

Gillings MPH Practicum Frequently Asked Questions 2019-2020

Note: This document does not apply to the Nutrition with Registered Dietitian Training (Nutrition/RD) concentration. Nutrition/RD students should refer to their program handbook for information about the Nutrition/RD practicum.

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 in a practical, professional, public or private public health environment such as a nonprofit organization, hospital, local or state health department, or for-profit firm. The practicum gives students an opportunity to:

- Apply public health concepts, skills, and values in a real-world setting
- Contribute to the work and impact of organizations advancing public health
- Explore areas of professional interest, network with public health professionals, and develop career goals
- Observe and learn from professionals in the field
- Gain feedback on professional skills and performance
- Demonstrate competency attainment (Appendix A)

What is the difference between a practicum and an internship?

The terms are often used interchangeably. It is acceptable to conduct an internship as long as it meets all of the Gillings MPH practicum requirements.

What are the components of the Gillings MPH practicum program?

The Gillings MPH practicum program has three components:

1. A two-credit **practicum preparation course** (SPHG 701: MPH Practicum Preparation) that provides support for the practicum process and trains students on how to ethically, meaningfully, and professionally engage with practicum organizations and their stakeholders through building skills in leadership and interprofessional practice. NOTE: Population Health for Clinicians will substitute PUBH 749 for SPHG 701.
2. A zero-credit 200 (minimum) hour **practicum experience** (see *What is a practicum?* and *What are the Gillings MPH practicum experience requirements?*).
3. A one-credit **practicum reflection course** (SPHG 702: MPH Practicum Reflection) that awards credit to a series of activities designed to facilitate critical reflection on, and sharing of, practicum experiences. Completion of the required activities helps students translate their practicum work into their long-term career goals.

Our goal for the Gillings MPH practicum program is to facilitate high-quality, equitable, and consistent practicum supports and experiences for all Gillings MPH students with an ongoing commitment to:

- Ensuring all MPH students have a strong grounding in practice;
- Facilitating opportunities for students to develop skills that support their career goals and employability;
- Increasing the impact of MPH practice activities within the state and beyond;
- Strengthening campus-community partnerships; and
- Feasibly meeting and documenting Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) accreditation requirements.

How do students identify practicum opportunities?

The search for a practicum opportunity parallels the process of a public health job search. **Like a job, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to secure a placement;** however, there are several supports available to help students with the process. Students identify practicum opportunities through those that are vetted and disseminated by Gillings, past practicum placements, personal and/or professional contacts, faculty recommendations, Internet searches, or direct contact with organizations of interest. The practicum preparation course (SPHG 701: MPH Practicum Preparation) is designed to provide students with the support they will need to identify, apply to, select, and prepare for a practicum experience.

When should students register for the practicum preparation course (SPHG 701: MPH Practicum Preparation)?

Prerequisites for SPHG 701 are SPHG 711, 712, and 713, or their approved substitutes. Residential MPH students (i.e., those completing the degree on-campus at UNC Chapel Hill or UNC Asheville) should register for SPHG 701 during the spring of their first year concurrent to taking SPHG 721 and SPHG 722. Generally speaking, MPH@UNC students should register for SPHG 701 in the term prior to their desired start date for their practicum hours (see *When can students begin their practicum hours?*). Given the variety of timelines for the MPH@UNC and the many factors leading to a desired start date for the practicum, MPH@UNC students should seek advice on when to register for SPHG 701 from their practicum manager. Population Health for Clinicians concentration students substitute PHLP 749 for SPHG 701 and should refer to their plan of study to determine when to register for PHLP 749.

Do students need to begin their practicum search prior to being enrolled in the practicum preparation course (SPHG 701: MPH Practicum Preparation)?

It depends. The timeline for progressing through the practicum process varies by the type of opportunity the student desires. International practica, research-based practica that require going through the IRB, and practica with organizations that have extensive onboarding requirements (e.g., academic institutions; hospitals and other medical facilities; health departments; military institutions; government agencies) may take longer to plan than other types of practica, and students should plan accordingly.

When can students begin their practicum hours?

Students can begin their practicum hours after completing the Gillings MPH Core courses (SPHG 711, 712, 713, 721, and 722) and the MPH practicum preparation course (SPHG 701), with the following exceptions:

- Health Policy students must also take HPM 754 prior to beginning their practicum hours.
- Nutrition students must take NUTR 611 and NUTR 705 prior to beginning their practicum hours.
- Population Health for Clinicians concentration and Veterinary students in the Leadership in Practice concentration may begin their practicum hours prior to completing the MPH Core.

