



DEPARTMENT OF EPIDEMIOLOGY & BIostatISTICS

**College Of Public Health
University of South Florida**

GUIDELINES FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS

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SECTION 1: GENERAL OVERVIEW

Overview & Purpose of the Special Project

Epidemiology Program

The Master's Special Project (MPH) in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics is a major requirement for the Master's degree concentrating in Epidemiology. The goals of the Special Project are to provide an opportunity for the student to synthesize and apply the knowledge and skills gained in their MPH course work, and demonstrate the ability to produce a scholarly product. The purpose of the Special Project for epidemiology students is to challenge the student to apply epidemiologic principles and methods to a specific clinical or public health issue. The student is expected to select a scientifically relevant, feasible topic, develop a rationale and a researchable hypothesis, and either synthesize the body of epidemiologic knowledge on the topic, or analyze and interpret a dataset to test the hypothesis. The Special Project will demonstrate the critical thinking skills of students and should be relevant to their field of study and their long-term goals as they prepare to enter their career in public health.

Biostatistics Program

The Master's Special Project (MPH) in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics (EPB) is a major requirement for the Master's degree concentrating in Biostatistics. The goals of the Special Project are to provide an opportunity for the student to synthesize and apply the knowledge and skills gained in their MPH course work, and demonstrate the ability to produce a scholarly product. The purpose of the Special Project is to challenge the student to use biostatistical principles and methods relevant to a theoretical or applied problem. The student's advisor may identify projects and obtain data for the student to use, often from ongoing research projects, but students are free to select their own problem which must then be approved by their advisor.

Registration for Special Projects

MPH students in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics should register for their Special Project after the majority of their departmental coursework has been completed and with advisor consent.

Each student must have a contract form signed by the project supervisor, which specifies the nature of the project and designate an anticipated completion date. This contract form must be signed and submitted at the time of registration for the Special Project.

Special Projects require a lot of time and planning in order to be completed successfully. Although some students are able to complete the Special Project in one semester, many students complete their Special Project in 1.5 – 2 semesters, depending on the scope and complexity of the project as well as the student's competing responsibilities.

Assignment of Project Supervisor and Second Reader

Each Special Project will have both a project supervisor (first reader) and a second faculty reader. The student's Departmental advisor will ordinarily supervise the project. Students must select a second faculty member within the department (who must be approved by their advisor) to serve as a second reader.

In the event that the content areas of the proposed project would make another faculty member in the department more appropriate to serve as project supervisor, the student may select this faculty member to act as project supervisor, with prior consent of the student's faculty advisor. In those cases, it is expected that the faculty advisor will serve as the second reader.

SECTION 2: TOPICS FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS

The student's project supervisor will discuss with the student the process of generating the Special Project's topic. It is expected to be a topic relevant to the student's concentration area. After a topic area has been chosen, the student will select the faculty member who is most appropriate to be the second reader. The student's project supervisor may identify projects and obtain data for the student to use, often from ongoing research projects, but students are free to select their own problem which must then be approved by their advisor.

Epidemiology Program

Students can do one of two types of projects: 1) statistical analysis of secondary data or 2) a critical review and synthesis of scientific literature. The nature and scope of the research is planned with the student's advisor, and is negotiated between the student and his/her advisor.

1. Analysis of Existing Data:

The student can conduct a descriptive or analytic analysis of existing data for his/her Special Project. The project is usually based upon data available through the department or from a data source available to the student.

2. Critical review & synthesis of scientific literature:

A complete and extensive assessment and synthesis of the literature, which is available surrounding an issue of concern to the student, is also appropriate for the Special Project. The review may be conducted on a specific topic in a content area (e.g., hypertension, breast cancer, HIV, etc.) or on an epidemiologic method (e.g., types of biases, statistical approach, etc.). The literature review must be written not only to describe findings in the chosen topic area, but to be a critical synthesis, identify strengths and weaknesses and identify substantive or methodological research that should be pursued. Students may find an article written by Zaccai H. "How to Assess Epidemiological Studies" Postgrad Med J 2004; 80:140-147 a helpful resource.

The specific content of the Special Project must be approved by the student's project supervisor prior to implementation of the project. A written proposal and a 1-page abstract briefly describing the idea should be submitted to the student's project supervisor prior to implementation of the Special Project.

Biostatistics Program

For the Special Project, the topic can be a theoretical or methodological problem or statistical application relevant to public health. With the guidance of the advisor, the student typically will be given a reading list of appropriate statistical methodology papers to read as background to the problem; the student then summarizes the papers in the background section and incorporates the synthesis of those papers in the methods section of the Special Project. Existing statistical methods and any new methods are then applied to the data set; typically this step requires extensive computational work. Both substantive and methodological conclusions are then drawn from the statistical analyses, and these conclusions form the last section of the Special Project.

