

iMEP Master’s Project Handbook

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Overview

The Master’s Project (MP) is a paper of around 8,500- 11,500 words, a policy memo or journal article required of all Master’s students in the iMEP program. Two types of projects are possible: a project for an actual client that involves approaches that are co-created with the client to meet their specific needs (client-based) or a research-based project that may involve a variety of methodological approaches and seek to advance the literature on a key environmental policy question or questions (research-based). Hybrids of these projects are also possible. Students are encouraged to build their projects in coordination with summer internships and to deepen their policy-area expertise by taking appropriate elective courses. As a principle, MPs should be undertaken as group projects unless the MP advisor explicitly agrees to supervise an individual project.

Goals

The MP seeks to enhance student’s skills and experience in conducting high-quality research and help them apply classroom skills and knowledge to address environmental challenges. By completing complex and multi-layered projects over approximately one and a half years, students will develop greater command of the topics they explore, better understand processes and considerations surrounding environmental policymaking, and enhance their abilities to produce and present rigorous research and policy advice.

Key Dates

YEAR 1	
February-March-April	<p>Students attend three “Kick-start MP” sessions with the MP Course Instructor at DKU in early February, early March, and early April.</p> <p>Students begin to elaborate on MP ideas, identify possible clients and internship opportunities, contact potential MP Advisors, apply for Faculty-generated projects, and undertake the required IRB procedures. If students want to do a group project, they undertake these procedures as a group.</p>
April	<p>In early April, students submit an MP Advisor application form to the iMEP Program Coordinator. The application identifies the faculty Advisor they would like to work with and motivates this choice based on the adequacy between the faculty advisor’s expertise and their MP project topic/idea. iMEP faculty examine student MP Advisor applications, decide on the attribution, and communicate it to students by mid-April.</p>

	By late April, students have met with their Advisor, and they must sign an <u>MP Agreement</u> containing the title and a succinct presentation of the MP project. The MP Agreement is submitted to the iMEP Program Coordinator. If the MP is a client-based project, an <u>acceptance letter or email from the client</u> should be provided.
Summer (May to August)	Internship and field research (if applicable), as much as possible in combination. Students submit an <u>Internship Report</u> to the iMEP coordinator after the internship ends or at the beginning of the Fall term at the latest.
YEAR 2	
Late August	MPI course begins in Kunshan
Early September	Work Plan submission through the iMEP MP Handbook website “deliverables + Milestones.” Deadline for changing supervisor
Late November	Mid-term Report and Pre-recorded presentation and PPT submission through the iMEP MP Handbook website “deliverables + Milestones.”
Late November	Mid-term Report Review Committee reviews meet to discuss and validate the MP mid-term report.
January	MPII course begins in Durham
Mid-March	1 st MP first draft submission to the iMEP Program Coordinator at Duke through the Duke Box submission page
Early April	2 nd MP first draft submission through the iMEP MP Handbook website “deliverables + Milestones.”
Mid-April	MP presentations recording submission through the iMEP MP Handbook website “deliverables + Milestones.” Public MP presentations at Duke
Late April	Final MP submission through the iMEP MP Handbook website “deliverables + Milestones” together with the MP submission form

*The MP1 and MP2 course instructors will communicate the exact deliverable submission dates

Types of Master’s Projects

Client-Based Projects

For this type of MP, Students will work with a client to recommend a specific course of action to solve an environmental policy problem. As a principle, Client-based projects should be undertaken as a group project unless the Advisor agrees to supervise an individual project. Students may develop their projectors and apply to work on “Faculty-client generated projects.” Projects ideally (but not necessarily) combine with summer internships or target an organization that the student(s) would like to work with in the future. To be approved as an MP topic, the

client must have a significant policy problem posed in the form of “What should the client do?”. The research topic must also be relevant to environmental policy. This project outcome must meet the MP criteria and measure up to standards of good analysis, including a clear definition of the problem and careful evaluation of the relevant evidence, identification of important trade-offs and potential indirect consequences, and the presentation of specific conclusions and recommendations. A client project involving policy analysis or recommendations, program evaluation, or quality improvement studies that is not going to be published is not designed to contribute to a field of knowledge. It does not need an Institutional Review Board (IRB) review. However, if research 1) is conducted with human subjects and 2) is made public in any way, then the IRB is required. If the research involves handling animal subjects, students may need the Duke Kunshan University Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to review and approve their protocol.

