**Governmental Public Health Practice Award: Program Overview**

**What is the Texas Public Health Training Center?**
The Texas Public Health Training Center (TPHTC) is one of 37 Public Health Training Centers across the nation established as collaborations between accredited schools of public health, governmental and public health agencies and related organizations. The TPHTC is a collaboration of the following three schools: The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston School of Public Health, The University of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health and Texas A&M University Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health. The mission of the TPHTC is to improve the state’s public health system by strengthening the technical, scientific, managerial and leadership competencies and capabilities of the current and future public health workforce.

**The Governmental Public Health Practice Award**
The Governmental Public Health Practice Award seeks to further the mission of the TPHTC by giving students the opportunity to have applied experience in the public health system. The TPHTC Governmental Public Health Practice Award is the first internship program of its kind. This 200 hour, paid ($2400 stipend) internship will provide interns with the experience necessary to excel in public health departments following graduation. The goals of this program are:

- To enable students to be prepared for careers in health departments through applied opportunities
- To expose students to career opportunities in governmental public health
- To orient interns to the practice, policies and skills necessary to thrive in the public sector
- To assist governmental public health in recruiting qualified candidates

Interns will have direct experience in various divisions of county and regional health departments. Each intern will be supervised and mentored by an experienced public health professional. Students will also have the opportunity to interact with other professionals in the field. Since the internship satisfies the practicum requirement, each intern will be responsible for finding their own practicum and completing a final project that has been approved by their supervisor and the TPHTC. Students are encouraged to contact their academic institution for specific academic requirements.

Ten interns were selected through a competitive application process for the Summer 2012 semester. They represented three schools of public health: Texas A&M University Health Science Center School of Rural Public Health, The University of Texas School of Public Health, and the University of North Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health. Students representing five different divisions or programs worked throughout the state for various governmental public health organizations. Each page below represents the experience of a different student ~ they are as broad and varied as the field of public health itself!
## Practicum Topics

**Serving Size:** 1 Practicum per Student  
**Servings per e-Magazine:** 10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours per Week per Student</th>
<th>Approximately 12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools of Public Health</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Divisions/Programs</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Student

#### Environmental & Occupational Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Chidinma Moito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trichloroethylene vapor intrusion</td>
<td>Heather Powell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cryptosporidium in Recreational Waters</td>
<td>Tonya Selvera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Epidemiology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuberculosis</td>
<td>Lindsay Dickey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### General MPH

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Needs Assessment</td>
<td>Stephanie Catellanos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Health Promotion & Behavioral Sciences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WIC Outreach</td>
<td>Nikki Bourdreaux</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American Health Initiative</td>
<td>Peteria Chan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Management, Policy & Community Health

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management, Policy &amp; Community Health (not pictured)</td>
<td>Pader Moua</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Policy</td>
<td>Michelle Seebachen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management, Policy &amp; Community Health (not pictured)</td>
<td>Kun-Ying Helena Sung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Healthy Homes and Standardization of Eligibility Criteria for Housing

Safe and Healthy Homes Program, and Standardization of the Eligibility Criteria across various programs of the Housing and Urban Development to enable cost saving

By: Chidinma Moito

I worked at the Houston Health Department, in the Bureau of Environmental and Children’s Health. During this period, I was involved in research, the aim of which was to explore the various federal housing programs and determine their similarities; standardizing them across board and so save the government the cost of having to perform repeated inspections for a particular beneficiary.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience covered at least 3 essential Public Health Services. We monitored homes in the community and identified problems. The Healthy Homes Initiative helped us diagnose and investigate hazards in homes, especially lead poisoning from lead-based painting. Also, by planning health fairs, our aim was to inform and educate people about possible hazards in their homes.

I was also involved in the Healthy Homes Initiative, and participated in a 2-day intensive Training program for Practitioners. The Healthy Homes Training featured interactive sessions about means of keeping homes healthy: Dry, Clean, Safe, Ventilated, Maintained, Contaminant-Free, and Pest-Free. I was scheduled to accompany inspectors on field visits to perform home hazard assessments and Lead based paint testing in pre 1978 homes.

My host organization contributes to public health by ensuring, through collaboration with the Housing and Urban Development and the Healthy Homes Initiative, that homes are healthy. My host organization also carries out targeted lead poisoning reduction in children.

My research was targeted at maximizing housing benefits for both low-income groups, as well as helping the government save costs. I also participated in the Healthy Homes Initiative as stated above.


Lessons Learned

- This practicum experience has taught me that Public Health is about collaboration with people. It is about forming partnerships with people from different facets of life to achieve a common goal of health for all.

http://www.greenandhealthyhomes.org/content/GHHI-project/

http://www.sell.com/29KGK4
Residents of Grand Prairie were tested for levels of trichloroethylene (TCE) in their blood in order to determine whether residents living above TCE groundwater plumes had higher levels than residents who did not live above a groundwater plume. The results of the investigation showed that residents of one neighborhood had higher than normal levels of TCE in their blood; however, none of the residents had TCE levels that would be expected to be harmful to their health. The purpose of my project was to determine if any lifestyle or demographic factors affected the relationship between TCE vapor intrusion and blood TCE levels.

