

**SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

GRADUATE PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM

THE SPECIAL PROJECT

Most Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Special Project?

The Special Project is one of the culminating activities in the M.P.H. Program; the other being the thesis. The Special Project requires that you enter into a professional service agreement with a health-related agency or complete a non-agency-based entrepreneurial project. In either case you will be required to plan and develop a response to a health problem. To be considered acceptable, you must establish a rationale that justifies the proposed project on the grounds that it will contribute to your professional development in one or more of the seven areas of responsibility of a health educator or one or more of the ten essential services of public health. Further, the special project requires the integration of theory, science and ingenuity into professional practice.

2. What are components of a Special Project?

The Special Project is composed of three distinct parts. They are:

- The prospectus of plan for the special project
- The special project final report
- The special project product or actual response to the health-related problem

3. When is the Special Project initiated?

You enroll in PCH 593 - Special Project Seminar I in the fall semester of your final year of study. However, it is actually never too early to begin thinking about a topic or area of interest for your Special Project. The Department's *Special Project Guidelines and Requirements* contains a list of sources for generating ideas for Special Projects.

4. Does the Department offer an orientation to the Special Project?

Yes. During the spring semester preceding your enrollment in PCH 590, the Department will conduct an orientation to the Thesis and Special Project. At this meeting, you will have an opportunity to ask questions about the Thesis process.

5. Are PCH 593 – Special Project I and PCH 594 – Special Project II offered as regular courses?

No. In the fall, there will be an orientation session for all students enrolling in one of the two culminating experience options. This will be a time to ask questions about the special project and thesis, respectively. Following this session, your special project advisor will inform you of his or required schedule of meeting times. With the exception of this initial session, subsequent contact with your special project advisor will be through independent study with an assigned schedule of meeting times.

6. Does the Department require an application for the Special Project?

Yes. The Application for Approval of Special Project Plan form is available at the Department's Web site or from the Office of the Coordinator of Graduate Studies. It is submitted to the Coordinator of Graduate Studies on or before June 1, prior to the fall semester of enrollment in PCH 593.

7. What types of Special Projects does the Department support.

There are three types of service agreements supported by the Department. They are:

- An agency-based unspecified response to an agency-identified health-related problem (e.g., an agency wants an unspecified response to lower the incidence of diabetes among its employees).
- An agency-based specified response to an agency-identified health-related problem (an agency wants the development of a policy manual to address the operations of an existing physical activity program).
- A non-agency-based entrepreneurial approach to responding to a documented health-related problem.

8. How do I make contact with an agency?

If you presently work at a health-related community or state agency, you can pursue the feasibility of conducting your project there. If you do not work at such an agency or choose not to conduct your Special Project at the agency you work for, you can

contact an agency that shares a particular interest you have. Your academic advisor or the Department's Coordinator of Graduate Studies will be available to assist you.

9. Does the Special Project have to be related to my program specialization?

Yes.

10. Is my academic advisor serve as my Special Project Advisor?

Not necessarily. There is certain faculty designated as Special Project Advisors. The list of available faculty will be included on the Application. Your Special Project Advisor must be a faculty member in the Department of Public Health. You will have the opportunity to indicate your choice of Advisor with the submission of the "Application for Approval of Special Project Plan." Every effort will be made to match you with an appropriate Advisor. Choice of Advisor is not guaranteed.

11. Can I conduct my Special Project with another student?

No. As a culminating Program activity, it is required that you demonstrate your ability to apply your general public health and specialized knowledge and skills (conceptual, human and technical) to plan and develop a response to a health-related agency- or non-agency-based health-related problem.

12. What is the role of my Special Project Advisor?

You can conceive of your Special Project Advisor as the "gate-keeper" who is responsible to ensure that the Special Project Prospectus, product and final Special Project Report conform to the Department's *Special Project Guidelines and Requirements* and whether or not it is acceptable and ready for submission to the Department Chairperson. Since it is your project, you will be expected to comply with the standards for scholarly writing, including spelling, punctuation and grammar. Your Special Project Advisor is not your personal editor, nor is he or she responsible for correcting deficiencies in structure, format, style or content that are part of your responsibility as author. The role of the Special Project Advisor is described in the Department's *Special Project Guidelines and Requirements*.

13. Who are the other individuals involved in the Special Project approval process?

In addition to you (author), and your Special Project Advisor, there is the Agency Preceptor and for non-agency-based projects, a Second Reader. The Department chairperson is also a signatory on the Special Project Report.

14. Does the Special Project require the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School?

No. Unlike the thesis, that requires Graduate School approval, the Special Project requires only the approval of your Special Project Advisor, Agency Preceptor or Second Reader and Department Chairperson. In March 2007, the Dean of Graduate Studies convened a Special Project Committee to develop guidelines for special projects, similar to the Graduate School Thesis Guidelines, that would require the submission to and approval of all special projects by the Graduate School.

