

Criterion 2

Instructional Programs

2.4 Practical Skills

CEPH Criterion

All professional degree students must develop skills in basic public health concepts and demonstrate the application of these concepts through a practice experience that is relevant to the students' areas of specialization.

CEPH Required Documentation

- a. Description of the school's policies and procedures regarding practice experiences, including selection of sites, methods for approving preceptors, approaches for faculty supervision of students, means of evaluating practice placement sites and preceptor qualifications, and criteria for waiving the experience.
- b. Identification of agencies and preceptors used for practice experiences for students, by program area, for the last two academic years.
- c. Data on the number of students receiving a waiver of the practice experience for each of the last three years.
- d. Data on the number of preventive medicine, occupational medicine, aerospace medicine, and public health and general preventive medicine residents completing the academic program for each of the last three years, along with information on their practicum rotations.
- e. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.

2.4.a. Practice Experience Policies and Procedures

Required Documentation: *Description of the school's policies and procedures regarding practice experiences, including selection of sites, methods for approving preceptors, approaches for faculty supervision of students, means of evaluating practice placement sites and preceptor qualifications, and criteria for waiving the experience.*

The school requires all professional degree students (BSPH, master's, and DrPH) to complete a formal, supervised fieldwork (practicum) experience in the field of public health. Fieldwork placements must be within the broad practice of public health and relevant to the major. All practice experiences require that students develop a contract or learning agreement that states their objectives, activities, timeline, and outcome. The student's faculty advisor approves the contract, and the student enters into a contractual agreement with a community preceptor, who contributes to the student's supervision and evaluation. Preceptors are approved on the basis of their expertise in the relevant field of public health. Typically, this experience takes place during the summer. Table 2.4.a. provides additional details, by department.

Table 2.4.a. Professional Degree Program Practicum Experience			
Policies and Procedures for Practicum Experience	Course Number	Credits	Report: Written/Oral/NA
<i>Biostatistics</i>			
BSPH	BIOS 691	1	Written
MPH	BIOS 841, 842	3, Var*	Written
DrPH	BIOS 841, 842	3; at least 3	Written; written
<i>Environmental Sciences and Engineering</i>			
BSPH	Experiential Education/Gen'l College	Varies	N/A
MPH, MSPH	ENVR 981	Var*	Written
<i>Epidemiology</i>			
MPH, MSPH	EPID 900	4	Written
<i>Health Behavior and Health Education</i>			
MPH	HBHE 742, 743	4	Both
<i>Health Policy and Management</i>			
BSPH	HPM 301	2	Written
MPH	HPM 704	1	Both
MSPH, MHA	HPM 704	2	Both
DrPH	Format for practicum is under development		
<i>Maternal and Child Health</i>			
MPH	MHCH 717, 718	8	Written
MSPH	MHCH 717	6	Written
DrPH	Applied field research required	N/A	N/A
<i>Nutrition</i>			
BSPH	NUTR 295, 710, various**	3 or 9, 3	N/A
MPH, MSPH	NUTR 730	4	Oral
DrPH	No students admitted during study years; program to be discontinued as of fall 2010	N/A	N/A
<i>Public Health Leadership</i>			
MPH	PUBH 886; PHNU 783, 784, 886	3-6*	Written

*Number of credits depends on agreement between faculty and student;

**Students complete a research practicum (NUTR 295 - 12 hours, 3 credits each time). Honors students complete NUTR 295 (9 credits) and NUTR 672 (3 credits). Students enroll in various courses university-wide for practicum.

Practicum Process and Requirements

Students begin the fieldwork process by meeting with their academic advisors to discuss available opportunities and the student's individual goals. Students then negotiate the specifics of their practicum experience with both their faculty advisor and community preceptor. These are summarized in a detailed fieldwork contract or learning agreement, which is signed at the start of the placement by all three parties.

Although approaches and methodologies may vary, each practicum experience is designed to expose students to the core functions, essential services, and competencies of public health. To this end, the practicum experience requires all students to integrate and apply the knowledge, principles, and skills acquired through classroom instruction, independent readings and other methods. Specifically, students must collect and analyze data (qualitative and/or quantitative); participate in regular, focused supervision; and deliver an oral or written summary that demonstrates mastery of public health principles, values, and practice.

Site Selection

To serve as an approved School of Public Health fieldwork site, an agency or organization must meet four basic criteria. First, the agency must provide public health-related planning and/or services. Second, the agency must have one or more staff members on site who are willing to serve as designated preceptors, and who have graduate credentials in public health (or equivalent professional experience and education). Third, the placement must allow the student to be involved in the essential public health functions of assessment, policy development, and assurance. Finally, students must be able to develop, enhance, and/or apply core public health competencies in a public health setting related to their field. It is desirable for students to have a paid placement, although this is not always possible.

Preceptors

All preceptors must have a minimum of an MPH or equivalent degree. Exceptions may be made when the proposed mentor has equivalent work experience in the content or skill area of the practicum. The student's faculty advisor and the department's practicum coordinator assess and approve all practicum sites and preceptor qualifications. Alumni often make ideal preceptors because of their familiarity with, and support of, the program.

