the appendix to this Handbook and described below. You will be asked to submit your final rank-ordered list of 3 to 4 SMS faculty and a brief paragraph describing your thesis ideas or plans. For some students, this will not get finalized until they meet and discuss with their thesis sponsors. The department will then match students and faculty. You and your faculty sponsor will be notified of the match in September.

In rare cases you may wish to consult and otherwise involve other faculty or non-faculty individuals as advisors for your thesis. Students may arrange to have two co-sponsors: 1 SMS faculty sponsor and 1 outside sponsor. Including other advisors in the thesis process should be done with the permission of the thesis course instructor (Christian Gloria).

An outsider approved as co-sponsor must agree to the thesis formats and structure noted in this handbook and the deadlines and grading process listed in the Coursework's site.

You should schedule, as soon as possible, ongoing meetings with your thesis sponsor, from whom you will receive regular feedback during the process of preparing your thesis. Early planning for these meetings is important because you and/or your sponsor may have other commitments that may make scheduling difficult. It is the student's responsibility, not the thesis sponsor's, to ensure that a sufficient number of sessions are scheduled.

When a student and sponsor have agreed to work together, the student should write a memorandum summarizing the discussion and the student's understanding of the agreement between themselves and

the sponsor. Some issues to discuss and address in the memo are:

1. Schedule of student-sponsor meetings
  - a) Are there times when meetings cannot occur due to travel or other obligations?
  - b) When to meet in-person or via video conference?
2. When should written drafts be submitted?
3. How would communication take place? Preference for written comments, in-person discussions, emails exchange, etc.
4. If thesis work is done on sponsor's research data (if another researcher's data, same questions apply):
  - a) What data will be available to student?
  - b) When will data be available to student?
  - c) Does sponsor approve that the thesis will be written by student and they would be the sole author on the thesis? How would later publication be handled? Student should first author? Would sponsor be co-author?
5. Sponsor's other expectations from student
6. Student's expectations, accommodation needs, and requests

It is also strongly recommended that you participate in a study group with other SMS students (possibly who are working on the same type thesis) and use the group format to ensure that you are making progress toward finishing your thesis on time.

### ***Library Resources***

Students are urged to avail of the many resources provided by CUMC Health Sciences Library that support conducting literature reviews including workshops, online guides, and individual consultations with subject matter specialists who can help define search terms and identify research databases, assessment, and review results summary tools, appropriate for your specific review. Using library resources will save time and effort in conducting reviews and contribute to a more professional literature review article.

- *Upcoming Classes, Workshops & Events* <https://library.cumc.columbia.edu/events>
- *Online resources* <https://library.cumc.columbia.edu/explore-resources#explore-activity>;
- *Individual consultation* with an information specialist <https://library.cumc.columbia.edu/user-inquiry-form>.

### ***Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval of the Thesis***

Students whose thesis involves some form of human subjects research will need to consult the Columbia University Human Research Protection Office Students as Researchers Policy. All research involving human subjects must be submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review. An IRB review may involve an exemption, an expedited review, or a full review. Only the IRB, following a review of the research protocol, may grant an exemption. That is, neither the faculty sponsor with whom you are working nor you can make the determination that your project is exempt. If you believe that your project should be exempt, you must apply to ask the IRB for an exemption.

The following are examples of the types of theses that REQUIRE review by the Columbia IRB:

- Collection of data using human subjects using quantitative or qualitative research methods, including interview of few respondents, focus groups, etc..
- Analysis of previously collected (also called "secondary") data
- Collection or analysis of data from human subjects even if the IRB has already the study (even if it is your sponsor's project).
- Analysis of data from human subjects that was already collected and approved by another institution's IRB, even an institute where you work(ed) or where you are doing (did) your practicum
- The following is an example of a thesis that would NOT require IRB approval: Research activities that involve only the analysis of de-identified data within a publicly available dataset need not be submitted to the IRB for review or for a determination that the project falls into an "exempt" category. For examples of publicly available datasets see links at the CU library website at <https://library.columbia.edu/services/research-data-services/guides.html>

The university's guidelines on students as researchers are available on the web site of the CUMC IRB: <http://www.cumc.columbia.edu/dept/irb/policies/index.html#irb>. Any student considering conducting human subjects research for their thesis should consult these guidelines to determine the appropriate steps to take for IRB review.

### ***Submission of IRB protocols***

The IRB review process can be complex and lengthy, so any theses that may require IRB approval should be started as soon as possible. If you seek to work on a thesis project that may require an application to the IRB, you should discuss your project with your thesis sponsor before beginning the process and obtain their agreement to serve as the Principal Investigator (PI) on your project. An IRB protocol must have a PI. In the protocol, the project should be identified as thesis research that you are conducting under faculty mentorship.

The CUMC IRB does not permit students to be listed as the PI on an IRB protocol. Theses that are submitted to the IRB need to be submitted with the Columbia University faculty member who is the Sponsor listed as the PI on the IRB protocol. The students should be listed as an Investigator.

All personnel listed on the protocol (including students) need to have passed the Human Subjects Protection Training exam and the Health Insurance Portability Accountability Act Training Course (HIPPA) exam.

Submission of IRB protocols and correspondence with the IRB is conducted on-line using the university's research administration system, RASCAL (see [www.rascal.columbia.edu/](http://www.rascal.columbia.edu/)). At the RASCAL website, click on "Human Subjects (IRB)," and "Create a Protocol." Under "Rascal Human Subjects" you can also click on "Helpful IRB Information," for a comprehensive archive of information and frequently asked questions.

### ***The Thesis or Capstone Course***

**Two-year Columbia MPH and Dual Degree** students are required to register for their thesis as a year-long, two-semester course sequence, **P8707 SMS Thesis Proposal** (1 credit) and **P8708 SMS Master's Thesis** (2 credits). These courses lead students through the process of developing the thesis: from brainstorming ideas and writing the thesis proposal (P8707) to completing the thesis paper (P8708)—a professional and

high-quality written product which meets the accreditation requirements of the Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) of the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

P8707 and P8708 do not have weekly class meetings throughout the semester. Instead, there are a limited number of sessions early in each semester. Most of the work on the thesis is done by the student independently as well as in collaboration with their thesis sponsor. Regular group writing sessions with classmates are strongly encouraged as sources of social support and peer reviews. The purpose of registering for the course is to provide students with guidance and resources via the Courseworks site and periodic meetings.

**Accelerated MPH, 4+1 MPH, and MS** students—instead of P8707 and P8708—are required to register for **P8719 SMS Master's Capstone** (3 credits) during their final Spring semester. P8719 is an accelerated version of P8707+P8708. During the preceding Fall semester, students will also be matched with a Faculty

### ***Grading of the Thesis***

The sponsor will grade the thesis based on the following criteria:

- How well-defined is the topic of discussion/research problem/theoretical issue?
  - How well-developed and appropriate are the theoretical/conceptual frameworks?
  - How well-developed is the literature review (i.e., are the relevant sources on the topic cited and discussed)?
  - How well-supported and convincing are the points, inferences and conclusions?
  - How well-organized, well-written, and readable is the thesis?
  - How innovative and sophisticated is the overall thesis and the presentation of arguments?
  - How well did the thesis address and meet the Integrative Learning Experience (ILE) competencies of CEPH?
  - Other strengths and weaknesses?
- *Thesis Award nomination - Each year the department gives an award for outstanding SMS Master's Thesis. Thesis sponsors are asked to submit their top theses for consideration. A panel of SMS faculty then reviews the nominations and selects the winner. The award is presented to the student at the Mailman School Student Awards Ceremony in May.*

### ***Writing the Thesis***

Writing is a skill that everyone can improve. There are many guides that are helpful. For writing research papers see, for example, Booth, W.C., Colomb, G.G., & Williams, J.M. (2008). *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. An excellent resource of review articles is *The Handbook of Research Synthesis* by H. Cooper & L. Hedges (eds.), (1994). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

### ***Columbia University Writing Center***

Students are strongly encouraged to regularly use the programs, services, and resources offered by the Columbia University Writing Center.

- The Writing Center provides writing support to undergraduate and graduate students. In one-on-

one consultations and workshops, our consultants offer feedback and strategies to help you improve at every stage of your writing, from brainstorming to final drafts.

- Thesis writers can sign-up for repeating appointments within the first two weeks of the semester by filling out the online form (link below). The Writing Center can offer each writer a 6-appointment block per term.
- Website: <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center>

### ***Acceptable Thesis Formats***

- 1) Literature Review (also referred to as a Review Article)
- 2) Research Proposal
- 3) Needs Assessment Proposal
- 4) Program Evaluation Proposal
- 5) Intervention Proposal
- 6) Research Report
- 7) Theory-Based Educational Curriculum

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## **1. Literature Review**

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### ***Overview***

The overall goal of a review article is to synthesize the recent literature on a problem, issue, or phenomenon of public health relevance, identify the current state of knowledge, and note gaps, unanswered questions, and possible controversies. A review article can focus on a variety of topics in public health, including the theoretical underpinnings and frameworks for investigating a particular issue, methodologies for research, results of intervention studies, summarizing quantitative and/or qualitative research findings on a particular issue, or a review of a policy that impacts the health of a defined population.

