



UNC
GILLINGS SCHOOL OF
GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH

Health Behavior Practicum Handbook

2014



Table of Contents

Overview	2
Requirements.....	2
Roles & Responsibilities	3
Student.....	4
Preceptor	4
MPH Program Manager	5
Academic Adviser.....	5
The Practicum Process	6
Overview	6
Planning.....	7
Implementation	7
Evaluation	8
Tasks & Events	8
Practicum Agreement	9
Mid-Practicum Meeting.....	9
End-of-Practicum Meeting.....	10
Preceptor’s Practicum Evaluation.....	10
Student’s Practicum Evaluation	10
Practicum Day	10
Preceptor FAQs	11
Appendix A: Practicum Student To-Do List.....	12
Appendix B: Practicum Preceptor Checklist	15
Appendix C: Practicum Timeline	16
Appendix D: The IMPROVE Strategy.....	17
for Giving Feedback	17
References	18

Overview

The Council on Education for Public Health, the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health, and the Department of Health Behavior (HB) require all students to participate in a practicum experience. A practicum is a planned, individualized, mentored, evaluated, experiential learning opportunity that serves as a bridge between a student's academic training and applied public health practice.

The practicum offers students an opportunity to:

- Contribute to the work and impact of a public health-related organization
- Explore areas of professional interest, network, and develop career goals
- Apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom re: program planning, theory, interventions, evaluation, dissemination, etc.
- Observe and learn from professionals in the field
- Gain feedback on professional skills and abilities

HB MPH students must complete a minimum of 240 practicum hours (equivalent to six weeks of full-time work) over the summer between the first and second years of the HB MPH program. Practica can occur anywhere, including both domestic and international settings, and can be paid or unpaid. During the practicum, an appointed on-site preceptor directly supervises the student. The MPH program manager contributes additional support and expertise to the experience.



Brother's Keeper Kick-Off Event July 18, 2008

"No other courses offered allowed me to focus on combining what I had learned in the program [...] to this extent, and to give me the opportunity to network and contribute to publications."

–MPH Student 2008

Requirements

Practicum experiences must:

1. Be at least 240 hours long.
2. Be mentored by a practicing public health professional (preceptor) who is working within a public health-related institution, private agency, or organization. The preceptor must have an MPH or another advanced public health degree, be willing and able to spend regularly scheduled time with the student, and provide regular guidance and feedback to the student.
3. Require students to apply graduate level skills acquired in the HB MPH program.
4. Involve projects that allow students to have principal responsibility for products that are of value to an organization. The number and types of projects a student completes are left to the discretion of the preceptor in recognition of the agency's needs, time constraints, and student interests and capabilities.
5. Provide students with opportunities to gain a wide perspective about the types of issues, concerns, and processes that occur in real world public health practice and research.
6. Develop and enhance students' professional skill sets.



“My practicum was a perfect fit for my capabilities and interests. I was able to develop new skills while sharpening the ones I already had, and gained the experience I wanted at the community level. I also had a high level of responsibility and independence, which I appreciated.” –MPH Student 2009

Roles & Responsibilities

The practicum is a partnership between the **student**, **MPH program manager**, **practicum preceptor**, and the student's **academic adviser**. Each party in this mutually beneficial relationship assumes certain roles and responsibilities.

Student

The student is expected to take substantial initiative in identifying, arranging, and completing a meaningful practicum that meets department and program requirements. The student:

- Ensures the timely submission of practicum assignments.
- Attends two mandatory practicum workshops.
- Develops a practicum agreement in collaboration with the preceptor, academic adviser, and MPH program manager and makes sure that is signed by all parties prior to the start of the practicum.
- Maintains a work schedule agreed upon with the preceptor.
- Maintains professionalism at all times during the practicum experience.
- Adheres to practicum agency standards, policies, and procedures including dress, personal conduct, and attendance.
- Regularly meets with the preceptor to discuss the progress of the practicum and receive support, guidance, and feedback.
- Maintains contact with the MPH program manager and academic adviser (as needed) regarding progress on the practicum.
- Completes the mid-practicum survey.
- Satisfactorily completes activities and deliverables outlined on the practicum agreement.
- Completes an evaluation of the practicum.
- Produces an abstract for Practicum Day.
- Presents at Practicum Day.