In extenuating circumstances and with the approval from the student's practicum manager, academic adviser, faculty mentor, and the Gillings MPH Practicum Director, some additional exceptions may apply (Appendix B).

What are the Gillings MPH practicum experience requirements?

In order to meet graduation requirements, a Gillings MPH practicum experience must:

1. Yield at least two student-generated products, produced in the practicum setting for the practicum setting, that allow for attainment of five (CEPH) MPH Foundational competencies (Appendix A).
2. Be mentored by a supervisor (preceptor) with an advanced degree in public health or equivalent experience with expertise in the practicum project area.
3. Comprise a *minimum* of 200 hours (equivalent to five weeks of full-time work).
4. Take place in a location approved for student travel ([UNC Travel Policy](#)), and the student must complete [UNC Gillings International Pre-Departure Travel Requirements](#) prior to travel if applicable.

Which concentrations have concentration-specific practicum experience requirements and what are those requirements?

- **Applied Epidemiology:** None.
- **Environmental Health Solutions:** Students must work on a project that has environmental health relevance.
- **Health Behavior:** None.
- **Health Equity, Social Justice, and Human Rights:** None.
- **Health Policy:** Students must complete HPM 754 prior to beginning practicum hours and must work on a project that has some policy implications.
- **Global Health:** Students are required to complete their practicum either through an international or domestic placement with an organization that either works with populations outside the US or with global populations (e.g. immigrants, refugees, foreign-born) within the US.
- **Leadership in Practice:** None.
- **Maternal, Child and Family Health:** Students must complete their practicum by either working directly with the MCH population or their work needs to directly impact the MCH population. The practicum cannot be strictly clinical in nature (counseling, health care, etc.).
- **Nutrition:** Students must take NUTR 611 and NUTR 705 prior to beginning their practicum hours. Experience must take place in a public health/community nutrition-based agency or non-governmental organization. Other organizations must be approved by the practicum manager.
- **Population Health for Clinicians:** None.
- **Public Health Data Science:** None.

What types of activities do students complete during the practicum?

Examples of practicum activities include:

- Collect, analyze, interpret, and summarize data
- Conduct cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost-utility analyses
- Conduct needs assessments
- Contribute to the measuring, reporting, and continuous improvement of programs or organizations
- Create an advocacy campaign
- Create infographics
- Design programs/curricula
- Determine the feasibility and expected outcomes of policy options
- Develop and coordinate programs and activities
- Develop and implement quality improvement projects
- Develop policy recommendations
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing programs
- Identify strategies for determining budget priorities based on federal, state, and local financial contributions
- Promote public health policies, programs, and resources
- Provide support and assistance in funding research and grant writing

Students are not limited to the activities listed above and can combine multiple activities during the practicum. The practicum is not clinical in nature; therefore, students cannot provide therapy or practice health care as part of their practicum.

What types of products do students produce during their practicum experiences?

A product is a tangible output from the student's practicum work. Students must produce a minimum of two products in the practicum setting, for the practicum setting that demonstrate attainment of 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. Multiple students can work on the same practicum product; however, each student must present documentation demonstrating individual competency attainment. Examples of practicum products include:

- Advocacy Tool
- Asset Mapping Report
- Business Plan
- 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 Collection Instruments
- Data Management User Guide
- Dissemination Plan
- Environmental Scan Report
- Evaluation Plan
- Evaluation Tool
- Event Plan
- Fact Sheet/Brief
- 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
- 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
- Sustainability Plan
- Training materials
- Video Storyboard
- Web-based Tool

Do students need to demonstrate all five competencies in both of the practicum products?

Assessment of student's competency attainment is through a portfolio approach that includes at least two products. The requirement of two products is a floor rather than a ceiling, and it may take additional products for students to demonstrate five competencies. The competencies are mapped to products, but each product does not have to map to all competencies. For example, one product (e.g., a written assignment) may demonstrate three competencies and the second product (e.g., a presentation) may demonstrate the other two competencies. As another example, students may produce five products if each one demonstrates a competency. Competencies and products differ from student to student.

What type of organization can host a practicum student?