There are several types of review articles; the most common include narrative review, systematic review, scoping review, and rapid review.

- **Systematic review** aims to provide a comprehensive, unbiased, synthesis of relevant empirical evidence to answer a focused research question. An explicit protocol guides comprehensive and replicable searching, and quality appraisal of identified studies. Findings across studies are synthesized and presented in tabular form and narrative summary. Meta-analysis is a type of systematic review that statistically combines the results of quantitative studies. However, systematic reviews can include quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods studies.
- **Narrative review** is a summary of published materials which examines existing literature on a topic, not necessarily following a systematic process for how publications are identified, included, appraised, or combined. The author conducts a purposive search to identify relevant literature which can cover a wide range of subject matter at various levels of completeness and comprehensiveness. Results are presented in a narrative format which ideally should synthesize rather than simply summarize results.
- **Scoping review** is a type of knowledge synthesis designed to map the literature on key concepts, theories, existing empirical evidence, and knowledge gaps pertaining to a research question. A

systematic methodology is developed to identify relevant materials from diverse sources that may include in-process research and existing systematic reviews. A scoping review may or may not include critical appraisal of individual sources of evidence. Findings across sources are synthesized and results are presented in tabular format with narrative commentary.

- **Rapid review** implements an explicit and systematic methodology, in which formal systematic review methods are streamlined and processes accelerated to complete the review more quickly. Techniques to shorten the timescale include using less comprehensive searching (e.g. limit language and date of publication, geographic area covered, secondary searching etc.), or performing only simple quality appraisal. The reviewer chooses which components to limit and explicitly reports the likely effect of limitations.

All the above (and others) are appropriate for the thesis but vary with regard to the purpose of the review and components of the review protocol. Standards for conducting the different types of reviews and reporting guidelines have been established – the best known by the [Cochrane Collaboration](#). Students undertaking a literature review for their thesis would *not* be expected to achieve a systematic review meeting all standards required by Cochrane. They are, however, expected to apply the general principles and guidelines of established frameworks to produce a literature review that uses a systematic approach in the search for, critique, and analysis of the literature. It is important to remember that a good quality literature review is a ‘research’ project. The task is to identify a research question or questions, and to answer the question(s) using a pre-defined methodology for searching for, appraising, and analytically summarizing information from the relevant published articles or other documents.

### ***Steps in completing a literature review***

1. **Identify a topic and formulate your review question.** Select a topic that is of interest to you, stimulates your curiosity, and contributes to understanding or responding to a public health issue. A broad search of the existing literature is a good way to start. For example, a review article on an aspect of the COVID-19 pandemic might start by searching for “risk factors for COVID-19.” Then a narrower focus guided by a thesis or theme, such as “characteristics of living settings that increase the risk of COVID-19” can narrow the search to better serve the writer’s objective. It is important to do background research to refine your review question and to check that the review you propose has not already been done.
2. **Develop your review protocol.** An essential step is the development of a review protocol that defines the objectives and methods of your review. You will need to specify inclusion/exclusion criteria (which types of studies or other published materials will be eligible for review) and your search strategy (how will you locate materials). A clearly defined search strategy includes search terms and the databases you will search, and strategy for any secondary searching such as checking references of eligible articles, and searching for ‘grey literature’ produced in print or online outside commercial or academic publishing such as dissertations, conference proceedings, government reports, expert opinion pieces, policy briefings, advocacy manifestos, etc.
3. **Select publications/documents for review.** Implement your search strategy and select publications that meet your inclusion criteria for review. Screen titles and abstracts for an initial check and access complete articles to determine inclusion. You often need to adjust your searching based on initial results (e.g. too many publications identified or missed). Document the process of refining your search and identifying studies or other published works relevant for your review.

4. ***Read and extract key data from each publication.*** Organization is critical in the reading phase of conducting a literature review. Set up a template for abstracting key components of each included item: citation, type of publication, setting/population, study design, data sources, factors examined, and findings etc. Relevant information about included articles or other documents will depend on the type of literature relevant to your review - key components of publications for a review of policy statements would differ from a review of qualitative studies of personal experience and cultural contexts of vaccine hesitancy. Take notes from each publication, organized by topics relevant to answering your review question. This will ease organization and writing of the review, assist in citing articles, and ensure a complete bibliography. Consider using a reference management system such as Zotero, EndNote or Mendeley.
5. ***Assess the quality of evidence.*** Assessing the quality of information from the individual studies or other documents included, and whether the evidence taken as a whole across the multiple data sources supports a particular intervention, policy, or other course of action, is an important feature of a literature review in public health. There are many tools for quality appraisal applicable to a range of evidence types. Other than for some types of systematic review, use of a specific tool is not essential. However, existing tools can assist you in developing an approach to evaluating the relevance, strength, and limitations of the literature for addressing your review question and responding to the health issue or problem that motivates your review.
6. ***Synthesize findings and analyze results.*** The next step is analyzing information from the publications or other documents you have reviewed to provide an overall summary of the information extracted from each as findings relate to your review question. There are methods for synthesis of findings from quantitative studies (meta-analysis) or from qualitative studies (meta-ethnography) on the same topic. However, given the variability in individual studies or other types of included literature, narrative synthesis is most often used to examine patterns and integrate findings across items reviewed. It is advisable to create a table(s) showing relevant characteristics of each study or document and summarizing evidence from each that relates to your review question. For example, a recent review of studies on social determinants of COVID-19 outcomes summarized results of studies in a table showing type of study design and social factors examined and analyzed findings by social determinant category.
7. ***Writing the review.*** As you begin to write, let the words flow freely and unreservedly! The initial draft can be revised, reorganized, and edited to satisfy the writer's purpose. What has been learned from the literature review can guide a clarification of the aims of the review article and contribute to the outline of the master's thesis. Thorough notes and/or an outline can help with identifying appropriate sections and sub-headings for the review, and provide a logical order to presenting the strengths and weaknesses of published studies and findings. Gaps in information can be noted. Information can be presented in the text, in tables, diagrams, or sidebars. Careful editing can come later, after the sections of the review are together.

Editing is a critically important part of the writing process. It gives the writer the opportunity to check the logic and consistency of an argument, reassess and reorganize the document to better meet the overall aim of the review, and ensure that proof is provided for statements and arguments. Keep in mind that sources should be cited for both ideas and facts. Do not hesitate to be critical when it is warranted and qualify the nature of evidence to provide a clear assessment of the implications of each study or other document reviewed. The review article should reflect the writer's overall

objective, keeping in mind that hard and fast conclusions may be elusive. In many areas of public health, science remains a work in progress. A well-crafted review article can stimulate next steps in advancing the evidence base in public health.

### ***Guidelines for the Structure of a Review Article***

The structure of a review article will depend in part upon the content of the material that is collected for it. Organization of the review depends on the ways that you want to build your argument. In general, however, your review article should contain the components listed below. The length of these sections will vary; the overall length of a review article should be 25 to 35 pages with additional pages for appendices often included to show details of your search strategy, quality assessment criteria, additional details for each item reviewed, etc.

#### ***Abstract***

The abstract of your review is a concise summary of the objective and type of review, your review question, summary of methods, essential findings, and conclusion. It may be structured or unstructured. The abstract is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you present.

#### ***Introduction/ Background***

Introduce the central issue, public health problem or topic that motivates your review and your review question. This section should include prior empirical research and other relevant background information depending on your thesis topic such as existing theoretical frameworks, current policy or practice, unaddressed equity issues. The introduction and background section presents information about what is known and not known about the issue, and the importance of learning more, addressing gaps, resolving or mitigating the problem, that led to your review of the literature. End this section with a clear statement of your review question and specific aims.

#### ***Methodology***

Summarize your review protocol including search strategy and selection criteria used to identify publications included in your review. Include your search terms, data bases searched, other resources searched, inclusion criteria, and criteria used for assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the articles or other documents identified.

#### ***Results***

This section presents results of the literature review as they relate to answering your review question. Create a logical structure for this section by organizing and synthesizing findings from the review. For most reviews a summary of results in tabular form is recommended.

Subheadings are essential in discussion of results. Use the themes or categorizations used for your synthesis of information from the individual articles or other documents. Data from the literature review should be presented accurately and cited correctly. Here is where you will analyze, interpret, critique, and synthesize findings from the articles or other documents in the literature review. An assessment of the quality of information in the published literature can set the agenda for the discussion and concluding remarks.

### ***Discussion/Conclusion***

Briefly summarize the key findings in the review and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the extant literature in relation to your answering your review question. In the concluding section of the paper, recommendations for further studies can be made that address gaps in information and unanswered questions. If relevant, implications for public health practice or policy can also be addressed.

### ***References***

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

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## **2. Research Proposal**

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### ***Overview***

A research proposal is a plan to investigate a problem, issue, or phenomenon of importance (in this case) to public health. Its three most critical components are: (1) A clear description the study's specific goal and the research questions, aims and/or hypotheses that will allow that goal to be achieved; (2) A strong case for the importance/significance of the proposed research based on available data (e.g. official data on prevalence, incidence, morbidity and mortality); and a thoughtful review of the relevant existing literature; and (3) The presentation of a methodologically sound and feasible plan for carrying out the work (e.g., identifying and recruiting the sample, gathering the data), and for the data analysis.

