



Evaluation of Practice Experience *Fall 2005—Summer 2006*



THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT HOUSTON
A part of The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston

TABLE OF CONTENT

Section	Page
I. Executive Summary	i
II. Introduction	1
III. Student Response	
■ Primary Campus Location	2
■ Division	2
■ Type of Organization	3
■ Final Product	4
■ Weekly Time Commitment	4
■ Source for Locating Practicum	4
■ Effectiveness of Learning Experience	5
■ Student Satisfaction with Practicum	5
■ Recommendation of Site	5
■ Student Contact with Preceptors	6
■ Preceptor Contact with Students	6
■ Community Preceptor Attributes	7
■ Student Satisfaction with Community Preceptors	7
■ Faculty Sponsors Attributes	7
■ Student Satisfaction with Faculty Sponsors	8
■ Student Comments	8
IV. Community Preceptor Response	
■ Perceptions of the Learning Experience	9
■ Student Performance	9
■ Community Preceptor Satisfaction with Students	10
■ Preceptor Comments	10
V. Conclusions	11
VI. Acknowledgements	11

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Public health is what we, as a society, do collectively to assure the conditions for people to be healthy (IOM, 1998).” To embrace the diverse and multidisciplinary facets of public health, schools of public health are partnering with public health practitioners in an effort to best train our future public health workforce.

This report demonstrates the benefits of public health practice from the perspectives of 145 University of Texas Health Science Center School of Public students (and community preceptors) who completed a practicum during AY 05-06. The data were gathered using Survey Monkey™ and analyzed with descriptive statistics. Surveys were sent via e-mail to students and community preceptors. The student form had thirty-six items addressing six components of the experience, demographics, practicum specifics, community site, community preceptor, and faculty sponsors. The community preceptor form had twenty items addressing demographics, type and quality of work provided by our students, and their willingness to accept students for practice experiences in the future. The average annual response rates for students and community preceptors were 82% and 76% respectively.

Five divisions of the School of Public Health were represented, with 50% representing two divisions: Management, Policy & Community Health Practice and Epidemiology. Regional campuses accounted for 21% of all respondents.

Ninety-two percent of students who completed a practicum reported that their practice experience was effective, with 43% indicating their practice experience as very effective. Community preceptors were highly valued by students for: their experience in the field of public health; flexibility; and, willingness to offer constructive feedback. Community preceptors reported that the work competed

by our students was of high quality, with 95% rating student performance as good or very good.

With regards to time commitment, 77% of students counted their practicum experience for 3 credit hours or more. Eighty-three percent of all students spent more than 8 hours per week working on practice related activities, with almost half of these students spending more than 16 hours per week on practice related activities.

The majority of students believed that their practice experience was effective in allowing them to transfer skills that they had learned in the classroom into a “real world” setting. Both students and community preceptors reported that the practice experience offered students an opportunity to successfully achieve the following eight competencies: 1) develop skills to work in teams; 2) navigate the work environment to accomplish objectives; 3) practice problem-solving skills; 4) work with diverse groups and cultures; 5) understand the structure of the organization; 6) formulate an idea from conception to completion; 7) develop an understanding of public health practice; and, 8) develop leadership skills . The highest ranked were: working in teams; navigating the work environment to accomplish objectives; and, practicing problem solving skills.

Of the 145 students who completed practicum in AY 05-06, 91% reported that they would recommend their community site to other students; 95% reported that they would recommend their community preceptor for another practice experience; and, 97% indicated that their practice experience prepared them for the job market.

Office of Public Health Practice

INTRODUCTION

A practicum is a planned, supervised, and evaluated “hands-on” experience that allows students to use the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom. The practicum is directly related to the academic goals and professional interests of the students. The practicum is population based and addresses a need identified by the host organization. The practicum is an essential part of the curriculum and is a requirement of the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), the accrediting body of Schools of Public Health.

During the 2005-2006 academic year, 145 MPH students enrolled in practicum. Students and community preceptors completed evaluations at the end of the semester. About two weeks before the end of the semester, Survey Monkey™ formatted evaluation forms were sent to students and community preceptors via email. The student form had thirty-six items addressing five components of their experience: demographics, practicum objectives, community site, community preceptor, and faculty sponsor. The twenty-three item community preceptor form included information about the site and student performance.

