

## UNC Department of Epidemiology Hosting a MPH/MSPH Practicum Student

**What is a practicum?** The Master's practicum is a planned, supervised, and evaluated practice experience during which students address basic public health concepts and competencies. The Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) Master's level competencies specific to Epidemiology and to its cross-cutting public health competencies are listed below in Appendix 1. The purpose of the practicum is to provide opportunities for the student to execute as many of these competencies as is feasible. The planning of a practicum, its implementation, and evaluation are guided by a review of these competencies that MPH and MSPH students should possess upon graduation.

The goals of the Epidemiology practicum can be met through an intensive, mentored, skill-building experience in which the student applies Master's competencies in the context of a public health practice setting.

***Appropriate settings for the practicum experience include: federal agencies (e.g. FDA, CDC, HHS); state, county, city health departments; state, local public health and social service agencies; neighborhood health centers and community clinics; hospitals; or global health organizations.***

**The practicum offers students an opportunity to:**

- Apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom
- 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

A minimum of 100 practicum hours must be completed during the Epidemiology MPH/MSPH student's course of study. Practicums can occur nearly 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 student's academic adviser can contribute additional support and expertise to the experience.

**What are the practicum requirements?** Practicum opportunities must:

- Be at least 100 hours long.
- Be mentored by a practicing public health professional (preceptor) who is working within a public health-related institution, private agency, or organization. The preceptor should have a degree in public health or a related field, have at least 3-5 years of public health working experience, and be willing and able to provide regular guidance and feedback to the student.
- Require students to apply graduate-level skills acquired in the EPID MPH/MSPH program.
- Involve projects that allow students to have principal responsibility for activities and 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.
- Provide students with opportunities to gain perspective about the types of issues, concerns, and processes that occur in real world public health practice and research.
- Develop and enhance students' professional skill sets.

**What do students do during their practicums?** Practicum activities and outputs vary in accordance with the practicum agency’s needs and the student’s interests and learning objectives. Examples of practicum activities include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coding or recoding data</li> <li>• Curriculum development</li> <li>• Data analysis</li> <li>• Database management</li> <li>• Implementation of a health intervention</li> <li>• Program planning</li> <li>• Outbreak investigation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of social marketing materials</li> <li>• Evaluation (planning, instrument development, reporting)</li> <li>• Formative research (interviews, focus groups, surveys)</li> <li>• IRB application development, submission, and/or renewal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative data collection</li> <li>• Quantitative data collection</li> <li>• Questionnaire/survey design</li> <li>• Report writing</li> <li>• Quality improvement projects</li> </ul>
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**What types of activities are NOT appropriate for EPID MPH/MSPH practicum students?** We expect students to get a mentored experience. A practicum that is a “shadow” experience or is strictly observational would not be appropriate. Students are not expected to replace administrative staff (e.g., only asked to do copying or filing). Research projects located or housed at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill or other universities do not suffice to fulfill the practicum requirement.

**What are the roles and responsibilities of the practicum preceptor?** The preceptor has the professional skills and knowledge to direct the on-site experience of the student. (S)he is expected to have: a public health degree and/or 3-5 years of experience; 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 learning objectives for the practicum
- Develops a realistic project scope and timetable with the student
- Approves the practicum agreement
- Orients the student to sponsor agency people, projects, and resources
- Provides resources needed to complete the project(s)
- Meets regularly with the student to provide him/her with support, guidance, and feedback
- Communicates with the Faculty Practicum Coordinator (Lorraine Alexander) and academic adviser as needed to provide feedback and monitor student progress
- Completes an evaluation of the student and the practicum experience.

**How do I request a student to work with my agency on his/her practicum?** If you are interested in hosting a student for his/her practicum, please send a description of your practicum opportunity to the Faculty Practicum Coordinator (Lorraine Alexander) at [Lorraine.Alexander@unc.edu](mailto:Lorraine.Alexander@unc.edu). At a minimum, please provide the following information in your correspondence:

- 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.).

