Appendix D

Master of Public Health

Practicum Guidelines
Georgia State University, School of Public Health  
Master of Public Health  
Practicum Guidelines

For more information, contact  
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Integral to the MPH curriculum is a required practicum, internship or field placement. The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) specifies that the MPH program “as a minimum, shall assure that each student acquires skills and experience in the application of basic public health concepts and of specialty knowledge to the solution of community health problems.”

CEPH further determined that “a planned, supervised and evaluated practice experience is considered a very important component of a public health professional degree program. These opportunities should be arranged in cooperation with as wide a range of community agencies as possible, including especially local and state public health agencies in the program’s geographic area.”

Practicum Goal
The goal of the Public Health practicum is to provide students with the opportunity to apply public health academic theory and acquired skills from their concentration or specialty track to community-based research and service in a practice setting.

Competencies for MPH Practicum
While each practicum will be different, the experience should provide the student with an opportunity to perform the following competencies:

1. Demonstrate effective written and oral skills for communicating with different audiences in the context of professional public health activities.
2. Apply evidence-based principles and the scientific knowledge base to critical evaluation and decision-making in public health.
3. Promote high standards of personal and organizational integrity, compassion, honesty and respect for all people.
4. Work collaboratively with diverse communities and constituencies (e.g. researchers, practitioners, agencies and organizations) to advance public health goals.

Length and Credits
Students must register for three (3) academic credits, which represent 300 hours of field-based work and a monthly in-class component. Field-based work can be performed in a concentrated fashion within one semester or carried out in two consecutive semesters. The in-class requirement, designed to complement the student’s work in the field, will consist of professional development opportunities; student-led seminars describing practicum progress; guest and preceptor presentations; and the student’s development and presentation of the final practicum report. Credits will be awarded by demonstrating achievement of all related requirements as outlined in this handbook, including those described in Section IV (Roles and Responsibilities).
Positioning within the MPH program
Students are eligible to begin practicum coursework following successful completion of the following core classes: PH7011, PH7017, PH7140, PH7150, and PH7160; and at least two (2) classes in the selected specialty track or concentration.

Practicum Topic Selection
The practicum topic selection process is a collaborative effort involving the student, the practicum coordinator, the student’s faculty advisor, and the preceptor. The topic must relate to the student’s chosen specialty track or concentration and division faculty can serve as consultants in the selection process. Practica may either be focused on practice-based research or a public health-oriented project. In either instance, field placement is required.

Relationship to Culminating Experience (Thesis or Capstone Project)
Although the practicum and the culminating experience are two distinct MPH curriculum requirements, the two may be linked. For example, a public health practice-oriented practicum can be developed into a central thesis theme. However, a full report documenting the results of the practicum remains a separate and distinct requirement. Likewise, a research-based practicum can yield a specific research aspect sufficiently robust for the development of a thesis. The resulting thesis would be distinct from the required final practicum report. Decisions regarding thesis and capstone development are further specified in the Graduate Student Handbook.

Enrollment and Grades for the Practicum
In order to begin the practicum, students must enroll in PH7960 (Public Health Practicum) for a total of three (3) hours. The practicum is an academic course; students register for the course, pay tuition and receive academic credit that applies toward the degree requirements. Students only register once for the practicum and credit hours are only applied once. If the practicum is not completed in one semester, the student continues the fieldwork until the hours are completed.

University rules state that no letter grades will be given for a practicum except “S” (satisfactory), “U” (unsatisfactory), or “IP” (in progress). IP grades are fairly common, because often a practicum does not completely coincide with the semester time frame and completion may occur in a later semester. Using the practicum evaluation and in-class progress reporting, the practicum coordinator and faculty advisor will evaluate student work and determine the appropriate grade for the practicum period under review.

Enrollment Exceptions
If a student proposes a practicum experience that will span more than one semester, the student will be permitted to register in the second semester of work. The student, preceptor, and practicum coordinator must sign off on the proposed timeline. If the student fails to register for the practicum in the second semester, he or she will not be allowed to count the hours accumulated in the first semester toward the total hours.
PLACEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Site Selection Criteria
Exposure of future public health professionals to practice relies to an important extent on the collaboration of a diverse set of public, private, and not-for-profit organizations engaged in public health and other related disciplines. Eligible organizations are those that offer practice settings with the following characteristics:

- Field experiences that are commensurate with the student’s specialty track or concentration;
- Well-defined activities that enable students to apply academic theory in real world situations;
- Engagement of experienced preceptors or practicum supervisors as outlined in the practicum plan; and
- A work environment, including work space, conducive to successful performance.