Research-Based Projects

This type of MP more closely resembles a Master’s thesis. Students may propose an original research idea to a faculty member or apply to a faculty-generated research project. Research-based projects should also be undertaken as a group project unless the Advisor agrees to supervise an individual project. Research MPs follow the standard format for scientific research or policy analysis to introduce a new idea and problem-solving approaches and may involve original field data collection. Students interested in a doctoral degree or employment in research roles may benefit from this type of MP. Working with the MP advisor, the student needs to follow the scientific or analytical methods in their topic area. The research topic must be relevant to environmental policy and involve rigorous quantitative and qualitative methodology. Research MPs should strive for publishable quality, although external publication is not required. If the project involves working with human subjects, students may need to apply for the Duke Kunshan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to review and approve their protocols. If the project involves handling animal subjects, students may need the Duke Kunshan University Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) to review and approve their protocol.

MP Coursework

During their second year, all iMEP students will enroll in the required fall course “Master’s Project Development I” by Professor Jingbo Cui and Professor Coraline Goron at DKU, and in the spring course “Master’s Project Development II” taught by Professor Jackson Ewing during their semester at Duke. The MPI course is completed with the production and validation of an MP Mid-term Report. The MPII Course ends with the submission of the final MP product. The two courses will provide general guidance to help students conceptualize their projects, provide guidelines related to applied research (including IRB procedures and research design), hone proposals and research questions, and help students produce successful MPs in written and presented forms.

Roles of MP Advisors, MP Course Instructors, and Clients

MP Advisors are the primary agents for helping students shape their projects, ensuring that they employ robust and ethical approaches, and tracking their overall progress. The MP advisors are solely responsible for reading, approving, and grading the final project.

MP Instructors and their courses are a resource for students to develop and hone useful skills for completing and presenting their MPs. They also, in some cases, introduce students to relevant experts and practitioners. MP Instructors and courses will also help students remain on track during the project and clarify process questions along the way.

For client-based projects, the student will work closely with the client to develop an appropriate topic that is of practical use to their organization. The student's MP Advisor will be involved in refining the topic and developing the research strategy for the MP. If needed, the student and client sign an agreement pertaining to the student's use and storage of data from the client and whether the MP can be stored in the public domain. The student and client should plan to talk or meet periodically to discuss the shape and direction of the project over the academic year. The client can be invited to attend the MP defense. However, the client is not involved in approving and grading the final project.

Completion Guidance

Spring of Year I

In the spring semester of their first year, iMEP students should start the process of identifying a project they want to work on, as well as a client if they're going to do a client-based project. They should also find an MP Advisor. The MP Advisor can be an iMEP faculty member, a DKU faculty member, or a Duke University professor. Students who want to work with an MP advisor outside Duke Kunshan University or Duke University must have a co-advisor who is an iMEP faculty member. A co-advisor serves as the student's primary contact to the iMEP for any academic issues that are related to MP and ensures continuing progress. Students who want to pursue a group project (strongly encouraged) must elaborate on their project and contact potential advisors and clients (for client-based projects) as a group.

In February and March, iMEP students are required to attend three kick-start MP sessions with the MP Course Instructor (the first in early February, the second in early March, and the third in early April). During these sessions, the MP Instructor provides initial guidance to students regarding the resources at their disposal to develop their MP idea and the ways to apply for Faculty-generated research and client-based projects. The MP Instructor also helps students develop strategies to find and contact potential clients and advisors in relation to their interests. Finally, the kick-start MP sessions also initiate the students to research ethics, data collection and protection, and the associated review and approval procedures at DKU (IRB and IACUC).