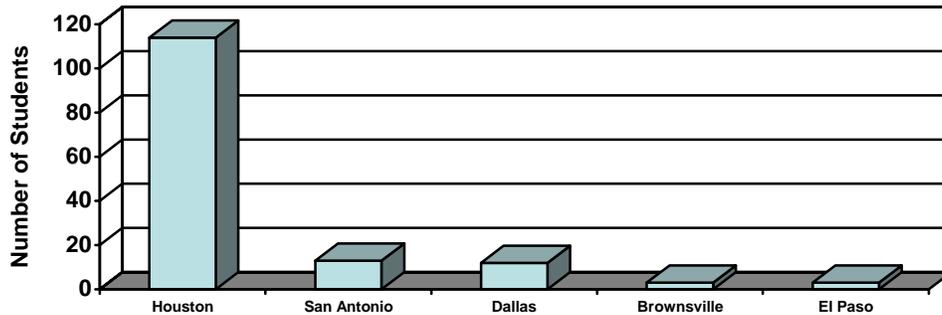
In an effort to increase response rates, students and preceptors were contacted three times after the electronic evaluations were distributed. The average annual response rates for students and community preceptors were 82% and 76% respectively. Student response rates per semester were: Fall – 76%; Spring – 88%; and, Summer 2006 – 83%. Community preceptor response rates per semester were as follows: Fall 2005 – 72%; Spring 2006 – 71%; and, Summer 2005 – 86%.

We used Microsoft Access to complete the data analysis. Some respondents did not answer a few questions. Records were not removed because of a missing response for one or two items.

This report summarizes the experiences of students and community preceptors for the AY 2005-2006 at the School of Public Health.

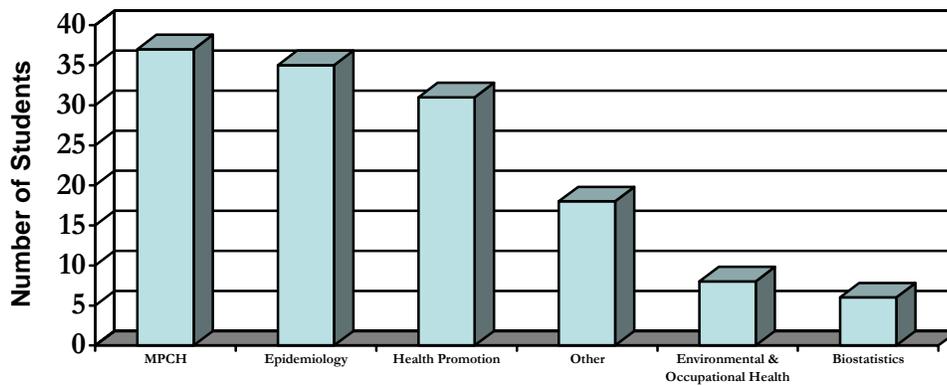
STUDENT RESPONSES

Primary Campus Location



- 21% were from regional campuses

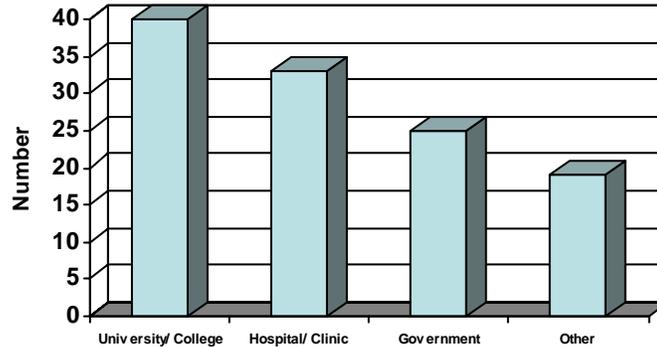
Division



- 26% Management and Policy/ Community Health Practice
- 24% Epidemiology
- 21% Health Promotion
- 18% Other
- 6% Environmental and Occupational Health
- 4% Biostatistics

The “*Other*” category included Tulane students and International/ Family Health students

Type of Organization



- Universities and Hospitals/ Clinics accounted for 73% of student placements
- Governmental agencies accounted for 25% of student placements
- The main organizations in the “Other” category were: Business/Cooperate, HMOs, Foundations, and International Health Agencies.