When preparing a research proposal be concise and clear in your writing. Avoid gratuitous language, jargon, going off on tangents, and very long or rambling sentences. If you are submitting your proposal to an agency or organization to seek funding to carry out the study, the reviewers will likely be given multiple proposals to evaluate alongside yours. Do not make them have to struggle to figure out the what, why and how of your proposal. Rather than devote extra time to doing so, they may simply give your proposal a poor score because you were unable to effectively make your case for funding. Also carefully proofread your application before submission. Sloppy work in preparing the proposal may be taken as an indication that you may not be a careful researcher. Doing careful work is always perceived as a good quality in a researcher. Finally, be realistic in what you propose to accomplish. Make sure your goals are achievable within the constraints of time and budget and the challenges that may exist to carrying out the work. Promising deliverables that the reader/reviewer will know are very unlikely to be able to be achieved might be taken as a sign of your inexperience, lack of sophistication, or poor judgement, all of which will hurt your chances of being funded.

The outline presented below for preparing a sound research proposal is a generic one. If you plan to seek funding to carry out the proposed research, different funders may have their own guidelines regarding what they require a proposal to include, specific page limits, and formatting requirements. Nevertheless, all of the elements in the outline below will likely be required in one form or another in most proposals accepted by funding bodies, as they are essential to a sound and competitive proposal. If you are submitting your research proposal to NIH, you should consult the Courseworks page for resources on writing research proposals. For example, the "Quick Guide for Grant Applications" by the National Institutes of Health offers specific tips on writing the different sections of a research proposal for funding at this government agency.

### ***One-Page Specific Aims***

This section should be thought of as a highly condensed version of key components of the full research proposal, which will subsequently be fully developed in later sections of the proposal. The overview should address the following questions: (1) What is the goal of the proposed research and what are the specific aims, research questions, or hypotheses that will be addressed to enable you to achieve that goal? (2) Why is it important (to public health) to undertake this study? That is, what will be learned that can help prevent or ameliorate an existing public health problem and/or be useful to other researchers, practitioners and/or policy makers? (3) What are the research methods you will use to carry out the research and the analysis plan for the data gathered?

### ***Background and Significance (Literature review)***

Situating your proposed research within the body of research that already exists on the topic, problem or phenomenon you will be investigating (**Background**) and making a persuasive case for the importance of the work you are proposing (**Significance**) are critical first steps in preparing a strong proposal. If the reviewers are not persuaded that the problem you are addressing is of real importance/significance, it does not matter how elegant your research design is. Funders will not support a well-designed study of a problem they regard to be of little significance.

To help the reviewer understand the importance of the proposed study, it needs to be put in a larger context and discussed in relation to existing related research. This is accomplished through a thorough review of that literature. This review should be organized to show how the research findings could make an important contribution to the literature and how what will be learned can help inform the work of other researchers, practitioners, or policy makers. This contribution can be made in a variety of ways, including (but not limited to): by filling an important gap in the existing literature that limits our understanding of the problem under investigation; by helping to resolve an important debate in the field that may be impeding efforts to address the problem; by informing the development of interventions, program or new research instruments; by providing a more nuanced or comprehensive understanding of the problem. To demonstrate the importance of the problem to public health, researchers will often cite available data (if it exists) on the incidence and prevalence of the problem, the associated morbidity and/or mortality, the economic and social costs of the problem, or the costs of the problem in terms of human suffering.

Be sure in the review to cite the seminal or foundational work in the field. The literature review does not have to be exhaustive and cite every relevant article in the literature. It should, however, include the findings from the best (i.e., most methodologically sound) studies available, and represent all of the significant points of view or ongoing debates in the literature about the issues that will be investigated. Further, it should include existing research findings that both do and do not support the premise of your study or the case for its importance -- if both exist. That is, you cannot just cherry pick articles that support your argument for doing the proposed research, while omitting those that weaken or challenge it. However, if it is the case that the existing studies that support your research proposal are more methodologically sound or immediately relevant to the proposed work than those that do not, you can point that out.

Try to keep the review as closely related to the focus of your proposal as possible. For example, if you are studying only one aspect of a complex multifaceted problem, it should focus on that single aspect unless it is necessary to include literature on other aspects of the problem to better highlight the importance of

the one aspect under investigation. How well you craft the review will allow reviewers to assess your command of what is currently understood about the problem under investigation and the importance of what your research can contribute to the field and advance the work of other researchers, practitioners and policy makers.

If you are preparing a grant for submission to NIH, you will also be asked to include a separate “Innovation” section. If the proposal is not being submitted to NIH, you might still want to address this issue (if relevant) at the end of the Background and Significance section. That something has never been studied before does not by itself make the work innovative. You have to show that you will be developing new methods or theories or are using existing ones in new ways in order to demonstrate your work is innovative.

### ***Preliminary Work (if relevant)***

In this section, if you or any key member of the research team has data of their own that might support the proposed study’s significance, the research design choices made, the feasibility of the study, or even some of the assumptions that might underlie your proposal, it should be discussed here. If you have publications from prior research you conducted that were cited in the literature review, they need not be repeated here, although you may want to add other information about them here that can support the application as designed. In “Preliminary Work,” you can also discuss your previous experience successfully employing the methods or theories you plan to use in the proposed research. For example, some populations are hidden or hard to locate or may be reluctant to participate in research that involves their admitting participation in an illegal or socially proscribed behavior (e.g., sex work). If in the past any key member of the proposed research team had success locating and enrolling individuals from this (or a similarly hidden) population -- for example, through respondent driven sampling -- you can cite this as evidence to support the feasibility or being able to recruit the proposed sample and your/your team member’s experience using this sampling strategy. Or, if you are proposing a longitudinal study and had previously conducted longitudinal research in which you were able to achieve a high retention rate, you can cite that data as evidence that you successfully employed strategies in past work that have enabled you to minimize attrition. Researchers will often undertake small pilot studies specifically to gather data they can report on in the “Preliminary Work” section to support the proposal in some way or to demonstrate some challenging aspect of the plan is feasible.

### ***Research Design (Methodology)***

Below is an outline of the principal points the “Research Design” section should address and the sections in which they should be included. You should try to include a justification for your key research design choices, especially if they are not common ones. Some procedures are the accepted “gold standard” for how to do something and do not require justification. However, often there are competing methods that do have different advantages and disadvantages. In such instances, you should explain your choices.

**Approach:** Briefly describe the basic approach of the study—e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, cross-sectional, longitudinal, ethnography, exploratory, randomized controlled trial/experiment, hypothesis testing, etc. You will typically need to discuss both data collection strategy and study design to describe your general approach. Explain why you feel this approach is best suited to the proposed study.

**Theoretical Framework** (if appropriate): Not all studies are theory driven. For example, qualitative

research typically relies on an inductive rather than a deductive approach to research. Theories can be used to provide a rationale for a study, to guide the choice of research questions or hypotheses to be tested, to guide the selection of variables to include, or to formulate a data analysis plan. Many researchers would argue that if you are claiming your research is theory driven, the theory should (to some extent) inform or infuse virtually all aspects of the research plan. This section should review how the theory is applied to the research design. The theoretical framework should initially be referenced and described in Background and Significance section of the proposal.

**Sample:** Describe the kind of sampling strategy you will use (e.g., probability or nonprobability sampling, stratified sampling, quota sampling, systematic sampling, multistage sampling, convenience sampling, etc.). Describe the population from which you are planning to draw your sample (e.g., women who have ever experienced intimate partner violence, individuals who suffered a heart attack in the past 2 years, US citizens who traveled abroad for medical care in the past 5 years). Who in this population will be eligible to participate in your study (i.e. what are your inclusion criteria) and who will not be eligible to participate (i.e. what are your exclusion criteria)? The inclusion and exclusion criteria should be justified. Describe the sampling procedures that you will use and the proposed size of your sample. Explain how you arrived at the sample size. Funders do not want to pay for extra cases that are not needed to answer the research questions, but also they do not want to find at the end of the study that there were not enough people in the sample to be able to adequately address the study aims. When a quantitative study is being proposed the reviewers will want to see a power analysis to determine the smallest sample size suitable to detect an effect of a given test at the desired level of significance. The power analysis can be included here, but more typically is included in the data analysis section. With

qualitative research, it is much harder to justify the sample size. However, there are numerous resources that address this issue and suggest criteria that should be considered in deciding if one needs a larger or smaller sample. These criteria include the heterogeneity/homogeneity of the population under investigation and whether sampling quotas will be imposed, among others). Typically, it is extremely hard in advance of gathering the data to know how large of a sample you will need for a qualitative study, especially if the phenomenon being researched is poorly understood. Nevertheless, because you must submit a budget with the proposal you will have to give an estimate so you can budget for interviewer time required, transcription of interviews, and any incentive (e.g. gift card, cash honorarium) participants will receive.