Affiliation Agreement
A memorandum of understanding (MOU) concerning affiliation of students for applied learning experience, on file at GSU, establishes a formal relationship between the University and the practicum placement organization and articulates the terms and conditions for the practicum experience. Each prospective practicum site will be required to enter into an MOU with GSU. Students should check with the practicum coordinator to determine if an MOU is already in place or if one must be initiated.

Preceptor Selection
Skilled practitioners who are willing to serve as preceptors or practicum supervisors represent a critical component of the practicum experience. Effective preceptors are those that possess the following qualifications:

- Extensive experience in public health, health care or a related discipline;
- Engaged in work that fulfills the requirements of the practicum;
- Experience as a mentor or supervisor;
- Ability to spend the required time with the student; and
- Ability to provide periodic feedback and guidance to the students through formal evaluations, regularly scheduled meetings and other means as described in the practicum plan.

An individualized practicum plan will be developed for each placement and documented on the prescribed forms. The parties will work together to fulfill the expectations set forth in the practicum plan, which will identify joint responsibilities of the practicum project; tangible, measurable practicum learning objectives; and available technical and programmatic support to achieve the objectives.

Student
In collaboration with the practicum coordinator, the advisor, and appropriate specialty track faculty, students are responsible for the following:

- Identify potential practicum sites based on the practicum topic, area of specialization, previous experience, career interests, and career goals. The MPH program will provide a list of approved practicum sites that offer diverse and effective placement opportunities. In some instances students may propose a placement organization. However, it is the student’s responsibility to establish contact with that organization, identify a prospective preceptor and propose the site and specific practicum plan to the program coordinator for review. The practicum site can only be approved by the MPH program after a formal agreement has been signed between the MPH program and the respective placement site.
o Develop a practicum/project plan including learning objectives, a timeline, milestones, and final deliverables and secure approval of the plan by the preceptor, the practicum coordinator. Where indicated the student’s faculty advisor or a faculty member in the student’s specialty track may be involved.

o Purchase Georgia State University Professional Liability Insurance. The purpose of Professional Liability Insurance is to cover you from alleged mistakes that may occur while you are completing your practicum in a place of employment. Students who already have coverage must provide documentation; otherwise, students may purchase insurance for a one-time fee of $13.00 through the GSU web store (https://webpay.gsu.edu/C20797_ustores/web/product_detail.jsp?PRODUCTID=194).

o Provide written progress reports to the preceptor and practicum coordinator.

o Participate in seminar series and student presentations

o Submit a final practicum report describing the project, activities undertaken, results, findings and recommendations.

o Conduct a midterm and final evaluation of the practicum experience.

**Practicum Coordinator**
The practicum coordinator provides overall management of the MPH practicum program. In this role, the coordinator, in collaboration with other faculty, is engaged in the following activities:

o Identifies prospective sites in collaboration with MPH faculty.

o Facilitates the development of formal agreements between the MPH program and the practicum organization.

o Serves as the liaison to the program, the student and the organizations formally approved as practicum placement sites.

o Provides advice to students regarding site selection, the development of the specific practicum plan, and reviews overall progress of the student during the practicum process.

o Facilitates any in-class component that accompanies the fieldwork

**Placement Organizations**
Following the development of a formal agreement, practicum sites are expected to accomplish the following actions:

o Identify prospective preceptor(s) who have expertise in the proposed practicum topic and will serve as the organization’s representative and mentor for the student.

o Allow the preceptor adequate time to serve as a mentor and supervisor

o Provide workspace and other workplace attributes to foster successful student performance.

o Provide periodic feedback to the MPH program through formal evaluations, organized meetings etc.
Preceptor
Once selected to serve as preceptor, the preceptor’s responsibility includes the following:

- Provide technical and administrative oversight to the student throughout the practicum period.
- Provide periodic feedback and guidance to the student in writing and through meetings.
- Review the student’s progress through formal mid-term and final evaluations.
- Collaborate with the practicum coordinator to address overall project issues

PRACTICUM EVALUATION

Evaluation of the MPH practicum will involve all parties and occur in a formal and informal fashion. Informal evaluations will be an integral component of the student presentations in the classroom. Information will also be gleaned from the periodic progress review meetings that take place at the placement site between the student and the preceptor, and discussions with the practicum coordinator. Formal evaluation will be conducted in a standardized fashion and is designed to be process and outcome related, involving students, preceptors, and the MPH program. Students and preceptors will provide midterm and final evaluations through completing designated forms. Evaluation at the program level will occur through feedback from the MPH program faculty and administrators as well as representatives from placement organizations.

PRACTICUM FORMS

Forms for practicum students and preceptors are available from the Practicum Coordinator or on the School’s website http://publichealth.gsu.edu/practicum.asp.

PRACTICUM WAIVER

For MPH students who are admitted to the School of Public Health possessing extensive public health experience, the fieldwork experience may be waived without credit. For more information on this option, contact the Practicum Coordinator.