

MPH Practicum Experience



Site Preceptor Guidebook

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH
AND HEALTH SERVICES

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1. Introduction

A programmatic requirement established by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) states:

All professional degree students must develop skills in basic public health concepts and demonstrate the application of these concepts through a practice experience that is relevant to the students' areas of specialization.¹

In concordance with these requirements, all MPH students in The George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services (SPHHS) are required to complete satisfactorily a practice experience or practicum before graduation.

Since practical knowledge and skills are essential to a successful career in public health, a **planned, supervised, and evaluated** practicum is an essential component of a public health professional degree program. These three components are required elements, which must be documented in the SPHHS practicum program.

The goal of the practicum is to provide the student with an opportunity to:

- Synthesize, integrate, and apply practical skills, knowledge, and training learned through courses;
- Gain professional experience in a public health work environment; and
- Work on public health practice projects that are of particular interest to you and the community at large.

The school's location in the nation's capital provides the opportunity for a wide variety of unique experiences at a multitude of readily accessible practicum sites and linkages to sites around the world. To help facilitate this experience, SPHHS has created this guidebook² to give you an overall picture of the SPHHS practicum program and expectations.

2. What is an MPH Practicum?

The practicum is a three-way partnership among SPHHS students, The George Washington University, and sponsoring agencies/organizations. In this partnership, SPHHS is represented by Practicum Directors and sponsoring organizations are represented by Site Preceptors. Each party in this mutually beneficial relationship assumes certain responsibilities, performs specific functions, and accrues benefits. The practicum is guided by a set of goals and objectives, which are based on the needs and resources of all parties involved.

¹ Council on Education for Public Health, School of Public Health Accreditation Criteria, Amended June 2005. See <http://www.ceph.org>

² Individual departments and academic programs may have *additional* requirements to tailor the experience to their MPH track's specific goals.

A practicum provides the opportunity to integrate and apply classroom learning in a public health setting, enabling students to observe and learn from you, a public health expert in the field. Students will contribute to an organization's resources and to the solution of public health problems, while developing practical skills and personal confidence as a public health professional.

Practicum placements are individually selected and, therefore, the focus, substance, and approach of the practicum will vary, depending on the student's particular academic program, interests, professional goals and objectives. The objectives of the student's practicum must be consistent with the objectives of the school's curriculum and his/her academic program.

During the practicum the student will work under the direct supervision of the Site Preceptor (SP or preceptor), with guidance from his/her track's Practicum Director (PD) and/or Academic Advisor (AA). Decisions on the focus, specific objectives and activities of the practicum are arrived at following discussions and agreements amongst the student, Practicum Director and Site Preceptor. The roles and responsibilities of each person are outlined in this guidebook.

The SPHHS MPH practicum experience requires a minimum of 60 hours of field work *per credit hour*; most programs have a 2-credit practicum requirement. The practicum may be performed in a concentrated fashion in one semester, or carried out over no more than two semesters (or 30 weeks, whichever is shorter). The practicum is graded on a Credit/No Credit basis.

3. School-wide Practicum Standards

Although certain elements of the practicum vary by department, the following are practicum standards for all MPH students:

- a. The practicum must be conducted **in a public health setting**;
 - b. The practicum must be **supervised by an experienced public health professional**.
Typically, a person who qualifies (for example):
 - Has relevant education and public health experience
 - 1) MPH, or masters or doctoral degree in a closely related field, plus 5 years of public health experience
 - i. OR
 - 2) Bachelor's degree in a closely related field plus 10 years of public health experience
- AND
- Is an employee of an approved Site organization.
- c. The student must complete at least **120 hours** of work **at the approved practicum site**; and
 - d. Students will receive credit or no credit based on the **Site Preceptor's mid-point and final evaluations** of the student's performance.