**Recruitment:** Explain how you will find and enroll eligible cases for your study. If you have a sampling frame explain its strengths and limitations. For example, how completely does the sampling frame enumerate the population under investigation? If you are studying a population that is very rare, hard to find, or hidden, reviewers will expect you to acknowledge that fact and provide a detailed plan for identifying and recruiting participants. If you will be conducting a longitudinal study, you should indicate what your estimates are for participant attrition/retention and what they are based on (e.g., reports from other studies, a pilot study you conducted and reported on in "Preliminary Studies," etc.). If participants will be given anything (e.g., a gift card or other incentive) for their participation report what that will be.

**Data Collection or Sources of Data:** If you will be gathering new data, describe the data collection procedures.

- If participants will complete quantitative surveys, include a description of the measures, instruments and other items that will be in the survey. This should include information on the reliability and validity of the measures. Also, describe how the survey will be administered. For

example, will participants complete it online, or be sent a printed-paper survey to complete and a return envelope; or will the survey be administered over the phone or in person by a researcher?

- If participants will participate in qualitative interviews, explain if the interviews will be conducted face-to-face, by telephone, via videoconference, or some other way. Describe who will conduct the interviews and the training they will receive. Describe key topics in the interview guide and explain how structured or unstructured the interviews will be. Indicate if they will be recorded and transcribed for later analysis or if only notes will be taken by the interviewer.
- If participants will be observed to gather data, explain how the observations made will be recorded (through notes, through videotaping, etc.). Explain how you will sample participants or units of time for observation. Will those who will be observed be aware this is happening?
- If rather than collecting new data for the study you plan to use secondary data (i.e., data gathered for another study or purpose that you can have access to address your research questions), explain why you have made the choice to use secondary data. Describe the type and source of that data including brief summary of the original methodology (site, sampling, assessment etc.). Describe its strengths and limitations. If your data will come from archival or official sources (e.g., data gathered by governmental bodies), describe the archives or official data sources you will use and your reasons for choosing them. Discuss their strengths and limitation with regard to the proposed study.

**Data Analysis Plan:** Specify the data analytic strategies you will use to analyze your data (e.g., logistic regression, structural equation modeling, cluster analysis, thematic analysis, grounded theory, etc.). Often proposed analyses can be organized by study research questions/aims. When a quantitative study is being proposed the reviewers will want to see a power analysis to determine the smallest sample size suitable to detect an effect of a given test at the desired level of significance. That can be included here or earlier in the “Sample” section, but more typically it appears in the Data Analysis Plan section. The justification for the size of a qualitative sample more commonly appears where the sample design is discussed. When a mixed methods approach is used, reviewers typically will want a plan at the data analysis stage for integrating the qualitative and quantitative data.

- If you are doing qualitative research and will be coding the data, explain how the coding scheme will be developed, who will train the coders, and how inter-rater agreement in the application of the codes will be assessed. Explain the data analysis methods you will use (e.g., content analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory, etc.) to address the research aims or questions).

### **Feasibility**

In this section, you should make a case for the feasibility of carrying out the proposed study. Before funders give a researcher money to carry out a proposed study, they want to be confident that the plans laid out for completing the research are going to be able to be carried out. You may already have started to provide evidence of the proposed study’s feasibility through past work described in the “Preliminary Work” section (above). For example, if you showed that in prior research you were able to locate and recruit a hidden population using the same methods you are currently proposing to use to find members of that same or a similarly hard to find population, that will lend support to the study’s feasibility. In this section, you might also discuss your access to special resources (e.g., a research van to go out into the community, etc.) that will be needed to complete the study. Alternatively, you might also discuss established relationships you have with community-based organizations that can assist you with enrolling eligible members of the communities that they serve. If there are potential challenges in successfully

carrying out the research using the procedures you outlined, explain what alternative plans you will be able to employ should the proposed methods prove to be less feasible or effective than you had anticipated. As part of the feasibility section, investigators often include a timetable to show when different components of the research study will be implemented and milestones reached.

### ***Strengths and Limitations***

Researchers sometimes choose to point out what they recognize as some of the strengths and limitations of their proposed study. In some cases, the strengths may have already been discussed in one of the earlier sections. If so, it is only necessary to briefly mention them here. Strengths may include things like the special expertise or extensive experience of the research team members. Alternatively, it might be strong relationships with community-based organizations who will be collaborators in the research. Limitations may include things like having to rely on a convenience sample. Others might be certain restrictions on the generalizability of the findings, or that because participants will be asked to report on events that happened years before and their reports may be subject to recall bias. Using secondary data can be an approach that has both strengths and limitations. It saves time and money because you are not collecting new data. However, when you use data collected for another purpose to try to answer your research questions, it may not include all the measures or questions you would like to have to address your research aims.

### ***References***

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

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## **3. Needs Assessment Proposal**

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### ***Overview***

Writing a needs assessment proposal is similar to writing an evaluation or research proposal. A needs assessment proposal may focus on examining health related needs (and assets) in a particular target population or community, or it may be conducted in preparation for an intervention program that serves a target population or community. Needs assessment proposals are divided roughly into the following three components: the abstract, needs and assets assessment plan, and the references.

### ***Abstract***

The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of the significance, overall purpose, objectives, (and preliminary findings of your needs assessment study). It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

### ***Background and Significance***

Here, the goal is to present: 1) a detailed description of the significance of conducting a rigorous needs assessment in the area that you have selected (e.g., a prospective funder/organization wants to address a health problem in a target population); 2) a description of the target population/community and setting for your needs assessment, including a summary of relevant demographic and general health data; 3) a

list of the objectives/aims of your needs assessment; 4) a description of what a “need” is and what a “needs assessment” is; 5) the theoretical perspectives and conceptual models you are using to frame your needs assessment; 6) the plan for assessing assets, capacity, and resources (some of this content may be incorporated under other sections above); and, 7) a summary of gaps in the scientific and gray literature and how the proposed needs assessment will fill these gaps.

This section should include a logic model diagram, particularly if you use the Intervention Mapping or the PRECEDE approach to guide your needs assessment.

### ***Preliminary Findings***

Discuss key findings from the scientific and grey literature and reports from secondary data. Summarize evidence you have found that supports items you have in your final Logic Model (e.g. the health problem or problems, quality of life issues, behavioral factors, personal determinants of behavioral factors, environmental factors, and personal determinants of environmental factors). It is also important to note any gaps in the literature and/or areas that require primary data collection.

### ***Data Collection & Analysis Design***

Based on your preliminary findings, there are likely topic areas that will require additional research. You need to decide upon the most effective design for investigating these remaining questions. State the purpose, objectives, and/or research questions of your needs assessment that remain unanswered after conducting a literature review. Summarize the research design/approach that you propose using to answer the remaining questions, including: your approach to working with key stakeholders, the quantitative/qualitative/mixed methods you will employ to collect data, potential indicators you will measure and your proposed methods of data analysis. While there are no limitations placed on proposals, you should consider and comment on the feasibility of your proposed design.

### ***Limitations & Ethical Concerns***

**Limitations** – Discuss the methodological and other limitations of your proposal and data collection plan. Include a discussion of threats to internal and external validity, how those will be addressed, and why they may be justified.

**Ethical concerns** - Discuss the most salient ethical concerns related to your needs assessment proposal — whether or not these relate to human subjects research or the broader ethical implications of your study — and the mechanisms you propose to use to address these concerns. You are not expected to write a Protection of Human Subjects Protocol for an Institutional Review Board.

### ***Dissemination of Findings and Conclusion***

Discuss plans for including key stakeholders in interpretation of the results, disseminating the findings, and ensuring that the needs assessment findings will be used and translated into action. Concisely summarize the findings of your needs assessment, explain the implications and significance of your needs assessment plan, and include recommendations for interventions, as appropriate.

## **References**

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

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## **4. Program Evaluation Proposal / Program Evaluation Report**

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### **Overview**

Completing a thesis related to program evaluation has two distinct options: (1) writing an evaluation proposal or (2) conducting the evaluation and presenting results as a report. When choosing this thesis option, the first decision point is which approach will be taken.

Writing an evaluation proposal is very similar to writing a research proposal. An evaluation proposal typically focuses designing a plan to assessing the process, outcome, or impact of a program, service, or initiative. Evaluation proposals are generally formatted with the following sections: Abstract, Specific Aims, Background & Significance, Evaluation Design, Feasibility, Conclusion, and References.

Conducting the evaluation is similar to implementing a research proposal and centers on data collection, analysis, and reporting. The format for a completed evaluation is generally formatted with the following sections: Abstract, Specific Aims, Background & Significance (includes summary of evaluation design), Data Collection, Data Analysis, Discussion, Conclusion, and References.

### **4.1. Evaluation Proposal**

#### **Abstract**

The abstract of your evaluation proposal is a concise summary of your evaluation problem, objectives, and evaluation design. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present

#### **Specific Aims**

In this section describe the overall purpose, specific objective(s), and implications of the proposed evaluation. Aims and objectives should be clear and easy to follow. Approach writing aims with the idea that you are not the person that will conduct the evaluation.

#### **Background & Significance**

This section presents your literature review and should include 1) a detailed description of the evaluation problem and the significance of conducting a rigorous evaluation of the problem that you have selected; 2) the key findings in the scientific/evaluation literature regarding ways to evaluate your selected problem; 3) a discussion of how your study will contribute to the already existing knowledge base from prior findings; 4) the theoretical perspective from which your evaluation design emerged; and 5) any conceptual innovations in the approach of your evaluation. Given all the possible information to include it is critical to be concise.

