

Department of Health Behavior

Practicum Frequently Asked Questions

What is a practicum?

A practicum is an individualized, mentored, on-site work experience that serves as a bridge between a student's academic training and applied public health practice. The practicum gives students an opportunity to:

- Apply public health concepts and skills in a real-world setting
- Contribute to the work and impact of a public health-related organization
- Explore areas of professional interest, network, and develop career goals
- Observe and learn from professionals in the field
- Gain feedback on professional skills and performance

What are the practicum requirements?

In order to qualify for course credit, a practicum must be:

1. An opportunity to apply master's level public health skills and competencies (Appendix A)
2. Completed over the summer between the first and second years of the HB MPH program
3. At least 240 hours long (equivalent to six weeks of full-time work)
4. With an organization that does public health work
5. Mentored by a practicing public health professional (preceptor)
6. In a location approved for student travel ([UNC Travel Policy](#))

Where do practicum opportunities come from?

Students are ultimately responsible for securing their practicum placements. Most do so through their own networking efforts. There are many Gillings School and department-level supports to assist students with identifying practicum opportunities. For example, both [Career Services](#) and the [Gillings Global Gateway](#) list practicum opportunities on their websites. Health Behavior (HB) staff work to collect opportunities from our community partners and conduct tailored searches for opportunities based on student interests. All identified opportunities that meet the department's practicum requirements are listed on, and disseminated through, an internal practicum course website.

What type of agency can host a practicum student?

To serve as an approved Gillings School practicum site, an agency or organization must work with public health data, do planning, and/or provide some type of public health service or policy work. Governmental, non-governmental, non-profit, industrial, for-profit settings, and university-affiliated settings are all appropriate. University-affiliated settings must be primarily focused on community engagement, typically with external partners. Some students may choose to do a practicum in an organization where they are employed. However, their practicum must be different from their regular work activities.

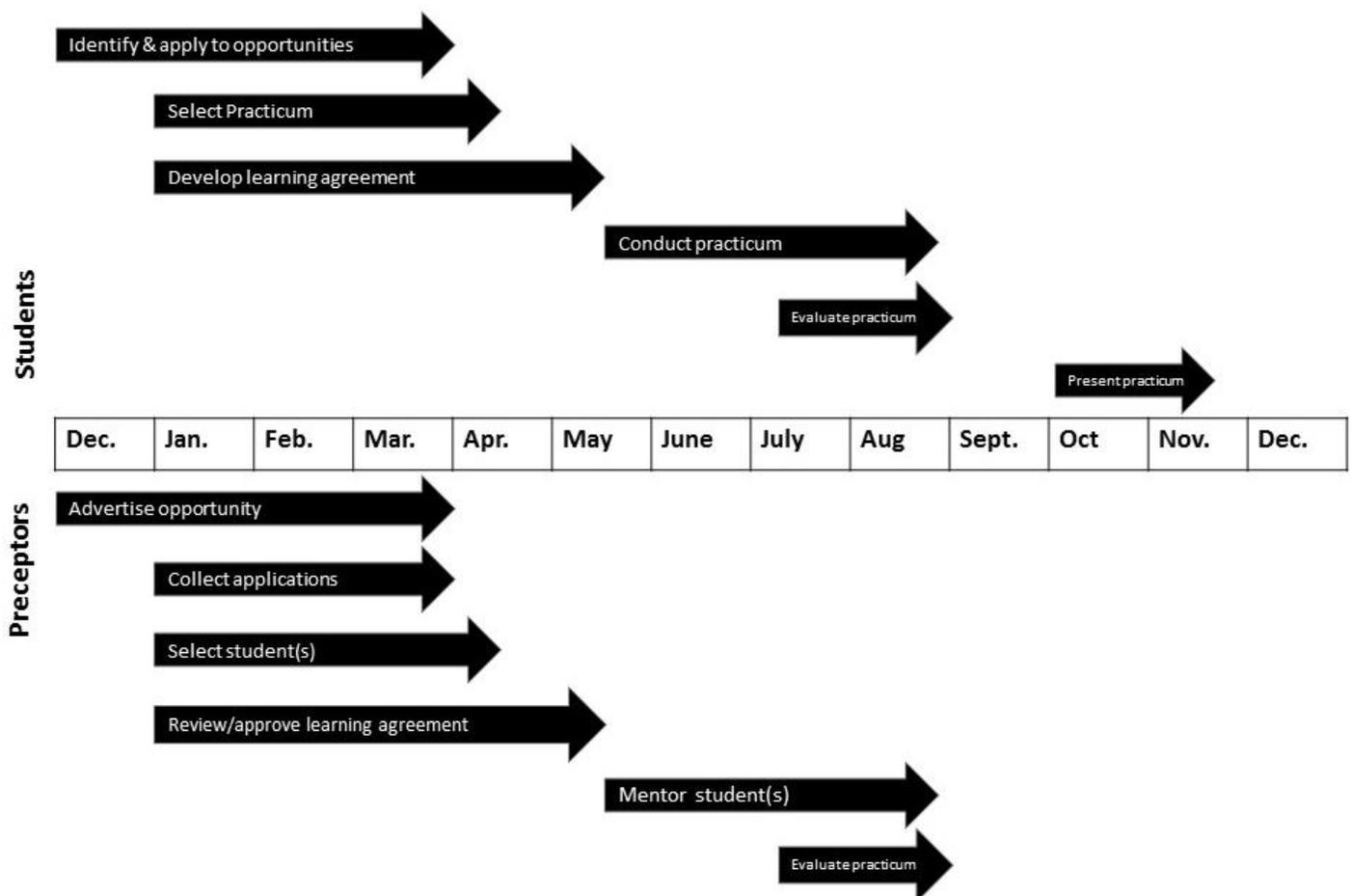
What are the practicum preceptor requirements?

