

## Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Epidemiology and Biostatistics Practicum (PubH 214.13) and Culminating Experience (PubH 215.13)

### *(1) What is the difference between the Practicum and Culminating Experience?*

The **Practicum** is a credit/no credit course which consists of a Practice Activity - defined as a planned, supervised, and evaluated experience in a public health organization. The Practice Activity can, for instance, consist of key elements of a primary research or surveillance project such as design, data collection and analysis, or a secondary analysis of an existing data base. The Practice Activity enables the student to apply new skills in the context of public health, and must not be directly related to the student's day-to-day work. If the student does conduct the Practice Activity at his/her place of employment, this must be a separate activity for which the student is not remunerated. Students are also required to attend the Epidemiology-Biostatistics Skills Building Seminar series and three Departmental research presentations.

The **Culminating Experience (CE)** is a graded course which consists of the following four products that stem from research and practice involving a specific public health issue: (a) Concept Paper, (b) Proposal, (c) Final Report, and (d) Oral Presentation. Although it is not mandatory, students often link the CE with the Practicum. This way, the CE serves as the integration of the application of the methods and the interpretation of results. However, if the Practicum and CE are not linked, the student should plan to do the Practicum first.

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

### *(2) Are there requirements before registering for the Practicum?*

Yes. Prior to enrolling in the Practicum, you must complete the following:

#### *Course Prerequisites*

- PubH 202 Biostatistical Applications for Public Health
- PubH 203 Principles and Practice of Epidemiology
- PubH 247 Design of Health Studies
- PubH 205 Policy Approaches to Public Health

#### *Co-Requisites*

- PubH 249 Use of Stat Packages for Data Management/Data Analysis
- PubH 214.13 Epidemiology and Biostatistics Practicum

#### *Recommended Courses*

- PubH 204 Environmental and Occupational Health
- PubH 207 Social and Behavioral Science Methods
- PubH 252 Advanced Epidemiologic Methods

#### *Other prerequisites*

- Students must take the online training courses relating to research with human subjects and personal health information (HIPAA) (CITI, <http://www.citiprogram.org/>).
- Students must have participated in an SPHHS Practicum Training session, designed to assist students with preparing for the completion of the Practicum course and future professional endeavors.
- Students must have participated in a Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics (DEB) mandatory Practicum orientation, designed to highlight the DEB specific requirements and expectations for completing the Practicum and CE courses.
- Students must meet with their departmental Practicum Director.
- If applicable, students must have submitted IRB paperwork before participating in the Practicum.

In addition, students must have identified a site, a preceptor, posted a Practicum plan on line, and had the Practicum Director sign off on the plan.

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

***(3) When do I need to register for the Practicum?***

The Practicum is open for registration throughout the semester. Once you have completed the steps mentioned above, you can enroll in the course.

***(4) I attended the SPHHS Practicum Training session, but I am still not verified on the Practicum website. Why am I not verified?***

In addition to attending the SPHHS Practicum training, in order to be verified, students must meet with their Practicum Director (PD) and attend the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics (DEB) mandatory Practicum orientation. The PD will also review the information submitted online and verify the student.

The Office of Student Records will also verify that the student has completed the SPHHS Practicum training and the CITI training, and the Dean's office will review the information submitted online.

***(5) When should I begin the Practicum planning process?***

It is never too early to begin thinking about your Practicum. Most full-time MPH students complete their Practicum during their second year of study.

**You should plan to begin this process no later than the semester before you intend to begin the Practicum experience.**

***(6) What is the difference between my Academic Advisor and my Faculty Advisor?***

The GW Academic Advisor assists the student in planning the course work for completion of the MPH in Epidemiology.

The GW Faculty Advisor works in tandem with the Practicum Director (PD) to guide students in the Practicum process. GW Faculty Advisors are generally faculty members in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics and often have research interests or experience in the student's Practicum and/or CE area of study. The GW Faculty Advisor reviews and approves: (a) the student's Practicum plan; (b) the concept paper; (c) the research proposal; (d) the final report; and (e) the PowerPoint presentation. The GW Faculty Advisor also reviews the final evaluation from the site preceptor for the CE and decides on the student's final grade.

***(7) How do I find a Practicum site and Site Preceptor?***

You are expected to take a proactive role and demonstrate initiative in selecting a Practicum site and 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
- Your departmental Practicum Director
- Your GW Academic Advisor

***(8) Do I have to pick a Practicum site from the SPHHS Practicum website?***

No. Students can identify a Practicum site through the website, through discussions with other students and faculty members, or they can seek out their own Practicum site.

***(9) I think I've found a good Practicum opportunity. What do I do now?***

- Meet with your Practicum Director to determine if the proposed Practicum opportunity is suitable. The site and site preceptor must meet SPHHS Practicum qualifications.
- Sign-in to the SPHHS Practicum Website (<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/index.cfm>) and begin filling out your Student Profile (<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/download/Student%20Profile.pdf>).
- After your site preceptor has registered and posted a practicum project, begin completion of your Student Practicum Plan

<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/download/Student%20Practicum%20Plan.pdf>) in conjunction with your Site Preceptor.