## **Evaluation Design**

The design of the evaluation is the heart of the thesis. After you select a specific intervention/service/program to evaluate, you will select the proposed evaluation design that links to the evaluation levels (process, outcome, impact), with a focus on linking the design to the feasibility (see below). Approach writing the design as if you will not be implementing the evaluation. As such, significant detail is needed to ensure a properly conducted evaluation. The following subsections are generally included in the evaluation design (with some potential deviation if an evaluability assessment is proposed).

*Evaluation Approach* - Briefly describe the overall design/approach of your evaluation and the supporting rationale.

*Program Overview* - Describe the program/intervention/service that you plan to evaluate, its components, focus population(s), setting(s), key stakeholders, and expected goals. This section should also include a logic model.

*Evaluation Questions and Data Sources* – Clearly define the key questions your evaluation proposal aims to answer and describe the data sources that will be utilized. Include the rationale for both the questions and the sources.

*Data Collection* – Describe the strategies and steps necessary to collect the evaluation data. Be sure to include descriptors of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches as well as any parameters related to managing and protecting data. Reference the specific tools used to collect the data (include tools in the appendix) and provide examples of recruitment and consent documents as appropriate. If IRB approval would be required, be sure to include it as a step before data collection.

*Proposed Analysis* – This section provides an overview of the planned analysis based on the data collection procedures.

*Ethics & Validity* – Describe how ethical principles of research and evaluation are being addressed. Include how the plan addresses threats to internal and external validity.

*Use & Dissemination of Findings* – Provide an overview of how the organization can use and disseminate the findings after conducting the evaluation. Be sure to address key stakeholders as part of the dissemination plans.

The evaluation design should be written in temporal order and clearly identify when and how the different components of the evaluation are going to be implemented.

## **Feasibility**

In this section discuss the feasibility of conducting the proposed evaluation design. The reality of conducting an evaluation is critical and this section should reflect considerations of the resources necessary to complete the evaluation are available and the value of conducting an evaluation is understood by the organization.

## ***Conclusion***

This section should provide a concise summary of the topic, program, evaluation purpose, evaluation plan, and anticipated use of findings.

## ***References***

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

## ***4.2. Evaluation Report***

### ***Abstract***

The abstract of your completed evaluation is a concise summary of your evaluation objectives, evaluation design, data collection, and key findings. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

### ***Specific Aims***

In this section describe the overall purpose, specific objective(s), and implications of the evaluation. Aims and objectives should be clear and easy to follow. Aims should demonstrate an understanding of the value of the evaluation to the sponsoring organization.

### ***Background & Significance***

This section presents your literature review and should include 1) a detailed description of the evaluation problem and the significance of conducting a rigorous evaluation of the problem that you have selected; 2) the key findings in the scientific literature reflecting the intervention and similar evaluations; 3) a discussion of how this evaluation will contribute to the existing knowledge base; 4) the theoretical perspective and evaluation design model that guided the process; 5) any conceptual innovations in the evaluation approach. Given all the possible information to include it is critical to be concise.

### ***Data Collection***

Describe the strategies and steps undertaken to collect the evaluation data in temporal order. This section will contain significant detail that would allow a non-involved person to follow the steps taken and the potential to replicate the evaluation. Be sure to include descriptors of quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches and the rationale that explains the selected approach. Reference the specific tools used to collect the data (include tools in the appendix) and provide examples of recruitment and consent documents as appropriate. Include any parameters related to managing and protecting data. Include discussions of research ethics. If IRB approval would be required, be sure to include it as a step before data collection begins

### ***Data Analysis***

This section provides an overview of the analysis conducted based on the data collect procedures. Be sure to name all steps in the analysis, organized by how the analysis is answering the evaluation questions.

Include both the planned analysis from an evaluation plan as well as any analysis that was conducted after collecting data. Be sure to note new analysis decisions and the rationale that supported additional analysis beyond the initial plan. Do not discuss the meaning of any findings in this section.

### ***Discussion***

Building on the presentation of the findings (data analysis), and proceeding in the order of the evaluation questions, present the interpretation of the data. Be sure to link findings of this evaluation to the literature described in the background and significance. Include limitations and a discussion of threats to the validity of findings (internal and external). As findings are discussed, link with stakeholder dissemination and program opportunities (improvement, validation, etc.).

### ***Conclusion***

This section should provide a concise summary of the topic, program, evaluation plan, data collection, data analysis, and plan for the use of findings.

### ***References***

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

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## **5. Intervention Proposal**

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### ***Overview***

Anyone who will be responsible for helping individuals or communities change health risk behavior, initiate health-promoting behavior, change environmental factors, and/or manage chronic illnesses must be able to design effective public health programs and develop plans to implement and evaluate these programs. Writing a master's thesis about planning a public health program (hereafter referred to as a public health intervention) to ultimately produce improved health outcomes and quality of life frequently focuses on changing behavioral factors and/or environmental conditions. However, the most immediate impact of an intervention is usually on well-defined determinants of the specific behavior(s) and related environmental conditions. Below are the steps that are commonly used to describe a health problem, then to develop, implement, and evaluate a public health intervention, regardless of the intervention-planning model you use.

There are a number of recognized intervention planning models that you can use to write your thesis including but not limited to the PRECEDE-PROCEED model, Mobilizing for Action through Planning and Partnerships process, Intervention Mapping process, and the CDC Program Planning model. All of these planning models include intervention development steps that are similar and that focus on aspects of other types of SMS master's theses described above (i.e., Review Article, Research Proposal, Needs Assessment Proposal, and Program Evaluation Proposal). The guidance below is excerpted from the [CDC Program Planning Model](#) a model frequently used by public health practitioners to develop public health interventions.

## ***Abstract***

The abstract of your proposal is a concise summary of your health problem, objectives, and intervention design. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present.

## ***Describing a Health Problem***

Describing a health problem involves: assessing population health data, assessing community needs, and analyzing data and needs by identifying (and ranking) risk factors and subgroups.

## ***Assessing Population Health Data***

To better understand the health problem, you should review population health data to identify mortality rates, incidence, and prevalence. By reviewing surveillance data, survey results, health records, and other data sources, you can also obtain information about the distribution of the health problem in terms of person, place, and time, as well as the risk factors. The [2020 County Health Rankings: State Reports](#) and the [New York City Community Health Profiles](#) may be helpful in completing this step.

## ***Assessing Community Needs***

In addition to reviewing health data, you may gather more information about the health problem and the health status of the community by meeting with or surveying community members, leaders, and stakeholders, if this is feasible. Through focus groups, surveys, and/or interviews, you can ask them their opinion about the importance of the health problem, who is affected by the health problem, and, why the health problem exists. For additional information on assessing community needs, you can refer to the guidance provided for the Needs Assessment Proposal described above.

## ***Analyzing Data and Needs***

After you assess the population health data and community needs, part of analyzing data and community needs is identifying and ranking risk factors that may be affecting the health problem. Because an organization that may implement your intervention in the future will probably have limited resources, it is not practical to develop an intervention that addresses all risk factors. You can rank risk factors by determining which one is the most important and most modifiable. Similarly, you may also need to rank subgroups to determine which segment of the population you can most likely affect or influence. To rank subgroups you may use variables such as effect (which subgroup will your intervention have the greatest impact on in terms of measurable results or outcomes, such as lowering prevalence or mortality), influence (which subgroup can your intervention have the most control over in terms of changing behaviors, increasing knowledge, etc.), and, accessibility (which subgroup will be most available to your intervention or easily reached).

## ***Writing a Health Problem Statement***

After you assess health data and community needs, and identify (and ideally rank) risk factors and subgroups, you need to develop a health problem statement. A good problem statement answers the what, who, how much, when, and where. For example, what is the health problem, who is being affected, how much of the population is affected, when did the problem occur or when was it identified and where

is this problem located. A specific example of a health problem statement is - In 2015, 75% of students in the north region reported having at least one parent who smoked in the home.

### ***Developing a Public Health Intervention***

After describing the health problem and writing a health problem statement, the next step is to develop a public health intervention (to the extent possible, given you are only writing a proposal) which involves the following steps:

- Creating an intervention goal
- Developing long-term objectives
- Identifying and ranking contributing factors
- Developing an intervention by:
  - Selecting a health strategy
  - Researching existing evidence-based interventions
  - Comparing interventions
  - Selecting one to adapt or create
- Developing medium- and short-term objectives
- Developing an implementation plan
- Planning for evaluation

### ***Creating an Intervention Goal***

Using the health problem statement to plan the intervention involves creating a program goal, which is a generalized statement of the result or achievement to which the program is directed. There are two main steps to writing a good program goal: 1. Specify an expected program effect in reducing the health problem, 2. Identify the subgroup or segment of the population to be affected. An example of a program goal is - Reduce exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke in children.