See **Appendix A** for a checklist of practicum student tasks.

Preceptor

The preceptor has the professional skills and knowledge to direct the on-site experience of the student. (S)he is expected to have: an advanced public health degree; an interest and competence in supervising and mentoring; expertise in assigned project areas; experience and status within the organization; and an ability to serve as the key link between the student and the agency and between the student and the community (if applicable). The preceptor:

- Assists in the development of mutually agreed upon learning objectives to be achieved during the practicum;
- Develops a realistic project scope and timetable with the student;

- Approves the learning agreement;
- Orients the student to sponsor agency people, projects, and resources;
- Provides resources needed to complete the project(s) (e.g., workspace, equipment, access to data, etc.);
- Meets regularly with the student to provide him/her with support, guidance, and feedback;
- Communicates with the MPH program manager (and academic adviser as needed) to provide feedback and monitor student progress; and
- Completes a final evaluation of the student and the practicum experience.

See **Appendix B** for a checklist of preceptor tasks.

MPH Program Manager

The MPH program manager is the student's primary contact as (s)he prepares for the practicum experience. She is responsible for the overall coordination of the practicum process. The MPH program manager:

- Provides objectives and guidelines that direct the practicum experience.
- Facilitates practicum opportunities.
- Assists students in identifying professional and career objectives, clarifying learning objectives, and identifying appropriate practicum placements.
- Maintains practicum records.
- Coordinates two practicum workshops.
- Approves and signs the practicum agreement.
- Problem solves with student, preceptor, and academic adviser, as necessary.
- Collects, reviews, and grades practicum assignments.
- Coordinates Practicum Day.

Academic Adviser

The student's academic adviser assists with planning the practicum and can serve as a resource during the practicum. The academic adviser:

- Assists with the development of the practicum agreement.
- Ensures that proposed practicum, negotiated between the student and preceptor, is appropriate, feasible, and meets department and program requirements.
- Makes sure that the practicum agreement is complete.
- Signs the practicum agreement.
- Works with the student, preceptor, and MPH program manager to resolve any problems or disputes during the practicum process, as needed.

The Practicum Process

Overview

The planning, implementation, and evaluation of the practicum is a collaborative effort between the student, the HB MPH program manager, the practicum preceptor, and the student's academic adviser. The MPH program manager provides resources and facilitates this process. Students are expected to take substantial initiative in identifying and arranging a meaningful practicum placement, with assistance from the MPH program manager. Throughout the fall, the MPH program manager meets with individual students to help them refine career and professional interests, develop practicum objectives, and identify appropriate practicum opportunities. Students identify and contact potential practicum sites throughout the fall and into the early spring.

We expect students to identify a practicum and a preceptor by mid-April. Once a student finds a practicum placement, (s)he works with his/her preceptor, academic adviser, and the MPH program manager to develop a practicum agreement that specifies the practicum's rationale, objectives, activities, deliverables, timeline, resources, and roles. The practicum agreement is reviewed and signed by all parties *before* the start of the practicum and is revisited throughout the experience, especially at mid and end-of-practicum meetings, to assess student progress. A mid and final practicum evaluation is completed by the student. The preceptor is asked to complete an end-of-practicum evaluation. The student is expected to complete the practicum by mid-August. The practicum culminates with **Practicum Day**, an annual event held in the fall during which students share the results and lessons learned from their practica. See **Appendix C** for practicum timeline.



