

Frequently Asked Questions

Field/Laboratory Experience (PubH 216.10)

(1) What is the Field/Laboratory Experience Requirement?

The overall purpose of the Field/Laboratory Experience requirement is to introduce students in the MS PHMEID Program to a supervised practical experience to reinforce the classroom and laboratory work in their academic program. Experiences generally take place in one of the following areas:

- Infectious disease research;
- Public health laboratories, or
- Qualifying public health entities (local, state or federal public health department, multilateral health organization, private contractor, etc.) to introduce them to epidemiologic research, particularly, surveillance and its tie-in with laboratories either in the United States or in an international setting.

Students choosing a laboratory-focused experience will gain concrete experiences in key laboratory functions. This includes but is not limited to gaining experience in specimen collection, use of test kits, specimen storage and transport, chain of custody procedures, specimen processing in the laboratory, Good Laboratory Practices, general quality control issues, use of basic lab instrumentation, issues of biosafety, and exposure to one or more key laboratory test methods.

Students seeking a more epidemiology-focused experience will carry out the field placement in contexts where they will be exposed to epidemiologic research, surveillance, and the relationship between the laboratory and public health epidemiologists.

For more information, please refer to the syllabus on the website.

(2) What is the difference between the Field/Lab Experience and the Final Project?

The Field/Laboratory Experience requirement is intended to introduce students in the MS PHMEID Program to a supervised practical experience to reinforce the classroom and laboratory work in their academic program. Students choose between focusing on a laboratory-focused experience vs. an epidemiology-focused experience.

The Final Project requirement is a three credit graded course (Micr 294), which consists of the synthesis and summary of data in an area of the students' interest in epidemiologic, bench or field research. Successful completion of the project includes submission of a concept paper and a final report or oral presentation. The final project is supervised by a faculty mentor, and students are evaluated by their project preceptors. For more information, please visit the MS PHMEID resource page on the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics website.

Students are able to link the work conducted as part of the Field/Laboratory Experience with that of the Final Project. This should be discussed in advance with the Course Directors and Site Preceptor.

(3) Are there any requirements before registering for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

Yes. Before a student can enroll in the Field/Laboratory Experience course, they must complete the following epidemiology and microbiology courses. These courses are:

Course Prerequisites

- PubH 203 Principles and Practice of Epidemiology
- PubH 245 Infectious Disease Epidemiology
- MICR 210 Infection and Immunity
- MICR 292 Tropical Infectious Diseases

Co-Requisite

- PubH 204 Environmental and Occupational Health

In the event a student has not completed one of these courses, the student should seek permission from a course co-director prior to enrolling in the Field/Laboratory Experience.

In addition, the student must have completed the following requirements:

- Attend the GWU Biosafety training course (offered every semester).
- Attend the MS Field/Lab Experience Orientation (offered every semester).
- Complete CITI (<http://www.citiprogram.org/>) and HIPAA (<http://inside.gwumc.edu/hipaa/train.htm>) on-line training.

Only after all of these requirements are met, can the student submit a Registration Transaction Form (RTF) to the Course Director for signature and enrollment in the Field/Laboratory course.

(4) What is the procedure/planning process for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

Before beginning the field placement, students and Site Preceptors develop a contract that outlines the learning objectives that will be met and defines the project activities. Site Preceptors are asked to certify the student's hours and evaluate the student (certification and evaluation documents can be sent via mail, fax, or email) and students are required to produce a brief report on their experience.

(5) When should I begin planning for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

It is never too early to begin thinking about your Field/Laboratory Experience. Most full-time MS students complete their Field/Laboratory Experience after their first two semesters of study.

You should plan to begin this process no later than the semester before you intend to begin the Field/Laboratory Experience.

(6) How do I identify a Field/Laboratory Experience Site Preceptor?

The following are resources that you may find helpful in securing your experience:

- Web resources:
 - SPHHS Practicum Website,
<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/index.cfm>
 - E-Connect
 - SPHHS Jobs Database
 - Other Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics and Microbiology faculty
- Your departmental Field/Laboratory Experience Course Director
- Other GW Faculty and Program Directors

(7) When do I need to register for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

Once you have completed the steps mentioned above, you can enroll in the course.

(8) I'm already in a job/internship/fellowship; can this count as my Field/Laboratory Experience?

You may complete the Field/Laboratory Experience requirement at your current place of employment, internship, or fellowship; however, if you decide to do so, you must abide by the following:

- Your Site Preceptor cannot be your current supervisor.
- The content and activities of the Field/Laboratory Experience must be distinct from your regular work, and must be outlined in your contract.

(9) Do I have to complete the Field/Laboratory Experience in one semester?

No, you can complete the Field/Laboratory Experience in one semester or carry it out over multiple semesters. Be sure the time frame you envision is pre-approved by your Course Director and Site Preceptor (e.g., clearly stated in your contract). You only need to register once for the Field/Laboratory Experience.

(10) Am I able to receive financial compensation for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

Yes. However, this is a matter to be negotiated between you and the Site Preceptor. The possibility of payment is not a consideration in the approval of the Field/Laboratory Experience. In most cases, because of the limited duration and nature of the experience, they are unpaid.

It is your responsibility to cover any fees that may be associated with your site (e.g. required immunizations, personal protective equipment, and travel).

(11) How can I obtain funding for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

The Department offers the Practicum Research Fellowship Awards which recognize academic achievement and service in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics and provide partial financial support for Practicum and Culminating Experiences. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/departments/epibio/practres.cfm>

Additionally, the SPHHS and Public Health Alumni Association have partnered to launch the Capital Connection Fund, which provides financial assistance for students to take advantage of off-campus research, internships, conferences and other professional development activities. For more information, please visit:

<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/StudentFunding/>

(12) Am I able to complete my Field/Laboratory Experience overseas?

Yes. This takes additional, early planning on your part. It is suggested that you meet early in the process with your Course Director. Please refer to the SPHHS International Guidebook (<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/download/Handbook-International.pdf>) for more information.

(13) What is the Skills Building Seminar and am I required to take it?

The Skills Building Seminar is a six or seven-week course (depending on the semester) offered in the 1st half of the Fall and Summer semesters. This course is not required of MS students but is strongly recommended. The course is designed to help prepare students for their practice activity and professional life.

Once students are registered for the Field/Laboratory Experience, they do not need to register separately for the Skills Building Seminar. The course is offered in the first half of the Fall and Summer semesters and should be taken as close to possible to the start of the Field/Laboratory Experience activities.

(14) What is the method of evaluation for the Field/Laboratory Experience?

Students will receive a letter grade based upon the Site Preceptor's evaluation and the student's Field/Laboratory Experience Report.