Supervision

Faculty advisors and department practicum coordinators supervise the development of students' learning agreements, which clearly specify responsibilities and expectations regarding placements. Advisors and practicum coordinators also monitor the practicum experience and departments continue to improve the collection of evaluative information about the practicum experience. For example, in HBHE and MCH, students, preceptors, and

faculty advisors all complete a formal evaluation about the practicum experience. HBHE also requires students to conduct an oral or poster presentation about their practicum experience during Practicum Day, an annual event held in November during which students share the results and lessons learned from their practica. In HPM, all returning master's students are required to participate on an Internship Panel early in the fall semester, to share their practicum experiences with the first-year students.

With the trend in public health education toward making competency specification explicit, the need to monitor and assess competency attainment has become more apparent. In summer 2008, the school piloted a schoolwide online practicum form (<http://www.sph.unc.edu/forms/practicum/>), and in summer 2009 students were required to submit a pre and post assessment of competency attainment during the summer practicum. This form is helping to generate useful assessment data for program planning and student advising purposes at the department level, as well as cross-department data for the school as a whole. Students complete the online form twice, first when they are making plans for their practicum and again after its completion. This allows the department to track achievement of specific competencies, and the school to monitor competency attainment in the aggregate.

Methods of Student Assessment

Preceptors complete an evaluation at the end of the placement. In addition, students complete an oral or written report about the practicum experience. These evaluations are used to provide guidance for future students planning their practica, including site selection.

Criteria for Waiver

Students are not permitted to waive the practicum experience in any department. (See Criterion 2.4.c. for information regarding three students whose department made an exception to this policy over the past three years.)

2.4.b. Practice Experience Agencies and Preceptors

Required Documentation: *Identification of agencies and preceptors used for practice experiences for students, by program area, for the last two academic years.*

Appendix 2.4.b. lists the field placement sites and preceptors for 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.

2.4.c. Practice Experience Waivers

Required Documentation: *Data on the number of students receiving a waiver of the practice experience for each of the last three years.*

Three students received waivers of the practicum requirement in the past three years: two students in 2007, and one in 2006; all three students were enrolled in the dual MPH/MRP

degree program in Health Behavior and Health Education and the Department of City and Regional Planning. The school granted the waivers because each student had already completed a practicum through City and Regional Planning that met the school's practicum criteria. Beginning in 2008, however, the school no longer granted waivers for students enrolled in the MPH/MRP dual degree program, regardless of prior practicum experiences.

2.4.d. Preventive, Occupational, Aerospace, Public Health and General Preventive Medicine Residents

Required Documentation: Data on the number of preventive medicine, occupational medicine, aerospace medicine, and public health and general preventive medicine residents completing the academic program for each of the last three years, along with information on their practicum rotations.

Twenty-one medical residents in HPM and eight preventive medical residents in PHLP completed academic programs and practicum rotations in the last three years (see table 2.4.d.); some sites hosted more than one student.

Table 2.4.d. Medical Resident Practicum Rotations, Summers of 2006-2008
Health Policy and Management
<i>2006</i>
Family Health International
Sheps Center
Avalere Health
American Cancer Society
RTI-UNC Evidence Based Practice Center (Sheps Center)
Dept. of Homeland Security
Hancock, Daniel, Johnson & Nagle, PC (Law Firm)
Moore & Van Allen, NorthEast Regional Hospital
Health Planning Source
<i>2007</i>
Alamance County Mental Health Department
Task Force for a Healthier North Carolina
Division of Medical Assistance
Women's Birth and Wellness Center
Duke University Medical Center
NC Attorney General's Office
New Partner Initiative - Serve Haiti
Center for Maternal and Infant Health
NCIPH
<i>2008</i>
Tanana Valley Clinic
Gliding Joint Massage Therapy
Indian Institute of Management
Public Health Leadership
<i>2006</i>
VA National Center for Health Promotion & Disease Prevention
North Carolina Health & Human Services
<i>2007</i>
Cancer Prevention & Control Branch, Division of Public Health, DHHS
<i>2008</i>
Quintiles Transnational Corp.
UNC School of Public Health-Epidemiology Dept.
US Department of Homeland Security

2.4.e. Assessment of Practical Skills

Required Documentation: <i>Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met.</i>
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Strengths

- Variety and breadth of practice sites available to students
- High quality of fieldwork projects and substantive contributions to host organizations (reflected in preceptor evaluation of practica)
- High quality of practicum advisors and mentors
- High student satisfaction with practicum experience noted in various schoolwide and department surveys of student satisfaction, exit surveys, etc.
- Role of practica as feeders for future employment

Challenges

- Obtaining financial support for summer practicum experiences, especially in global settings
- Finding practicum opportunities in a period of economic crisis

Future Directions

- Continue to identify and reinforce important connections with alumni who can serve as community preceptors
- Continue to improve monitoring of the practicum experience, including tracking students' attainment of core practice competencies, and implementing protocols for follow-up
- Help students to find appropriate practicum experiences that also are financially feasible for them, especially those in global settings

This Criterion is met.