Sample Practicum Topics

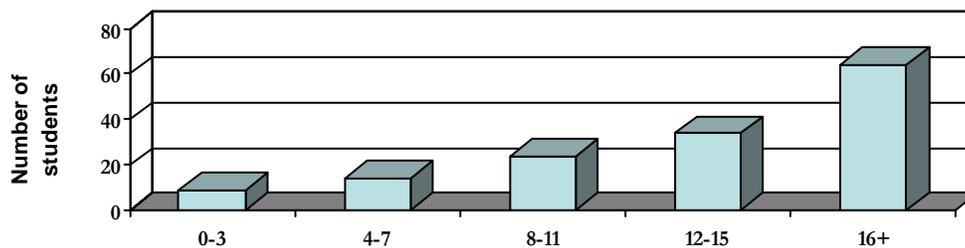
- Hospital Infection Control
- Bioethics & Health Policy
- Syndromic Surveillance
- Health Literacy
- Latin American Sanitation Infrastructure
- Environmental Health & Safety at a Local Collaborative
- Genetic Epidemiology of Familial Childhood Cancers Syndrome
- Cultural Competence Curriculum Evaluation
- Bioterrorism/ Natural Disaster Preparedness
- VA Regional Council
- Childhood Obesity Community Outreach
- Urban Planning and Public Health
- Trauma in Pregnancy
- Mental Health and the Justice System
- Rural Public Health Emergency Planning
- Ethics and Human Subjects
- Hispanic Social Security and Medical Access
- Human Performance Enhancement
- Pain Inference
- Diabetes Collaborative
- Infection Control and Hospital Epidemiology
- Pediatric Advanced Life Support Guidelines
- Physical Activity and Nutrition in Children
- Air Quality in the Rio Grande Valley
- Community Based Obesity Prevention

Final Product

Report	56%
Presentation	18%
Thesis	14%
Journal Articles	12%
Training Manual	6%
Promotional Material	3%
Other	16%

- Reports and presentations accounted for 74% of final products
- 94% of final reports were rated as average or above, with 48% rated as excellent

Weekly Time Commitment by Student (Hours/Week)



- Two-thirds of all students spent more than 12 hours per week completing practicum-related activities
- 77% counted their practicum experience for 3 or more credit hours

Source for Locating Practicum

Faculty	32%
Friend/Colleague/Student	23%
Self-developed	14%
Current employment	13%
Email	12%
OPHP Practicum website	8%
Other	17%

- 55% of students located their practicum via the assistance of faculty, friends, colleagues, or students

- Approximately 20% of the students located their practicum through the Office of Public Health Practice

Effectiveness of Learning Experience

As indicated in the table below, students reported that their practicum provided an effective learning experience across eight competencies

Question	Rating on a scale of 5.00 Average
Developing skills to work as a team member	4.64
Navigating work environment to accomplish objectives	4.53
Developing problem-solving skills	4.49
Working with diverse groups and cultures	4.43
Understanding the structure of the community organization	4.38
Formulating an idea from conception to completion	4.38
Developing an understanding of public health practice	4.37
Developing leadership skills	4.32

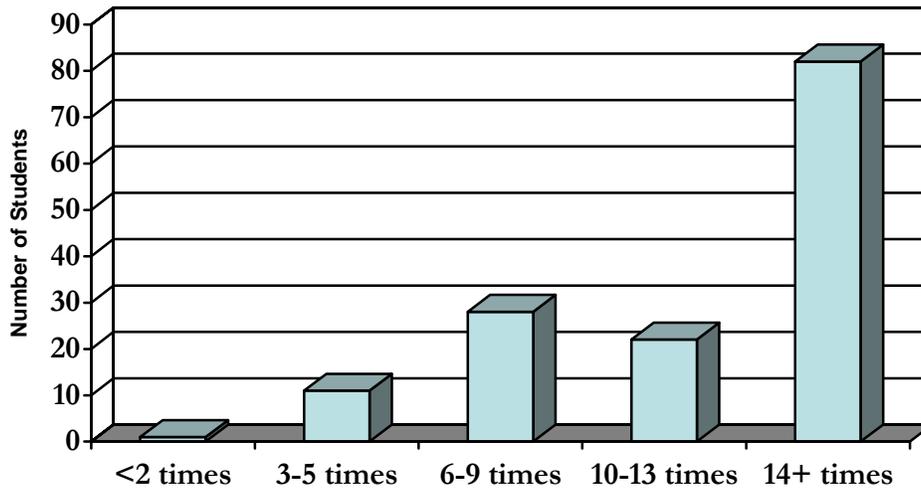
Student Satisfaction with Practicum

- 92% of students reported that the practicum experience was effective, with 43% indicating that the practicum experience was very effective
- 97% of the students reported that their practicum prepared them for job opportunities

