

Faculty of Social Sciences

Master's Degree Programme in Public and Global Health

Academic Counselling Plan for Master's Degree studies

Contents

ACADEMIC COUNSELLING IN HEALTH SCIENCES IN THE MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN PUBLIC AND GLOBAL HEALTH	2
Introduction.....	2
Background.....	2
Premises of Academic Counselling at the Health Sciences	4
Objectives of Academic Counselling.....	5
Academic Counselling Practices of the Master’s Degree Programme in Public and Global Health (PGH) - Practices, key players and responsibilities in academic counselling.....	6
Getting New Degree Students Started in the PGH.....	6
Personal Study Plan (PSP) Instruction	7
Intermediate Studies	8
Internship and Career Advice	9
Supervision of Master’s Thesis Work	9
Supervision Agreement	10
The Guidance at Tampere University	10
Evaluating and Improving Academic Counselling in health sciences	11
Links	13

ACADEMIC COUNSELLING IN HEALTH SCIENCES IN THE MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN PUBLIC AND GLOBAL HEALTH

Introduction

The continuous improvement of the offered study programmes is a focal point in our education in Health Sciences. Most faculty members in Health Sciences have completed either basic or advanced training in university pedagogy at the University of Tampere. In previous academic years the improvement of the offered study programmes has focused on various aspects of teaching such as supervision and evaluation of the Master's theses. Currently academic counselling in health sciences is integrated in our strategy.

The students in health sciences come from various backgrounds and the age range is wide, which has implications on their academic counselling and guidance. Many students already have previous experience in the field of health: a health-related degree, other university studies or practical work experience. The fact that many students live in another town with their families and are actively involved in working life while studying poses an additional challenge for organizing the studies.

The international students in the public and global health programme form a multicultural group that represent many different nationalities and various academic backgrounds. The heterogenic background of students brings up the need for flexibility and cultural sensitivity in counseling. In addition to international degree students there are exchange students who mostly come from European partner universities.

This academic counselling plan is a result of the development work conducted by the study programme and the whole academic counselling community in health sciences.

The purpose of this plan is

- to make students aware of academic counselling practices and the responsibilities of the various actors in the process.
- to identify the persons providing counselling and advice in the public and global health programme.
- to promote a shared understanding of academic counselling and ensure continuous discussion.
- to function as a guideline for faculty members in their counselling work and help new teachers adopt the counselling practices.

Background

As a result of an academic and administrative reform in our university the education was restructured into interdisciplinary undergraduate programmes and a selection of specific master level programmes. Osaamisperustaiset opetusuunnitelmat Competence-based curricula were introduced in all degree programmes and the curriculum work focused on defining learning outcomes, both on degree level

and for individual courses. The specific learning outcomes function as a tool in the student's personal study planning process and in evaluating their learning.

[Teaching Council Policy Guideline on Academic Counselling \(in Finnish\)](#)

(https://intra.uta.fi/portal/documents/159280/467334/Opintojen_ohjaus_TaYssa_ONn_linjauksia_3_10_2011.pdf):

The foundation for education and academic counselling at the University of Tampere is that its students are fully fledged members of the University community. The University is responsible for setting up and presenting the overall academic counselling structure so that the information, advice and guidance needed for the smooth progress of studies is available and that it is easily accessible. The University is also responsible for designing and implementing the curricula, the learning environment and the instruction provided so that the students can realistically complete their studies within the proposed time. The guideline also defines student responsibilities. Students are responsible for planning and carrying out their studies and for developing their expertise. Students must also engage in the academic counselling that is incorporated into their education, and they are responsible for seeking any other academic counselling they may need.

[University of Tampere – A Good Academic Community](#)

(http://www.uta.fi/studies/studying/practices/good_academic_community.html):

The document 'University of Tampere – A Good Academic Community' says that teachers are obligated to inspire and support students and to promote their studies, learning, and growth into an expert by applying teaching methods that aid students with learning disabilities and by providing feedback that motivates students to learn new things. All teachers must provide academic advice and supervision and take part in developing their own work community and skills. At the University of Tampere, students are treated equally, supportively and respectfully.