- Indicate the possible **ASPPH** Master's Degree in Public Health Core Competencies that your practicum opportunity will address. (See Appendix 1 for list of competencies).
- 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.).
- Timeframe: 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. The Faculty Practicum Coordinator will review your opportunity for feasibility and appropriateness. If it meets EPID's practicum requirements, it will be emailed out to all MPH/MSPH EPID students.

**Questions?** To learn more about the practicum process, please contact the Faculty Practicum Coordinator at [Lorraine\\_Alexander@unc.edu](mailto:Lorraine_Alexander@unc.edu).

## APPENDIX 1

### Practicum Competencies

The following are the **ASPPH** Master's Degree in Public Health Core Competencies (separate from the departmental competencies):

#### Discipline-Specific Competencies

Upon graduation a student with an MPH or MSPH should possess the competencies listed below. The following is a list of discipline-specific competencies. You must choose **at least 3** that your practicum experience will address. **Please note: A competency may be used only once in either the discipline-specific or the cross-cutting table, but not both.** If more than 3 competencies are addressed you can also list those.

1. Describe a specific public health problem in terms of its magnitude, person, time and context
2. Formulate an informative study question and the associated testable hypotheses
3. Identify an appropriate source of data for this purpose and define an informative subset
4. Review basic ethical and legal principles applicable to the collection, maintenance, use and dissemination of these data
5. Identify an appropriate study design and method of analysis
6. Use statistical analysis software to estimate and test the hypothesized associations
7. Apply appropriate analytical techniques to calculate the pertinent epidemiology measures
8. Apply descriptive and inferential methods to deduce results
9. Apply the concepts of error and bias in the evaluation of the results
10. Interpret the results addressing the strengths and limitations of the inference(s)
11. Communicate this information to professional and lay audiences.

#### Cross-Cutting Competencies

The training in epidemiology and its practicum experience are embedded in the broader context of public health as a discipline, as follows. The following is a list of all cross-cutting competencies. You must choose **at least 3** (among all cross-cutting competencies) that your practicum experience will address. **Please note: A competency may be used only once in either the discipline-specific or the cross-cutting table, but not both.** If more than 3 competencies are addressed you can also list those.

## 1. Communication

- A. Describe a specific public health problem in terms of its magnitude, person, time and place
- B. Develop cogent and persuasive written materials regarding public health topics
- C. Communicate information on a public health topic to professional and lay audiences.
- D. Deliver oral presentations using recognized criteria for effective information dissemination
- E. Adapt language and delivery modalities to specific audiences.
- F. Use media, advanced technologies and community networks to disseminate information about public health issues
- G. Facilitate collective information sharing, discussion and problem solving

## 2. Diversity and Cultural Competency

- A. Demonstrate sensitivity to varied cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds of individuals and groups
- B. Demonstrate tolerance with differences in perspectives, norms and values of others
- C. Recognize the varied levels of health access among individuals and within communities
- D. Interact productively with diverse co-workers, partners and other stakeholders

## 3. Leadership

- A. Recognize the importance of maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders.
- B. Adopt best practices from other disciplines, fields, or organizations.
- C. Solicit ideas and opinions to learn from others in forming decisions.
- D. Demonstrate basic negotiation and conflict management skills.

## 4. Professionalism and Ethics

- A. Review basic ethical and legal principles applicable to the collection, maintenance, use and dissemination of research data
- B. Establish the basis for lifelong learning in the field of public health
- C. Apply ethical principles in both personal and professional interactions
- D. Consider the effect of public health decisions on social justice and equity
- E. Apply evidence-based concepts in public health decision-making

<http://www.aspph.org/educate/models/mph-competency-model/>

[Note: The competencies listed above are an updated version of what is in this ASPPH document.]

Note: This document was adapted from PHLP practicum preceptor guidelines.