By early April, students are expected to submit their MP advisor application form to the iMEP Program Coordinator. The form includes a preliminary introduction of the MP topic or idea, which must fit in the scope of “environmental Policy” broadly understood. Advising responsibilities are equitably distributed among faculties in order to ensure that each student receives adequate attention and support. After deliberation among iMEP faculties, the attribution of MP Advisors will be communicated to students by mid-April. Consequently, by the end of April, students are expected to meet with their MP Advisor and mutually sign an MP agreement containing the title and a succinct presentation of the MP project. The MP project must fit in the scope of “environmental policy” and be broadly understood. If the MP is a client-based project, an acceptance letter or email from the client should be provided with the MP agreement.¹ Exceptionally, the MP Advisor can be changed at a later date upon motivated request from the student, but no later than the end of September.

If required, students should begin the DKU IRB or IACUC process in April. In any case, they must obtain the relevant institutional approval of their research protocol prior to commencing the data collection/fieldwork.

Summer of Year I

In the summer before their second year, students are recommended to cultivate advisor and client relationships. Internships are broadly understood as including positions at companies or non-governmental Organizations (sometimes as volunteers) and research internships with faculty. Upon starting the internship, students must sign an internship agreement with their employer. This agreement should identify the tasks attributed to the students and the project they will be working on, as well as any relevant confidentiality issues.

Suppose the student wishes to use data collected during the internship for their research or client-based MP. In that case, they should sign an MOU with the employer regarding the use of internship-related data for the MP and the conditions of this use, including data transfer and storage on DKU’s protected network (see annex on data protection) and their potential disclosure through submission of the MP on DukeSpace Library Archive upon graduation.

Fall of Year II

Early during the fall semester of year II, students submit a final Work Plan describing the shape of their project through the iMEP MP Handbook website. After securing approval from the MP Advisor, students continue in good standing to work on the MP. After that date, it is no longer possible to change supervisors, and students should refrain from introducing major changes to their MP topics. Students are required to submit assignments and supervision check-in reports according to the calendar set out in the MPI course syllabus.

The main output of the MPI course is a minimum of 3,000 words MP Mid-term Report, for which students carry out the research, data analysis, and writing necessary to start fleshing out the MP. If the project involves a client, the Mid-term Report must present the strategy adopted to satisfy the client’s needs. If the project involves empirical research, the Mid-term Report must

¹ Depending on motivated circumstances, the acceptance letter from the client can be added at a later stage.

describe the method used to collect and analyze it. Due to the wide variety of projects, the specific contents of the Mid-term Report are tailored to each project and are agreed upon with the MP Advisor.

The MP Mid-term Report and Pre-recorded Presentation are submitted through the iMEP MP Handbook website in November. In early December, a review committee, composed of the MP Advisor(s) and the MPI and MPII course instructors, meets to discuss and validate the Mid-term Report. Only projects that pass the review committee can validate the MPI course.

Spring of Year II

Most students will spend the fall semester of their second year at Duke University in Durham. Students who remain at DKU during the Spring semester of their second year will attend the MP II course remotely. During their stay, students will maintain long-distance communication with their Advisor if they are based at Duke Kunshan University, as well as their client for client-based projects. Students are expected to set up meetings with their Advisor during the Spring term, as planned in the MPII syllabus. The first MP draft will be submitted through the iMEP MP Handbook website by mid-March. The MP should be around 8,500- 11,500 words long (12 pt, Times New Roman, 1.5 spaced). Students should indicate the word count on the cover page (see template in annex). A revised draft will be submitted in the same manner in early April.