"The whole process seems very thoughtful and rigorous, reflecting concern for student learning, and that is much appreciated." – Practicum Preceptor 2008

Planning

Effectively integrating a HB MPH student into the practicum organization will take some advanced preparation. Here are some steps to help preceptors plan for the practicum experience:

1. **Set aside time to discuss the expectations for the practicum.**
Discussing expectations for the practicum will make the experience more productive. The practicum agreement (**Tasks & Events**) provides a platform for this conversation.
2. **Prepare your staff to work with the student who is doing a practicum.**
Inform your staff about the upcoming preceptorship so that they are prepared to help you model professional behaviors. Ohrling & Hallberg, as cited by Kemper et al.,² explain, “Observations give students concrete examples for patterning their own actions when approaching task and talking with peers and program participants.” Thus, the student will be learning not only from your guidance, but also from the social and professional climate of your agency.
3. **Plan the student's orientation to your office.**
Who are the key staff the student will need to meet? Do you have materials on your organization’s mission, the types of populations served, and the services provided? What organizational policies, procedures, and norms does the student need to know? Encourage the student to familiarize him or herself with your organization before starting the practicum.

Implementation

Here are some tips for practicum students and preceptors to help make the practicum experience a success:

1. **Know the HB Department’s specific requirements for the practicum.**
Review these requirements (p. 3) during the orientation to the practicum site.
2. **Establish mutually agreed upon meeting dates.**
We encourage you to meet as often as is necessary to move forward on the learning objectives and deliverables.
3. **Set deadlines for all tasks and give/ask for constructive feedback on all assignments.**
Regular feedback from the preceptor helps the student maximize his/her strengths and systematically address any problems. See **Appendix D** for a strategy for giving feedback.

4. **Encourage/seek opportunities for professional development.**
For example: continuing education workshops, attending meetings, interviewing experts or leaders in the organization, observing existing programs, etc.
5. **Anticipate issues that may have an impact on practicum work.**
These can include personal situations; schedule or financial changes; or personality differences that may affect your working relationship. Please contact the MPH program manager if there are issues that may compromise your ability to have a positive practicum experience.
6. **Be a problem solver.**
If a potential problem situation arises, take action as soon as possible.
7. **Think about the practicum as a learning opportunity for both of you.**

Evaluation

Feedback is crucial to the practicum student's professional development. "Providing the students with feedback about their progress will better prepare them as professionals and effective practioners."² Preceptors are encouraged to provide positive and constructive feedback on a regular basis. Please provide feedback on the student's:

- Conduct/professionalism
- Practice-based and research-based skills
- Commitment to learning
- Growth in knowledge and skills
- Achievement of practicum goals and objectives on a timely basis

A preceptors may also consider evaluating his/her organization's ability to provide an environment that is conducive to learning.



"It is rewarding to mentor students. In addition, it is great to have a 'fresh' perspective on different study related items. Students are full of great ideas and the practicum provides an opportunity to share those thoughts."

–Practicum Preceptor 2009

Tasks & Events

Practicum Learning Agreement

DUE: by May 19, 2014

The practicum agreement provides the foundation for the practicum. Its purpose is to formally establish expectations and the conditions under which a student will work on his/her practicum. The practicum agreement articulates the practicum's rationale, objectives, activities, deliverables, timeline, resources, and roles. If applicable, it should also note travel arrangements; access to data, support staff and supplies; and any required licensure and/or certification (e.g., CITI). The student, the preceptor, the student's academic adviser, and the MPH program manager sign the practicum agreement. It can be modified with agreement among these parties. Because this contract forms the basis of working relationships during the practicum, it must be signed and submitted *prior* to the start of the practicum.

Mid-Practicum Meeting

DUE: at the midpoint of the practicum

At the midpoint of the practicum, we encourage students and preceptors to meet and formally discuss the student's progress, summarize accomplishments, and make any necessary adjustments to the practicum agreement. If an in-person meeting is not feasible, the student, preceptor, and MPH program manager (as needed) can check in with one another on a conference call or via email.

