



Evaluation of Practice Experience *AY 2007-2008*



THE UNIVERSITY of TEXAS
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT HOUSTON
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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 perspective of University of Texas Health Science Center School of Public Health students and community preceptors who completed a practicum during Academic Year 2007 – 2008 (AY07-08). The data were gathered using SurveyMonkey™ and analyzed with descriptive statistics. Questionnaires 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. Two hundred and eight students completed a practicum during the 2007-2008 Academic Year response rates for students and community preceptors were 96% and 88%, respectively. Regional campuses accounted for 23% of all respondents.

Ninety-six percent of students reported that their practice experience was effective, with 69% indicating their practice experience as very effective. Community preceptors were highly valued by students for their: ability to answer questions and provide support; flexibility; and, willingness to offer constructive feedback. Community preceptors reported that the work completed by our students was of high quality, with 98% rating student performance as good or very good.

With regards to time commitment, 79% of students counted their practicum experience for 3 credit hours or more. Ninety-three percent of all students spent more than 8 hours per week working on practice related activities, with 77% of these students spending more than 12 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 public health organizations; 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; formulating an idea from conception to completion; and practicing problem-solving skills.

Of the 208 students who completed practicum in AY 2007 – 2008, 99% reported that they would recommend their community site to other students and 93% 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 2007-2008 academic year, 208 MPH students enrolled in a practicum. Students and community preceptors completed evaluations at the end of the semester. About two weeks before the end of the semester, SurveyMonkey™ 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.

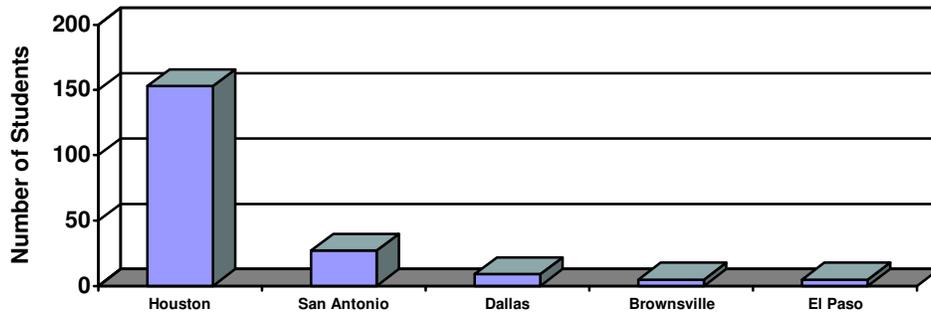
In an effort to increase response rates, students and preceptors were contacted three times after the electronic evaluations were distributed. The response rates for students and community preceptors were 96% and 88% respectively.

We used SPSS 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 AY 2007-2008.

