



Department of Health, Aging & Society

MA Health & Aging Handbook

2023-24

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**McMaster University
Department of Health, Aging & Society
Master's Degree Program**

**This Handbook covers the period from
September 2023 to August 2024**

Disclaimer: *If there is a discrepancy between this Handbook and the School of Graduate Studies Calendar, the School of Graduate Studies Calendar prevails.*

The MA degree program in the Department of Health, Aging & Society offers students a critical social science perspective and an interdisciplinary approach to the study of health and aging.

Admission

Admission to the MA degree program requires an average of B+ or better in an undergraduate Honours Bachelor's degree or equivalent. Upon admission, all students will be accepted into the one-year course work and major research paper option. Students may apply for the two-year course work and thesis option during their first term of studies.

Degree requirements

Students will have two options for completing their MA.

A. Course Work and Major Research Paper Option (one year)

This option takes 12 months to complete. It features two terms of course work (six courses) and a Major Research Paper completed under the supervision of a faculty member. All students accepted into the Master's program are placed in this one-year MA option by default.

Students will be required to complete six (6) one-term courses, including:

- i. HLTH AGE 701 Social Science Perspectives on Health and Aging

- ii. ONE of: HLTH AGE 716 Quantitative Research Methods in Studies of Health and Aging OR HLTH AGE 714 Qualitative and Historical Methods in Studies of Health and Aging
- iii. ONE of: HLTH AGE 713 Critical Perspectives on Aging OR HLTH AGE 715 Critical Perspectives in Health & Society
- iv. Two elective courses offered by Health, Aging & Society (HLTH AGE 713, 714, 715, 716, or any other 700-level HLTH AGE course)
- v. One elective course offered by Health, Aging & Society (HLTH AGE 713, 714, 715, 716, or any other 700-level HLTH AGE course) or by another department or academic unit (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or academic units).
- vi. A research paper (7500-8500 words, excluding references) supervised by a core or associate faculty member. The research paper will be read by the supervisor and another faculty member. If the supervisor is an associate member, then the second reader must be a core faculty member selected by the supervisor in consultation with the student.

B. Course Work and Thesis Option (two years)

Once accepted into the Master's program, students may apply for the two-year degree option that requires course work in the first year (four one-term courses) and a thesis (in the second year) that is based on original research under the supervision of a faculty member.

Students will be required to complete four (4) one-term courses, including:

- i. HLTH AGE 701 Social Science Perspectives on Health and Aging
- ii. ONE of: HLTH AGE 716 Quantitative Research Methods in Studies of Health and Aging OR HLTH AGE 714 Qualitative and Historical Methods in Studies of Health and Aging
- iii. ONE of: HLTH AGE 713 Critical Perspectives on Aging OR HLTH AGE 715 Critical Perspectives in Health & Society
- iv. One elective course offered by Health, Aging and Society (HLTH AGE 713, 714, 715, 716, or any other 700-level HLTH AGE course) or by another department or

academic unit (provided that permission has been obtained from those departments or academic units).

- v. A thesis that involves original and independent research (20,000-25,000 words excluding references) supervised by a core faculty member or an associate member if approved by the graduate committee. The thesis will be orally examined by a committee including the supervisor and two other faculty members selected by the thesis supervisor in consultation with the student.

Faculty Advisors/Supervisors

Graduate students in the department's MA program are assigned to one of the faculty members, who acts as an advisor/supervisor throughout the duration of the program. The department's faculty research includes a wide range of topics, such as: social-cultural dimensions of health and/or aging; systems, services and policy; environments and inequalities; diversity and inclusion.

In addition, the department's associate members can act as instructors for graduate course HLTH AGE 706 (Independent Study), second readers for the MA Major Research Paper, and/or members of a thesis supervisory committee.