Other topics such as literature review or re-analysis of existing studies are also appropriate for Special Projects if approved by the project supervisor. The specific content of the Special Project must be approved by the student's project supervisor prior to implementation of the project. A written proposal and a 1-page abstract briefly describing the idea should be submitted to the student's project supervisor prior to implementation of the Special Project.

Dual Degree/Concentration Program

For the Special Project, students enrolled in dual degree or dual concentration programs must select a topic which fulfills the requirements of both programs. For example, students enrolled in the Epidemiology/Global Health Dual MPH Program must fulfill the guidelines of the Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics and the guidelines of the Department of Global Health. The nature and scope of the research is planned with the student's advisor, and is negotiated between the student and his/her advisors. The student should meet with advisors from both departments/concentrations and obtain approval for the topic, scope and format of the Special Project prior to initiating any work on the project. Students may find it helpful to schedule a joint meeting with both advisors to discuss the proposed Special Project. A written proposal and a 1-page abstract describing the idea should be submitted to the student's project supervisor prior to implementation of the Special Project.

SECTION 3: SPECIAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

A typewritten proposal (approximately 8-10 pages, double-spaced (some proposals may be longer or shorter depending on the number of pages needed to fully explain the design and methods of the proposed study)) and a 1-page single-spaced abstract describing the idea should be submitted to the student's project supervisor for approval prior to the initiation of the project. The proposal should be written following careful consideration and planning with the project supervisor. By the time the proposal is completed, few questions should remain about its acceptability. The proposal is expected to be the final opportunity for the student and the project supervisor to decide on the scope and nature of the project. The proposal must be formally approved, in writing, by both the project supervisor and the second reader before the student begins the project.

The proposal will form the basis of the Special Project report. The methods section (the 'proposed methods' section if it is an analysis of existing data or the 'methods of the review' section if it is a literature review) will be the blueprint which will be used to conduct the project. When the

proposal is complete, it will be submitted to the project supervisor and second reader. When they have approved it in writing the project can begin. When the project is complete, it must be presented in the form of a Special Project paper.

Outline for Special Project Proposals

A description of the project proposal for each type of project is listed below.

1. Analysis of Existing Data

Proposals for this type of project should include the following components. They are outlined in the order in which they should appear in the proposal.

1. Introduction

i. Statement of the problem

This section of the proposal delineates the issue that the student is studying. The statement should specifically identify the question that is being addressed. It should include background information on why this is an important issue or an issue of interest to a public health researcher.

ii. Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of the project should be very clear. If it is the intent of the study to contribute to the general knowledge in the literature, this should be specified.

2. Background & Rationale (Literature Review)

An initial literature review should be included in the proposal. This literature review will help to focus the study, as well as to ascertain whether similar types of studies have been done and their results. The review should include not only a description of the literature, but also a review of the adequacy of the literature. For example, in reviewing a topic one might find that there are a number of articles about a topic but that all of them are theoretical. No quantitative studies have been conducted to test the theories that have been presented. In other situations it may be clear that though there are a few studies in the area of interest most are improperly conducted. Often one will find that the conclusions drawn from the data analysis are controversial or open to debate. All these issues should be described in the literature review.

The literature should be scientific and from peer-reviewed, scientific journals. Students are expected to search multiple electronic databases to identify relevant articles pertaining to the selected topic (e.g. PubMed, Medline, PsychInfo (if applicable), etc.). Students are encouraged to contact the USF Health Shimborg Health Sciences Library for assistance with using electronic databases and locating relevant articles. Students can also consult the Cochrane Handbook (www.cochrane.org/resources/handbook/) for guidance on good search strategies.

No websites will be accepted as references. The literature review should be long enough to provide the reader with sufficient understanding of the epidemiology, pathophysiology and medical background (if applicable) of the relationship between the predictor variable (s) and outcome(s) selected for study.