Governmental, non-governmental, non-profit, industrial, for-profit settings, and university-affiliated settings are all appropriate practicum sites. **University-affiliated settings must be primarily focused on community engagement, typically with external partners.** University health care systems and health promotion or wellness centers may also be appropriate. **Faculty-supervised lab settings are not appropriate for the practicum.**

Can students do a practicum with their regular place of employment?

Students are discouraged from completing a practicum with their regular or past place of employment in order to gain exposure to different types of public health work, networks, and work settings. However, with approval from the student's practicum manager, a student may do a practicum with their regular or past place of employment if the opportunity meets Gillings MPH practicum requirements and differs substantially from the student's current/former role. For example, a student could work in a different division/department at their place of employment or work on a project that encompasses different work. If a student pursues a practicum at their regular place of employment, their preceptor must be someone other than their regular supervisor.

What are the roles and responsibilities of a practicum student?

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

- Secures a practicum placement;
- Adheres to all UNC international [travel policies and registration](#) requirements as needed;
- Develops a practicum learning agreement in collaboration with the preceptor and faculty mentor that is complete, accurate, and includes signatures of approval from the student, preceptor, and faculty mentor prior to submitting it to the practicum manager for final approval and signature;
- Maintains professionalism at all times during the practicum experience;
- Acts in accordance with all practicum organization rules, regulations, and professional standards including dress, personal conduct, and attendance;
- Meets regularly with the preceptor to discuss the progress of the practicum and receive support, guidance, and feedback;
- Maintains contact with the practicum manager and faculty mentor (as needed) regarding progress on the practicum; and
- Completes and ensures the timely submission of all practicum assignments and products.

Who can serve as a practicum preceptor?

Practicum preceptors should have appropriate education and experience to mentor the student in the practicum's project area and provide a meaningful learning experience. We understand that people come to public health from a range of backgrounds and expect a preceptor to have either:

- A terminal degree (e.g., PhD or MD) and current, professional experience in public health;
- A graduate degree in public health (e.g., MPH) and at least three years of full-time, professional experience in public health;
- A graduate degree in a field other than public health (e.g., MS) and at least three years of full-time, professional experience in public health; OR
- At least five years of full-time, professional public health experience in addition to a bachelor's degree.

Preceptors should not be a student. **If there is any uncertainty whether someone is qualified to serve as a preceptor, please contact your practicum manager.**

Can students work with Gillings faculty for the practicum?

To gain exposure to public health work outside of an academic setting, students are generally discouraged from completing a practicum with a Gillings faculty member. However, a student may produce a project for a practicum setting under a Gillings faculty member's supervision if the products arise from the student having significant contact with the practicum setting. In such cases, the practicum must be approved by the student's practicum manager and must have a co-preceptor from the practicum setting. An experience conducted solely under faculty supervision, such as a case study or simulation, or preparing a manuscript for publication, will not satisfy Gillings' practicum requirements.

What are the roles and responsibilities of a preceptor?

Preceptors mentor the practicum student and supervise the practicum work. The preceptor:

- Establishes, in collaboration with the student and the student's faculty mentor, an appropriate and feasible scope of work, which gets documented in the student's learning agreement, that is directly aligned with the practicum organization's needs and provides a valuable learning experience for the student;
- Orients the student to the health topic(s), people, policies, procedures, and norms related to the practicum work;
- Meets regularly with the student to provide guidance, support and timely, constructive feedback;
- Communicates with the student's practicum manager (and the student's faculty mentor as needed) to provide feedback on the student's performance;
- Models professional, ethical behavior;

- Completes an evaluation of the student and the practicum experience; and
- Identifies a suitable replacement if unable to continue in the role of a preceptor.

Do the student-preceptor interactions need to be in-person?

In-person interaction is preferred; however, it is not always possible. As long as the preceptor is providing directions, feedback, and guidance throughout the practicum experience, preceptor-student interactions can be conducted via Zoom, Skype, email, phone calls, etc.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the faculty mentor?

The faculty mentor provides discipline-specific feedback and technical support for the practicum. The faculty mentor:

- Assists students in identifying professional and career objectives, clarifying learning objectives, and identifying appropriate practicum placements (shared responsibility with practicum manager, SPHG 701 section instructors, Career Services, etc.);
- Reviews and provides feedback on learning agreements to ensure that the proposed scope of work accounts for all steps entailed in producing the products and is feasible for the timeframe;
- Provides technical assistance and problem-solving support during the practicum, as needed; and
- Assesses mentees' practicum products for competency demonstration.