Suggested Program Timelines

MA in Health & Aging (1-year option): Major Research Paper

1-Year Schedule: September Admission (Full Time)

Schedule	Fall Term (September - December)	Winter Term (January - April)	Spring/Summer Term (May - August)
Year I: Courses Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 courses ▪ SGS 101 & SGS 201 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course)

Major Research Paper Option - 6 courses required:

- HLTH AGE 701
- ONE of: HLTH AGE 716 or HLTH AGE 714
- ONE of: HLTH AGE 713 or HLTH AGE 715
- Two elective courses from HLTH AGE
- One elective course from HLTH AGE OR another department/academic unit*

**obtaining permission for courses in another department/academic unit is the student's responsibility*

Schedule	Fall Term (September - December)	Winter Term (January - April)	Spring/Summer Term (May - August)
Year I: Major Research Paper (MRP) Schedule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Informal discussions with MRP supervisor ▪ Develop outline & research plan with supervisor ▪ December 1: Declare MRP supervisor to Grad Admin Assistant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ January 15: Submit MRP draft proposal with bibliography to MRP supervisor ▪ First week February: Supervisor feedback on proposal ▪ February 15: Submit MRP Formal proposal (signed by supervisor) to Grad Admin Assistant ▪ February 15: Submit ethics application, where appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ June 15: Submit first draft of MRP to supervisor ▪ June 30: Draft returned to student with comments ▪ June 30: Second reader of MRP selected by supervisor, in consultation with student. Submit name of second reader to Grad Admin Assistant ▪ First Tuesday in August: Submit completed MRP: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ electronically to supervisor, 2nd reader, and Grad Admin Assistant plus ▪ check with supervisor & 2nd reader if they are each interested in receiving a hard copy ▪ August 31: Grades and comments from supervisor and reader due

MA in Health & Aging (1-year option): Major Research Paper (MRP)

The MRP Process

In the late Fall Term, students begin work towards their MRP, which is completed during the Summer Term. The MRP is a project consisting of 7500-8500 words (excluding endnotes and bibliography). Students are responsible for selecting a topic for study or research, which must be approved by their supervisor. The topic should be of a scope that is manageable within the deadlines outlined below. The MRP is not a thesis and fieldwork is not required. The MRP should, however, demonstrate a student's ability to integrate ideas that reflect the current state of knowledge on their chosen topic. The MRP must demonstrate critical thinking and expertise at specific, general, and abstract levels.

MRP Schedule

Students and supervisors are strongly advised to draw up a detailed plan indicating when/how they will communicate. Meetings should be in person wherever possible, though it may be necessary to communicate electronically.

1. **Fall Semester:** Informal discussions with MRP supervisor; develop outline and research plan
2. **December 1:** Declare MRP Supervisor to Graduate Admin Assistant
3. **January 15:** Students must declare their "option" choice as the "1-year Masters MRP option" and submit a draft proposal, with bibliography, to MRP supervisor
4. **February 15:** Submit MRP Formal proposal, signed by supervisor, to Graduate Admin Assistant (1000 words -- plus bibliography)
5. **February 15:** Where appropriate, submit ethics application
6. **June 15:** Submit first draft of MRP to supervisor
7. **June 30:** Draft returned to student with comments. Second reader of MRP selected by supervisor, in consultation with student. Submit name of 2nd reader to Graduate Admin Assistant.
8. **First Tuesday in August:** Submit completed MRP: electronically to supervisor, 2nd reader, and Graduate Admin Assistant PLUS check with supervisor & 2nd reader if they are each interested in receiving a hard copy. If yes, hard copies should be coil bound with an acetate cover.
9. **August 31:** Grades and comments from supervisor and reader due.

Ethics

Students whose projects require Ethics Committee approval (i.e., if they involve human or animal subjects of research) should ensure that all communications with the

Committees/Boards identify the student and the supervisor, and bear the signatures of both. Ethics application, where appropriate, must be submitted by February 15. More detailed information about the criteria for obtaining Ethics Committee approval can be found at the [McMaster Research Ethics Board web site](#).