University students pursue studies in order to acquire the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed in life and future duties. They also study to progress in and complete their degrees. The key objective of studies at university level is to develop good learners who are able to solve problems using scientific and critical thinking.

[University of Tampere – A Good Academic Community](#)

(http://www.uta.fi/studies/studying/practices/good_academic_community.html)

Students of health sciences become part of a dialogic and interactive academic community that strives to promote their critical thinking and personal expression. In our degree programmes we support individual learning styles by using a variety of teaching methods in creative learning environment. Teachers and supervisors provide high-quality research-based education, supervise students in their thesis work, and introduce students to the world of research. The teaching takes into account the existing skills and knowledge of the students and they are encouraged to discuss, reflect on their learning, and give feedback. Students also have the opportunity to participate actively in the academic community through working in research groups and acting as members in various committees, such as the curriculum committee.

Premises of Academic Counselling at the Health Sciences

The community of Health Sciences is a multidisciplinary research and training unit that offers an excellent environment for students' cognitive and methodological growth. The Degree Programmes study factors that impact health: the means and effectiveness of health promotion and disease prevention, areas of healthcare and health policy, and the fundamentals of nursing, health and well-being. The disciplines of health sciences educate bachelors and masters in health sciences in Finnish-language in two majors: nursing science and public health. In addition, there is an international Master's Degree Programme in Public and Global Health (in English). The programme offers graduate-level courses that also students in the Finnish-language programme are welcome to take. In its degree programmes, the education field of health sciences covers the following disciplines: biostatistics, epidemiology, gerontology, nursing science, public health science, social psychiatry, social and healthcare policy, health economics and occupational health.

Under the Degree Programme in Nursing Science, the Nursing Management specialism prepares students to fill high positions in administration and nursing, but also to assume roles in research and planning, whereas the Teaching of Nursing specialism trains students to become teachers at polytechnics and vocational schools and fill various healthcare planning and development positions. The Degree Programmes in Public Health as well as Public and Global Health educate experts for different jobs in evaluation, development, planning, research and education to promote population-level health both in Finland and abroad. Students who major in public health and nursing science in the Finnish-language programme may also complete the health education study module. The successful completion of this module, added to pedagogical studies and the Master's degree programme, qualify students to act as health education teachers at schools.

Academic counselling, supervision of thesis work and personal study planning (PSP) assistance are an integral part of both the Finnish and the English taught degree programmes. *A key starting point in academic counselling in health sciences is that students are responsible for their own studies and the degree programme is responsible for the organisation, resources and quality of academic counselling.* The community of health sciences views academic counselling as the interaction between the person providing the counselling and the student or group of students receiving counselling, with the aim of promoting students' growth into academic experts. Academic counselling promotes student activity, the development of their problem-solving skills, and the smooth advancement of their studies. Academic counselling targets the learning and problem-solving processes of students and study groups.

All students need academic counselling to advance in their studies, and all instructors are required to provide counselling as part of their educational duties. Academic counselling is an ongoing and structured activity that involves every member of the counselling community. Academic counselling is not separate from teaching, but it is an activity that is integrated in everything that goes on in the Degree Programmes in Health Sciences. An important duty of the counselling community is to uphold an operational culture and practices that enable students to become a part of the academic community. Academic counselling is organised in such a way that all students can access it equally. The key players in academic counselling include the counselling community, instructors, supervisors and, on courses, other students. Instructors, study administration staff and students are all responsible for improving the academic counselling practices.

The main tool in academic counselling is the degree programme curricula, which is designed by all the instructors in health sciences counselling community together with student representatives. The instructors contributing to the degree programme in question must be familiar with the curricula and how their courses fit in the degree structure. For its part, **the Faculty** must ensure that all instructors have enough information and receive the educational support they need to function as instructors and supervisors.

The degree programme curriculum is a student's map to planning and implementing his/her course of studies. The curriculum specifies the overall learning outcomes for the Bachelor's and Master's degrees and the individual learning outcomes for each course. The curriculum also states the scope (in ECTS credits), content, mode of implementation and evaluation criteria for each course and points out the interconnections between courses. The teaching schedule, drawn up separately for each academic year, sets out the suggested timing for each course. The academic counselling provided by instructors and study administration staff lays out and clarifies the choices students have and encourages students in setting their own objectives for their studies.