All students must comply with University policies. For example:

- A student must register for the practicum course (PubH 214) in the semester he/she begins the practicum fieldwork.
- If the site is outside of the United States, the student is required to follow all applicable policies of the GW Office of International Programs. On the SPHHS Practicum website, go to the “University Policy – International Travel” link for more information.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

During the practicum the student will work under the direct supervision of the Site Preceptor, and the guidance of the Practicum Director and/or their Academic Advisor. Decisions on the specific objectives, activities, and division within the organization are determined through discussions and agreements amongst the Site Preceptor, the student, and the Practicum Director. The roles and responsibilities of a **Site Preceptor** are described in 1-7:

- a. Visit the Practicum Website <http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/>. To be verified as an SPHHS Site Preceptor, complete the following:
 - Site Preceptor Application
 - 1) This form requires a one-page biosketch which lists your relevant educational training and public health experience.
 - 2) You will be required to enter your work address and contact information, but this information is not available to students unless you choose to have students contact you directly as they select practicum sites.
 - 3) You will also be asked to provide an alternate contact person; this person will not be verified as a “backup” preceptor. He/she should be someone who will be able to contact you if the student or practicum officials cannot communicate with you using the information on your application.
 - 4) The SPHHS department you select on the drop-down menu will be the initial reviewer of your credentials as an SPHHS Site Preceptor.
 - 5) Once the school-level verification has occurred, you will receive a password that will allow you to access the documents you will need to post a project description and evaluate the student.
 - Site Application
 - 1) The department you selected on your preceptor application will also review your site application. If your organization is already approved in the SPHHS practicum system, verification will occur when different organizational location or contact information is entered.
 - 2) If your organization’s mission statement does not explicitly include public health, be sure to add remarks to clarify the public health focus of your unit in the organization.
 - Project Description (to be submitted after you receive your website password)
 - 1) You will be asked to list the goals, objectives and activities of the project.

- 2) Enter the preferred start and end dates, and indicate whether this project will be ongoing.
 - 3) The project form allows you to indicate how many students you are willing to interview from which programs and to supervise simultaneously. You will also be required to indicate the preferred number of days, time of day and hours per week.
- b. Once you and a student have been linked:
 - negotiate payment/stipend with the student, if applicable
 - Review and approve online the student's Practicum **Plan**. This approval must occur the first day the student is at the approved practicum site.
 - c. Engage the student in work that is consistent with his/her Plan, and provide constructive feedback and **supervision**.
 - d. Provide guidance for professional conduct
 - e. Complete the following on the Practicum Website:
 - When the student has completed about 60 hours of work at the approved practicum site, complete the Midpoint **Evaluation** Form in conjunction with the student. Discuss the student's performance and provide advice for the remaining work.
 - When the student has completed all required hours (typically 120), complete the Final Site Preceptor **Evaluation** Form of the student and practicum program. Discuss the evaluation with the student and provide advice, as appropriate. The student will not see the comments you enter on the program or website.
 - f. Address the student's reports of problems, including barriers to completion of planned activities or products, site safety and/or sexual harassment issues.

Students are responsible for:

- Discussing practicum-related issues and departmental practicum requirements with their Practicum Director and Academic Advisor
- Proactively selecting a practicum site and Site Preceptor
- Completing all prerequisites (e.g., the introductory public health core course (PubH 205), online human subject training, SPHHS practicum training session, and track-specific requirements)
- Negotiating financial compensation with the Site Preceptor, if applicable
- Registering for the practicum in the semester in which they will BEGIN their fieldwork
- Functioning as a professional at all times
- Contacting the Site Preceptor and potentially the Practicum Director if there are any problems, including site safety and/or sexual harassment issues

Departmental **Practicum Directors** are responsible for:

- Acting as a guide for the student
 - 1) Reviewing program-specific practicum requirements with the student
 - 2) Discussing potential sites and types of practicum experiences with the Student
 - 3) Discussing practicum progress with the student while he/she is on-site
- Reviewing and approving the following:
 - 1) Student application

- 2) Site and Site Preceptor Applications
 - 3) Student's Practicum Plan
 - 4) Midpoint Evaluation, and if submitted the revised Practicum Plan
 - 5) Final Evaluations: Site Preceptor and Student
- Judging the student's work as "credit" or "no credit," based on the evaluations and input of the student's Site Preceptor
 - Addressing student's reports of problems, including site safety and/or sexual harassment issues
 - Staying in touch with the Site Preceptor

5. An Overview of the Practicum Process

Practicum Site Characteristics

In general, a practicum site has the following elements:

- It serves a public health or health services mission, or supports a department or unit with such a mission
- Addresses significant public health or health services problems
- Offers students the opportunity to build professional skills under the supervision of a Site Preceptor

The following provides a general overview of the processes involved in completing the practicum experience.