Marking Guidelines

The MRP is marked on a Pass/Fail basis for transcript purposes. The second reader should send the mark and comments for the MRP directly to the supervisor. Final marks and comments (from BOTH supervisor and second reader) should be submitted BY THE SUPERVISOR to the Graduate Admin Assistant by August 31st. The Supervisor shall provide the student with their mark as well as comments from the reader and the supervisor.

If there is a serious discrepancy between the supervisor and the reader (i.e., one marker fails a paper), a meeting of the supervisor and the reader will be convened to resolve and confirm the mark. If no agreement is reached, a third marker, assigned at the discretion of the Chair, will evaluate it.

Archiving MRPs for Future Reference

The Department will keep an archive of completed MRPs as reference for future students and supervisors. If the student does not wish to have their MRP included in the archive, the student MUST submit a written notice to the department by August 31st.

MA in Health & Aging (2-year option): Thesis

2-Year Schedule: September Admission (Full Time)

Schedule	Fall Term (September - December)	Winter Term (January - April)	Spring/Summer Term (May - August)
Year I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 courses ▪ SGS 101 & SGS 201 ▪ October 15: Declare intent to pursue 2-year option ▪ October 15: Develop thesis proposal/study plan with supervisor ▪ December 1: Thesis proposal submitted for approval to Graduate Committee ▪ December 1: Declare thesis supervisor to Grad Admin Assistant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 courses ▪ Thesis Option APPROVED: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 1 course ○ January 15: Supervisory Committee formed ○ data collection for thesis <li style="text-align: center;">– OR – ▪ Thesis Option NOT APPROVED: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 3 courses ○ 1-year option: Major Research Paper (See MRP Guidelines) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course) ▪ data collection and analysis for thesis

Thesis Option - 4 courses required:

- HLTH AGE 701
- ONE of: HLTH AGE 716 or HLTH AGE 714
- ONE of: HLTH AGE 713 or HLTH AGE 715
- One elective course from HLTH AGE OR another department/academic unit*

**obtaining permission for courses in another department/academic unit is the student's responsibility*

MA in Health & Aging (2-year option): Thesis

2-Year Schedule: September Admission (Full Time)

Schedule	Fall Term (September - December)	Winter Term (January - April)	Spring/Summer Term (May - August)
Year II: June (Spring) Convocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course) ▪ 1st Draft by 7th week of Fall Term 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course) ▪ Final Draft by 7th week of Winter Term to supervisory committee ▪ Thesis Submitted to Department (Prior to Defense): mid-March <i>(see Grad Calendar for exact date)</i> ▪ Oral defense by end of Winter Term (late March/early April) 	
Year II: November (Fall) Convocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course) ▪ data collection and analysis for thesis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course) ▪ 1st Draft by mid-May 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ SGS 700 (placeholder course) ▪ Final Draft by mid-July to supervisory committee ▪ Thesis Submitted to Department (Prior to Defense): mid-August <i>(see Grad Calendar for exact date)</i> ▪ Oral defense by end of August/first week of September

MA in Health & Aging (2-year option): Thesis

The MA Thesis

1. All theses must make distinct contributions to knowledge and meet the highest academic standards.
2. Students must declare and discuss interest in the thesis option with their faculty advisor/thesis supervisor by **October 15th of the student's first year**.
3. Students prepare a thesis proposal in consultation with their supervisor. The proposal must contain the following elements: (1) a statement of the problem/research question; (2) background/rationale/theoretical orientation; (3) research methodology; (4) plan and schedule of research/proposed timeline; (5) contribution to existing literature; (6) bibliography. The thesis proposal must be submitted to the supervisor and the Graduate Administrative Assistant by **December 1st of the student's first year**. The proposal must be approved by the department's graduate committee and the student's supervisor.
4. After the thesis proposal has been approved, students submit a Service Request for a Plan Change on Mosaic (request to change academic plan to MA Health & Aging Thesis).
5. Each MA thesis candidate is required to form a three-member supervisory committee (comprised of the thesis supervisor and two faculty members) by **January 15th of the student's first year**. The supervisory committee will guide them through all stages of thesis preparation and also participate in the thesis defense.
6. Students are responsible for following the guidelines set by the School of Graduate Studies for the format of the thesis and required number of copies. Students do not receive course credit for preparing the thesis.
7. The oral defense of the thesis will be scheduled only when the supervisory committee approves the thesis as defensible. The defense is scheduled after submission (see below).
8. Previous approval of the written thesis for defense does not guarantee that the student will pass the oral defense.