### ***Developing Long-Term Objectives***

You should then develop SMART long-term objectives, which describe the incremental steps needed to accomplish the program goal. An example of a long-term objective for the secondhand smoke program goal above is - Goal: Reduce exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke in children. Long-Term Objective: By the end of 2020, reduce by 25% the prevalence of adult smokers in the home.

### ***Identifying and Ranking Contributing Factors***

To better focus your intervention planning efforts, you need to review and research how factors in a person's environment might cause them to behave in ways that increase or decrease the chance to develop a certain disease or condition. These factors contribute to the prevalence of the health condition. For example, if the dangers of smoking are unknown, a person may be more likely to smoke. Or, if cigarettes are easily available through vending machines at restaurants and other buildings, a person might be more likely to smoke. Identifying contributing factors requires a thorough review of the research and scientific evidence.

### ***Developing an Intervention***

All of the above steps lead up to designing or adapting your public health intervention, which should be the longest, most detailed section of your thesis. This involves determining a health strategy, researching existing evidence-based interventions, comparing interventions, and selecting an intervention to adapt or create.

- A health strategy is a general plan of action for affecting a health problem. The three main types of strategies include behavioral/educational, environmental, and policy. The health strategy you identify must relate to the program goal, the long-term objective(s), and the contributing factors that are most important and modifiable. To have a significant impact on the contributing factors of a health problem, you will often need to identify a combination of health strategies at the educational, behavioral, environmental, and/or policy levels.
- After selecting a health strategy or strategies to use, you should research existing evidence-based interventions to gain the support your intervention will need. Evidence-based interventions may also be cost effective to implement and can save time and resources during planning and implementation. By using an evidence-based intervention that successfully achieved its objectives, you will have more confidence that the intervention you develop will also be successful. An excellent resource to use to research evidence-based program and policy interventions is The Community Guide <http://www.thecommunityguide.org>.
- After you research evidence-based interventions, you will determine how well the intervention matches your program and future organization's: target audience (i.e., subgroup), goals and objectives, culture, cost, setting or future organizational capacity to implement it.
- Because public health interventions do not uniformly apply to all groups, it may be more efficient and cost-effective to adapt an existing intervention to a future organization's specific needs and situation. If you choose to create a new intervention, you should consider what would likely be leadership support, resources, feasibility, and availability of an intervention champion. Or, if there is no current evidence-based intervention that fits the culture, target audience, future organizational capacity, program goals, objectives, and delivery methods, you can create a new intervention. If you decide to create a new intervention, consider future
  - Leadership support
  - Resources (financial, personnel, facilities, partnerships)
  - Feasibility
  - Availability of program champion

### ***Developing Medium- and Short-Term Objectives***

After you select an existing intervention or decide to create a new one, you will create medium- and short-term objectives. These objectives will be the benchmarks of your intervention and should clearly describe what you expect your intervention to accomplish. Medium-term objectives usually describe a behavior or policy change, typically within 3-5 years. Short-term objectives usually describe knowledge, skills, attitude, or awareness change, typically within 1-3 years. An example of medium- and short-term objectives for the secondhand smoke problem is:

- Program goal: Reduce exposure to secondhand tobacco smoke (SHS) in children.
- Intervention: Marketing campaign about the dangers of secondhand smoke.

- Long-term Objective: By the end of 2020, reduce by 25% the prevalence of adult smokers in the home.
- Medium-term objective: By 2015, the number of smoke-free homes will increase by 15%.
- Short-term objective: By 2013, increase by 25% both the awareness of and exposure to messages about the hazards of SHS.

### ***Developing an Implementation Plan***

Now that you have developed your proposed intervention focusing on how you will address the health problem, you will develop a *preliminary plan* regarding how your proposed intervention will be implemented by: identifying and addressing potential barriers to implementation, developing a work plan to ensure you achieve the objectives, and developing a communication plan to ensure project members and stakeholders.

### ***Planning for Evaluation***

While you were designing your proposed intervention, you should also have been planning for evaluation. It is important that planning and evaluating should be done concurrently. During the planning process, you will develop a *preliminary plan* for evaluation by considering the following:

- Do you have the resources to do an evaluation?
- What component of the intervention will you evaluate?
- What do you want to know about your intervention?
- When will you evaluate the intervention?
- What type of data will you need to address the evaluation questions?
- Do you have a system or tools for collecting the data? Where, how, and when will you collect the data?
- Do you have a system or tools for organizing and interpreting the data?

The CDC framework to evaluate programs/interventions may be a helpful framework to use when developing a preliminary plan for your proposed intervention - <https://www.cdc.gov/eval/steps/>. You can also refer to the Program Evaluation Proposal thesis guidelines above for additional information.

### ***References***

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

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## **6. Research Report**

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### ***Overview***

A research report is a paper describing an original piece of empirical research the investigator (student) has carried out. A student should not consider preparing a research report for their thesis unless they are familiar with the research area, have access to research data (that you have collected yourself or that has been collected by others), and are confident in their ability to analyze the data and write it up in a research report.

## ***The Structure of a Research Report***

In addition to an abstract and reference list, research reports are typically divided into four main components: the introduction/literature review, the methods, the results, and the discussion.

### ***Abstract***

The abstract should be a concise summary of your research report including: the significance and objective(s) of the work that will be reported on, the methods used to carry out the research, the findings, and the conclusions. It is the last thing that you should write and the first thing that you should present when preparing a research report

### ***Introduction/Literature Review***

In this section, begin by introducing the general topic or issue that is the focus of your report (e.g., how HIV-related stigma may adversely affect willingness to be tested for HIV), and why it is important (e.g., if infected, a delay in diagnosis and start of treatment can lead to poorer health outcomes). At this point, do not yet state the specific questions that were the focus of the research that will be reported on. Here, in a paragraph or two, describe the nature and magnitude of the problem that you will address in your report. This may be accomplished by citing available statistics (e.g., on the prevalence or incidence of some disease, or of some social problem like homelessness) or findings from previously published research.

To help the reviewer understand the importance of the study, it needs to be put in a larger context and discussed in relation to existing related research. This is accomplished through a review of the research that summarizes and synthesizes the key findings of the existing literature relevant to your topic. The review need not be exhaustive and cite every relevant piece of literature. However, it should be comprehensive in terms of representing all the principal points of view or sides of a debate that exist on the topic in the literature. If little prior data on the problem is available, discuss the gap in the current literature your research report will address. Try to keep the review as closely related to the focus of your report as possible. For example, if you are studying only one aspect of a complex multifaceted problem, it should focus on that single aspect unless it is essential to include literature on other aspects of the problem to better highlight the importance of the one aspect under investigation.

You should conclude the Introduction/Literature Review with a statement of the specific research questions or aims you will be addressing or the hypotheses you will be testing (if relevant) in the report. If you have crafted the literature review well it should be apparent at this point to the reader how answering these questions will contribute in important ways to the existing literature (e.g., by filling gaps in our understanding about some problem or phenomenon, helping resolve an ongoing debate related to the topic, by generating new insights or hypotheses). You might want to organize your Introduction/Literature Review into subsections that will allow you to best locate it in the existing literature in the field and show how it can contribute to that literature

### ***Methods***

Introduce this section with a brief description of key features of the approach and design of the research that provided the data for the report -- e.g., whether it is qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, cross-

sectional, longitudinal, an ethnography, exploratory, randomized controlled trial or other experiment, hypothesis testing, etc. You will typically need to discuss both data collection strategy and study design to describe your general approach. If a theoretical framework was used to guide or inform the research (e.g., to derive hypotheses, select key variables) this should have been described in the Introduction. In the Methods section, you can explain and how the essential components of the theory relate to your study design.

**Sample:** Define the population from which the sample was drawn (e.g., women who have ever experienced intimate partner violence, individuals who suffered a heart attack in the past 2 years, US citizens who traveled abroad for medical care in the past 5 years). Indicate who within that population was eligible to participate in your study (i.e., what are your inclusion criteria) and who was not (i.e., what are your exclusion criteria).

**Recruitment:** Explain how you found and enrolled eligible cases for study. If you will be conducting a longitudinal study, you should report the attrition that occurred at each assessment point. If participants were given an incentive (e.g., a gift card or other honorarium) for their participation, report what they were given.

**Data Collection or Sources of Data:** Explain how the data were gathered/ obtained. If participants were surveyed, how were the surveys completed (e.g., online, administered by a research team member by phone, mailed paper surveys that were completed and returned, etc.)

- If you interviewed participants, describe how the interviews were conducted (e.g., face-to-face, over the phone, via videoconference)? Describe how structured or unstructured they were? Indicate if they were recorded and transcribed for analysis or if just notes were taken by the interviewer.
- If you observed or videotaped participants or sampling units, explain how you sampled observations or how the videotaping was carried out.
- If you used existing records or documents (e.g., diaries or letters people have kept, energy bills, phone records, etc.), explain how you obtained these records, and their strengths and limitations for addressing the research aims, questions or hypotheses.
- If rather than collecting new data for the report you used secondary data (i.e., data gathered for another study or purpose that you were given access to address your research questions), explain why you made the choice to use secondary data. Describe the type and source of the data including brief summary of the original methodology (site, sampling, assessment etc.). Discuss the dataset's strengths (e.g., is a large data set that well represents the population under investigation) and weaknesses with regard to your study (e.g., may not have contained all the variables you would have liked to have, the data are 5 years old, etc.).
- If the data you used in the report came from archival sources or official sources (e.g., data gathered by governmental bodies), describe the archives or official sources you used and your reasons for choosing them. Discuss the strengths and limitation of the data.

