

Department of Health Behavior

Practicum Frequently Asked Questions

What is a practicum?

A [practicum](#) is a planned, mentored, and evaluated work experience (paid or unpaid) that enables students to integrate and apply knowledge, skills, and values from their Gillings MPH training into a practical, professional public health environment such as a nonprofit organization, hospital, local or state health department, or for-profit firm (public or private sectors). 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
- Demonstrate attainment of at least five of the Council on Education for Public Health's (CEPH) MPH Foundational Competencies (Appendix A)

What are the practicum requirements?

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

1. Be with an agency or organization that works with public health data, does public health planning, provides some type of public health service, and/or or does public policy work.
2. Yield a least two products, produced by the student in the practicum setting for the practicum setting, that allow for attainment of at least five (CEPH) MPH Foundational Competencies (Appendix A).
3. Be mentored by a practicing public health professional (preceptor).
4. Occur during the summer between the student's first and second year in the HB MPH program.
5. Be a minimum of 240 hours (equivalent to six weeks of full-time work).
6. Take place 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 [Research, Innovation and Global Solutions](#) 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. An internal course website (MPH Program Sakai site) keeps a record of all opportunities that meet the department's practicum requirements.

What type of agency can host a practicum student?

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. University health promotion or wellness centers may also be appropriate. Students may choose to do a practicum with their regular employer; however, their practicum must be different from their regular work activities.

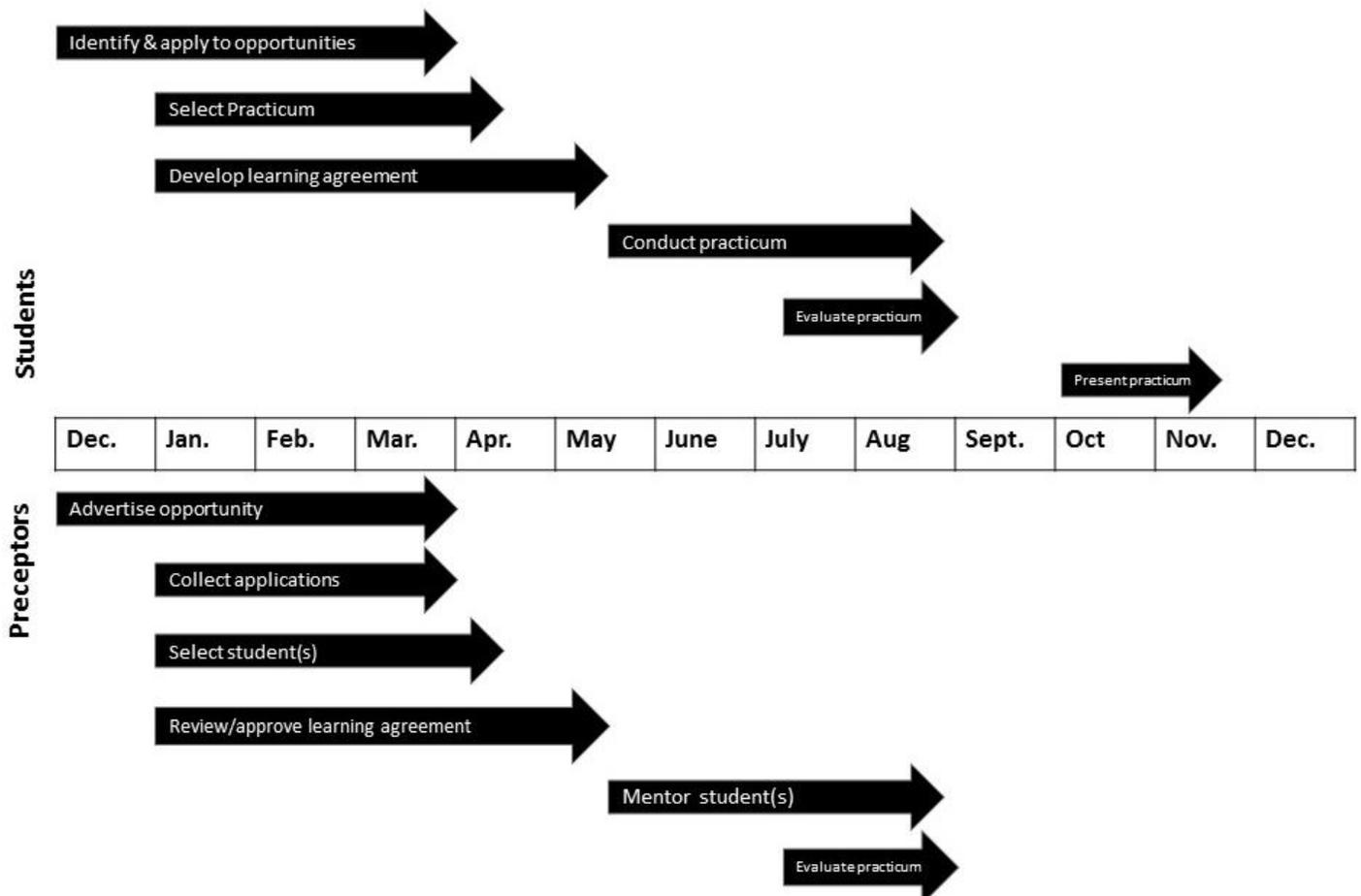
What are the practicum preceptor requirements?