15. Can I change to a thesis after I have initiated my Special Project?

It depends. The Ad Hoc Committee on Culminating Experiences may determine that your Application for Approval of Special Project Plan may be more appropriate as a thesis. Once your Special Project Prospectus (a.k.a., Proposal) has been accepted by your Special Project Advisor, you cannot change to a thesis, unless you are willing to submit a new Application with a start date of the subsequent fall semester.

16. Can I expect my Special Project Advisor to tutor me in content, concepts or methodology that I did not master in my other courses?

Remember, that the Special Project requires you to demonstrate your abilities. Your Special Project Advisor will expect you to review or learn the knowledge or skills required to successfully complete your Special Project. New learning involved in completing the Special Project is incidental to the process. You can expect your Special Project Advisor to offer you guidance, consultation, and support as you demonstrate your ability to complete this culminating activity. The Application for the Special Project will require you to establish your credentials and capacity (knowledge, skills and access to resources) to complete the service agreement.

17. Is a Special Project less demanding than a Thesis?

No! Although the term "Thesis" seems ominous, it is actually no more or less demanding than the Special Project. Both culminating experiences involve substantial research and the ability to apply acquired knowledge and skills to a health-related problem. Although, both experiences require the development of a written process document, students selecting the Special Project will also be required to create a distinct intervention that would attest to your ability to problem-solve and develop appropriate interventions.

18. Is it advisable to follow the format of a previously completed Special Project?

No, since requirements may change from year-to-year. The only approved format is contained in the most recent edition of the Department's *Special Project Guidelines and Requirement* document, available online at the Department's Web site and from TYCO Printing.

19. What if I cannot finish the required work for my Special Project within the prescribed time period?

If you are unable to meet the end-of-semester deadline, your Special Project Advisor will assign a "Q" grade. Although this grade will not impact on your grade-point-average, you will be required to register again for PCH 593 - Special Project Seminar I, or PCH 594- Special Project Seminar II, only during the semester in which these respective courses are normally scheduled. Note that PCH 593 and PCH 594 are offered, respectively only during the fall and spring semesters.

20. Can I fail the Special Project?

Yes, as is the case for any course. You will be permitted a maximum of three drafts of any section of your Special Project. A minimum of two drafts is to be expected. If you are unable to complete a section within three drafts, obviously you were not able to demonstrate the proficiency required to complete the Special Project. Failure to successfully complete the Special Project will result in your dismissal from the Program.

21. What if my Special Project Advisor and Agency Preceptor disagree about some aspect of my Special Project?

In most instances your Special Project Advisor and Preceptor/Second Reader will resolve their differences with a minimum of effort. In the final analysis, it is your Special Project Advisor who will make the ultimate decision.

22. When can I expect drafts of my work submitted to my Special Project Advisor to be returned to me?

Response time will vary with Advisors. Once assigned you should contact your Advisor to determine his or her policy on response time.

23. How often is it recommended that I consult with my Special Project Advisor?

In addition to the schedule prescribed in the course outline for PCH 593, you should establish a schedule of consultations with your Advisor.

24. Can I register for Special Project Seminar II if I have not completed Special Project Seminar I?

No. To be eligible to register for Special Project II you must have been assigned a passing grade (i.e., minimum of “C+”) for Special Project I.

25. Should I retain the services of an experienced editor to review my Special Project?

The Department neither encourages nor discourages the use of outside editorial assistance. It is your sole responsibility to meet the stringent grammatical and style requirements for the written parts of the Special Project. In most cases, students who spend the time, including online tutorials and written guides, usually can meet the expected standards.

26. Is there a requirement that my Special Project be microfilmed?

No. This is a requirement for theses only.

27. Is there a requirement that my Special Project be copyrighted?

No.

28. How many copies of my Special Project Am I required to prepare?

A minimum of two (2). One copy which is submitted to the Department with a CD-ROM and one copy of the Special Project Report and Product to your Special Project Advisor. As a courtesy, you are encouraged to provide your Agency Preceptor with a copy of your Special Project Product.

29. When can I expect to receive a grade for PCH 593 - Special Project Seminar I?

A grade will be assigned after you have satisfactorily completed the coursework assigned by your Special Project Advisor for the semester.

30. When can I expect to receive a grade for PCH 594 - Special Project Seminar II?

A final grade will be assigned only after you have submitted a bound copy of your approved Special Project and CD ROM to the Coordinator of Graduate Studies, who will accept these documents on behalf of the Department of Public Health.



Absolutely no data collection without approval of the University's
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