In-text citations should use the format outlined by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

3. *Proposed Methods*

The final section of the proposal should include the following sections:

- a) Study Design
- b) Study Population (including, but not limited to, a description of the target and study population, inclusion/exclusion criteria, sample size and sampling procedures)
- c) Data Collection Methods (including a description of database and study variables)
- d) Statistical Methods (including planned analyses, hypotheses, and power calculations (if applicable))
- e) Limitations of Research Design

4. *Literature Cited*

The scientific literature cited should reflect articles selected from an exhaustive search of the peer-reviewed scientific literature and should not be limited to e-journals or on-line journal availability. The literature cited section should follow the format of citations used in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

2: Critical Review & Synthesis of Scientific Literature

The literature review should consist of a complete and extensive assessment and synthesis of all published articles relevant to the selected topic. The topic may be a content area or an epidemiologic method. The review should not only describe findings in the chosen topic area, but also be a critical synthesis, which identifies strengths and weaknesses and substantive or methodological research that should be pursued. The review must focus on epidemiologic studies, although supporting clinical, animal, or laboratory studies can be included to provide appropriate supporting information. It is expected that the literature review will be written based on the actual empirical study rather than findings from the paper's abstract or information given in another review.

In general, all literature included in the special project must be scientific and from peer-reviewed, scientific journals and should not be limited to e-journals or on-line journal availability. Students are expected to search multiple electronic databases to identify all relevant articles pertaining to the selected topic (e.g, PubMed, Medline, PsychInfo (if applicable), etc.). Students are encouraged to contact the USF Health Shimberg Health Sciences Library for assistance with using electronic databases and locating relevant articles. Students can also consult the Cochrane Handbook (www.cochrane.org/resources/handbook/) for guidance on good search strategies.

No websites will be accepted as references. In-text citations should use the format outlined by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). Proposals for this

type of project should include the following components. They are outlined in the order in which they should appear in the proposal¹.

1. *Background*

An initial literature review should be included in the proposal. This should explain the context and elaborate on the purpose and rationale of the review. This literature review will help to focus the review. The literature review should be long enough to provide the reader with sufficient understanding of the epidemiology, pathophysiology and medical background (if applicable) of the relationship between the predictor variable (s) and outcome(s) selected for study.

2. *Objectives*

This should be a precise statement of the primary objective of the review, ideally in a single sentence. Where possible the style should be of the form 'To assess the effects of [intervention or comparison] for [health problem] for/in [types of people, disease or problem and setting if specified]'.

3. *Criteria for considering studies for this review*

The criteria that will be used to select studies for inclusion in the review should be stated. Types of studies (e.g. 'all randomized controlled comparisons' or 'all double blind randomized controlled trials'), types of interventions and types of outcome measures subheadings should be in this section, if applicable.

4. *Search strategy for identification of studies*

The data sources that will be used to identify studies should be summarized, including bibliographic databases, reference lists from pertinent articles and books, conference proceedings and personal contact with experts or organizations active in the area. The databases that will be searched, the range of dates they were searched and the keywords/terms used should be stated, including any constraints, such as language.

5. *Methods of the review*

This should include the method that will be used to apply the selection criteria (e.g. if they were applied independently by more than one reviewer), the criteria used to assess the quality of studies and how they were applied, how data were obtained (e.g. if individual patient data were sought, or if the number of events will be calculated from published survival curves), how the data will be synthesized, and any statistical techniques that will be used and sensitivity analyses performed.

6. *Literature Cited*

The scientific literature cited should reflect articles selected from an exhaustive search of the peer-reviewed scientific literature and should not be limited to e-journals or on-line journal availability. The literature cited section should follow the format of citations used in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

¹ Based on: Clarke M, Oxman AD, editors. Guide to the Format of a Cochrane Review. Cochrane Reviewers' Handbook 4.2.0 [updated March 2003]; Appendix 2a.
<http://www.cochrane.dk/cochrane/handbook/handbook.htm> (accessed 30 April 2003).

SECTION 4: HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL AND HIPAA COMPLIANCE

The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) must approve any project consistent with University requirements. Human subjects review (IRB) approval is required for any project where data is being collected directly from individuals or data will be used from an existing data source. Human subjects review (IRB) approval is required for Special Projects involving data analysis and is usually not required for literature or systematic reviews. A number of IRB approval types exists, some of which require only submission of brief information. More complicated applications may require an appearance before the full board. Students should contact the USF Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (website: <http://www.research.usf.edu/cs/>) to obtain the guidelines for review of studies involving human subjects. Students should consult with his/her project supervisor about completing the information needed for IRB. IRB approval must be obtained PRIOR to data analysis or implementation of the Special Project. This process may take several weeks or months depending on the complexity of the project.

Students may also need to obtain approval from other agencies/institutions (e.g., Tampa General Hospital) depending upon the source of the data and/or complexity of the project. If this is necessary, students must obtain approval from the external agency/institution prior to applying for approval from USF.

All Special Projects involving data from human subjects must comply with Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations. Guidelines for compliance with HIPAA regulations can be found on the USF website.