**Public Health Significance**

The vapor intrusion portion of my practicum was most closely related to the *Diagnosis and investigation of health problems and health hazards in the community.*

TXDSHS investigated a health hazard (TCE vapor intrusion) and its possible effects on the health of citizens of Grand Prairie.

TXDSHS is a very large state health entity, so they are responsible for all aspects of essential public health services.
Cryptosporidium in Recreational Waters

Filling in the Informational Gaps for Health Inspectors and Pool Operators

By: Tonya Selvera

The State of Texas has added an amendment to the Health and Safety Code called Public Interactive Water Features and Fountains (spray parks) which requires a secondary disinfection system for the control of Cryptosporidium (Crypto). However, many commercial pools still use sand filters which do not adequately protect against Crypto.

My project was to create a brochure to educate health inspectors and pool operators about the new law and also about the latest filtration technologies in Crypto removal.

Studies show that diatomaceous earth filters, which have smaller grains than sand, are better at Crypto removal.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience related to the Essential Services of Public Health in the following ways: Through investigation, we found that there is a potential for further outbreaks in public pools. The health inspectors were unaware of this potential problem, and so we informed them by means of a brochure. They can then pass this information on to pool operators. Also, we researched solutions to this problem. Not only did we find that different filters are better at protection, but we found products that pool operators can use with their existing filters.

The City of Frisco Health Department monitors the health of their population through surveillance, they inform and educate the community when out on inspections, or by giving presentations on food safety or other issues, and they develop polices, and enforce them.
Applying new technologies to track an ancient killer

By: Lindsay Dickey

This summer, I worked with the Tuberculosis services branch of the Infectious Disease department at the TX DSHS. I worked with two different areas, one was the genotype program, which utilizes laboratory-determined genotype information from each case of TB to identify chains of recent transmission. In this area, I helped consolidate demographic, genotype, and contact investigation information for cases of known clusters.

Another area I worked in was TB in correctional facilities. I updated facilities information and wrote training presentations for training correctional staff about TB.

Texas has the second highest incidence of TB in the US, behind California, in part due to high proportion of foreign-born residents, and binational and its large correctional facility population.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience really touched on several of the tenets of public health, including monitoring cases of tuberculosis in the state, and investigating the case links to known clusters and known cases. When more than an expected number of new cases were diagnosed in a particular region or facility, we worked with the local site to develop better TB prevention policies, or enforce existing Texas safety codes.

The TX state TB services department uses surveillance data from the surveillance team and analyzes it, and connects with the local and regional health departments to strengthen preventative measures, or to investigate ongoing clusters. This department also communicates extensively with the CDC, especially since Texas has such a large number of TB cases, and CDC experts help investigate large outbreaks.
Understanding the Needs of the Transgender Community in the Rio Grande Valley

Valley AIDS Council is a private, non-profit organization with support services and primary outpatient care for children, women, & men living with HIV/AIDS in South Texas with three main offices located in the RGV in McAllen, Harlingen, and Brownsville.

“At VAC I was allowed the opportunity to go on outreach visits throughout the region to provide information on HIV prevention as well as the importance of getting tested. It was eye opening to see how receptive some persons were more than others…something I had not seen as much while working at the college campus community level.”

Summers 2012  Stephanie Castellanos  Valley AIDS Council

Planning for the Future

By: Stephanie Castellanos

The purpose of this project was to create a tool that would be able to assess the current needs of the local transgender community. Part of the difficulty initially included to identify what other community tools had been created and used efficiently before and how to adapt it locally. Residing here on the US/Mexico border would raise certain development issues such as possible language barriers. It was definitely a learning experience to translate the content and have to research certain terminology that was contextually appropriate.

As part of the needs assessment, questions included obtained basic demographic information, knowledge of HIV, & sexual behaviors. Information on experience of discrimination, violence, and access to social services was also sought. Currently, the tool is being used across the region. As part of the proposal, with the valuable information collected & preliminary findings, VAC will work on seeking additional funding to provide unique and better services for the transgender population.

Public Health Significance

VAC is one, if not the only, main non-profit organization that provides HIV/AIDS outreach and treatment services in South Texas. With a population of over 1 million in the area and the majority of the population is Hispanic, VAC works on visibility with not just community members but also health care professionals. This year, VAC will host its 25th Annual HIV/AIDS Summit at South Padre Island featuring a variety of guest speakers on current HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention.

Map of RGV: http://www.getencore.org/images/valley_map.jpg
Transgender Pride Flag: http://www.capitolpride.org/images/symbol_transgender_pride_flag.png
VAC Logo: http://www.vacinc.org
Outreach in Public Health

Increasing Outreach Activities in the Denton County Women, Infants and Children Program

By: Nikki M. Boudreaux

The Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program is a federally funded supplemental nutrition program that provides healthy foods, nutrition counseling, breastfeeding support and health care referrals to income pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women and children up to 5 years of age.