The Finnish-language degree programme and the English-language Master's degree programme utilize a multidisciplinary approach and varied teaching methods that take into account not only different learners and learning styles but also complex modern phenomena. For example, students look at health factors from various angles during their studies, thus gaining an extensive overall picture. The multidisciplinary educational background and research of the health sciences instructors offer enriching viewpoints and varied approaches to the supervision of learning processes and problem-solving situations. The mode of implementation of each course is designed to communicate the learning objectives of that course in the best possible way.

Objectives of Academic Counselling

Academic counselling is the tool that makes the knowledge-based and professional development of students visible and helps students value their skills and expertise. The academic counselling provided at universities is a communal activity aimed at improving students' all-round education and thinking and developing their identity as experts with abilities based on scientific thinking. Academic counselling must always have an objective and produce added value for the student. For this reason, academic counselling must always be based on the individual student's objectives: the intensity of counselling provided may vary greatly over the course of the student's studies.

The objectives of academic counselling include

- integrating students into their study programme and the academic community
- preventing students from dropping out
- helping students gain an overview of their education
- integrating the skills and knowledge gained from different courses into a coherent whole
- offering students different viewpoints and the tools to make educated choices during their course of studies

As students progress in their educational career, the role of academic counselling on courses grows: as the counsellor, the course instructor identifies the needs of individual students and the group and

helps students identify the elements of their growing professional identity. The role that career advice plays also increases as students advance in their studies.

Academic Counselling Practices of the Master's Degree Programme in Public and Global Health (PGH) - Practices, key players and responsibilities in academic counselling

In health sciences, academic counselling includes all information, advice and psychosocial support that is related to pursuing studies or the supervision of learning, learning processes and problem-solving skills. Academic counselling is seen as a communal activity for which the starting point lies in the objectives written down in the curricula and those set by students for themselves. The academic counselling provided in the Master's Degree Programme in Public and Global Health is based on interaction, mutual respect and equality. In academic counselling situations, both the adviser and the student should assume initiative and active and responsible roles. The time spent on academic counselling is limited, so it is used for target-oriented work.

The professor in charge of the Degree Programme in Public and Global Health carries the main responsibility for developing and improving practices in teaching and academic counselling. The head of academic counselling with the teaching staff of the degree programme is responsible for coordinating personal study plan instruction, participating in the development and improvement of practices in teaching and academic counselling, and providing academic counselling and advice on curriculum and teaching schedule work. The Head of Study Affairs is responsible for providing administrative advice. The international affairs coordinator coordinates the international Master's degree programme, plans and executes orientation courses and participates in teaching study skills. Faculty members and especially course instructors are responsible for providing and improving both thesis work supervision and academic counselling at a course level. In 2012, the University adopted its equal opportunities strategy, which states that the faculty members and the head of academic counselling share responsibility for not permitting personal factors to affect academic counselling or the grading of courses.

Academic counselling of the Degree Programme in Public and Global Health is provided at the individual, group and peer level. Personal study plan instruction is provided by the instructors of the degree programme, the coordinators and the head of study affairs. Peer counselling is provided by student tutors, online-instructors and other students in personal study plan groups and in classes. Students writing their thesis receive individual supervision, group supervision and peer supervision. The instructors who teach research methodology play a key role especially as supervisors in learning problem-solving skills and supporters of students in their independent problem-solving work. Studies secretaries offer advice on courses, examinations, enrolment procedures and thesis practices.

Getting New Degree Students Started in the PGH

Planning of the studies plays a significant role when students are just starting out. The students elected in the PGH degree programme receive their acceptance letters in spring together with an

information package about housing and residence permit applications and other practical issues. Their studies start with a joint Orientation course on the last week of August.

In the PGH, orientation of new students comprises orientation courses, personal study plan instruction, a study skills course, and student tutoring. Orientation courses familiarise students with the structure and objectives of the PGH degree programme, with the community of health sciences, the faculty of social sciences and the University as an environment, and with matters related to student wellbeing, learning and financial aid. The PGH website and the study guide of the university help students familiarise themselves with the practices. An efficient flow of information plays an integral role at this stage.