The students will then prepare an MP public presentation and Q&A, which will take place around mid-April at Duke. All students, the MP advisors, and instructors, as well as for client-based projects, the client, if possible, will be present (if necessary, they will be invited to attend online). Students also submit a pre-recorded presentation through the iMEP MP Handbook website. Following the presentation, students will submit their final MP in late April. The final copy must be submitted through the iMEP MP Handbook website, as well as to the MP Advisor and the client, for client-based projects.

The student must also submit an electronic MP Submission Form by this date on the same page as the iMEP MP Handbook website. When the student submits their electronic MP Submission Form, the student's MP advisor will receive an MP Advisor Approval Form by email, which they must submit to record the official approval of the student's MP. If you have any questions about the MP submission process, please get in touch with the iMEP Program Coordinator at Duke.

After the students have officially submitted their MPs following the procedure above, they have the option to submit them to the DukeSpace Library Archive, which has a collection specifically for iMEP MPs. More information on the requirements for submission to the DukeSpace Library Archive and on submission processes is found in Annex VI of this guidebook.

MP Grading method

The MP Advisor reviews the final MP and assigns one of the following grades: pass or fail. If a student disagrees with the advisor's decision, they can make a reasoned appeal to the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). In this case, the DGS sets up an appeal committee consisting of the MP Advisor and an ad hoc group of faculty members and makes a final decision on the MP.

Resources

iMEP Master Project Handbook Website:

<https://sites.nicholas.duke.edu/mastersprojectshandbook-imep/>

Instruction:

Dr. Jingbo Cui, MPI Instructor, jingbo.cui@dukekunshan.edu.cn

Dr. Xiao Wang, MPI Instructor, xiao.wang@dukekunshan.edu.cn

Dr. Jackson Ewing, MPII Instructor, jackson.ewing@duke.edu

Admin:

Sihui Zhou: Program Coordinator (DKU); sihui.zhou@dukekunshan.edu.cn

MP Samples: <https://dukespace.lib.duke.edu/dspace/handle/10161/18332>

IRB: [DKU Institutional Review Board](#)

IACUC: [The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee](#)

Annex I. Expectations for MP Advisors and Students

iMEP student and MP Advisor both play crucial roles in ensuring that the Master's Project (MP) is a top-quality piece of work. In order to ensure that the student and the advisors have the most productive working relationship possible, the following guidelines and expectations can serve as reference:

Expectations for MP Advisors:

The MP Advisor serves as the student's chief guide throughout the MP process. More specifically, the MP Advisor is expected to:

- Meet with the student on a regular basis to provide advice and feedback throughout the MP process. It is recommended that the student begin meeting regularly with the advisor during the Spring semester.
- Provide timely feedback to the student throughout the MP writing process. Generally, drafts should be turned around within one week.
- Help the student formulate searchable problems and questions and devise a sound research strategy.
- Provide advice to the student on managing the client relationship and balancing academic and professional standards with obligations to the client.
- Provide specific, constructive feedback on the mid-term report submitted by the student in December.
- Work with the student on drafts of the MP until the project reaches the required level of excellence to be considered final.
- Sign the MP Completion Form provided by the student when the final draft of the MP is complete.
- Communicate the final grade to the DGS to be assigned to the MP.
- Recommend MPs of the highest quality for posting to the Duke University Library's electronic document repository, Duke Space.

Expectations for Students:

By acting in a professional manner and meeting the deadlines set, students share responsibility with the MP Advisor and MP Committee Member to ensure that the advising relationship is successful. Specifically, students are expected to:

- Meet all deadlines set by the MP Course instructors, the iMEP Program, and Duke University.
- Secure faculty members to serve as MP Advisors no later than the end of April.
- Attend and actively participate in regularly scheduled meetings with the MP Advisor. It may be helpful to develop a step-by-step MP process schedule/calendar with the advisor to set interim deadlines and ensure that the project remains on track.
- Provide deliverables (drafts, etc.) to the MP Advisor and Program Coordinator in a timely fashion to allow for feedback.
- Submit the MP mid-term report on time and attend the MP mid-term report Review Committee.