At this meeting, students should identify what is going well and identify any challenges that are acting as barriers to a rewarding experience. Preceptors should also provide positive feedback and share any concerns. This meeting is an opportunity to resolve or at least identify possible solutions to difficulties the student or preceptor may have encountered to date.

In addition to discussing the strengths and limitations of the practicum experience thus far, the student and preceptor should discuss plans for completing practicum tasks in a timely manner. If necessary, they should revise timelines and tasks and add/subtract tasks that are appropriate for meeting the practicum's objectives within the given timeline. After this meeting, the student should make any needed revisions to the practicum agreement to reflect changes in the timeline or scope of work. When substantial revisions to the practicum agreement are required, the revised contract should be signed by the preceptor and student and submitted to the MPH program manager.

End-of-Practicum Meeting

DUE: at the completion of the practicum

Right before or soon after a student completes his/her practicum, (s)he should arrange a final meeting with the preceptor to discuss the practicum and review learning objectives and accomplishments. Please take advantage of the opportunity to provide feedback regarding each other's performance over the course of the practicum experience. This meeting is also an opportunity to focus on challenges of the practicum and recommendations for improving the experience for future practicum students. Generally, the end-of-practicum meeting should occur prior to the completion of the preceptor's final evaluation. Information from the end-of-practicum meeting should be included in the final evaluation.

Preceptor's Practicum Evaluation

DUE: August 11, 2014

The preceptor is required to complete an evaluation to assess the practicum experience and recommend a final grade for the student (High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, or Fail). This evaluation will be provided toward the end of the student's practicum.

Student's Practicum Evaluation

DUE: August 11, 2014

The student is required to complete an evaluation to assess the practicum experience and recommend a final grade for herself/himself (High Pass, Pass, Low Pass, or Fail). This evaluation will be provided toward the end of the student's practicum.

Practicum Day

DUE: TBD

Practicum Day is an event held annually in November. Students apply skills in poster preparation and making professional presentations. The goals of Practicum Day are to: 1) present and celebrate the students' practicum accomplishments; 2) thank faculty, preceptors, and community partners for sharing their time and expertise with our students; and 3) help first year students learn about possible practicum opportunities, lessons learned, and what to look for in a practicum. All faculty, staff, students, preceptors, and community partners are welcome to attend.



Preceptor FAQs

What type of work space does a student need?

Students need the space and materials necessary for them to be successful in completing their assigned project(s). In most cases, that includes: a desk, computer access, a phone, and basic office supplies.

What do I do if I have a problem and/or concern with a student?

The practicum is typically a positive experience for both the student and the preceptor; however, problems can arise. If a problem arises between communications from the HB department, you should initiate contact with the MPH program manager immediately. Though rare, unprofessional behavior can occur, but it can be part of the learning experience. Kemper et al.² highlight the following common problems and suggest their solutions:

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Solution</i>
Missed meetings	Establish rules for contacting you about canceling meetings and clarify the consequences of missed meetings.
Inappropriate attire	Provide information about agency dress codes at the beginning of the practicum experience. Revisit these guidelines as necessary.
Lack of initiative and/or inadequate skills	Objectively address the areas where the student needs to improve through positive oral feedback. If the problem persists, make a formal written statement concerning the problem and send it to the MPH program manager.
Inaccurate information and lack of follow through	Explain your expectations for information accuracy and the completion of tasks. Use the practicum agreement as a platform for addressing these expectations.
Unprofessionalism (in behavior, attitude, or other expression)	Clarify your expectations for professional behavior during the student's orientation to the agency. This conversation can be framed in terms of your desire to assist the student in his/her professional development.

Who owns the work produced by the practicum student?

The final work product is owned by the practicum organization. However, the HB Department reserves the right to publicly list the organization as a practicum site and to include a brief project description in Practicum Day promotional materials. Furthermore, students should be allowed to use the work produced for their practicum in the pursuit of their professional careers.