Submission and Defense of Thesis

1. Once the supervisory committee approves the thesis for defense, the candidate and supervisor work with the Graduate Administrative Assistant to schedule the date, time, and location of the defense. The candidate also submits the

defensible copy of the thesis to the Graduate Administrative Assistant, who makes one (1) desk copy available in the main office to members of the department.

2. The oral defense is chaired by the thesis supervisor, and the defense is made before an examining committee consisting of the supervisor and two committee members. It is at the discretion of the student and thesis supervisor to allow other members of the department to attend the oral defense.
3. The supervisor usually begins the oral defense by asking the student to give a resume of the thesis, of not more than 15 minutes, highlighting its purpose, methodology, theory, and conclusions.
4. The examining committee then proceeds with their questions. In fairness to the candidate, the supervisor curtails unnecessary or extraneous discussion, and may allow or disallow questions from the audience.
5. At the end of the defense, the examining committee will formally assess the oral defense and the thesis as "Pass" or "Fail." If the student fails the oral defense, the student may request a second oral defense. If the student fails a second defense, the case will be evaluated by the Graduate Committee.

Scholarships and Funding

The majority of graduate students at McMaster receive competitive funding packages that may include financial support such as teaching assistantships, university graduate scholarships, as well as external scholarships and bursaries.

External Scholarship Competitions:

- Ontario Graduate Scholarships (OGS)
- Canada Graduate Scholarships-Master's (CGS-M) Competition (harmonized SSHRC Master's, CIHR Master's and NSERC Master's)

Travel Grants

The Department has funds available to help offset costs (travel, etc.) for Health, Aging & Society graduate students who attend conferences/workshops related to their area of research. The maximum amount for the grant is typically \$250 per student.

If you are interested in applying for a conference travel grant, please contact the Graduate Administrative Assistant.

The Graduate Students Association (GSA) also accepts applications for a number of GSA Travel Assistance Grants awarded each semester (Fall, Winter, and Spring/Summer). For more information, visit the [GSA Travel Grants web site](#).

Other Policies and Procedures

For a complete listing of the policies and procedures pertaining to Master's degree programs, students are advised to consult the current edition of the School of Graduate Studies calendar on the [McMaster University Academic Calendars Welcome Page](#). A candidate for the Master's degree must comply with the general regulations and program requirements of the School of Graduate Studies.

Office Facilities

Graduate student offices are located in Kenneth Taylor Hall (KTH) on the 2nd floor. All offices are shared between multiple occupants. Each office has 5-7 workstations and is equipped with one desktop computer plus a printer. **For MA students:** The MA and Teaching Assistants (TA) office is KTH 221. All workspaces in KTH 221 are shared

between MA students and TAs who work for the Department. **There are no workspaces in KTH 221 designated for the exclusive use of any one particular occupant.** The access code for KTH 221 will be given to MA students at the Orientation Session in September.

Graduate Student Mailboxes and Photocopier Codes

Mailboxes for graduate students are located on the 2nd floor of Kenneth Taylor Hall (KTH), in the Department lounge, Room 215. The access code to the lounge will be given to all graduate students in September.

Departmental Contacts

Graduate Committee:

- Dr. Tara Marshall (Graduate Chair)
- Dr. Meridith Griffin
- Dr. Rachel Zhou

Academic Department Manager:

- Kristine Espiritu

Graduate Administrative Assistant:

- Colleen Brown
Tel.: 905-525-9140 ext. 27961
E-mail: brownc88@mcmaster.ca
Location: Kenneth Taylor Hall (KTH) Room 226

[Department of Health, Aging & Society](#)