- Work with the MP Advisor on drafts of the MP until they reach the required level of excellence to be considered final.
- Once a final draft of the MP has been approved, submit the MP Completion Form.
- Submit the final MP through the iMEP MP Handbook Website and, if recommended by the primary MP Advisor, to DukeSpace.

In addition to their obligations to the MP advising team, the student has additional obligations to the iMEP Program, the Sanford School, and the NSOE, and the client. The student's relationship with the client is a unique one. The student must balance academic and professional standards with obligations to the client. In all dealings with the client, the student is expected to conduct themselves professionally, remembering that all their actions reflect on the larger iMEP Program, Sanford School and NSOE, and Duke University communities.

Annex II: MP Information for Clients

iMEP students who choose to pursue a Client-Based Master's Project are required to produce a professional report or Master's Project (MP) that helps a client decide what to do about a policy problem. The MP's purpose is to analyze an issue of concern to the client and possibly recommend and defend a specific course of action to the client. It is important to recognize that the MP is also a key component of a student's academic program requirements and must be approved by the student's iMEP Faculty Advisor. As such, the MP must measure up to the standards of good analysis, including precise definition of the problem, dispassionate evaluation of the evidence, identification of important trade-offs, and clear presentation of the results and recommendations.

What is Expected of the Client: The client should work closely with the student to develop an appropriate topic that is of practical use to their organization. The student's MP Faculty Advisor will be involved in refining the topic and developing the research strategy for the MP. The student and client should plan to talk or meet periodically to discuss the shape and direction of the project over the academic year.

Schedule: Students begin their project during the spring of their first year. They are expected to use the summer holiday (May-August) to make steady progress on their MP together with their client. This includes refining the topic or research question and method, gathering and cleaning data, doing fieldwork, etc. During the fall term of their second year, students begin writing the MP and submit an MP mid-term report, which is reviewed and approved by the MP Faculty Advisor and the MP mid-term report Review Committee in December. During the spring term, students complete the MP project. A draft MP is submitted to their MP Faculty Advisor and client in March for feedback; a second draft is submitted in early April; a final version is due both to the MP Faculty Advisor and to the client in late April following a public presentation at Duke. The client is encouraged to attend the MP public, as well as to request that the students make a presentation of the project to the client's organization.

The MP Faculty Advisor may recommend a student's final MP for posting to the Duke University Library's DukeSpace digital repository. If so, the MP will be web accessible to the public using a Creative Commons license and will be assigned a persistent URL. Exceptions to posting MPs are granted via application by the student to the iMEP Program's Director of Graduate Studies.

Support: Students welcome financial or in-kind assistance to help defray the costs of their research. Contact: Clients should feel free to contact the iMEP program coordinator at DKU (sihui.zhou@dukekunshan.edu.cn) for any clarification on the MP processor requirements.

Annex III: Data Security

To help ensure the safe storage of research data, Duke Kunshan University has adopted a [Policy on Research Data Management](#). This policy defines a 5-level categorization schedule for research information and the minimum protections required for each level: Level 1 -Non-confidential research information, Level 2 -Benign information to be held confidentially, Level 3 -Sensitive or confidential information, Level 4 -Very sensitive information, and Level 5 -Extremely sensitive information.

The basic principle of this policy is that more exacting storage measures must be followed as the information risk posed by a research project increases. Please review the documentation to determine which type of data your study contains.

Possession of, access to, or storage of any research data that are classified as Level 3, 4, or 5 requires the advance review and approval of the Data and Visualization Services Librarian Scott Mauldin (scott.mauldin@dukekunshan.edu.cn)

Level 2 information can be stored on devices configured for secure storage, transport, and disposal of confidential research data. Research data designated Level 3 may only be used, stored, or processed on servers or services (such as file sharing or collaboration services, cloud-based email services, cloud-based backup and recovery services, etc.) that meet applicable Duke Kunshan data protection requirements. Research data designated Level 4 or higher may only be used, stored, or processed on the Duke Kunshan Protected Network (DKPN) or an alternative, Duke Kunshan-hosted or –approved alternative system.