Preceptors must have a Master of Public Health (MPH) or equivalent degree/experience. Exceptions may be made when the proposed preceptor has comparable work experience in the content or skill area of the practicum. The preceptor is expected to serve in a day-to-day supervisory type role and be the key link between the student and the agency and between the student and the community. Preceptors must be able to observe and evaluate the student's performance in the practicum setting.

What is the practicum process?

The planning, implementation, and evaluation of the practicum is a collaborative effort between the student, the student's academic adviser, the MPH program manager, the MPH program assistant, and the practicum preceptor. Students are expected to take initiative in identifying and arranging a meaningful practicum placement, with assistance from the MPH program staff. Throughout the fall and early spring, academic advisers and MPH program staff meet with individual students to help them refine career and professional interests, develop practicum objectives, and identify potential practicum sites and contacts. Once a student finds a practicum placement, they work with their preceptor, their academic adviser, and MPH program staff to develop a learning agreement. The learning agreement outlines the practicum's rationale, objectives, activities, deliverables, timeline, resources, and roles and **must be completed, reviewed, and signed by all parties before the start of the practicum.** Students and preceptors submit evaluations of the practicum experience upon its completion. The practicum culminates with [Gillings School Practicum Day](#), an annual event held in the fall during which students share the results and lessons learned from their practicums. Preceptors are invited to attend this event.

What is the practicum timeline?



What knowledge and skills do students bring to the practicum?

By the end of their first year, HB MPH students have completed core coursework in: health behavior theory; biostatistics; qualitative and quantitative research methods; and program planning, as well as elective coursework. For more information about the HB MPH curriculum, please review our [HB MPH Program Quick Guide](#).

What type of activities do students complete during their practicums?

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. Examples of practicum activities include:

- Coding or recoding data
- Conducting a literature review
- Curriculum development
- Data analysis
- Database management
- Development of social marketing materials
- Evaluation (planning, instrument development, reporting)
- Formative research (interviews, focus groups, surveys)
- Grant writing
- Implementation of a health intervention
- IRB application development, submission, and/or renewal
- Program planning
- Qualitative data collection
- Quantitative data collection
- Questionnaire/survey design
- Report writing

Should students receive compensation for their practicum work?

Practicum agencies should provide resources and/or material assistance to the extent that is possible. Although compensation is not required, the majority of HB MPH students choose paid practicums, especially because they have to pay for the academic credit associated with the practicum. In-state students pay approximately \$300 for their practicum credit. Out-of-state students pay approximately \$900 for their practicum credit. Compensation for the practicum varies significantly by the type of organization, project, and location. Students can be compensated at an hourly rate (\$15/hour average) or by stipend (\$3,600 average).

How can organizations advertise practicum opportunities to our students?

Organizations interested in hosting a practicum student should send a description of their opportunity to [Meg Landfried](#).

We recommend including the following information when describing a practicum opportunity:

- **Practicum Agency Contact Information:** Address, website, and phone number for your organization
- **Practicum Description:** An overview of the major activities associated with the practicum
- **Final Deliverable(s):** The products that will result from the student's work (e.g., curriculum, manuscript, evaluation report, database, etc.)
- **Skills Required:** Skills that students must already have before completing the practicum (e.g., computer skills, language skills, experience with a specific task, knowledge of a particular health topic, etc.)
- **Timeline:** When the student will be expected to complete the work
- **Funding:** Amount of funding (hourly wage or stipend) available, if applicable
- **Application Instructions:** Steps that should be taken to learn more about, or apply to, the opportunity

A sample practicum opportunity description is provided in Appendix B.

How can I get more information about the practicum?

Please visit our practicum [webpage](#) and/or contact Meg Landfried, lecturer and MPH program manager, by email (landfried@unc.edu) or phone (919-966-0057).

Appendix A

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health Social and Behavioral Sciences Competencies

1. Identify basic theories, concepts, and models from a range of social and behavioral disciplines that are used in public health research and practice.
2. Identify the causes of social and behavioral factors that affect health of individuals and populations.
3. Identify individual, organizational and community concerns, assets, resources and deficits for social and behavioral science interventions.
4. Identify critical stakeholders for the planning, implementation and evaluation of public health programs, policies, and interventions.
5. Describe steps and procedures for the planning, implementation and evaluation of public health programs, policies, and interventions.
6. Describe the role of social and community factors in both the onset and solution of public health problems.
7. Describe the merits of social and behavioral science interventions and policies.
8. Apply evidence-based approaches in the development and evaluation of social and behavioral science interventions.
9. Apply ethical principles to public health program planning, implementation and evaluation.
10. Specify multiple targets and levels of intervention for social and behavioral science programs and/or policies.

Sample Practicum Opportunity

XXX is seeking a candidate who will be integral in implementing the community's goal of increasing the walkability of the parks and greenways system in support of healthier communities. This position will work closely with city staff to develop a policy to provide equitable neighborhood access to parks and greenway trails throughout the city.

Major activities:

- Identify sample policies from other communities
- Review existing community data
- Draft prioritization criteria
- Engage with key stakeholders via informal interviews

Final deliverables:

- Policy brief
- Summary report detailing recommendations

Qualifications:

- Interest in health and the built environment
- Quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis skills
- Community engagement skills
- Experience conducting literature reviews
- Proficiency in MS Word, Excel, Power Point, and Adobe

The ideal candidate will be available to work 25-35 hours per week beginning in mid-May. Compensation will be \$15-\$17 an hour, commensurate with experience.

Applicants should provide a:

- Cover letter
- Resume
- 3-5 page writing sample for a non-academic audience

For more information and to apply to this opportunity, please contact:

Jane Doe, MPH

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