Appendix A: Practicum Student To-Do List

<i>Step</i>	<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
<p>1. Refine career and professional interests, develop practicum objectives, and identify potential practicum sites and contacts. (Fall 2012)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Explore HBHE 742 Sakai site <input type="checkbox"/> Attend funding workshops <input type="checkbox"/> Research programs/agencies <input type="checkbox"/> Revamp CV or resume <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with academic adviser 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Practicum search questionnaire (DUE: by October 18, 2013)
<p>2. Contact potential practicum sites, apply for practicum opportunities, & look for funding. (Fall 2012/Spring 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Send MPH program manager contacts for Department practicum solicitation <input type="checkbox"/> Review & apply to practicum opportunities (posted on Sakai and sent out via email) <input type="checkbox"/> Send letters of inquiry/interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Where are You in the Practicum Search? Survey (DUE: January 20, 2014)
<p>3. Register for practicum credits. (Spring 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Register for HBHE 742-001 for Summer Semester II (spans entire summer session) <input type="checkbox"/> Direct all registration questions to Paige Anderson 	
<p>4. Select a practicum & preceptor. (Spring 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Notify Meg and your academic adviser about your practicum selection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Notice of Practicum & Preceptor Selection Survey (DUE: by April 14, 2014)

Step	Tasks	Assignments
<p>5. Develop a practicum agreement. (Spring 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Review the template and samples provided on Sakai <input type="checkbox"/> Meet with your preceptor to discuss expectations, rationale, timeline, learning objectives, scope of work, funding, resources, etc. <input type="checkbox"/> Draft the practicum agreement <input type="checkbox"/> Share the draft of the practicum agreement with your preceptor and academic adviser <input type="checkbox"/> Make any necessary edits <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize the practicum agreement and obtain signatures of approval from your preceptor and academic adviser <input type="checkbox"/> Email a signed pdf of your practicum agreement to Meg 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Practicum Agreement (DUE: one week before the practicum begins and no later than May 9, 2014)
<p>6. Practicum (Summer 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Receive orientation to practicum agency <input type="checkbox"/> Meet regularly with practicum preceptor <input type="checkbox"/> Complete all practicum activities and deliverables as outlined in practicum agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> UNC SPH Student Practicum Report pretest (DUE: one week before the practicum begins and no later than May 9, 2014) <input type="checkbox"/> Mid-Practicum Survey (DUE: at the midpoint of the practicum) <input type="checkbox"/> Student Practicum Evaluation (DUE: August 11, 2014) <input type="checkbox"/> UNC SPH Student Practicum Report posttest (DUE: August 11, 2014)

<i>Step</i>	<i>Tasks</i>	<i>Assignments</i>
7. Practicum Day (Fall 2013)	<input type="checkbox"/> Submit practicum abstract <input type="checkbox"/> Finalize practicum title and abstract <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare oral or poster presentation	<input type="checkbox"/> Practicum Day presentation preference survey (DUE: TBD) <input type="checkbox"/> Practicum Abstract (DUE: TBD) <input type="checkbox"/> Practicum Day Presentation (DUE: TBD)

Appendix B: Practicum Preceptor Checklist

This list was developed to assist preceptors in tracking the various preceptor tasks associated with the HB practicum.