The study skills course is online on the electronic learning platform Moodle and lasts a few weeks, offering students a chance to reflect on their studies and previous experiences with studying and ways of learning, and to plan the integration of studying, working and free time. The course also introduces students to online courses and helps them network with each other. Successful completion of the study skills course requires that students participate in discussions on Moodle and complete the learning assignments. Peer counselling is an integral part of the study skills course, also because the online-instructor in charge of the course is him/herself a student.

The course materials prompt students to reflect on the nature of university studies, their personal learning style, the systematic nature of studies, and the integration of studying and personal life. The Moodle platform also enables students to share their studies-related experiences and receive peer and teacher feedback on their thinking.

Student tutoring is an essential part in integrating new students into the academic community. In the degree programmes of health sciences, all student tutors have undergone tutor training and were selected among voluntary tutors by the student association *Salus*. International students are generally tutored by student tutor pairs, with one tutor studying in the international study programme and one in the Finnish-language degree programme.

Student tutoring starts at the first information session organized in the Degree Programme, and it is discussed in more detail in the specific sessions. According to student feedback, the role of student tutors should be explained more clearly in the first info sessions. Student tutors also expressed a wish for closer collaboration with teacher tutors.

In the first term, it is important that all students receive academic counselling that suits their situation and that they receive counselling and advice from different people. This embodies the communality that will help integrate students into the academic community, remove any hindrances in studying and promote the smooth progression of studies.

Personal Study Plan (PSP) Instruction

In the PGH programme, all students are required to draw up a personal study plan that lists the courses the student intends to take to earn his/her degree. The personal study plan is a tool students can use to clarify their goals and the curriculum objectives and to schedule their studies. In other words, students use their personal study plans to construct their own study paths. The personal study plans are changed and updated as the students progress, allowing students to evaluate their learning

in the process. The first version includes a list of the courses the student intends to take in his/her first year and when the student intends to take the courses. All students are required to draw up a personal study plan in order to successfully complete the Study skills and personal study planning course.

Each student is entitled to receive personal advice on how to draw up a personal study plan. The process of preparing a personal study plan helps students feel connected to their studies and study community. The personal study plan is first and foremost written for the student himself/herself, but it also acts as an academic counselling tool and initiates the interaction between the student and his/her personal study plan instructor. Academic counselling starts right at the beginning of the studies, and students are informed of the practical side of academic counselling at the info sessions. The degree programme lecturers act as personal study plan instructors and register this duty in their work plans. By including personal study plan instruction in work plans, the faculty ensures that instructors can spend enough time providing personal study plan instruction. A student's personal study plan instructor remains his/her teacher tutor even after the initial study plan has been accepted and registered. *The personal study plan team (student and instructor) agrees on the rules, the schedule for checking and updating the plan, and the ways they communicate with each other.* Students are responsible for making the necessary appointments with their instructor. Students can also receive advice from other members of the academic community.

In the PGH degree programme, degree students are admitted through a special admissions procedure. Some students have completed previous studies at universities of applied sciences or either universities abroad or in Finland. These studies can be recognised and included in student's degree studies. If the prior studies or work experience are similar to the courses of the PGH, both in content and extent, the student demonstrate these skills to the course instructor in some agreed way. The recognition of previous studies is usually discussed in the personal study plan process (Student's Personal Study Plan Instructions in PGH moodle).

Intermediate Studies

At the intermediate level, academic counselling is mainly concerned with the content of instruction and is provided through the supervision of student assignments and learning in all teaching situations. This means that all staff member working with students give academic counselling, not only the personal study plan instructors. Students ponder and solve various learning- and study-related problems in many different groups: working in small groups promotes a communal learning culture and develops the use of cooperative learning methods. Academic writing and communication skills are built into various courses through different assignments and through feedback received from instructors and fellow students. As studies progress, courses gradually become more demanding, and students acquire new intellectual and methodological skills. The student can naturally arrange a meeting with his or her personal study plan instructor whenever one is needed.

Internship and Career Advice

Academic counselling members in health sciences pay special attention to students' working life skills in planning the course descriptions. An extensive number of core courses, methodology courses and project courses provide students with widely applicable working life skills such as communication skills, information retrieval skills, problem-solving skills and the ability to work independently and handle extensive entities.