- Register for the Practicum course (using an RTF) when the plan has been signed by the Practicum Director.

***(10) How do I know if I have to go through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process?***

Students must work with their GW Faculty Advisor to decide whether the topic for a proposed Practice Activity must be submitted for IRB approval. The IRB is a committee mandated by federal law to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects participating in research activities. The IRB achieves its primary function, protecting the rights and welfare of subjects participating in research, by educating researchers and carefully reviewing proposals for conducting human research.

If IRB review is required, students must work with their GW Faculty Advisor, the Practicum Director, and the Office of Human Research (OHR) to obtain access to the appropriate forms; OHR has a Blackboard course which has forms and worksheets to assist students. Once an IRB submission has been prepared, the GW Faculty Advisor should review it. Since the student's practicum preceptor is never a SPHHS faculty member, the GW Faculty Advisor must sign as the PI. If the student's preceptor is a member of the GW faculty but not the SPHHS, they can sign as PI. Once the package is signed it should be submitted to the Practicum Director for review and signature. The Practicum Director will sign in lieu of the Department Chair.

***(11) If the study I am working on already has IRB approval, do I need to get approval again?***

Students will sometimes work with institutions other than GW that have their own IRB. The general rule is that students still have to complete an IRB submission for GW once the IRB used by the site has approved the project. Students should include the other IRB's documentation of project approval in the application materials for the GW IRB.

For students conducting research at Children's National Medical Center (CNMC), submissions are made directly to the CNMC IRB. There is no need for a submission to the GW IRB because there is an agreement between the two institutions and the CNMC IRB will notify the GW IRB of any submissions.

***(12) Where can I find information on the IRB process?***

Please refer to the flowchart on the GWUMC Office of Human Research website (<http://www.gwumc.edu/research/human>). The flowchart is under the "Forms" link on the top left and will help you to determine if you will be engaging in human subjects research.

A human subject has been defined by the GWUMC Office of Human Research as “a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains: data through intervention or interaction with the individual or identifiable private information.” If you are engaging in human subjects research, this will require you to go through the GWU Committee on Human Research Institutional Review Board (IRB).

However, requirements and timelines will vary depending on the following:

- The type of data you will be working with (e.g., de-identified or exempt data does not need to undergo full IRB committee review)
- The agency or organization with which you are conducting research
- The location of the research project (e.g., USA vs. International sites)
- Whether the project has previously been reviewed by an IRB

Thus, it is extremely important that you consult with your Site Preceptor and GW Faculty Advisor on your research project and the steps that you will need to take. It is best to **start this process early, as the IRB will not approve studies retrospectively.**

***(13) I'm already in a job/internship/fellowship; can this count as my Practicum?***

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

- The site and Site Preceptor must meet SPHHS Practicum qualifications.
- Your Site Preceptor cannot be your current supervisor.
- The content and activities of the Practicum must be distinct from your regular work, and must be outlined in your Student Practicum Plan.

***(14) Do I need to register for the Skills Building Seminar?***

Once students are registered for the Practicum, they do not need to register separately for the Skills Building Seminar as it is included in the two-credit Practicum course. The course is offered in the first half of the Fall and Spring semesters and in the first Summer session. It should be taken as close as possible to the start of the Practicum and CE activities.

***(15) When should I take the Skills Building Seminar?***

As part of the Practicum course (PubH 214.13), students are required to attend the Epidemiology-Biostatistics Skills Building Seminar, a required six or seven-week course (depending on the semester) offered in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the Fall and Spring semesters and

the first Summer session. The course is only open to students who have identified a Practicum site, Site Preceptor and are working on or have submitted a Practicum plan.

***(16) What types of lectures or seminars can count towards the three research summaries?***

Students are required to attend three epidemiology seminars. Examples of lectures or seminars that students can attend to fulfill this requirement include the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics (DEB) Research Seminars, DEB Culminating Experience student presentations, Grand Rounds, Public Health Grand Rounds, training programs and conferences and other relevant research-related seminars both within and outside of the SPHHS. Students should submit a written summary for each seminar attended to include the objectives of the presentation, major findings and what they learned. Each summary should be approximately one paragraph and the three summaries should be submitted electronically in one document on the blackboard course by the end of the semester in which they are enrolled in the Skills Building Course. Presentations cannot be counted twice to meet the SPHHS Professional Enhancement requirement.

***(17) What do I need to post to the Practicum blackboard course?***

Blackboard will be used for posting files you may require, guidelines, templates, evaluation forms, etc., and communicating with the Practicum Director, GW Faculty Advisor, and Department faculty. You are already “signed up” for this course on Blackboard, since it is linked to the course registration system. It is your responsibility to periodically check the course site (log in at <http://blackboard.gwu.edu/> using your gwu.edu address) for information and announcements.

