



Gillings MPH/RD Supervised Field Experiences Frequently Asked Questions 2019-2020

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** (NUTR 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.
2. A zero-credit, 400 hour **clinical practicum experience**
 - a. 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.
3. Practicum reflection included in **NUTR 723: Public Health Nutrition Management** that includes a series of activities designed to facilitate critical reflection on, and sharing of, practicum experiences.

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.

What practicum/field experience hours are required of MPH/RD Students?

MPH/RD students are required to complete practicum/field experiences in several areas. These experiences are comprised of 960 hours over four primary field experiences (remaining field hours will be completed during field activities throughout coursework, **for a total of 1018 hours**): Clinical Nutrition Experience, Foodservice Management Experience, Public Health Nutrition Experience, and Advanced Nutrition Experience. These experiences provide students an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills acquired through their coursework and further develop and demonstrate attainment of program learning outcomes and competencies. Detailed information about each of these experiences can be found in UNC Nutrition Experience Handbooks.

Clinical Nutrition Experience (The clinical nutrition experience fulfills the CEPH/Gillings MPH Practicum requirements.)

The Clinical Nutrition Experience (400 hours) is the first experience and offers learning experiences to provide basic competencies in clinical nutrition and dietetics practice. The student develops an understanding of the role of the clinical dietitian, the opportunities and constraints of the healthcare setting in providing nutritional care to patients, and awareness of the need for continuity of patient care between the healthcare facility and the public health agency.

Foodservice Management Experience

The Foodservice Management Experience (110 hours) occurs at a local foodservice facility (university, hospital, etc.) or foodservice facility affiliated with the student's clinical nutrition site. Students will complete online foodservice management modules (20 hours) and take a ServSafe Manager's Training course and certification exam (10 hours) to prepare for their foodservice rotations (80 hours).



Public Health Nutrition Management Experience

The Public Health Nutrition Experience (240 hours) provides students with an understanding of how a public health department or organization supports its community. Students are assigned to a state or local health agency for their community field experience under the direction of a public health nutritionist/dietitian preceptor.

Advanced Nutrition Experience

The Advanced Nutrition Experience (240 hours) is the final field experience for MPH/RD students. Students are placed in domestic and international organizations (governmental, non-profit, and private sector) that have a role in supporting nutritional health and well-being. This experience provides students with the opportunity to integrate theory with practice, facilitate the transition from student to professional status, and clarify short-term career objectives in a supportive and nurturing environment. The Advanced Nutrition Experience is tailored to the interests and professional goals of the individual student.

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

Prerequisites for NUTR 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) should register for NUTR 701 during the spring of their first year concurrent to taking SPHG 721 and SPHG 722. Generally speaking, MPH@UNC students should register for NUTR 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 NUTR 701 from their practicum coordinator.

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), Nutrition courses (NUTR 611, NUTR 630, NUTR 715, NUTR 640) and the MPH practicum preparation course (NUTR 701).

What type of organization can host a practicum student?

Governmental, non-governmental, hospital, 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 promotion or wellness centers may also be appropriate.

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 the approval from the student's practicum coordinator, a student may do a practicum with their regular or past place of employment if the opportunity meets Gillings MPH practicum requirements and is different 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?

- 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 coordinator 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 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 coordinator and faculty mentor (as needed) regarding progress on the practicum
- Completes and ensures the timely submission of all practicum assignments and products

Who can serve as a practicum preceptor?

- A Registered Dietitian
- A nutrition professional that is approved by the practicum coordinator (this mostly applies to global sites)

Can students work with Gillings faculty for the practicum?

Students completing their Advanced Nutrition Experience may work with Gillings faculty. The Gillings faculty member must be approved as a preceptor by the practicum coordinator.

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 coordinator (and the student's academic 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
- 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. When not possible, interactions must be pre-approved by the practicum coordinator.

When should students register for Public Health Nutrition Management (NUTR 723)?

Students should register for NUTR 723 in the term following completion of the clinical nutrition experience.

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. NOTE: 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](#)).

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.

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?

Your practicum coordinator is your primary contact and source of support for all aspects of the Gillings practicum program. Your NUTR 701 section instructor, your faculty mentor, and Gillings Career Services (residential) or the MPH@UNC Virtual Career Center (online) are additional supports.