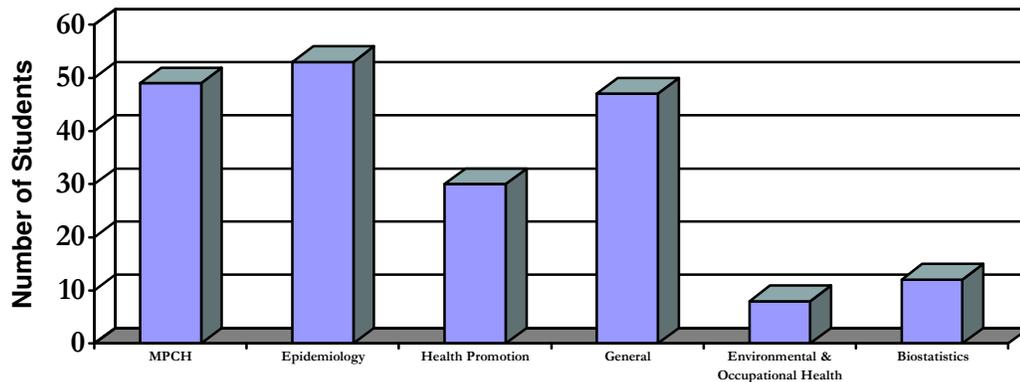
STUDENT RESPONSES

Primary Campus Location



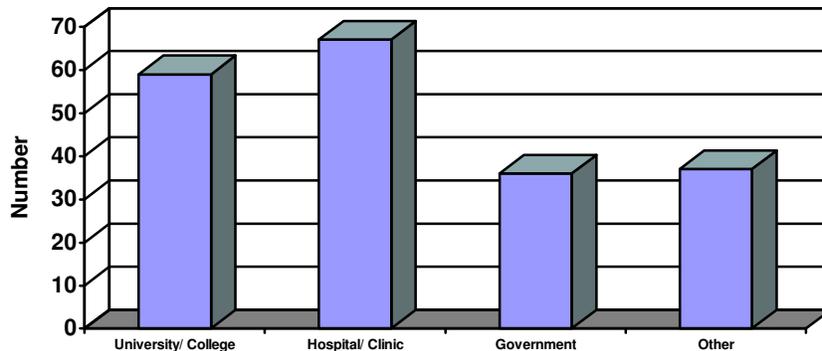
- 23% were from regional campuses

Division



- 25% Management, Policy, and Community Health
- 27% Epidemiology and Disease Control
- 15% Health Promotion and Behavioral Sciences
- 23% General
- 4% Environmental and Occupational Health
- 6% Biostatistics

Type of Organization



- Universities and Hospitals/Clinics accounted for 63% of student placements
- Governmental agencies accounted for 18% of student placements
- The main organizations in the “*Other*” category includes: Business/Corporate, HMO, Foundation, and International agencies. Nine percent of students represented in “*Other*” completed their practicum experience at a Community Service Organization

Sample Practicum Topics

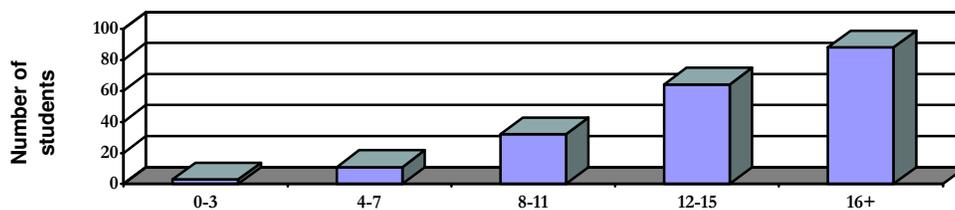
- Cancer Prevention
- Employee Health
- Lung Cancer
- Reducing Tobacco Use
- Biosecurity and the Law
- Childhood Cancer Care In Africa
- Childhood Obesity
- Food-borne Disease Surveillance
- Premature Birth
- Subtle Prejudice
- Uninsured Americans
- Barriers For Caring Seriously Ill Children
- Burmese Refugees
- Disinfection of Drinking Water
- HIV/AIDS and Homosexual Men
- Infection Control
- Managing Disaster Victims
- Influenza Surveillance
- Veteran’s Health Care

Final Product

Report	59%
Presentation	11%
Thesis	8%
Journal Articles	7%
Training Manual	5%
Promotional Material	1%
Other	9%

- Reports and presentations accounted for 70% of final products
- 82% of final reports were rated as average or above, with 50% rated as excellent

Weekly Time Commitment by Student (Hours/Week)



- 77% of all students spent more than 12 hours per week completing practicum-related activities
- 79% counted their practicum experience for 3 or more credit hours
- 95% of all students reported that the weekly time commitment was appropriate

Source for Locating Practicum

Faculty	32%
Self-developed	21%
Current employment	16%
Friend/Colleague/Student	13%
OPHP Practicum website or emails	13%
Other	5%

- 45% of students located their practicum via the assistance of faculty, friends, colleagues, or students

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	4.53
Navigating work environment to accomplish objectives	4.47
Developing problem-solving skills	4.44
Working with diverse groups and cultures	4.44
Understand the health goals of the community and organization	4.46
Formulating an idea from conception to completion	4.43
Developing an understanding of public health practice	4.44
Developing leadership skills	4.23