SECTION 5: FINAL SPECIAL PROJECT REPORT

In all cases, a final written report for the Special Project is to be presented in a typewritten, bound document to the project supervisor and second reader. The Special Project report will be approximately 25-35 typewritten, double-spaced pages. However, some final reports may be longer or shorter than the recommended page length depending upon the nature and scope of the project.

After the Special Project is finished and approved by the project supervisor, a bound copy must be submitted to the: 1) project supervisor, 2) second reader and 3) Department. A copy of the report will be filed in the departmental archive. The project supervisor and second reader will retain copies of the final project report. An electronic version of the final report should also be submitted to the project supervisor. This electronic copy may be submitted to *SafeAssignment* plagiarism detection tool (please refer to the Student Conduct/Academic Dishonesty section for more information).

Format of Special Project Report

The format of the final report should follow the guidelines published in the *Handbook of Graduate Theses and Dissertations*, which is available in the University Bookstore and on the USF website (a summary of the sections most relevant to your Special Project are included in the following sections). “Format” refers to the overall physical appearance of the manuscript as set out by margins, pagination, and spacing. If you are using Microsoft Word go to “Page Set-Up” adjust the settings.

Biostatistics Students: Because of the sizeable number of figures and mathematical text in Biostatistics theses, students will need to use a text processor such as LaTeX which can incorporate figures and mathematical text. A good introductory book on LaTeX is Leslie Lamport's book, LaTeX: A Document Preparation System. Students also can learn TeX or LaTeX by examining completed papers or theses written in these text processing languages.

Margins

There should be no text in any of the margin fields. Set margins for all pages:

Top: 1 inch Right: 1 inch
Bottom: 1 inch Left: 1.5 inches

Font Options

Type: Times, Times New Roman, Verdana, or Arial

Size: 11-12 points (Tables/Figures/Footnotes may have font-size of: 8-12 points).

Style: Be consistent in use of italics, bolding, etc. Do not mix font sizes within text.

Page Numbers

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| First Pages | Includes Title Page and Acknowledgments page; pages are not numbered. |
| Preliminary Pages | Includes Table of Contents through Abstract; pages are numbered with lower-case Roman numeral, centered at the 1" bottom margin. |
| Text | Includes Manuscript Body; pages are numbered with Arabic numerals, centered at the 1" bottom margin. |

The first numbered page (i) is the Table of Contents. Subsequent pages through the end of the Abstract are numbered sequentially in lower case Roman numerals. Roman Numerals (lowercase) are used for: Table of Contents, List of Tables / List of Figures, other applicable lists, Abstract. Do not use sub-numbers or alpha-numeric such as 34-A or 76.1 to indicate manuscript page numbers. Landscaped tables and figures should have page numbers located at the bottom of the page. Fonts of page numbers must be of same size/type as font used for text.

Headings

Headings and chapter titles may be either placed flush-left or centered, but must be consistently placed, and are located 1" below the 1" top margin. The easiest way to do this is to space down (i.e. hit "Enter" until the text is located at the proper place). Follow style guide for format of subheadings. Be consistent in all presentations.

Cover Pages

The final document should include a set of cover pages in the following order (see Appendix for format): a cover, a blank page (fly page), a signature page, acknowledgements (optional), an abstract, a table of contents, list of tables, list of figures, and a list of appendices (if applicable). The entire document should have pages numbered on the bottom center of the page and follow the formats described below.

Cover Page

The cover page should include the title, student's name, type of degree, academic information on college, department, etc. The cover page should be printed on cardstock paper or have some type of report cover that can be bound. An example of the format can be found in the appendix.

Signature Page

Includes academic information on college, department, type of degree, date of approval, project supervisor and second reader. An example can be found in the appendix.

Format:

1. Center contents of page vertically so that the top margin and bottom margin are equal, and center all text lines horizontally (use "center" justification).
2. No page number.
3. Spell out your degree (Master of Public Health).
4. List your project supervisor and second reader by their full names, followed by his/her highest academic degree. Do not put "Dr. John Smith, Ph.D." but "John Smith, Ph.D."

Note: If you have a dual concentration, list them both as "Co-Project Supervisors" instead of "Second Reader."

Acknowledgments (optional page)

This is a brief paragraph expressing recognition of and appreciation for special professional assistance extended to you by academic personnel, agencies, and institutions. It may be up to one page.

Format:

1. Center contents of page vertically so that the top margin and bottom margin are equal.
2. No page number.
3. The Acknowledgments page should be double-spaced.
4. Include at the top of the text the heading "Acknowledgments."