Specific storage options may be further determined by university affiliation and the size of data files. Questions about affiliation or file size limits should be directed to the Duke Kunshan IT Director (william.wan@dukekunshan.edu.cn).

All studies that are categorized as Research with Human Subjects will need to include a [Data Management Plan](#) as part of the IRB application. Even those that do not require an IRB protocol, however, are still subject to the above restrictions and controls if they include restricted or sensitive data.

Resources:

- [Duke Kunshan University’s Policy on Research Data Management](#)
- [Duke Kunshan University’s Policy on Data Management Plans](#)
- Questions about data management plans can be sent to scott.mauldin@dukekunshan.edu.cn

Annex IV: iMEP Master's Project Research/Travel Grants

Some Master's Projects may require extra expenses to produce the best possible product. These expenses might include costs incurred to gather data or domestic or international travel for field research. Students are encouraged to work closely with their Advisor and their Client, who might consider supporting some of the incurred costs if the project contributes to their research and activities.

In addition to external support from the MP Advisor and the MP client, the Guo Tingting Scholarship iMEP Master Project Award provides limited funding to help support some students with MP research and related travel expenses.

The number and amount of the grants, application procedures, and deadlines will be communicated in a Call for Proposal circulated in April of the first academic year. Only one grant per project can be received from this fund, but group projects may receive larger amounts. A committee will review the applications, and grants will be distributed on a competitive basis to the best project proposals.

Criteria for awarding a grant will include the necessity of funding to carry out the proposed MP and the quality of the project application. The approved award will be disbursed as a Guo Tingting scholarship to the student's SIS account as a partial offset on their second-year Spring tuition bill. For group projects, the award (tuition offset) will be disbursed to whoever incurred the expense.

Annex V: Template MP Cover page

[MP Title]

By

[Student: name of student]

[Supervisor(s): name of supervisor(s)]

[Client (if applicable): name of client]

Masters project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the International Master of Environmental Policy at Duke Kunshan University, degree awarded by the Nicholas School of the Environment and Sanford School of Public Policy of Duke University

Date (month/year)

Annex VI: Duke Space Submission

After the students officially submit their final drafts of their MPs following the procedure above, they have the option to submit their papers to DukeSpaceiMEP, which has its collection on DukeSpace.

On the MP Advisor Approval Form, the MP Advisor will note whether the student's MP is approved for submission to Duke Space. Reasons for not approving submission may be that the MP is not polished enough, incomplete, or must remain confidential based on the client's needs or the nature of the data collected. The MPs in the DukeSpace collection will be available via a CC—BY-NC-ND 3.0 license. The MP Advisor should provide guidance to their advisee on these issues in relation to submitting their MP to DukeSpace.

The students' MP will be open to the public unless they add an embargo during the submission process. If they add an embargo, the paper will still be searchable in the database, but no one can download it. If someone wants to view the MP, they will have to contact the student directly to request it. The student will have the option to choose an embargo period of 6, 12, or 24 months. After the embargo period is over, the paper will become open to the public. A student should not put an embargo on their paper unless their MP advisor and client have advised them to do so.

Reasons for using an embargo:

- The paper contains confidential information that the student, advisor, or client wants to protect for 6-24 months. However, if the information remains too sensitive for the public after 24 months, then it is better not to submit the MP to DukeSpace or to submit a censored copy.
- The student is continuing to work on the paper or the data for publication or another project and wants to protect the content of the paper until publication.

If you have any questions about MP submission to the DukeSpace Library Archive, please get in touch with Duke iMEP Program Coordinator.