

STONY BROOK UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PUBLIC HEALTH

ACADEMIC YEAR 2012-2013



Stony Brook **Medicine**
Graduate Program in Public Health



MPH PRACTICUM MANUAL

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Introduction

This document is intended to help guide you, the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree candidate, in selecting and completing the Practicum required by the *Graduate Program in Public Health*. It provides clear and concise information on the Practicum experience to guide you, your Faculty Supervisor, and Practicum Preceptor.

The Practicum is an essential part of the *Graduate Program in Public Health* curriculum and is intended to provide hands-on experience in the field of public health. The Practicum aims to provide you with opportunities to apply and test public health concepts and theories in practical settings and improve your learning related to the Program's public health competencies. The Practicum typically accounts for 3 academic credits, but may account for more than that amount in some situations.

The Practicum must be conducted in partnership with an agency or organization (hereafter "the Practicum Organization") that is providing a public health service, in the broad sense of public health. The Practicum Organization may be a public health department or a non-governmental agency. The Practicum process is overseen by the MPH Practicum Coordinator, who ensures that all requirements of the Practicum are met. For the purpose of the practicum, it is required that you develop a supervisory team, which will help you define, plan, and implement the Practicum. The team consists of a Faculty Supervisor, who is a Core Public Health Faculty member, and a Preceptor, who works in the Practicum Organization.

Ethical and professional conduct is essential. As an individual training to be a public health professional, you are expected to conduct yourself ethically and professionally according to the standards of the *Graduate Program in Public Health*, Stony Brook University, and the Practicum Organization.

The purpose of the Practicum is to blend practical field experiences with academic learning. The Practicum is defined as the process and product resulting from a planned, supervised practical experience, strategically designed to provide an opportunity for you to support and apply your academic knowledge and acquired skills to a specific project in the public health arena.

**The Practicum must meet the mission of student's MPH concentration:
Evaluative Sciences, Public Health Practice, or Community Health.**

The mission of each concentration is outlined below.

- **Evaluative Sciences:** The mission of this concentration is to prepare public health professionals with the analytical, research, and statistical skills necessary to benchmark and evaluate health improvement initiatives in community and health care settings. Increasingly, the health field is challenged to adopt an evidence-based approach to

preventing and treating disease and disability. The mission is considered met if the student applies research, statistical, and/or problem-solving skills that the Practicum Organization finds valuable or beneficial.

- **Public Health Practice:** The mission of this concentration is to prepare students with a clinical background for positions in public health organizations or to incorporate public health knowledge, skills, and values into their clinical practice. The mission is considered met if the student performs a Practicum in policy development or evaluation, operations, or cost-benefit analyses relevant to the Practicum Organization's mission and goals.
- **Community Health:** The mission of this concentration is to prepare students for community-based work in public health. Students will acquire skills and knowledge related to planning, implementing, and evaluating community health improvement projects and interventions. They also will learn the principles of community-based participatory research and community engagement. The mission is considered met if the student performs a Practicum related to planning, implementing, or evaluating community health improvement projects or interventions for a Practicum Organization.

Public Health Competencies & the Practicum

The curriculum for the MPH degree is competency-based in order to comply with current efforts to improve the quality and accountability of graduate public health education and training.

Identifying competencies helps to ensure that public health programs achieve a workforce that can deliver the essential services of public health, which are to:

- Monitor the health status of the community
- Investigate and diagnose health problems and hazards
- Inform and educate people regarding health issues
- Mobilize partnerships to solve community problems
- Support policies and plans to achieve health goals
- Enforce laws and regulations to protect health and safety
- Link people to needed personal health services
- Ensure a skilled, competent public health workforce
- Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility and quality of health services
- Research and apply innovative solutions

The *Graduate Program in Public Health* faculty developed the required MPH Core and Concentration Competencies using the Association of Schools of Public Health, Master's of Public Health Core Competency Development Project, as the starting point.

To ensure that all students have a broad understanding of the basic areas of public health, every student is required to complete all MPH Core courses satisfactorily, and these courses convey the Core Competencies through associated Learning Experiences. You, the student, receive training in the five basic, discipline-specific, competency areas of public health: biostatistics, environmental health, epidemiology, health policy and management, and the social and behavioral sciences. You also receive core competency education in informatics and communication, professionalism, systems thinking, and problem solving. The Evaluative Sciences, Public Health Practice, and Community Health concentrations have concentration-specific competencies and learning experiences. A complete list of MPH Core Competencies and Concentration Competencies, with Learning Experiences, can be found on our website at: <http://www.stonybrookmedicalcenter.org/gpph/academics/competencies>.