Students will be asked to fill out a Student Data survey about their Practicum placement in the Blackboard course.

***(18) Do I have to complete the Practicum in one semester?***

No, you can complete the Practicum in one semester or carry it over into a second semester. Be sure the time frame you envision is pre-approved by your Practicum Director and Site Preceptor (e.g., clearly stated in your Student Practicum Plan). You only need to register once for the Practicum.

***(19) Am I able to receive financial compensation for the Practicum?***

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 Practicum. In most cases, because of the limited duration and nature of Practicum placements, 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).

***(20) How can I obtain funding for the Practicum?***

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/>

***(21) Am I able to complete my Practicum overseas?***

Yes. This takes additional, early planning on your part. It is suggested that you meet early in the process with your Practicum Director. Please refer to the SPHHS International Guidebook

(<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/download/Handbook-International.pdf>) for more information.

***(22) How long do I have to complete my Culminating Experience?***

The Culminating Experience can be completed in one semester or carried out over multiple semesters. Be sure the time frame you envision is pre-approved by your Practicum Director, GW Faculty Advisor, and Site Preceptor (e.g., clearly stated in your Student Practicum Plan). You only need to register once for the Culminating Experience. However, if a student has registered for the course and finds that they need more than one semester to complete the course, they should contact their Practicum Director to take appropriate action.

***(23) When do I have to enroll for continuing research or petition for continuing enrollment?***

Students who continue to work on their Practicum and/or their Culminating Experience after they have finished all other course work must be careful to maintain their enrollment status until they complete their degree. This means that if they have completed all other course work they must be registered for Continuous Enrollment (\$35) or Continuous Research (value of one academic credit).

This is how it works (adapted from the SPHHS Student Handbook, Academic Year 2008-2009):

- For Fall and Spring semester, you must register for one or more credit hours to maintain enrollment status. – If you finished all other course work, you would enroll in Continuous Research.
- During the Summer session, you do not have to be enrolled unless you are graduating during the summer; in this case you must register for continuous enrollment (\$35).

There are situations wherein a student can petition for continuous enrollment while completing the Culminating Experience. Be sure to stay in touch with your Practicum Director and Site Preceptor to maintain enrollment status.

***(24) What is the difference between the Practicum plan and the concept paper?***

Before a student can sign up for the Practicum, s/he must identify a site and a preceptor, as well as post a Practicum plan on the SPHHS website. The Practicum Plan will identify: 1) the Practicum site where you will complete the Practicum, 2) the person who will serve as the Site Preceptor, 3) the learning objectives of the Practicum, 4) a description of the Practicum activities you will undertake, and, 5) if applicable, a timeline for the Student's products or deliverables. The preceptor will review the plan, which must be signed off by a Practicum Director before s/he can register for the course. The preceptor must sign off on the plan within the first 24 hours of the student beginning the Practicum on-site.

For the Culminating Experience, the first requirement is the development of a concept paper which describes the work that will be done and how it will be carried out. The Concept Paper is written in conjunction with the GW Faculty Advisor and the Site Preceptor. Once completed, it is reviewed by the Practicum Director to assess the appropriateness of its scope as well as its feasibility. Once the Concept Paper is approved by the Practicum Director, the student expands the Concept Paper into a Proposal which also requires the approval of the GW Faculty Advisor and Site Preceptor.

***(25) What is the method of evaluation for the Practicum and Culminating Experience?***

For the Practicum, students will be evaluated on how well they have accomplished the objectives for their Practice Activity based upon the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics competencies outlined in the Practicum course syllabus by the on-site preceptor and the Practicum Director. Evaluations for the Practice Activity will take place at both the midpoint and the end. The student's on-site preceptor will be responsible for evaluating the student's performance, and the student will also evaluate his/her own experience. Evaluation of student participation in the Epidemiology-Biostatistics Skills Building Seminar will be based upon the student's in-class participation. Students will also be evaluated based on the provision of summaries for the three departmental research presentations.

For the Culminating Experience, students will be assessed on how well they accomplish the objectives for the CE through the evaluation of their (a) Concept Paper, (b) Proposal,

(c) Final Report, and (d) Oral Presentation. The GW Faculty Advisor and Site Preceptor will each fill out an evaluation of the student's performance. The GW Faculty Advisor will give the student the final grade taking into account the Site Preceptor's input.

***(26) It is possible to be exempt from completing the Practicum requirement?***

There are no automatic exemptions or waivers of the SPHHS Practicum. In rare situations, it is possible to receive "Practicum Equivalent Experience."

Please refer to this section of the SPHHS Practicum Handbook, (<http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/download/Student%20Practicum%20Guidebook.pdf>).

Note: If you wish to apply for this, you must **file a request by petition during your first semester.**