Graduate studies in public and global health include a three-month internship at a social or healthcare research institute, an educational institution, a civic health organisation, or another health organisation in Finland or abroad.

Completing an internship at the graduate level enables students to apply their knowledge and skills in practice. During the internship, students evaluate their knowledge, skills, working practices and their learning process and report on them in the seminar held after the internship. The head of internships and the PSP instructors provide students with advice on selecting where to have their internship and, if needed, also helps them find one. The degree programme can also provide support to students during their internship if a student considers it necessary.

Some courses also include workplace visits, and visiting lectures from experts in social and health research institutes are included in some course programmes. Many research projects in health sciences are also closely linked to working life. Participating on a student exchange or work placement abroad help students form networks also with the international working life.

Supervision of Master's Thesis Work

Writing a Master's thesis is a major learning process for students, who are entitled to receive supervision at all stages of the process. At this stage, students have reached the point in their studies where they already have plenty of knowledge and skills: supervision is intended to steer and support students' application and evaluation of their knowledge and skills during the process. In the PGH studies, students receive group supervision, personal supervision and peer supervision in their Master's thesis work.

In the PGH programme, supervisors mainly include instructors or researchers who hold a doctorate in the field of health sciences. If a student is supervised by an outside supervisor, he/she must also have a supervisor from the degree programmes of health sciences. Public and global health majors are mainly supervised by one supervisor selected on the basis of the student's thesis topic or method. At the latest, students will receive help in finding the best supervisor in the Master's Thesis Seminar. If the thesis topic requires it, not only a supervisor will be appointed, but also a resource person who is an expert either on the topic or the method in question. Students must also attend Master's thesis seminars held by two professors or lecturers, at which students receive and give peer feedback, act as opponents and practice giving feedback.

The supervisors for each student are agreed between student and the supervisor. Students receive information about how to write an article-based thesis or a monograph from their supervisor. All degree students in the PGH programme also receive the necessary instruction on statistical methods.

At the beginning of each academic year, faculty members record in their work plans the number of supervision hours agreed on. The number of students per supervisor may vary, but in general the degree programme aims at keeping the number of students per supervisor at a reasonable level. The number of supervision hours per student depends on the student and the thesis, and the hours may be allocated differently throughout the process for each student.

Master's theses are evaluated based on the evaluation criteria produced by faculty members. The new criteria aim at making evaluation equal and transparent. The criteria also act as a supervision tool and are available to both faculty members and students on the PGH moodle area and in the intranet group of the social sciences (SOC staff). Using the evaluation criteria, students can set themselves grade objectives, recognize their weaknesses and prepare for supervision meetings.

Two examiners appointed by the Dean give their report on a thesis. Both examiners must have doctorates, and at least one of them must be employed by the University of Tampere or be a docent at the University of Tampere. In the degree programmes of health sciences, one of the examiners is usually the supervisor.

Supervision Agreement

A student and the thesis supervisor must always draw up a supervision agreement concerning personal supervision. The supervision agreement expresses the principles that bind both parties and through which the rights and responsibilities of both the student and supervisor will be fulfilled. When drawing up the supervision agreement, the student and supervisor will discuss the topic, the data, the stages of the process, the form of the thesis and the preliminary schedule for the thesis work. The agreement also ensures that the student and supervisor share an understanding of the objectives of the supervision process and the thesis itself. In the case of an article-based thesis, the supervisor discusses with the student the research process and the possibility of the student being involved in the research after the manuscript is accepted as a Master's thesis.

The discussion must also cover the rights and responsibilities of the student and supervisor as well as specify agreed working practices. Prior experience by both supervisors and students have shown that it may be useful for the student to write a short summary of each meeting and submit it to the supervisor after the meeting. This practice ensures that the student and supervisor reach an understanding of what happened in the meeting. The supervisor's responsibility is to inform the student of time constraints and of his/her way of providing feedback. The student's responsibility is to come to each meeting prepared and to submit material and questions to the supervisor in advance so that the supervisor can also carefully prepare for the meeting. The student must also inform the supervisor if he/she is unable to follow the plans they have agreed on together.

The Guidance at Tampere University

The University of Tampere Career services provide students and newly graduated students career advice and training on job seeking. They also forward information on internships and help Schools in organizing career days.