You should choose a Practicum that is consistent with your career objectives and conducive to building professional relationships with relevant public health organizations. Thereafter, you should identify the Core and Concentration Competencies, and related Learning Experiences, that will be strengthened through the Practicum.

At least one Core Competency and one Concentration Competency must be addressed during the Practicum experience. Identify the specific Learning Experiences within each competency that will be strengthened.

By the time you are ready to begin your Practicum, you will have been introduced to and developed many of these skills or competencies through MPH coursework; many are addressed at least partially in more than one course. To assess your acquisition of these skills and to help determine your progress in developing as many public health competencies as possible, you must consider the Learning Experiences throughout the entire Practicum process: from planning through writing of the final Practicum Report.

Selecting a Practicum

Your consideration of a suitable Practicum topic and a Practicum Organization may begin with a conversation with a fellow student or faculty member, while reading a journal article, or sparked by circumstances in your workplace. You should develop and obtain feedback about your ideas from the Practicum Coordinator, who can help focus the Practicum and suggest possible resources and sites. The topic you decide on should coincide with your own interests, concentration, and educational and career goals. For example,

- A student in the Evaluative Sciences concentration may choose to perform an epidemiological investigation of a public health problem identified by the Practicum Organization as important to its goals, or perform statistical analyses using data collected by the Practicum Organization about a public health-related subject and report the results to the Organization when complete.
- Alternatively, a student whose concentration is Community Health may choose to design a health-related community intervention for the Practicum Organization. Design of a program would include identifying needed resources and activities and creating procedures, manuals, or educational materials. Another Community Health Practicum might lead to a student's implementation of a program already planned for the Practicum Organization or undertaking an evaluation of the Organization's existing public health programs to assess effectiveness and outcomes.
- The Public Health Practice student might consider a Practicum like those listed above, or might choose to develop a health policy position paper or analyze the health characteristics of a community or defined population for the Practicum Organization.

Practicum Proposal

Once you have selected a topic or project for your Practicum, you must write a Practicum Proposal. The proposal must be typed onto *Form C: Practicum Proposal*, and signed by your Preceptor, Faculty Supervisor, and Practicum Coordinator.

**The Practicum Proposal must contain all of the following elements, unless approval is obtained from the Practicum Coordinator beforehand to change the format: Background, Project Description, Goals & Objectives, Competencies Addressed, Resources (if applicable), and Timeline.
See next page for brief description of each section.**

Background

The Practicum Proposal should contain a Background section, which will:

- Describe the public health service that your Practicum Organization provides.
- Identify the Practicum Organization's problem, question, or issue related to this public health service that your Practicum will address (the "what").
- Identify the importance of the problem, question, or issue to the Practicum Organization (the "why").
- Describe your Preceptor's role in providing the public health service and relationship to the problem, question, or issue the Practicum will address (the "who").
- Discuss how the Practicum relates to the mission of your concentration: Evaluative Sciences, Community Health, or Public Health Practice.

Project Description

The Practicum Proposal should summarize what the Practicum is intended to accomplish and how you plan to go about this. Describe how you will address or answer the problem, question, or issue (the "how"). As a part of the description, be sure to include sections on the methods, data sources (and procedures to access these data sources if not publicly available), and measures you will use to complete the Practicum.

Goals & Objectives

The Practicum Proposal should state the goal(s) for the Practicum and the associated objectives. Your goal(s) and objectives will be the basis for evaluating your performance during the Practicum.

Goals are broad, generalized statements about what you want to achieve, the "targets" to be reached. Objectives are the steps you take to reach your goal(s). Objectives should be SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-limited. Each objective should begin with an active verb, for example, identify, define, develop, investigate, prepare, write. "The goal is where we want to be. The objectives are the steps needed to get there."

One of the objectives must identify the "product(s)" or "deliverable(s)" of the Practicum, for example, a research report, program implementation plan, program evaluation plan, community health curriculum. One of the objectives must be a presentation to the relevant audience for the Practicum project, which will usually be within the Practicum Organization.

If Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required to complete the Practicum, one of the objectives will be to complete the application to the Committees on Research Involving Human Subjects (CORIHS), the University's on-site IRB, with responsibility for protecting the rights and welfare of human subjects involved in research. See the CORIHS website for information about conducting research at Stony Brook University and the compliance-related forms needed to apply for IRB approval of research projects at:

<http://www.research.sunysb.edu/humans/humansubjects.html>.