Beginning the Process

To get started, you need to submit the *Site Preceptor Application* and *Site Application* online through the SPHHS Practicum Website. As part of the Site Preceptor application, you will be required to submit a one-page biosketch or resume with the Site Preceptor application. The departmental Practicum Director will then review and approve these materials.

After final verification by SPHHS, you will receive a login by e-mail. Then, submit your *Preceptor Project Description* on the Practicum Website for students to review.

Note that in order to submit a Project Description on this site, you must first submit a Site Preceptor and Site Application (if your site is not already in the system), and subsequently receive a login code.

Interviewing and Selecting MPH Practicum Students

Once verified by their Practicum Director, SPHHS students will be able to view projects, but not contact information, posted on this site. Practicum Directors and students will then discuss potential placements. When a placement is identified, the Practicum Director or student will contact you. Your contact information will be available to students only if you have given permission (on your Project Description) for them to contact you directly.

The selection of MPH practicum students by your site can occur in two ways:

- 1) A student can express interest in your project and discuss this with the Practicum Director. If the PD agrees that the selected project is a good fit for the student, either the PD or student will contact you.
- 2) The Practicum Director can help match your needs to potential practicum students.

Planning the Placement

The Practicum Plan

A student will work with the Site Preceptor and Practicum Director and/or Academic Advisor to design, review, and approve the *Practicum Plan*. As part of the plan, the student will write learning objectives and activities, related to his/her program-specific competencies for the practicum experience. The student may revise the plan in discussion with the PD and/or Site Preceptor. The student will submit the Plan online for review and approval by you and the departmental Practicum Director and Academic Advisor. All Site Preceptors must approve their student's plans by logging on to the SPHHS Practicum Website.

Track-specific competencies are posted on the SPHHS practicum website. The student must select no more than 3 competencies from their track to serve as the focus of their Practicum Plan. Selecting more than 3 is usually unrealistic for a 120-hour practicum.

Learning objectives are statements of what the student will achieve during the field placement or will be able to do once the student has completed the practicum. You and the student will evaluate these objectives at the mid-point and the final evaluations of the practicum.

Learning objectives must:

- Be linked to the student's program-specific practicum competencies
- Build the student's professional skills
- Be prepared in conjunction with and approved by you and the Academic Advisor and/or Practicum Director.

Activities are the specific, measurable tasks that are linked to the Learning Objectives in the Plan. The student and Practicum Director will develop the activities prior to the start of the placement. The student must finalize these activities on the first day of the placement by consulting with the Site Preceptor. You and the student must sign off on the plan online before work begins. You will evaluate the student's performance based on these activities.

Examples of appropriate competencies, learning objectives (LO) and activities are as follows:

- 1) Competency: Assess environmental and occupational exposures.
LO: Use air monitoring equipment correctly for taking meaningful workplace samples.
Activity 1: Calibrate the area monitoring equipment.

Activity 2: Measure breathing zone 8-hour particulate levels (PM_{2.5}) on at least 3 days.

Activity 3: Submit the samples to the laboratory with appropriate paperwork for analysis and reporting of the results.

- 2) Competency: Apply qualitative and quantitative methods to policy and programmatic research in the global context.

LO: Conduct a needs assessment in response to avian influenza in Uganda.

Activity 1: Conduct semi-structured key informant interviews to assess community responses and needs related to avian influenza cases.

Activity 2: Assist in mapping community resources in a specific region, to be determined

- 3) Competency: Assess the methodology and quality of research results.

LO: Synthesize and summarize new developments in health care policy as it relates to children, low-income families, and Medicaid

Activity 1: Draft position statements on key issues (to be identified)

Activity 2: Write articles on policy issues for internal and external newsletters

Supervising the Student

In this stage of the practicum experience the student will work under your guidance to carry out the practicum project in accordance with the expectations set forth in the *Practicum Plan*. The practicum must involve a minimum of 60 hours of fieldwork per credit hour; 120 hours to meet the requirements of most MPH programs. The practicum may be completed in as little as three weeks, but no more than 2 semesters (or 30 weeks).