Preceptors must have a Master of Public Health (MPH) or equivalent degree/experience. Exceptions are possible when the proposed preceptor has at least three years of work experience in the content or skill area of the practicum. The preceptor serves in a day-to-day supervisory type role and must 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 must 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 a scope of work and defines roles and responsibilities for the experience. It **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.

What types of products do students produce during their practicums?

Students must produce a minimum of two products in the practicum setting, for the practicum setting that demonstrate attainment of at least five CEPH MPH Foundational Competencies (Appendix A). The preceptor and student determine the number and types of products a student completes based on the agency's needs, time constraints, and student interests and capabilities. Examples of practicum products include:

- Advocacy Tool
- Asset Mapping Report
- Communications and Outreach Plan
- Community Advisory Board Meeting Summary
- Community Assessment Report
- Community Forum Summary Report
- Community Profile Reports
- Conceptual Model
- Cost-Tracking Instrument
- Course Module
- Curriculum
- Data Analysis Report
- Data Management User Guide
- Dissemination Plan
- Environmental Scan Report
- Evaluation Plan
- Evaluation Tool
- Event Plan
- Focus Group Guide
- Formative Research Report
- Funding Database
- Funding Toolkit
- Fundraising Resource Guide
- GIS Map
- Grant Proposal
- Health Assessment
- Health Communication Campaign Materials
- Implementation Resources
- Interview Guide
- Literature Review
- Logic Model and Core Component List
- Manuscript Development
- Marketing Plan
- Media Materials
- Message Testing Summary Report
- Patient Engagement Tools
- Photovoice Findings Report
- Policy Brief
- Program Plan
- Recommendations Report
- Recruitment Materials
- Resource Guide
- Social Marketing Campaign
- Strategic Plan
- Survey
- Sustainability Plan
- Training materials
- Video Storyboard
- Web-based Tool

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, more than 90% of HB MPH students choose paid practicums. Compensation for the practicum varies significantly by the type of organization, project, and location. Organizations can compensate practicum students at an hourly rate (\$18/hour average) or by stipend (\$4,200 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 [Kelsey Dickman](#) as soon as possible, not later than **April 1, 2019**. 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 purpose, major activities, and desired impact of the practicum.
- **Products:** The tangible items that will result from the student's work that will be used to demonstrate and allow assessment of competency attainment.
- **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

Appendix B provides a sample practicum opportunity description.

How can I get more information about the practicum?

Please visit our [practicum](#) and [community partners](#) webpages and/or contact Kelsey Dickman (Kelsey_dickman@unc.edu).

Appendix A

Council on Education for Public Health MPH Foundational Competencies (SPH and PHP)

All MPH graduates demonstrate the following competencies. These competencies are informed by the traditional public health core knowledge areas, (biostatistics, epidemiology, social and behavioral sciences, health services administration and environmental health sciences), as well as cross-cutting and emerging public health areas.

Evidence-based Approaches to Public Health

1. Apply epidemiological methods to the breadth of settings and situations in public health practice
2. Select quantitative and qualitative data collection methods appropriate for a given public health context
3. Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming and software, as appropriate
4. Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy or practice

Public Health & Health Care Systems

5. Compare the organization, structure and function of health care, public health and regulatory systems across national and international settings
6. Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community and societal levels

Planning & Management to Promote Health

7. Assess population needs, assets and capacities that affect communities' health
8. Apply awareness of cultural values and practices to the design or implementation of public health policies or programs
9. Design a population-based policy, program, project or intervention
10. Explain basic principles and tools of budget and resource management
11. Select methods to evaluate public health programs

Policy in Public Health

12. Discuss multiple dimensions of the policy-making process, including the roles of ethics and evidence
13. Propose strategies to identify stakeholders and build coalitions and partnerships for influencing public health outcomes
14. Advocate for political, social or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations
15. Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity

Leadership

16. Apply principles of leadership, governance and management, which include creating a vision, empowering others, fostering collaboration and guiding decision making
17. Apply negotiation and mediation skills to address organizational or community challenges

Communication

18. Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors
19. Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation
20. Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content

Interprofessional Practice

21. Perform effectively on interprofessional teams

Systems Thinking

22. Apply systems thinking tools to a public health issue

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

Products:

- 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 \$20 an hour.

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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