Recommendation of Site

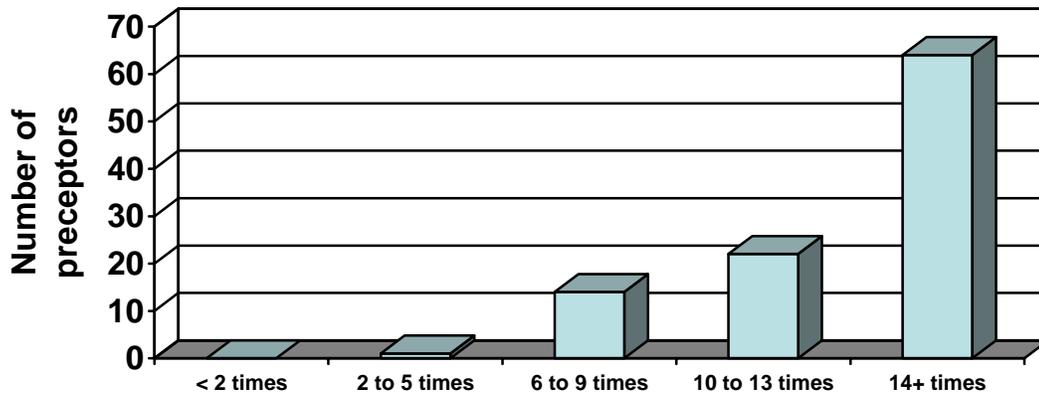
- 91% of students reported that they would recommend their community site. Other students reported that they would recommend their practice site with reservations because of the need for specialized skill sets

Student Contact with Preceptors during Practice Experience



- 72% of students met with their community preceptors 10 times or more
- Face-to-face communication was the most common form of contact
- 93% of community preceptors reported that the weekly time commitment was appropriate

Preceptor Contact with Students during Practice Experience



- 86% of community preceptors indicated that they had contact with the student at least 10 times during the practice experience

Community Preceptor Attributes

As indicated in the table below, the community preceptors were highly valued by students for their experience, commitment, and mentoring skills

Question	Rating on a Scale of 5.00 Average
Experienced in his/her field of work	4.86
Flexible and open to making changes to suit my needs as a student	4.76
Willing to offer suggestions and directions when needed	4.73
Available to answer questions and provide support	4.72
Helpful in accomplishing project milestones	4.64
Available to provide useful feedback concerning my work	4.61

Student Satisfaction with Community Preceptors

- All community preceptors were rated as average or above average with 79% rated as very good
- 95% percent of students reported that they would recommended the community preceptors for another practice experience, with 44% reporting that they would highly recommend their community preceptors

Faculty Sponsor Attributes

As indicated in the table below, students gave their faculty sponsors high ratings related to their availability and feedback throughout the practice experience

Question	Rating on a Scale of 5.00 Average
Flexible to suit my needs as a student	4.63
Willing to offer suggestions when needed	4.60
Available to provide useful feedback concerning my work	4.46
Helpful in accomplishing project milestones	4.45

Student Satisfaction with Faculty Sponsors

- 95% of students reported that they would recommend their faculty sponsor, with 59% indicating that they would highly recommend