Abstract

The abstract should be limited to 350 words and should include the following:

- Background
 - Brief review of the literature
 - Public Health significance
 - Statement of purpose
- Methods
 - Study design
 - Methodology
- Results
 - Primary results from study
- Conclusion

Table of Contents

The Table of Contents is a guide to the contents of the text.

Format:

1. The Heading “Table of Contents” is placed at the top center of the page.
2. The first item listed is the first section to follow the Table of Contents.
3. Every heading and subheading within the text should be listed verbatim in the Table of Contents.
4. Indent the headings on this page in any consistent style.
5. Corresponding page numbers are aligned with the appropriate heading or with the last line of a multi-line heading.
6. Corresponding page numbers are “right-aligned” at the 1” right margin (Use a Right Tab to align these properly)
7. The Table of Contents page itself begins with a lowercase Roman numeral (i) centered at the 1” bottom margin.

List of Tables and/or Figures (if applicable)

Similar to the Table of Contents, but only lists the titles of the tables and figures (not headings) that are within the manuscript (this includes those in appendices). Reproduce verbatim only the first sentence of the title or figure caption. Other lists (i.e. List of Acronyms, etc.) are formatted in the same manner as the List of Tables and/or List of Figures and are placed in the manuscript immediately after the List of Figures.

Format:

1. The Heading “List of Tables” or “List of Figures” is placed at the top center of the page.
2. Titles are listed and numbered (Arabic numerals) in the order of appearance in the document.
3. Even if there is only one table and/or figure, include it on a List of Tables and/or a List of Figures.
4. Include a page number for each table/figure listed.
5. Corresponding page numbers are aligned with the appropriate heading or with the last line of a multi-line heading. Corresponding page numbers are “right aligned” at the 1” right margin (Use a Right Tab to align these properly)
6. The List of Tables and/or Figures page itself has a lowercase Roman numeral centered at the 1” bottom margin.
7. Tables and figures in a “landscaped” orientation should have page numbers in the same place and orientation as other pages.

Text

The text is the main body of the document. The text of the document should be divided into an introduction, methods, results and conclusion.

Format:

1. Begin each major section on a new page, using a 1” top margin throughout.
2. All headings placed in the text must be represented verbatim in the Table of Contents.
3. Avoid “widows and orphans.” Note: Widows and orphans are straggling lines of text (one single line at the beginning or end of a paragraph.) at the bottom of a page (widow) or at the top (orphan). Lone headings at the bottom of a page are also widows.
4. In-text citations and literature cited should follow the style used in JAMA.

Tables and Figures*Numbering*

Every table and figure must be assigned Arabic numbers sequentially in the order of appearance from the text through the Appendices. In no case should Table 16, for example, appear in the text earlier than Table 14. If two or more tables/figures are closely allied as a generic unit, they may be referred to as Table 1-A and Table 1-B, or Figure 1-A and Figure 1-B, and so on, each with its corresponding caption.

Titles

Every table or figure must have a title that indicates its contents concisely. When applicable, a citation of source may then follow parenthetically. Table titles should be flush-left or centered above the table; figure titles should be flush-left or centered below the figure. Title style and format must be consistent. If the table or figure is displayed landscaped, the title will also be landscaped.

Content of the Final Special Project Report

A recommended outline and the content for each section of the final special project report are given below.

Epidemiology Program***1: Analysis of Existing Data:***

1. Cover Pages
2. Introduction (or Statement of the Problem)
This section should give an overview of the project and delineate the issue that the student is studying. This section should specifically identify the question that is being addressed. It should include some brief background information on why this is an important issue or an issue of interest to a public health researcher.
3. Specific Aim(s)/Objective(s)
The purpose of the project should be very clear. If it is the intent of the study to contribute to the general knowledge in the literature, this should be specified.
4. Background & Rationale (Review of Relevant Literature)
This should explain the context and elaborate on the purpose and rationale of the study. This literature review will help to focus the study. The literature review should be long enough to provide the reader with sufficient understanding of the epidemiology, pathophysiology and medical background (if applicable) of the relationship between the predictor variable (s) and outcome(s) selected for study.

The background section should be scientific and include articles from peer-reviewed, scientific journals. Students are expected to search multiple electronic databases to identify relevant articles pertaining to the selected topic (e.g. PubMed, Medline, PsychInfo (if applicable), etc.). Students are encouraged to contact the USF Health Shimborg Health Sciences Library for assistance with using electronic databases and locating relevant articles.

Students can also consult the Cochrane Handbook (www.cochrane.org/resources/handbook/) for guidance on good search strategies.