**Measures:** Describe the principal variables that were the focus of the analyses carried out to address the research questions, aims or hypotheses. Explain how these variables were chosen and how they were operationalized and measured. If existing standardized measures or instruments were used, provide information on their reliability and validity. If they were in any way modified in an effort to make them more suitable or relevant to the population or questions under investigation, describe those modifications

and the rationale for making them.

**Data Analysis Plan:** Specify the types of data analytic strategies you used to analyze your quantitative data (e.g., logistic regression, structural equation modeling, cluster analysis, path analysis, etc.) or your qualitative data, (e.g., thematic analysis, constant comparative method, etc.). Explain why you chose this analytic strategy (e.g., why it is the best fit for addressing the research aims) and how you applied it in your study.

### **Results**

Describe again the key research question you addressed in this report or the hypotheses you sought to test. Next report the principal findings related to these questions or hypotheses. Do not discuss what you think are the implications and significance of the findings in this section. Those comments should be saved for the Discussion section. Analyzed data is sometimes summarized or depicted in figures, or, tables, or in text form. If results are presented in a table, they do not need to be repeated in the text. You should refer to the table and describe highlights of the results presented there. In text, refer to each figure as "Figure 1," "Figure 2," etc. Number your tables as well (see the reference text for details).

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the discussion is to provide the reader with an integration and interpretation of the results and provide conclusions that address the research aims presented in the introduction. The purpose of the Discussion section is not to repeat the findings reported in the Results section in all their detail. Rather, it is to go beyond the results by interpreting them and discussing their implications and importance. If there were unexpected or serendipitous findings of importance, discuss those too. If your research was theory driven, tie your findings back to the theory (e.g., discuss how they were consistent with or diverged from what the theory would have led you to expect to find). Discuss the implications of your findings for future research. For example, do your findings raise new questions that should be investigated? Near the end of the discussion section, you should discuss the limitations of the study. These might be, for example, things about the study's scope, design, sample or methods that limit the generalizability of the study or that compromise the integrity of the inferences you wish to draw from the data. If there are factors that mitigate these limitations, those should be noted too. Conclude with strengths of the study and implications for future research, intervention, and/or policy.

### **References**

American Psychological Association (APA), 7<sup>th</sup> Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

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## **7. Theory-Based Education Curriculum**

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### **Overview**

In this project, a student will describe the design for and/or development of a health education curriculum. In keeping with best practice for state-of-the art public health instructional design, this curriculum should achieve the following outcomes for learners. Depending on the learners and the educational context, these may be personal or professional attitudes, knowledge, and skills.

- Teach functional health information (essential knowledge)
- Shape personal and/or professional attitudes that support health
- Shape social or group norms that support health
- Develop the essential skills necessary to adopt, practice, and maintain health-enhancing behaviors

Your curriculum may be designed to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to personal health behaviors or to provide guidance for those who support promote health at the programmatic level (so called “train the trainer” curricula).

### ***Guidelines for the Structure of Educational Curriculum***

The structure of a review article will depend in part upon the content of the material that is collected for it. Organization of the review depends on the ways that you want to build your argument. In general, however, your review article should contain the components listed below.

#### ***Literature Review***

An effective curriculum has clear health-related goals and outcomes that are directly related to the goals above. Instructional strategies and learning experiences are therefore directly related to the outcomes. In the literature review, please identify the health problem or issue of interest and what need the curriculum is developed to address.

#### ***Learner Profile***

- For whom is the curriculum intended? Why?
- Provide a sketch of the learners.
- What are their values, beliefs, and health goals?
- Are these personal or professional goals?
- What are their health-promoting individual and group norms? In a personal context, these may be community or cultural norms. For “train the trainer” curricula, these may be organizational dynamics or professional culture.
- What are their social influences and pressures?
- What forms of capital (see Yosso, 2006) support their learning and health-promoting decisions?

The profile should be as specific as possible, which will enable you to develop a learner-centered, supportive, responsive curriculum.

#### ***Theoretical Foundations***

Your curriculum should be research-based and theory-driven. Please describe the following as they relate to your design

- Theories of Health Behavior
- Theories of Adult/Adolescent/Child Learning
- Pedagogical Approaches
- Other Models

### ***Goals and Objectives of the Curriculum***

Please include a completed [Learning Plan](#) utilizing the Understanding by Design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2002)

### ***Instructional Content of the Curriculum***

- Given the learning objectives of the curriculum, many different topics areas could have been included. You likely included some topics and not others. Justify those decisions.
- Some topics/themes/skills rose to a central position in your curriculum (which may be reflected in their coverage across a variety of sessions).
- How and why did you choose the ones you did for this central position?
- Implementation: frequency, setting, teacher/trainer professional development (if applicable)
- Instructional Strategies and Learning Activities
  - Mode(s) of presenting material (actual activities of teachers and learners; didactic and interactive components) that support student engagement
  - Strategies to ensure that curriculum and instruction are culturally responsive and inclusive
  - Rationale: How are the instructional activities and learning exercises connected to theoretical framework and objectives in Section 2?

### ***Quality Control, Supervision and Limitations***

- Address the assurance of fidelity in the delivery of the curriculum
- Address ideas/plans for ongoing implementation of the curriculum (as applicable) as well as preparation of new educators as staff changes and learner needs evolve
- What are the limitations of the curriculum?

### ***Evaluation Outline***

Outline a plan for evaluating the effect(s) of the curriculum on learners, including key indicators.

### ***References***

American Psychological Association (APA), 7th Edition is preferred. Other styles are acceptable upon approval of the faculty sponsor.

## Appendix A Thesis Sponsors

**Adkins-Jackson, Paris “AJ” (pa2629)**, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). Structural racism on healthy aging for historically marginalized populations like Black and Pacific Islander communities; life course adverse community-level policing exposure on psychological well-being, cognitive function, and biological aging for Black and Latinx/a/o older adults; effectiveness of anti-racist multilevel pre-intervention restorative programs; community health, institutional trustworthiness, multisector community-engaged partnerships.

**Aidala, Angela (aaa1)**, Associate Research Scientist (PhD - Sociology). Research, teaching, and service delivery strategies to work effectively with disadvantaged and often ‘harder to reach’ populations in urban settings; social-structural and cultural determinants of health; housing/ lack of housing and individual and community health; collaborative, practice-based evidence to advance health equity.

**Boccher-Lattimore, Daria (dmb82)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (in Psychiatry) at CUMC (DrPH). HIV, workforce development, capacity building, interprofessional education, practice transformation, quality improvement, behavioral health integration, stigma, HIV and Aging, Ending HIV Epidemic programming, needs assessment and program evaluation, implementation science.

**Bogart, Jane (jb925)**, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (EdD, MA, MCHES). Health Promotion theory; health & well-being in higher education; social determinants and health equity; needs assessment; program evaluation (quantitative, qualitative, & mixed methods); healthcare leadership; mental health stigma; gender and sexual identity.

**Chowkwanyun, Merlin (mc2028)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). History of public health; health social movements; racial inequality; environmental health and toxic substances policy; immigration; GIS; oral history, interviewing; archival research; text-mining, databases, cloud/parallel computing methods.

**Cohall, Alwyn (atc1)**, Professor of Public Health and Pediatrics, Sociomedical Sciences and Population and Family Health (MD). High-risk youth; sexually transmitted infections; HIV; PEP/PrEP; juvenile justice; access to care; men's health; community-based participatory research.

**Colgrove, James (jc988)**, Interim Chair of Sociomedical Sciences, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). Vaccination; Government responsibility for public health; the relationship between individual rights and communal responsibilities from the 19th century to the present; the role of the law and other forms of coercion in public health; ethical issues in public health.

**Dasgupta, Anindita (ad3341)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences, (PhD, MPH). social and behavioral scientist; gendered inequities of health; sexual and reproductive health marginalized girls and women in the United States, India, and the Middle East; reproductive justice; systems of oppression to improve reproductive health outcomes of birthing people through intervention and epidemiologic research; reduce hazardous alcohol use, intimate partner violence and increase PrEP initiation for women engaged in the criminal legal system.

**Dupont-Reyes, Melissa (md3027)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences and Epidemiology.

Interdisciplinary public health; trained psychiatric and social epidemiologist; mental illness stigma; adolescent mental health; global health communication; intersectionality; latinx and immigrant health; community violence; school mental health; quantitative and mixed-methods research; health equity research.

**Ford, Jessie (jf3179)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD-Sociology). Gender inequality, sexual and reproductive health; sociological approaches to health; sexual violence, health, and pleasure; qualitative research and mixed methods.

**Franks, Julie (jf642)**, Senior Technical Advisor, ICAP (PhD, History). Areas of interests: HIV and AIDS, especially in sub-Saharan Africa; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender health; behavioral health interventions; sex workers; social networks; the emergent global COVID-19 pandemic; engagement of under-represented populations in health research; qualitative research and mixed methods.