Competencies Addressed

The Practicum Proposal must identify the Core and Concentration Competencies, and their associated Learning Objectives, which will be strengthened through the Practicum experience. **At least one Core Competency and one Concentration Competency must be addressed during the Practicum experience. Identify the specific Learning Experiences within each competency that will be strengthened.**

Resources Required (if applicable)

Timeline

The Practicum Proposal must include a timeline that estimates how long it will take to complete each objective including the “product” or “deliverable” of the Practicum and the presentation you will make at the conclusion of the Practicum. Include an estimate of the number of hours that it will take to complete each step in the process, which will total to a minimum of 135 hours (equivalent to 3 credits).

A Gantt chart can be used to create the timeline. This is a bar chart that illustrates a project schedule, with start and finish date for each of the terminal elements in the project. You can create a Gantt chart in Excel. For instructions, see: <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/excel/HA010346051033.aspx>

You can use another method of showing the timeline, if you like. Edward Tufte dislikes the Gantt chart as a method for visualizing project processes. You can read his comments at: http://www.edwardtufte.com/bboard/q-and-a-fetch-msg?msg_id=000076

Practicum Time Commitment & Timing

You must complete a minimum of 135 hours on the Practicum project, and this work can be performed in a short period of time or be carried out over a period that spans more than one semester. The timeline developed for your Practicum Proposal will describe how you, your Preceptor, and your Faculty Supervisor have agreed to time the key facets of the work. You may spend all 135 hours at the Practicum Organization or perform the work of the Practicum outside the organizational setting, depending upon the needs of your project.

- If you are a full-time MPH student (i.e., you plan to complete coursework requirements for the MPH degree in 18 months to two years), you should begin planning your Practicum no later than two semesters prior to when you intend to graduate, with the goal of implementing your Practicum in the semester immediately prior to graduation.
- If you are a part-time MPH student (i.e., you are attending the Program on a part-time basis, including MD or DDS students), you should consider starting your Practicum after you have completed the MPH Core Courses, or after you have obtained written approval from the Practicum Coordinator, who will consult first with your Faculty Supervisor.
- If you are working full-time, you should investigate with your employer ways to accommodate the time needed to devote to the Practicum. You may need to negotiate the use of vacation time, a flexible work schedule, or other arrangement with your employer. Or, if you are only able to conduct your Practicum in your regular place of employment and it is an acceptable Organization for the purposes of Practicum, you may do so, as long as the Practicum extends beyond your normal job duties and addresses the aforementioned Competencies.

Consider whether you will need Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for your project. This requires an application to the Committees on Research Involving Human Subjects (CORIHS). If you need CORIHS approval, you will need to adjust your timeline appropriately since obtaining approval from CORIHS usually takes several months.

Practicum Enrollment

Permission to enroll in HPH 580 is at the discretion of the Practicum Coordinator. You should meet with the Practicum Coordinator early in the planning of your Practicum project. The Practicum Coordinator will help you to make sure that your proposal satisfies Practicum criteria.

The Practicum Coordinator may also schedule small-group meetings with you and other students to facilitate development of the proposal and completion of the Practicum.

It is preferred that you enroll in HPH 580 in the semester in which you expect to complete the Practicum. If you register for HPH 580 and do not complete the Practicum in that semester, you must arrange with the Practicum Coordinator to receive an Incomplete, which will be substituted with a grade when you have fulfilled the requirements of the Practicum in a subsequent semester.

Shortly after you have enrolled in HPH 580, you will receive a Pre-Practicum Competency Assessment Survey via email. It is required that students complete Competency Assessment Surveys for all Core courses. The *Graduate Program in Public Health* reserves the right to withhold grades or prevent subsequent course registration if you who do not complete both the pre- and post-course competency assessment survey.

Practicum Grading

Upon successful completion of the course requirements of the Practicum, you will receive academic credit that will apply toward fulfilling the MPH degree requirements. The Practicum is graded. The Practicum grade is determined by your Faculty Supervisor and is based on your Preceptor's evaluation, your self-evaluation, and your Practicum deliverable(s).

Once you have completed your Practicum and received a grade, you will receive a Post-Practicum Competency Survey via email. It is required that you complete this survey.

Relationship of Practicum to Capstone Seminar

The Practicum is distinct from the Capstone Seminar, with each course earning three academic credits. The Practicum should precede the Capstone Seminar since you make a presentation about your Practicum as part of your Capstone Seminar requirements.

Practicum Waivers

Because of the fundamental importance of the Practicum experience, no waivers of the Practicum will be considered.