No websites will be accepted as references. The literature review should be long enough to provide the reader with sufficient understanding of the epidemiology, pathophysiology and medical background (if applicable) of the relationship between the predictor variable (s) and outcome(s) selected for study.

In-text citations should use the format outlined by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

5. Methods

This section should be very detailed and include:

- a) A description of the study design
- b) A description of the study population (including, but not limited to, a description of the target and study population, inclusion/exclusion criteria, sample size and sampling procedures)
- c) A description of the data collection methods (including a description of database and study variables)
- d) A description of the statistical methods (including analyses, hypotheses, and power calculations (if applicable))

6. Results

7. Discussion and Conclusions

This section should include a summary of the overall findings, a comparison of the results from the project to the findings in the scientific literature, potential explanations for study findings, strengths and limitations of research design and methods, and overall conclusions.

8. Literature Cited

The scientific literature cited should reflect articles selected from an exhaustive search of the peer-reviewed scientific literature and should not be limited to e-journals or on-line journal availability. The literature cited section should follow the format of citations used in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

9. Tables and Figures (if applicable)

10. Appendices Cover Page

11. Appendices

12. Addendum including Institutional Review Board (IRB) review approval where needed

2: Critical Review & Synthesis of Scientific Literature²: (see appendix for brief description of each section)

1. Cover Pages
2. Introduction

² Taken from: Clarke M, Oxman AD, editors. Format of a Cochrane Review. Cochrane Reviewers' Handbook 4.2.0 [updated March 2003]; Section 2. <http://www.cochrane.dk/cochrane/handbook/handbook.htm> (accessed 30 April 2003).

This section should give an overview of the project and delineate the issue that the student is studying. This section should specifically identify the question that is being addressed. It should include some brief background information on why this is an important issue or an issue of interest to a public health researcher.

3. Background

This section should explain the context and elaborate on the purpose and rationale of the review. This literature review will help to focus the review. The literature review should be long enough to provide the reader with sufficient understanding of the epidemiology, pathophysiology and medical background (if applicable) of the relationship between the predictor variable (s) and outcome(s) selected for study.

The literature review should be scientific and from peer-reviewed, scientific journals. Students are expected to search multiple electronic databases to identify relevant articles pertaining to the selected topic (e.g, PubMed, Medline, PsychInfo (if applicable), etc.). Students are encouraged to contact the USF Health Shimborg Health Sciences Library for assistance with using electronic databases and locating relevant articles. Students can also consult the Cochrane Handbook (www.cochrane.org/resources/handbook/) for guidance on good search strategies.

No websites will be accepted as references. The literature review should be long enough to provide the reader with sufficient understanding of the epidemiology, pathophysiology and medical background (if applicable) of the relationship between the predictor variable (s) and outcome(s) selected for study.

In-text citations should use the format outlined by the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

4. Objectives

This should be a precise statement of the primary objective of the review, ideally in a single sentence. Where possible the style should be of the form 'To assess the effects of [*intervention or comparison*] for [*health problem*] for/in [*types of people, disease or problem and setting if specified*]'.

5. Criteria for considering studies for this review

The criteria that were used to select studies for inclusion in the review should be stated. Types of studies (e.g. 'all randomized controlled comparisons' or 'all double blind randomized controlled trials'), types of interventions and types of outcome measures subheadings should be in this section.

6. Search strategy for identification of studies

The data sources that will be used to identify studies should be summarized, including bibliographic databases, reference lists from pertinent articles and books, conference proceedings and personal contact with experts or organizations active in the area. The databases that will be searched, the date they were searched and the terms used should be stated, including any constraints, such as language.

7. Methods of the review

This should include the method that will be used to apply the selection criteria (e.g. if they were applied independently by more than one reviewer), the criteria used to assess the quality of studies and how they were applied, how data were obtained (e.g. if individual patient data were sought, or if the number of events will be calculated from published survival curves), how the data will be synthesized, and any statistical techniques that will be used and sensitivity analyses performed.

8. Description of the studies

9. Methodological quality

10. Results

11. Discussion

This section should include a summary of the overall findings, a comparison of the results from the project to other published reviews (if applicable), potential explanations for study findings, and the strengths and limitations of the review.

12. Conclusions & Public Health Implications

13. Literature Cited

The scientific literature cited should reflect articles selected from an exhaustive search of the peer-reviewed scientific literature and should not be limited to e-journals or on-line journal availability. The literature cited section should follow the format of citations used in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).

14. Tables and Figures (if applicable)

15. Appendices Cover Page

16. Appendices

Grading of Special Projects

The student's project supervisor, with consultation from the second reader, will approve the final project as represented in the written document. The Special Project will be graded as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. If, after review of the written document, the project supervisor feels that it is appropriate, the student may be asked to present his/her project in a formal presentation.