**Fullilove, Robert (ref5)**, Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (Ed.D). Minority health; effects of mass incarceration; HIV/AIDS; addiction.

**Giang, Le Minh (lg282)**, Adjunct Associate Research Scientist, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Epidemiology of Hanoi Medical University, Vietnam (PhD – SMS, MD – Hanoi Medical University). Substance use disorders, substance use treatment and prevention; HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases, mental health among gay and other men who have sex with men and transgender women; health service research among people living with HIV and other vulnerable populations; mixed-methods and implementation science; Southeast Asia.

**Giovenco, Daniel (dg2984)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). Tobacco control policy and disparities in tobacco use; impact of marijuana legalization; population survey data analysis; GIS and community mapping techniques; neighborhood field data collection.

**Gloria, Christian (cg3310)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MA, CHES). Quantitative research methods on stress, emotions, coping, and resilience; surveillance of Filipino health in the Philippines. Planning, implementation, and evaluation of public health programs. Health education and health promotion curriculum design.

**Hernandez, Diana (dh2494)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD- Sociology). Areas of interests- social and environmental determinants of health; housing and health; energy insecurity and energy justice; policy and place-based interventions; health disparities and health equity; qualitative research and mixed methods.

**Hirsch, Jennifer S. (jsh2124)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Anthropology and Population Dynamics). Gender, sexuality and migration; sexual, reproductive and HIV risk practices; the anthropology of love; social scientific research on sexual assault and undergraduate well-being and the intersections between anthropology and public health.

**Hooper, Leah (lch2124)** Associate, Sociomedical Sciences (MST – Secondary Education). Progressive education; health literacy; critical and feminist pedagogy; trauma-informed teaching and learning; communication of scientific and health messages to lay, professional, and community audiences.

**Hopper, Kim (kh17)**, Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - Sociomedical Sciences/ Medical Anthropology). Homelessness; the "de facto" public mental health system; recovery from severe psychiatric disorders; ethnographic methods; qualitative research methods, social theory, ethics and research.

**Hutchinson, Carole L. (Carly) (clh47)**, Adjunct Assistant Professor (PhD, MA-Anthropology). Community-based participatory research and community engaged research methods and practice focused on vulnerable/marginalized populations related to severe weather impacts, mass incarceration, chronic disease, and interprofessional teamwork. Ethnographic, qualitative, human-centered design methods.

**Knox, Justin (jrk2115)**, Assistant Professor of Clinical Implementation Science and Intervention (PhD – Epidemiology). Prevention and treatment of HIV domestically and globally; substance use; *staphylococcus aureus*, Covid-19; dissemination and implementation science; social network analysis; sexual minorities, racial minorities; mixed methods.

**Kukafka, Rita (rk326)**, Professor of Biomedical Informatics and Sociomedical Sciences. Patient centered care; shared decision making; decision support; electronic health records; patient decision aids; hereditary cancer syndromes; risk communication; implementation science; participatory design; mixed methods; randomized clinical trials.

**Kunzel, Carol (ck60)**, Professor of Dental Community Health and Sociomedical Sciences at CUMC (PhD – Sociology). Clinician behavior, social-behavioral models of clinical decision-making; diffusion of innovation; patient –clinician communication; health literacy, access to care, health disparities.

**McNeil, Michael (mm3117)**, Adjunct Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (EdD, MS, CHES). Health promotion; program evaluation (quantitative, qualitative, & mixed methods); health in higher education; health and academic success; professional preparation; technology and health; alcohol & other drugs; opioid overdose prevention/ naloxone; tobacco control; sleep; stress; & time management.

**Oppenheimer, Gerald (go10)**, Professor at Columbia University Medical Center of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - History; M.P.H. Epidemiology). History of HIV/AIDS; history of public health; history of epidemiology, particularly heart disease epidemiology; history of social medicine; history of race and research.

**Paine, Emily Allen (ep2982)** Assistant Professor of Clinical Medical Sociology (in Psychiatry) (PhD-Sociology). Transgender and nonbinary community health; LGBTQ+ health; community-engaged research methods; HIV/AIDS; Economic empowerment interventions to improve health equity; structural determinants of health; barriers and facilitators to healthcare access, uptake, and adherence; qualitative and mixed methods research; sexuality; minority stress and stigma; social relationships and health; intersectionality.

**Parish, Carrigan L. (cp2696)**, Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences (DMD, PhD - Epidemiology). Special needs dentistry (dental needs of patients with acquired disabilities, developmental disabilities, mental health and substance use disorders, HIV); preventive medical screenings in dental settings; oral health disparities; access to dental care and perceived unmet dental needs; oral health related quality of life; provider stigma in dental settings; interplay between oral health, mental health, and HIV. Dr. Parish is a faculty member in SMS's Miami Research Center located in Miami,

FL, which is a remote research team based at the University of Miami medical campus.

**Pereyra, Margaret R. (mrp2177)**, Associate Research Scientist (DrPH). Quantitative research methods, study design, biostatistics, applied data analysis and management, program evaluation, and questionnaire design. Substantive areas of past research include HIV testing, prevention and treatment, access to care, maternal/child health. Member of Columbia's Sociomedical Sciences Miami Research Center.

**Prins, Seth J (sjp2154)**, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology and Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MPH). Collateral public health consequences of mass incarceration and criminalization; psychiatric epidemiology; relational social processes; economic exploitation and domination; racial capitalism; critical social theory; quantitative methods; critical causal inference.

**Schiavo, Renata (rs3406)**, Senior Lecturer of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD, MA, CCL). Global health (U.S. and international settings); health communication for behavioral, social, and organizational change; health equity and social and political determinants of health; health systems; multi-sectoral partnerships and interventions; cultural competence/humility; risk communication; community engagement and participatory planning methods; program evaluation; capacity building, training, and workforce development; systematic reviews; qualitative research methods; community-based participatory research (CBPR); epidemics and emerging diseases, including the COVID-19 pandemic; maternal, newborn, infant, and child health; immunization and vaccine hesitancy; building and restoring trust in science; implicit bias; public health practice.

**Shelton, Rachel (rs3108)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (ScD- Social Epidemiology and Community-based Intervention Research; MPH). Racial/ethnic and socioeconomic-based inequities in cancer screening and preventive health behaviors; health equity; dissemination and implementation science; sustainability of evidence-based interventions in real-world community and clinical settings; community-based participatory research; qualitative and mixed-methods research; Lay Health Advisor and peer-led programs; role of social and contextual factors (medical mistrust, discrimination, social networks) in influencing health behaviors and outcomes for cancer and other chronic diseases.

**Schmid, Carina (cs2904)**, Lecturer of Sociomedical Sciences (MPH, BA). Entertainment-education; new and digital media; risk communication; participatory program design using the positive deviance approach and liberating structures; qualitative research methods; intervention mapping; capacity building; train the trainer curriculum development; trauma-informed health communication; non-violent and resonant communication; inter- and intrapersonal communication.

**Siegel, Karolynn (ks420)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (also Social Work) (PhD - Sociology). Psychosocial dimensions of genetics and disease; living with chronic or life threatening illness; stress and coping with health related stressors; stigma; HIV/AIDS.

**Sivaramakrishnan, Kavita, (ks2890)**, Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD - History) Global health history; international health and politics of disease surveillance, history of public health and society in south Asia; population health politics; historical and comparative perspectives on age and aging; health and volunteering across cultures; history of chronic disease in colonial and contemporary settings, WHO and history of social determinants of health; non western medicine and traditions of ethics, healing and professionalization.

**Sweetland, Annika (acs2124)**, Assistant Professor of Clinical Sociomedical Sciences in Psychiatry (DrPH, MSW). Global mental health; tuberculosis and depression; implementation & dissemination science; training non-specialists to deliver evidence-based mental health interventions in primary care; m-health; science of e-learning; cross-cultural measurement of psychiatric disorders; bridging the gap between research and policy.

**Van Wye, Gretchen (gv2218)**. Adjunct Associate Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD – Chronic disease epidemiology MA – Health Communication). Communication of scientific and health messages to lay, professional, and community audiences; chronic disease intervention design, implementation, and evaluation; social determinants of health; public health practice.

**Wingood, Gina (gw2326)**, Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (ScD, Society & Health); Research focuses on the design, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of HIV interventions for African American women in clinical and non-clinical settings (i.e. church settings). Research portfolio in women's health, social justice, and adapting public health interventions to enhance their contextual and cultural relevance to facilitate their dissemination and adoption.

**Yomogida, Maiko (my2278)**, Senior Staff Associate III in the Department of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD – School Psychology, MA – Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences). Child development, developmental & learning disabilities, early childhood education, mental health, HIV, criminal justice, psychosocial determinants of health and health service utilization. Program evaluation, survey research, quantitative methods.

**Zhang, Yuan (yz4510)**, Assistant Professor of Sociomedical Sciences (PhD – Gerontology, MS – Survey Methodology). Demography of aging, cognitive aging, health and wellbeing in later life, social disparities in biomarkers of aging, the effects of early-life experience on health and mortality at older ages, social and economic aspects of aging, global health and aging, international comparisons, survey methodology, quantitative methods.