Over the past year enrollment in the Denton County WIC program has steadily decreased. Based on my outreach experiences in the program, professional advice from the WIC staff and literature review, I developed an outreach policy for the Denton County WIC program based on the principles of social marketing.

Public Health Significance

The Denton County WIC program offers an invaluable service to low-income women and children. Outreach fills the gap between an available service and utilization of that service. In order to increase program enrollment there must be an increase in public knowledge and understanding of the WIC program. Outreach aligns with the essential public health service of linking people to needed health care services.

Working in the community to develop positive attitudes towards the program and to change the perception of WIC being a welfare program is essential to program success. Given its limited resources and forthcoming funding cuts, the Denton County WIC program will face challenges in increasing outreach activities. However, with a solid policy and evidence-based strategies in place efficient and effective outreach is possible.
Asian American Health in Austin-Travis County

By: Peteria Chan

For my practicum, I conducted secondary research and analysis on the Asian American population for the Austin-Travis County Health and Human Services Department (ATCHHSD). Additionally, I participated and volunteered at other ATCHHSD events and projects related to health disparities.

My work will contribute to the Asian American Health Initiative for Austin-Travis County, championed by the former Assistant Director of ATCHHSD.

I created a written report to inform ATCHHSD about the demographics, geography, and health issues concerning Asian Americans in the county. Ultimately, my findings and recommendations will assist the department in developing programs to address health burdens faced by Asian Americans.

Public Health Significance

My practicum experience is most directly related to the Essential Public Health Service of improving health disparities and health inequities. As stated in the Healthy People 2020 objectives, tackling health disparities among racial/ethnic groups is deftly needed in order to ensure equal health access, quality, and positive outcomes for all.

In addition, the Public Health Essential Service most closely related to my practicum is assessment. My work involved investigative research and analysis of data for a certain population in our community. Only by assessing the needs and health issues for the Asian population can we begin to prioritize, select and implement potential programs to address these concerns. The ATCHHSD has much power and vested interest to influence and create municipal policies and programs to address health disparities in our community.

Special events/ duties during my practicum

- Collaborated with other researchers and community stakeholders with interests in Asian American health
- Volunteered with the mobile outreach van for the African American Quality of Life initiative (AAQOL)

Advice for Future Students

- Pay attention in Epidemiology Class! I applied much of what I learned in that class in my research and analysis. GIS skills would also have been very helpful to my practicum.

Asian refugees, particularly from Burma and Bhutan, make up about 1/3 of the total clients served in Travis County. Burmese refugees, like the children pictured above, are at high risk for suicide.
Public Health Policy in Legislation

Through my public health practicum, I was able to experience and learn about several facets of the city and state governments’ involvement in health.

I was fortunate enough to work on a range of issues including child trafficking in Houston, men’s health awareness, and Medicaid expansion. For each of these topics, I researched and synthesized a broad range of materials into concise memos to be used as briefs. This is a crucial step in the development of health policy - it’s where policy advisors piece together the past, present, and future of important health topics.

My final product was a comprehensive look at Medicaid expansion. This subject will be one of the leading topics in the 2013 legislative session. Texas is currently opposed to program expansion, but there is potential for high impact minor policy changes.

Policy Work: The initial step towards change

By: Michelle Seebachan

Public Health Significance

As it relates to the 10 Essential Public Health Services, my practicum allowed me to work on mobilizing community partnerships to identify and solve health problems. This was achieved through partnerships with local organizations like Texans Together, Children at Risk, and Hip Hop for HIV.

My practicum also allowed me to contribute to developing policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts. Many of the partner organizations with which Senator Ellis works, bring to light pressing community issues. Through dialogues with constituents and the organizations, the staff policy advisors are able to propose policies that will solve problems at a local level.

The local needs are taken into consideration when formulating state policy, too. Medicaid expansion, which I worked on for my final project, is a top down policy initiative. Because it is a state program, the final rulings at the state level will affect what can be done at the local level.

Special Practicum Duties & Events:

- Prepare policy memos regarding trending topics to be disseminated amongst public officials
- Connect & communicate with important community partner organizations
- Become deputized for voter registration
- Assist in voter registration at the annual Hip Hop for HIV Awareness campaign

“Be prepared to take initiative and to step outside of your comfort zone - this will maximize your learning experience on the site.”

Encouraging community involvement at the Hip Hop for HIV Awareness campaign!

Photo: Courtesy of Michelle Seebachan
For more information regarding the Governmental Public Health Practice Award, visit:  
https://sph.uth.edu/research/centers/tphtc/

or send an email to:  
tphtc@uth.tmc.edu

For information regarding additional practicum opportunities, visit  
The University of Texas School of Public Health, Office of Public Health Practice:  
https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/