SECTION 6: STUDENT CONDUCT /ACADEMIC DISHONESTY POLICY

The Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics does not condone academic dishonesty by students in the preparation of their Special Projects. A brief overview of the University Of South Florida policy on student conduct and academic dishonesty is included below.

Plagiarism is defined as 'literary theft' and consists of the unattributed quotation of the exact words of a published text, or the unattributed borrowing of original ideas by paraphrase from a published text. On written papers for which the student employs information gathered from books, articles, or oral sources, each direct quotation, as well as ideas and facts that are not generally known to the public at large, or the form, structure, style of a secondary source must be attributed to its author by means of the appropriate citation procedure. Only widely known facts and thoughts and observations original to the student do not require citations. Citations may be

made in footnotes or within the body of the text. Plagiarism, also, consists of passing off as one's own, segments or the total of another person's work.

Cheating is defined as follows:

(a) the unauthorized granting or receiving of aid during the prescribed period of a course-graded exercise: students may not consult written materials such as notes or books, may not look at the paper of another student, nor consult orally with any other student taking the same test;

(b) Asking another person to take an examination in his/her place;

(c) Taking an examination for or in place of another student;

(d) Stealing visual concepts, such as drawings, sketches, diagrams, musical programs and scores, graphs, maps, etc., and presenting them as one's own;

(e) Stealing, borrowing, buying, or disseminating tests, answer keys or other examination material except as officially authorized, research papers, creative papers, speeches, etc.

(f) Stealing or copying of computer programs and presenting them as one's own. Such stealing includes the use of another student's program, as obtained from the magnetic media or interactive terminals or from cards, print-out paper, etc.

Punishment for such Academic Dishonesties will depend on the seriousness of the offense and may include receipt of an 'F' or 'O' grade on the subject paper, lab report, etc., an 'FF' in the course, suspension or expulsion from the University. The University drop policies and forgiveness policies shall be suspended for a student accused of plagiarism or cheating or both. For further information regarding these topics, see the Graduate School Catalog which can be found online at <http://www.grad.usf.edu/gradcatalog.html>.

Misconduct may be identified using the following procedure:

The University of South Florida currently has the ability to use an automated plagiarism detection service (*SafeAssignment*) which upon the request of the instructor allows students to submit their assignments to be checked for plagiarism. The Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics reserves the right to:

- 1) request that the Special Project (Assignment) is submitted as an electronic file and
- 2) request the student to electronically submit assignments to *SafeAssignment* plagiarism detection tool (see below for instructions)

Assignments are compared automatically with a huge database of journal articles, web articles, the internet and previously submitted papers. The instructor receives a report showing exactly how a student's paper was plagiarized. For more information about the plagiarism policy at USF, go to

<http://www.ugs.usf.edu/catalogs/0304/adadap.htm#plagiarism>.

SECTION 7: OVERVIEW OF STEPS TO COMPLETE FOR YOUR SPECIAL PROJECT

- Step 1: Discuss the project with your project supervisor. Do this early in your course of study, if possible. With your advisor(s), decide on a topic and on the faculty member who will be your second reader. If you are in a dual concentration program – your second reader is your advisor from the other CPH Department.
- Step 2: Ask the professor to serve as your second reader. Begin working with your advisor(s) to develop your project's overall design. Register for credit for Special Project work and sign a contract with your advisor(s) and second reader.
- Step 3: Finalize your project purpose and project methods. Prepare a final proposal for presentation to your advisor(s) and second reader. It may take two or three revisions before your final proposal is accepted. Allow each reader at least 2 weeks to review each draft of your proposal.
- Step 4: Submit your study to the human subjects review board for approval, if needed. (It may require several weeks or months to obtain approval.)
- Step 5: Conduct the data analysis or literature review for your Special Project.
- Step 6: Write the final sections of your report. Submit the draft report to your readers for their comments/suggestions. (Allow each reader at least 2 weeks to review the draft)
- Step 7: Make corrections to the Special Project report and resubmit corrected report to the first and second reader for review and approval.
NOTE: Most Special Projects are revised two or more times before the final draft is accepted by the first and second reader. Allow each reader at least 2 weeks to review each draft.
- The final draft should be submitted to the first and second reader at least two-weeks before the end of the semester (note: the end of the semester is considered the first day of exam week). Please note that the final draft of the Special Project must be accepted by both the first and second reader in order for the student to be cleared for graduation.
- Step 8: Upon approval of the final report, submit final bound copies to both readers and the Department Office Manager or Academic Coordinator prior to the end of the semester.