What are the roles and responsibilities of the practicum manager?

The practicum manager coordinates the student's practicum experience. The practicum manager:

- Vets practicum opportunities to ensure they meet Gillings MPH requirements;
- Approves the learning agreement and grants permission to begin the practicum hours;
- Assists with onboarding requirements;
- Provides instructions for the practicum at the beginning, middle, and end of the experience;
- Monitors the practicum experience and problem-solves as needed; and
- Disseminates and collects practicum evaluations.

When should students register for the practicum reflection course (SPHG 702: MPH Practicum Reflection)?

Students should register for SPHG 702 in the term following or concurrent to their timeline for completing their practicum hours. They must complete their practicum hours and submit their practicum products within one month of the last day of classes for the term in which they are registered for SPHG 702.

Can students do more than one practicum?

The Gillings MPH practicum program is designed to support one practicum experience with one practicum organization per student. If students would like to do additional practicum-like work, they may do so outside of the structure of the Gillings MPH practicum program and should speak to their academic adviser to identify what other type of applied learning structure (see below) will best fit their interests/needs.

How does the practicum differ from other forms of applied learning?

There are many valuable forms of learning that encourage students to apply their academic experiences to a particular practical concern. Here is how the practicum differs from other applied learning opportunities in the Gillings MPH program:

	Practicum	Independent Study	Research Assistantship	Culminating Experience
Definition	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 in a practical, professional, public or private public health environment such as a nonprofit organization, hospital, local or state health department, or for-profit firm.	A mechanism for a student to work on a specific topic with a faculty member for 1, 2, or 3 academic credits depending on the agreed upon scope of work.	A paid work experience with a faculty member that is not for academic credit.	An experience at the end of a student's plan of study that demonstrates synthesis of competencies.
Requirements	See "What are the Gillings MPH practicum experience requirements?"	Student must be in good academic standing. At least three hours of independent work and one hour of contact time with the faculty adviser for the independent study per week is expected for each unit of credit. The student's scope of work, timeline, and type and frequency of contact with the faculty adviser must be described in a learning agreement. Students may not enroll in more than 6 credits of independent study during their time in the MPH program.	Varies by research assistantship.	The format of the culminating experience varies by concentration, ranging from individual master's papers and group public health crisis simulation projects to year-long community health projects. Regardless of format, the experience must yield a high-quality written product in which students demonstrate a synthesis of at least two MPH foundational competencies and at least two MPH concentration competencies.
Outputs	Two (minimum) products produced for the practicum setting, in the practicum setting that allow for attainment of five (CEPH) MPH Foundational Competencies (Appendix A).	A final written paper, report, or other agreed-upon deliverable.	Varies by research assistantship.	One (minimum) high-quality written product that demonstrates a synthesis of at least two MPH foundational competencies and at least two MPH concentration competencies.
Timeline	Typically occurs at mid-point of MPH program.	Can occur at any point during a student's course of study.	Can occur at any point during a student's course of study.	Must occur during final academic term in MPH program.

Do students receive compensation for their practicum work?

Sometimes. Compensation for the practicum varies significantly by the type of practicum organization, project, and location. The proportion of students who secure paid practica varies by concentration. For those students who do receive funding from their practicum organization, the average rate of compensation is \$16-26/hour.

Are students responsible for the costs associated with the practicum experience?

Yes. Students are responsible for the cost of their own travel, housing, and meals associated with completing their practicum hours.

Does Gillings provide any funding to support practica?

Yes. The school offers schoolwide self-nominated travel awards and a global practice award for students completing a global practicum (i.e., a practicum through an international or domestic placement with an organization that either works with populations outside the US or with global populations [e.g. immigrants, refugees, foreign-born] within the US). Some awards are only available to residential MPH students whereas others are open to all graduate students. Some departments/programs have additional funds to support unmet need for the practicum.

Does the school provide any practicum housing support?

Moving to another location to complete a practicum can create additional expenses for the student. The costs associated with this are borne by the student. If the practicum placement is in North Carolina, students can apply for housing sponsored by our Area Health Education Center (<https://www.ncahec.net/student-services/student-housing/>). If the practicum involves travel abroad, there may be suggested funding resources through the Office of Research, Innovation and Global Solutions ([funding resources](#)).