- Practicum Agreement:* Review and sign the final version of the practicum agreement.
DUE before the start date of the practicum

- Orientation:* Introduce key staff, provide a tour of the facility, discuss the types of populations served and services provided, supply specific information about office policies and procedures.
DUE within the first two weeks of the practicum

- Mid-practicum Meeting:* Meet with the practicum student approximately half way through the practicum to discuss progress, troubleshoot, and make any necessary revisions to the practicum agreement.
DUE at the midpoint of the practicum

- End-of-practicum Meeting:* Discuss the practicum and review learning objectives and accomplishments. Focus on success and challenges of the practicum and recommendations for possible future practica activities for other students. Take the opportunity to provide verbal feedback regarding the student's performance over the course of the practicum experience.
DUE at the end of the practicum

- Final Evaluation:* Complete final evaluation of the practicum.
DUE one week after the completion of the practicum

- Practicum Day:* If you are able, please attend.
Date TBD

Appendix C: Practicum Timeline

Task	2013				2014												
	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	
MPH program manager solicits practicum opportunities	[Yellow bar]																
Students look for and apply to practicum and funding opportunities	[Yellow bar]																
Students select practicum, practicum preceptor, and practicum adviser			[Yellow bar]														
Notice of practicum and preceptor due							[Yellow bar]										
Learning contract due								[Yellow bar]									
Mid-practicum meeting										[Yellow bar]							
Mid-practicum evaluation due										[Yellow bar]							
End-of-practicum meeting											[Yellow bar]						
Practicum evaluations due												[Yellow bar]					
Students submit practicum abstract for Practicum Day													[Yellow bar]				
Practicum Day															[Yellow bar]		
Final grades due for practicum																	[Yellow bar]

Appendix D: The IMPROVE Strategy for Giving Feedback¹

I = Identify how feedback will help the student meet the goals of the [practicum]. Discuss with student how you will provide him/her with feedback on how well he/she is meeting these goals. Let the student know how often you prefer to give feedback. Use the student's past experiences with feedback as a way to individualize your feedback to the student. Encourage the student to perform his/her own skill self-assessments and to openly communicate to you when he/she needs your assessment or guidance on skills improvement.

M = Make an environment in which feedback is welcomed. Let the student know that you and he/she are partners working towards the common goal of expanding his/her [professional] skills. Comment on what the student does well in addition to what he/she could improve.

P = Assess Performance and Prioritize. Directly observing the student is the best way to assess a student's skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Prioritize what feedback to give. Providing too much feedback at once may overwhelm your student. Provide the student with information that he/she can use to improve his/her future performance. Some behaviors are easier to correct than others: identify those behaviors that the student can reasonably change.

R = Respond to the student's self-assessment. Have the student evaluate his/her own skills and behavior before you provide your feedback. Students tend to be less defensive when they are allowed to self-evaluate. Use the student's observations in your feedback. Opening the discussion with a question such as "What did you like about [conducting the focus groups]?" can help focus the student on specific skills and their own behavior.

O = Be Objective. Begin providing feedback by describing the specific behaviors and skills that the student demonstrated. Do not add any interpretations of what you think the student may have been thinking or feeling during the event. Once you've described the behavior, then let the student know the potential outcomes that could follow the behavior. [For example,] "You started the interview by shaking Mr. Jones' hand and introducing yourself. Small actions like these seemed to make Mr. Jones more comfortable talking with you."

V = Validate positive behaviors or suggest alternative strategies. Reinforce what the student has done well and suggest ways that the student can improve behaviors.

E = Establish a Plan to improve performance. Let the student know what skills he/she should work on and suggest ways to work on these skills.

¹ Adapted from: <http://depts.washington.edu/fammed/predoc/courses/501/preceptors/feedback> ³

References

- (1) Atchison C, Boatright DT, Merrigan D, Quill BE, Whittaker C, Vickery AR, et al. Demonstrating excellence in practice-based teaching for public health. *J.Public Health Manag.Pract.* 2006 Jan-Feb;12(1):15-21.
- (2) Kemper KA, Rainey Dye C, Sherrill WW, Mayo RM. Guidelines for public health practitioners serving as student preceptors. *Health.Promot.Pract.* 2004 Apr;5(2):160-173.
- (3) University of Washington Department of Family Medicine. Providing Feedback 2008; Available at: <http://depts.washington.edu/fammed/predoc/courses/501/preceptors/feedback>. Accessed March 17, 2009.