SECTION 8: HELPFUL RESOURCES

Students may find the following resources helpful in preparation of their special project.

1. Clarke M, Oxman AD, editors. Guide to the Format of a Cochrane Review. Cochrane Reviewers' Handbook 4.2.0 [updated March 2003]
<http://www.cochrane.dk/cochrane/handbook/handbook.htm>
2. Zaccai H." How to Assess Epidemiological Studies" *PostGrad Med J* 2004; 80:140-147.

APPENDIX 1: Outline of Literature Review for Special Projects³

1. *Background:* This should explain the context and elaborate on the purpose and rationale of the review.
2. *Objectives:* This should be a precise statement of the primary objective of the review, ideally in a single sentence. Where possible the style should be of the form ‘To assess the effects of [intervention or comparison] for [health problem] for/in [types of people, disease or problem and setting if specified]’.
3. *Criteria for considering studies for this review:* The criteria that will be used to select studies for inclusion in the review should be stated. Types of studies (e.g. ‘all randomized controlled comparisons’ or ‘all double blind randomized controlled trials’), types of interventions and types of outcome measures subheadings should be in this section.
4. *Search strategy for identification of studies:* The data sources that will be used to identify studies should be summarized, including bibliographic databases, reference lists from pertinent articles and books, conference proceedings and personal contact with experts or organizations active in the area. The databases that will be searched, the date they were searched and the terms used should be stated, including any constraints, such as language.
5. *Methods of the review:* This should include the method that will be used to apply the selection criteria (e.g. if they were applied independently by more than one reviewer), the criteria used to assess the quality of studies and how they were applied, how data were obtained (e.g. if individual patient data were sought, or if the number of events will be calculated from published survival curves), how the data will be synthesized, and any statistical techniques that will be used and sensitivity analyses performed.
6. *Description of studies:* This should refer to the information contained in the ‘Characteristics of Included Studies’ and the ‘Characteristics of Excluded Studies’ tables. It should describe key characteristics of the study participants, interventions [if applicable] and outcome measures in the included studies and any important differences among the studies. The sex and age range of participants should be stated here unless it is obvious (e.g. if all the participants are pregnant). Also note any other characteristics of the studies that are regarded as important for readers of the review to know.
7. *Methodological quality of included studies:* This should describe the general quality of the included studies and any important flaws in individual studies. If the quality of

³ Based on: Clarke M, Oxman AD, editors. Guide to the Format of a Cochrane Review. Cochrane Reviewers’ Handbook 4.2.0 [updated March 2003]; Appendix 2a.
<http://www.cochrane.dk/cochrane/handbook/handbook.htm> (accessed 30 April 2003).

each study was assessed using explicit criteria, the criteria that were used should be described or referenced under 'Methods'.

8. *Main results:* This section should begin with the total number of trials and participants included in the review, and brief details pertinent to the interpretation of the results (e.g. the quality of the studies overall or a comment on the comparability of the studies, if appropriate). It should address the primary objective and be restricted to the main qualitative and quantitative results (generally including not more than six key results).
9. *Discussion:* This should include brief comments on any methodological limitations of the included studies. Comments on how the included studies fit into the context of other evidence might be included here.
10. *Conclusions:* The conclusions should be succinct and drawn directly from the findings of the review so that they directly and obviously reflect the main results. Any important limitations of data and analyses should be noted. Important conclusions about the implications for research should be included if these are not obvious.
11. *Literature Cited*

APPENDIX 2: Examples of Cover Pages for Special Project

Example of Cover Page

Title goes here, centered, ALL CAPS (double spaced)

by

YOUR NAME HERE, WITH DEGREES ALREADY EARNED

SPECIAL PROJECT

Master of Public Health

Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics

College of Public Health

University of South Florida

Tampa, Florida

Month, Year

Example of Signature Page for Special Project

Title goes here, centered, ALL CAPS (double spaced)

by

YOUR NAME HERE, WITH DEGREES ALREADY EARNED

SPECIAL PROJECT

Master of Public Health

Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics

College of Public Health

University of South Florida

Tampa, Florida

Month, Year

APPROVED:

Project Supervisor Name & Degrees Date

Second Reader Name & Degrees Date

ABSTRACT PAGE (TITLE GOES HERE)

Student Name and Degrees (including the currently sought one)
The University of South Florida
College of Public Health, Year

Project Supervisor: Name and degree

Abstract may be more than one page but should be limited to 350 words no exceptions.

Should be double spaced.

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