Practicum Requirements

The following forms and deliverables are required for the Practicum:

- Form A: Memo to Preceptor
- Form B: Practicum Team Information
- Form C: Practicum Proposal
- Form D: Practicum Logbook
- Form E: Interim Practicum Review (If applicable)
- Form F: Preceptor's Evaluation
- Form G: Student's Self-Evaluation
- Form H: Student Waiver of Liability (In process, requirement to be determined)
- Practicum Deliverable(s), as described in Form C: Practicum Proposal

Responsibilities of the Student, Practicum Coordinator, Preceptor & Faculty Supervisor

Student

You are responsible for identifying a Preceptor and Faculty Advisor, developing the Practicum Proposal to the satisfaction of the Preceptor and Faculty Supervisor, ensuring the completion and delivery to the Practicum Coordinator of all forms required for the Practicum, and completing the Practicum deliverables that were described in the Practicum Proposal.

Upon approaching a potential Practicum Organization and Preceptor, you must provide that person with *Form A: Memo to Preceptor*. When you have selected a Practicum topic and team, you will complete *Form B: Practicum Team Information* and *Form C: Practicum Proposal*, which requires the signature of your Preceptor and Faculty Supervisor. You will submit these forms to the Practicum Coordinator for signature.

You are also required to fill out a Competency Assessment Survey before and after the Practicum is conducted. You will be sent the survey via email.

You cannot register for HPH 580 Practicum until you have received permission to do so by the Practicum Coordinator.

You should meet regularly with your Preceptor and Faculty Supervisor during your Practicum. Review progress and problem-solve as necessary. Adjust your Practicum goals, objectives, and/or timeline, if necessary. **Complete Form E: Interim Practicum Review only if the Practicum changes substantially.** Submit the completed *Form E* to the Practicum Coordinator. When the Practicum project is complete, submit a copy of the deliverables to your Preceptor, along with *Form F: Preceptor's Evaluation*. Submit *Form F* when your Preceptor has completed it, along with *Form D: Practicum Logbook*, *Form G: Student's Self-Evaluation*, and your Practicum deliverables to the Practicum Coordinator.

Practicum Coordinator

The Practicum Coordinator has the following responsibilities:

- Provide you with a copy of the Practicum Manual and all required Practicum Forms.
- If needed, meet with you to brainstorm possible Practicum projects.
- Provide a list of possible Practicum Organizations with contact persons.
- Provide information on the CORIHS process, if necessary.
- Communicate with your Preceptor to establish an agreement with the Practicum Organization that will allow you to complete the Practicum at that site, in the form of a memorandum of understanding or detailed letter that will serve as such.
- Intercede on your behalf where necessary to clarify your and your Preceptor's roles and facilitate understanding and agreement as to goals, conduct, commitment, and deliverables.
- Facilitate distribution of your Practicum deliverables
- Ensure that all requirements of the Practicum are met.
- Ensure that you receive a grade for HPH 580.

Preceptor

The Preceptor should be a skilled practitioner willing to serve as the student's mentor and guide, providing practical experience and supervision for the Practicum project. The Preceptor has the following responsibilities:

- Be engaged in work that will help you fulfill the requirements of the Practicum.
- Provide an overview of the Practicum Organization, including its organizational composition and mode(s) of operation, mission, goals, and activities, and target population(s).
- Orient you to Practicum Organization policies and procedures relevant to your work with the organization
- Provide necessary organizational resources for project, including any pertinent reports.
- Allot adequate time to spend with you and provide periodic and timely feedback and guidance to you through regularly scheduled meetings, formal evaluation, and/or other means outlined in your Practicum Proposal.
- Review and comment on your Practicum deliverables through completion of *Form F: Preceptor's Evaluation*.

Faculty Supervisor

The Faculty Supervisor for your Practicum should have expertise and interest in your Practicum topic, and provide practical and academic guidance to you. The Faculty Supervisor has the following responsibilities:

- Meet with you during the Practicum planning phase to discuss possible opportunities and help you to choose a project that will be most suitable for your educational goals.
- Help you set attainable goals and objectives for the Practicum, and establish a realistic timeline.
- Meet with you regularly to discuss progress and help resolve any problems as you conduct the work of your Practicum, and advise you on adjusting your Practicum goals, objectives, and/or timeline.
- Assure the quality of the Practicum deliverable(s).
- Review your Practicum deliverables, *Form F: Preceptor's Evaluation*, and *Form G: Student's Self-Evaluation*, and grade your Practicum.

Appendix A: MPH Practicum Forms

- Form A: Memo to Preceptor
- Form B: Practicum Team Information
- Form C: Practicum Proposal
- Form D: Practicum Logbook
- Form E: Interim Practicum Review (If applicable)
- Form F: Preceptor's Evaluation
- Form G: Student's Self-Evaluation
- Form H: Student Waiver of Liability (in process, requirement to be determined)