<https://www.uta.fi/opiskelunopas/opiskelunopas/opiskelunopas/opiskelunopas/en/working-life>

University studies are challenging and sometimes the challenge can become overwhelming. When facing study-related problems, the student can also turn to the joint services on academic counselling and guidance at Päätaalo. The joint services on academic counselling complement the guidance given in the faculty.

<http://www.uta.fi/opiskelunopas/en/joint-services-academic-counselling>

The Finnish Student Health Service (FSHS) offers different kind of guidance, if you encounter difficulties during your studies. The services are available for those, who have paid the student union membership fee. FSHS for example arranges groups for those, who suffer from anxiety while giving a presentation. You can see the FSHS pages for more information.

[The Finnish Student Health Service \(FSHS\)](http://www.yths.fi/en) (<http://www.yths.fi/en>)

Evaluating and Improving Academic Counselling in health sciences

In health sciences teachers collect written and oral feedback from students to evaluate academic counselling. Feedback is collected on study units such as basic or intermediate studies based on their learning objectives. There is also an electronic feedback form for student feedback on general matters. Feedback for individual courses is usually collected orally by the teacher after the course.

Student feedback and improvement ideas as well as the instructor's evaluation of the success of the implementation of the course are discussed each term in teacher's weekly meetings. Separate weekly meetings among nursing science faculty members and public and global health faculty members are part of educational planning forums whose purpose is to maintain an ongoing discussion about the development of education and educational quality. Evaluation discussions on instruction and academic counselling are also held in curricula committee meetings and the teaching development seminars, which are organised twice a year. In these development seminars, the teachers of health sciences evaluate and create practices that aim at promoting students' studies, improving on educational offerings of health sciences, enhancing the quality and presence of academic counselling, and increasing interaction in the community. Students participate in evaluating academic counselling by acting as working group and committee members and by participating in the development seminar discussions through a representative. A special feedback group consisting of staff and students has also been recently established. The group for example administers the feedback received through the electronic feedback form.

The objectives and evaluation of personal study plan instruction and thesis work supervision are discussed in student-supervisor meetings. Oral evaluations have their advantages: the time reserved for the evaluation enables the student and supervisor to thoroughly discuss the student's objectives and how well they have been fulfilled. At the same time, the practice promotes the use of feedback acquired through supervision and the development of the student's self-evaluation skills.

Academic counselling is continuously assessed and developed. The teaching staff who has participated university pedagogy courses, has become familiar with peer evaluation in supervision as part of their

studies. Using peer evaluation is one of the focal points when developing academic counselling in health sciences.

The PSP process could be developed further: the policies practiced in health sciences and at the faculty of social sciences could be integrated and the concrete visibility of the PSP instruction at a later stage of the studies could be reinforced. Once the early stage of the studies is over, students are thought to be responsible for agreeing on PSP appointments with their instructor. In some cases this practice could be reassessed; although the majority of HES students proceed well in their studies, but the follow-up on the less-active students should be more effective and they should be invited to PSP-meetings, in order to avoid them dropping out entirely.

A career-oriented PSP-meeting could be arranged at the Master's level, when the students are close to graduating. These actions would make PSP instruction more visible throughout the studies which would also address the problem mentioned before that not all study counselling is recognised as such by the students.

Links

Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council's (FINHEEC) publications: [2001](#), [2005](#)

(http://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2015/01/KKA_1301.pdf,
http://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2015/08/KKA_0505V.pdf)

[University of Tampere – A good academic community](#)
(http://www.uta.fi/studies/studying/practices/good_academic_community.html)

[The University of Tampere's Equal Opportunities Plan](#)
(http://www.uta.fi/english/files/Equal_Opportunities_Plan.pdf)

[Employability and careers](#) (<http://www.uta.fi/studies/employment/index.html>)

[The Finnish Student Health Service \(FSHS\)](#) (<http://www.yths.fi/en>)

<https://www.uta.fi/opiskelunopas/en/essential-information/academic-counselling-and-guidance-university>

<https://www.uta.fi/opiskelunopas/en/essential-information/study-related-decrees-and-legislation>
<https://www10.uta.fi/opas/index.htm?uiLang=en>