Are students guaranteed a practicum site within commuting distance of their home?

No. Gillings does not guarantee that MPH students will find a practicum within commuting distance of their current place of residence.

Whom should I contact for help with my practicum search and to answer any additional questions?

Please contact mphpracticum@unc.edu for additional support.

Appendix A
Council on Education for Public Health
MPH Foundational Competencies

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

Policy on Beginning Practicum Hours Before Completing Practicum Experience Prerequisites

Practicum Hour Prerequisites

To ensure that students are adequately prepared to integrate and apply knowledge, skills, and values from their Gillings MPH training in an applied setting, Gillings MPH Students must complete the Gillings MPH Core courses and the MPH practicum preparation course (SPHG 701) prior to beginning their practicum hours. Some concentrations require additional prerequisites.

Exceptions to Practicum Hour Prerequisites

The Population Health for Clinicians concentration will substitute PUBH 749 for SPHG 701. Due to their twelve-month plan of study, students in the Population Health for Clinicians concentration and Veterinary students in the Leadership in Practice concentration may begin their practicum hours before completing the practicum hour prerequisites. Other Gillings MPH students (online or residential) wishing to begin their practicum hours before completing the practicum hour prerequisites may do so for extenuating circumstances with the approval from their practicum manager, their concentration lead, and the Gillings MPH Practicum Director. Extenuating circumstances include medical, mental health, financial, and/or personal situations that warrant a petition for exemption. Permission to begin the practicum hours early does not relieve students of the responsibility of knowing the material covered in the practicum preparation course and completing the practicum preparation course assignments.

Process for Requesting to Begin Practicum Hours Early

Students must meet with their practicum manager prior to initiating the petition to begin their practicum hours early. In this meeting, the practicum manager will explain the implications for beginning the practicum hours early and help the student outline a timeline for doing so. Next, the student should fill out the "Petition to Begin Practicum Hours Early" form, which should include:

- A justification for beginning the practicum hours prior to completing the practicum hour prerequisites;
- Approval from the student's practicum manager as an accountability check for having a plan in place for the student to complete SPHG 701 practicum assignments early;
- Approval from the student's academic adviser as an accountability check to make sure that the student is in good academic standing and to confirm that the student will not be overextending themselves by completing the hours early;
- Approval from the student's faculty mentor to ensure the faculty member is aware of the student's plan; and
- Any additional documents to support the petition request.

The finalized petition should be submitted to the Gillings MPH Practicum Director (who will ensure consistent practices across the MPH program). The outcomes for the petition are "approved," "needs additional information," or "denied." The Gillings MPH Practicum Director can request additional documents or explanation from the student should they not have enough information to render a decision. Should the petition be denied, the MPH Practicum Director will provide a justification for the student. If approved, the Gillings MPH Practicum Director will notify the student, the student's practicum manager, and the student's concentration lead.

Impact on Practicum Funding

Beginning the practicum hours prior to completing the practicum prerequisites may render a student ineligible for some sources of practicum funding due to competing timelines.

Petition to Begin Practicum Hours Early

Date: _____

Student's Name: _____

Concentration:

- Applied Epidemiology
- Environmental Health Solutions
- Health Behavior
- Health Equity, Social Justice, and Human Rights
- Health Policy
- Global Health
- Leadership in Practice
- Maternal, Child and Family Health
- Nutrition
- Public Health Data Science

Justification:

Please describe the medical, mental health, financial, and/or personal situation(s) that warrant a petition to begin the practicum hours prior to completing the practicum hour prerequisites:

I understand that, if approved, this petition to begin practicum hours early does not relieve me of the responsibility for knowing the material covered and completing the assignments in SPHG 701: MPH Practicum Preparation.

Student's Signature

Approvals:

Practicum Manager

I certify that I have discussed the implications of starting the practicum hours early with the student and can accommodate the student's requested timeline:

Signature

Date

Academic Adviser

I certify that the student is in good academic standing and am confident that the student can manage beginning the practicum hours early on top of their other responsibilities:

Signature

Date

Faculty Mentor

I certify that I am aware of the student's desired timeline and I am able to uphold the practicum faculty mentor roles and responsibilities during that time period:

Signature

Date

Submit to Meg Landfried, MPH Practicum Director, for approval.