Graduate Program in Public Health

PRACTICUM HANDBOOK
(MPH0090, 0 credits)

Revised Fall 2016
THE PUBLIC HEALTH PRACTICUM

Background

The Practicum experience provides the student with an opportunity to implement and practice lessons learned in the classroom, offering the possibility to integrate knowledge and expose the student to new and exciting prospects for future professional development. The Practicum experience offers students an opportunity to achieve many of the competencies necessary to be successful public health practitioners. In many cases, the Practicum provides students with the opportunity to serve a community.

Description

The Practicum experience is a planned, supervised, and evaluated practical experience that can take place at a variety of agencies and organizations. There are abundant opportunities for the student to meet the goals and objectives of this requirement. The only limit is the student’s ability to be creative, while ensuring applicability to the field of Public Health.

The student is supervised by an on-site preceptor for the duration of the practicum. The preceptor should have a Master of Public Health degree, an advanced degree in a related field, or considerable experience and/or certifications in the field of public health.

Eligibility & Timing

Students are eligible to begin the practicum after completion of fifteen credits in the Program. Generally, students are prepared after they have completed coursework in the five core areas of public health: biostatistics, epidemiology, sociobehavioral health, health policy & management, and environmental health.

Ideally, the practicum will be completed between the student’s first and second year, but students are welcome to complete the practicum at any time during the year. The duration of the practicum is determined between the student and the preceptor, taking into consideration the student’s schedule and the needs of the practicum site. Students should register for the practicum in the academic term in which the practicum is beginning.

Requirements

The practicum is a requirement for the MPH degree. All requirements must be completed and submitted to the Program Office before the student can earn his or her degree.

- Minimum 150 hours
- Registration for MPH0090 Practicum- 0 credits
- Practicum Proposal & Practicum Proposal Form
- Practicum Postscript Report
- Preceptor Evaluation
- Checkout Appointment
Waivers

The practicum is designed for students to apply graduate level competencies to the public health practice setting. In very rare circumstances, the practicum experience may be waived if the student has documented substantial experience in public health practice. If you think you may be eligible for a waiver, please meet with Program Administration.

Generally, residents in Preventive Medicine and Occupational & Environmental Medicine satisfy the practicum requirement through their residency requirements. In this case, the resident should submit the Alternative Practicum Fulfillment form in lieu of any other required practicum forms.

A Foundation for the Culminating Experience

Often times, the practicum can serve as the basis for the final culminating experience. Think about how the practicum might develop into a thesis, manuscript or capstone project. Your track advisors and the Office of Public Health Practice can advise you on the development of your culminating experience. The practicum and culminating experience are separate requirements for the MPH Degree. The culminating experience may not count as the practicum. Please refer to the Culminating Experience Guide for more details.

IDENTIFYING A PRACTICUM SITE

Finding a practicum placement is much like finding any other internship or job. Location should not necessarily be a limiting factor. While there are an abundance of public health agencies and organizations in and around New York City, the practicum may be completed at sites across the country or around the world.

The student is responsible for working with the track advisor to identify a field placement opportunity. Ultimately, it is the student’s responsibility to identify and secure his/her practicum site. There are several resources in place for identifying a practicum site. These include:

- Specialty Track Advisor
- ISMMS Faculty
- Office of Public Health Practice
- Friday Finds (weekly bulletin)
- Blackboard: List of potential placement sites

Be proactive and build your network. Reach out to agencies and organizations directly. You can also contact course directors and faculty across ISMMS as they may be able to connect you to individuals and organizations within their networks.

Be creative. Identify potential sites that are working on issues of interest to you and your career objectives. Reach out and discuss the possibility of hosting a practicum student. Some organizations will offer graduate level internships. Search for these positions using online job/internship search engines, or by searching the organization’s website.
If a student wishes to complete the practicum at his or her place of employment, the practicum activities must be distinct in nature from the job description, and must extend beyond the student’s work responsibilities. A preceptor must still agree to oversee the experience and the Program Office must approve of the practicum.

Students who participated in the Summer Global Health Experience with the Graduate Program in Public Health may use this experience to fulfill the practicum requirements. Students who choose this option are still required to adhere to the practicum requirements. All forms, evaluations and the Practicum Postscript Report must be submitted to receive credit for the practicum experience.

