

Public Health Leadership Program – MPH in Leadership

PUBH or PHNU 886: Field Practicum Experience

The Practicum (field work, special project) is a three-credit course (requiring at least 140 hours of time) which gives you an opportunity to explore various public health applications that relate to your area of academic focus. This process also could be the background for the Master's Paper.

Please note: Nothing in this document is meant to replace the guidance on the PHLP Practicum Sakai site. Visit that site early and often to be sure you are complying with university guidelines and PHLP processes for the practicum.

You will be expected to work on some project of benefit to an agency with an on-site preceptor who has content knowledge of the project. In working to assist the agency to meet its objectives you must be able to develop the competencies you need as well. You will then submit evidence of what you have accomplished for the agency and your own learning.

The course is flexible in location, focus, and format. Typically, students identify their practicum site and preceptor, in consultation with their adviser. Placement decisions should be tailored to student learning needs and interests. The placement should reflect an interdisciplinary experience. The practicum cannot be only an observational experience—rather, it must involve a project relevant to all parties.

As a public health practicum, it should involve experience that includes a population/community focus and an emphasis on public health principles of primary prevention and the community as client. As a leadership practicum, it should include recommendations for leadership action (e.g. policies to be implemented) and leadership lessons learned. Practicum experiences may involve any of the following combinations of setting, population focus, and disciplinary involvement, although the first option, which has an interdisciplinary focus, most closely approximates the intentions of the interdisciplinary MPH:

- ◆ Interdisciplinary focus: a team working on a public health problem at the population level;
- ◆ Interdisciplinary setting: an individual working on a public health problem at the population level;
- ◆ Disciplinary setting: an individual in a disciplinary setting, but focusing on a public health problem.

The preferred format is a concentrated experience that meets the 3-credit, 140 hour requirement as it provides an opportunity for focused effort. However, individual circumstances and/or previous work experience may favor an experience one or more days a week over a longer time period. Only in exceptional situations can additional credits may be assigned for a longer practicum. These decisions are negotiated among the faculty adviser, the student, and the preceptor prior to registration for the practicum. Products and outcomes of the experience will vary according to each student's objectives. (Distance students in the Field Epidemiology Focus Area and the Public Health Nursing Focus Area should ensure that they include consideration of the unique perspective of their focus area in completing this culminating experience requirement.)

The course is intended to be a practical application of the courses you have taken in the Leadership Program and, as such, the Practicum should not be started until you have completed a major portion of your course work. It is vitally important that you complete (1) the CITI training and (2) develop and submit an IRB to be considered by the UNC IRB. This is a requirement for any effort involving interaction with humans and/or data. Even “non-invasive” actions such as asking questions on a survey may require IRB review and approval.

The purpose of the IRB review is to determine whether adequate procedures for informed consent have been followed and adequate protection provided for subjects at risk. (Instructions and forms may be obtained from the IRB website:

<http://ohre.unc.edu>.) UNC IRB training **must** be completed in advance of requesting approval and advisers should be involved in preparation of the IRB application and provide their signature on the form. Students and advisers must also have completed the IRB certification. Details and procedures for completing this mandatory, on-line, Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) can be attained at

<http://research.unc.edu/offices/human-research-ethics/researchers/training/> No research should be conducted and no data should be collected until full IRB approval has been received. **Failure to comply with IRB regulations may prevent or delay graduation.**

Selecting a topic

There are several approaches to selecting a practicum experience. You can use the practicum as a way to gain experience and develop skills in a topic area that you are already working in or would like to be working in. You might prefer to use the practicum as a way to shore up a skill set in which you feel unprepared. It's up to you—the beauty of the public health practicum is that it is student-driven. You decide what competencies you want to gain and find an experience that will help you gain those skills.

To get started, ask yourself the following questions:

1. What competencies/experiences do I hope to gain through my practicum? Use the competency checklist on the practicum website to identify cross-cutting competencies.
2. Is there a particular public health topic that I want my practicum to focus on?
3. Is there a particular work setting I want to experience in my practicum (e.g.: governmental public health, non-profit, etc.)
4. What geographic location do I want for my practicum?

Finding a site/preceptor

Most students find practicum sites through networking. However, to help you narrow your scope, once you have an idea of what you want to do, you can begin to identify some potential options by looking at previous student placements. One of the questions the preceptors answer after a student placement is whether or not they would be willing to accept another student – so this is often a good place to start. You can also look at where faculty and staff are already working, across NC and across the globe. Finally, looking at community health assessments (CHAs) in the area you identify might be helpful. A number of organizations conduct periodic community assessments (e.g.: local health departments, United Ways, hospitals, Federally Qualified Health Centers). Sometimes you can find these documents online, and you can use these to see who is doing what related to your topic. In NC, the CHAs done by local health departments (sometimes in conjunction with other organizations) are located:

<http://publichealth.nc.gov/lhd/cha/reports.asp/>

Proposing the Practicum to your Adviser

Once you have made initial arrangements for your practicum, you'll need to make a proposal to your adviser. You'll need to specify a preceptor, the hours you expect to earn, beginning and ending dates, and what your responsibilities will be. You'll also want to address the following questions:

1. What is the overall goal for your practicum?
2. What are the primary objectives?
3. How will you participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of your practicum experience?
4. What are the public health services the organization expects from you during the practicum experience?
5. What competencies do you hope to improve, identifying the coursework that you will employ during the practicum?

You must have your objectives approved BEFORE you start your work. A practicum approval form (preceptor contract) is required with signatures by adviser and preceptor and must be submitted **prior to registration** for credit. The practicum is a requirement for all MPH students in the UNC Gillings School of Global Public health; there is no provision for waiver of the practicum.

Milestones and paperwork for completing the practicum

In general, you are expected to keep track of the required paperwork (preceptor contract, pre-practicum abstract, entering the practicum into the SPH database, keeping a log of your activities and time, assuring the preceptor online evaluation is submitted, and completing your own, online evaluation of the experience. In addition, you need to prepare and provide to your faculty adviser a practicum binder that includes the components listed in the checklist. Two of those components, a post-practicum abstract and the PowerPoint summary of your abstract, provide opportunities for you to demonstrate the linkages with your field experiences and your MPH academic training.

Grading

Your grade in the practicum will be based on the following four criteria:

- meeting the required milestones and deliverables in a timely and professional manner
- the extent to which your submitted products demonstrate evidence of the competencies gained, work done and lessons learned
- the extent to which your submitted products demonstrate a link between lessons learning in your MPH program and your field experience
- the assessment of your work from your preceptor as obtained through phone calls and online evaluation