Student Comments

- Excellent experience – I gained extensive background in rural public health as well as emergency management
- Preceptor was very helpful as a mentor despite being located at a different geographical campus
- Helped me learn data coding and analysis, and I'm applying it to my academic courses as well
- I learned to work in a multicultural environment
- I have learned a lot about data manipulation and handling, research and publishing
- Doing the practicum in this research unit brings me a good experience of conducting the community research with the hard to reach groups. Therefore, it helps me to build up a problem solving skill, anticipate possible solutions for potential problems in order to run the research smoothly and effectively.
- Extremely valuable experience. I learned an incredible amount of information about the uninsured and the cost of emergency care. I also got to attend and was encouraged to participate in many meetings with people who are active in changing the laws in this area.
- Wonderful, educational experience!! It was great to utilize all of the concepts learned in class into the real world.
- An enjoyable and challenging learning experience. I felt well supported when I encountered problems. I was given ample feedback and time to respond to constructive criticism.
- It was an outstanding experience in which I gained an extensive background not only in rural public health but emergency management as well. The contacts I made while pursuing my internship are well respected in their fields and offered multiple opportunities for me to participate in emergency planning exercises. I could not have chosen a better internship.
- I appreciated my community preceptor very much. She provided me with feedback that made the practicum experience worthwhile and allowed me the opportunity to work independently on the research.
- My preceptor was extremely patient, very generous with her time, and very effective as a teacher.
- I was offered a wide range of experiences and the preceptor was very willing to answer questions and offer advice.

COMMUNITY PRECEPTOR RESPONSES

Perceived Effectiveness of the Learning Experience

As indicated in the table below, community preceptors reported that their placement provided an effective learning experience for students across eight competences

Question	Rating on a Scale of 5.00 Average
Develop an understanding of public health practice	4.23
Formulate an idea from concept to completion of project	4.38
Understand the organizational structure	4.06
Develop skills to work as a team	4.50
Work with diverse groups and cultures	4.34
Problem solving skills	4.43
Develop leadership skills	4.05
Navigate the work environment	4.45

Student Performance

As indicated below, community preceptors were very pleased with the students' abilities to fulfill the duties of the practicum

Question	Rating on a Scale of 5.00 Average
Ability to perform assigned task	4.65
Motivation, maturity, and initiative	4.63
Ability and willingness to work with others	4.66
Proficiency in using appropriate methods and techniques	4.57

Community Preceptors Satisfaction with Students

- All community preceptors were satisfied with the performance of the students, with 95% rating student performance as good or very good
- 97% percent of community preceptors indicated that they were willing to accept students for practice experience in the future. The 3% that indicated that they would not accept additional students reported that the tasks required specialized skills and/ or security clearances

Community Preceptor Comments

- Our organization benefits from the skills of MPH students
- I think the opportunity to tailor it to the needs of the student and community sponsor made it an excellent experience
- Excellent program. Look forward to the next interaction
- Excellent students from your program
- I really enjoy these students. They really help out and always offer unique ideas that make the projects better
- We always appreciate these students as they are top tier and contribute fully to the policy products and processes created by this office
- Excellent experience with UT School. I have worked with many students already and have been highly impressed with their commitment
- Enjoyed the experience of working with such an enthusiastic young man
- I enjoyed this learning arrangement. The student's perspective helped me in thinking about our own research from a different point of view. Since this is the first time that our organization worked with students, I am confident the next would be more fruitful
- This was a productive experience for our organization. The student gained insight into our overall work, and specifically into teen parent challenges and the challenges of funding services for them; we gained a motivated, educated individual's focus on a project we didn't have time to do
- We enjoy the energy they bring to our office
- We have had a number of students work for us as interns and/ or part time temporary employees. All have contributed to our efforts and have been very worthwhile
- Is it my opinion that the students enrich our program and also is a good system for blending theoretical academic experience with field/ community experience
- Overall, I was extremely impressed with our intern and would gladly accept future students with his level skill and abilities
- Excellent experience! Your student was certainly one of the best interns that we have had in over 15 years
- Our intern has a wonderful personality for teamwork

CONCLUSIONS

This evaluation demonstrates the win-win nature of applying classroom learning to the “real world.” Students overwhelmingly reported that the practice experience helped them develop problem solving skills and become more familiar with public health practice. Community preceptors were highly impressed with the students’ skills, motivation, maturity, and initiative. Overall, 97% of the community preceptors reported that they would be willing to accept students for future practice experiences; and 97% of the students believed their practice experience was complimentary in preparing them for the job market.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the University of Texas School of Public Health, the Office of Public Health Practice extends our warmest gratitude to the organizations and community preceptors who graciously allowed our students to gain practice experience at their places of business. Without your continued support and feedback, we would not be able to offer this invaluable experience to our students.

Approved by Practice Council January 11, 2007