THE PROPOSAL, POSTSCRIPT REPORT & EVALUATION

Proposal

All students are required to submit a Practicum Proposal and Practicum Proposal Form signed by the preceptor and track advisor. The proposal should be as detailed as possible, and should include your anticipated tasks and responsibilities, the overall context of the practicum project and/or site, learning objectives and program competencies. Please write your proposal using the outline developed by the Program. The proposal should be developed in consultation with your preceptor, and must be pre-approved by the track advisor and Program Office prior to initiating the practicum. Students may be asked to modify the proposal until it satisfies the requirements of the practicum experience. Students are not permitted to begin the practicum until the proposal has been submitted and approved by the Program Office.

Postscript Report

Once you have completed the practicum, you are ready to submit the final postscript report. The postscript report includes a detailed description of the practicum, and a self-assessment of the accomplishment of the practicum experience, goals, and objectives set forth in the beginning of the project. Please write your postscript report using the outline developed by the Program. The postscript report must be submitted to your preceptor, to your track advisor, and to the Program Office.

Evaluation

All students must be evaluated by their practicum preceptor. Students are evaluated on their performance, application of public health concepts, and achievement of competencies. The preceptor must complete the Practicum Preceptor Evaluation. Students are responsible for initiating the evaluation and for submitting the evaluation to the Program Office.

The Practicum Proposal Outline and Form, Postscript Report and Preceptor Evaluation are located in the MPH Student Organization on Blackboard.
**ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Student**

1. Identify potential practicum sites based on previous experience and career interests. The advisor will assist with identifying opportunities, a prospective site, and potential preceptor. The preceptor should be a public health practitioner, or an experienced professional in a closely related field.

2. Develop a Practicum Proposal. Review the proposal with your track advisor and preceptor for approval and signature (Practicum Proposal Form). Submit the proposal and signed proposal form to the Office of Public Health Practice for approval prior to the start of your practicum.

3. Maintain an activity log to record all hours contributed toward the practicum experience, and the specific activities performed.

4. During the practicum experience, participate in any necessary review meetings with the preceptor as requested.

5. Notify the Office of Public Health Practice if there are significant changes to the nature and scope of the practicum so that it may be re-evaluated.

6. Complete a final Practicum Postscript Report. Submit the report with the Preceptor Evaluation Form to both the preceptor and track advisor. The preceptor and advisor should review the postscript report when evaluating the practicum experience.

7. Submit the signed proposal form, postscript report and completed evaluation to the Program Office. The proposal must be approved by the Program Office prior to initiating the practicum.

8. Schedule a practicum checkout appointment with the Office of Public Health Practice.

**Track Advisor**

1. Assist students with identifying prospective sites and provide advice to students about site selection.

2. Provide guidance in the development of the practicum proposal.

3. Review overall progress of the student during the practicum experience, as needed.

4. Advise students on requirements of the practicum experience.

5. Evaluate student progress at the end of the practicum by reviewing the practicum postscript report and signing off on the Practicum Evaluation Form.

**Office of Public Health Practice and Program Office**

1. Orient students to the practicum and assist in navigating the practicum process.

2. Review practicum proposals and provide feedback as necessary.

3. Send a confirmation email to the preceptor with the Practicum Handbook attached.


5. Review the postscript report and preceptor evaluation to ensure successful completion of the practicum.

6. Manage student field placements and maintain the practicum database.

7. Assist the student and/or preceptor in resolving any issues that may arise during the practicum.

8. Develop, maintain and communicate practicum opportunities.
Preceptor

1. Provide technical and administrative oversight to the student throughout the practicum experience.
2. Sign the Practicum Proposal Form (an agreement between the preceptor/host site and practicum student).
3. Orient the student to the practicum site, including policies and procedures.
4. Regularly schedule check-in meetings with the student and provide feedback and guidance as needed.
5. Review and evaluate the student’s progress at the end of the experience with the Preceptor Evaluation form.

PRACTICUM CHECKOUT APPOINTMENT

Upon completion of the practicum, students are required to schedule a practicum checkout appointment with the Office of Public Health Practice. Students will have an informal discussion about the practicum experience and submit the final deliverables (Postscript Report, Preceptor Evaluation, supporting documents, and any other deliverable(s) produced for the practicum site). To schedule the checkout appointment, please contact Christine.cortalano@mssm.edu.