While the student is onsite, the student will be required to login to the Practicum Website and record contact hours on an ongoing basis. As the hours are completed, the system will track and subsequently prompt the student and Site Preceptor to fill out the two required, time-sensitive materials; the Midpoint and Final evaluations.

Evaluating the Student and the Practicum Program

There are two types of evaluation that will be completed for the practicum: a mid-point evaluation that will be completed halfway through the practicum and a final evaluation that will be completed at the end of the practicum experience. Both evaluations are expected to be used as tools for dialogue with the student about his/her performance and for guidance.

The midpoint evaluation will be completed with the student. Any changes to the *Practicum Plan* must be submitted by the student to the Practicum Director and Academic Advisor at the time of the change.

The final evaluation of the practicum experience will be judged for “credit” or “no credit” by the PD, based on the evaluation and recommendation of the Site Preceptor. The student will see and review the Site Preceptor’s final evaluation of his/her work, without seeing your responses about the program or website.

6. Practicum Website

The Practicum Website provides you with one location for:

- Policies and requirements
- Required forms
- Program-specific materials
- Tools and resources

All Forms must be filled out electronically and submitted to this site. Practicum Training sessions are available to provide you with an overview on how to use this site and address any questions you may have.

The **direct address** of the site is: <http://www.gwumc.edu/sphhs/studentres/practicum/>. The site can also be accessed by visiting the SPHHS homepage (www.gwumc.edu/sphhs). It is the first item under the “Student Resources” button on the left. If you have any questions about the website, please contact the SPHHS Webmaster, James Kraetz, at sphjak@gwumc.edu or (202) 994-2976.

7. Practicum Training

You are encouraged to participate in the ***Site Preceptor Practicum Training prior to having students onsite.*** This training is offered throughout the year.

The training takes one hour. It provides information on your role and responsibilities, and a demonstration of the use of the Practicum Website.

8. Financial Compensation

Participation in the practicum is not predicated on the availability of remuneration but on the quality and value of the educational experience. Financial compensation for the practicum, if available, is a matter to be negotiated between you and the student prior to the commencement of the practicum experience.

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, practicums are unpaid. However, preceptors are advised that the student must pay tuition to the University for a two-credit hour course (approximately \$2,000) in order to receive credit for the practicum.

Some sites offer compensation in the form of travel/commuting reimbursements, a flat stipend, conference registration fees, supplies required to complete the work, etc.

9. Whom Should You Contact?

If you have a specific department in mind for your project, please contact that department's Practicum Director.

Practicum Directors			
Environmental and Occupational Health	David Goldsmith Peter LaPuma	eohtdfg@gwumc.edu eohtpl@gwumc.edu	(202) 994-1734 (202) 994-1734
Epidemiology and Biostatistics	Ann Goldman Amanda Castel	sphasg@gwumc.edu sphaxc@gwumc.edu	(202) 994-4581 (202) 994-8325
Global Health	Ashleigh Black Samantha Ski	ashblack@gwu.edu Skeith@gwu.edu	(202) 994-1024 (202) 994-1406
Health Policy	Kristin Younger Lara Cartwright-Smith	kyounger@gwu.edu laracs@gwu.edu	(202) 994-4130 (202) 994-8641
Health Services Management and Leadership	Robert Burke	bobburke@gwu.edu	(202) 994-5560
Prevention and Community Health	Karyn Pomerantz	kpomeran@gwu.edu	(202) 994-3623
Webmaster			
Office of the Dean	James Kraetz	sphjak@gwumc.edu	(202) 994-5549
SPHHS Practicum Coordinator			
Office of the Dean	Donna Caruso	carusod@gwu.edu	(202) 994-7418
Associate Dean for Research and Public Health Practice			
Office of the Dean	Rebecca Parkin	parkin@gwu.edu	(202) 994-4569

Please contact Prof. Donna Caruso if you have general questions regarding the school's practicum program.

***Thank you for your commitment
to shaping our future public health workforce.***

We greatly appreciate your time and support!