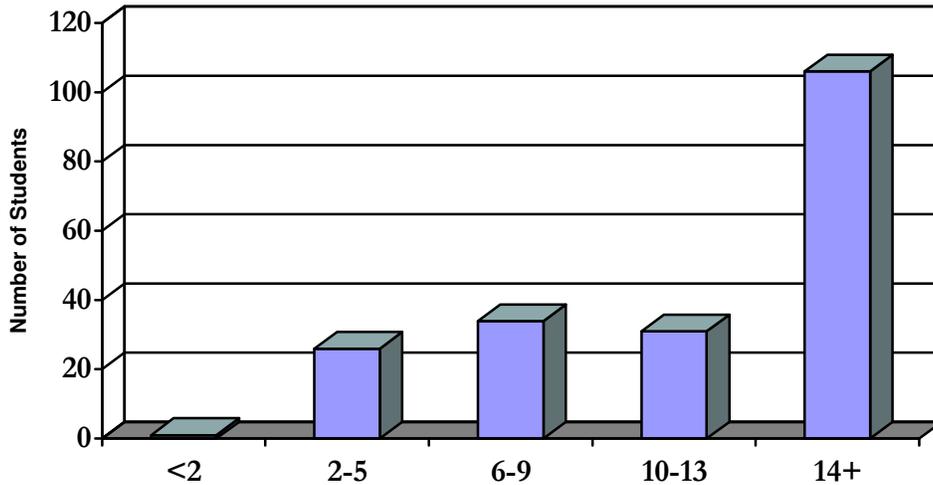
Student Satisfaction with Practicum

- 96% of students reported that the practicum experience was effective, with 69% indicating that the practicum experience was very effective
- 93% of the students reported that their practicum prepared them for job opportunities

Recommendation of Site

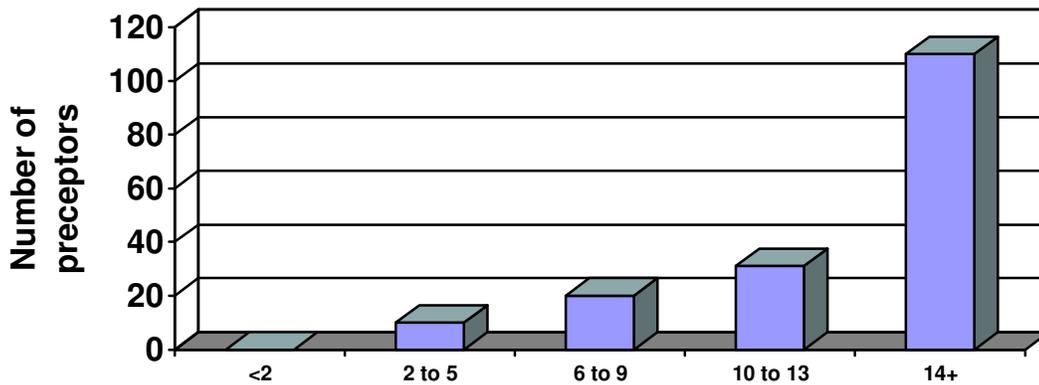
- 99% of students reported that they would recommend their community site. Eleven percent of students reported that they would recommend their practice site with reservations because of the need for specialized skill sets

Student Contact with Preceptors during Practice Experience



- 69% of students met with their community preceptors 10 times or more
- Face-to-face communication was the most common form of contact
- 96% of students reported that the weekly time commitment was appropriate

Preceptor Contact with Students during Practice Experience



- 83% 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	4.77
Flexible and open to making changes to suit my needs as a student	4.69
Willing to offer suggestions and directions when needed	4.65
Available to answer questions and provide support	4.67
Helpful in accomplishing project milestones	4.57
Available to provide useful feedback concerning my work	4.59

Student Satisfaction with Community Preceptors

- 99% of community preceptors were rated as average or above average with 77% rated as very good
- 99% of students reported that they would recommend the community preceptor for another practice experience, with 53% reporting that they would highly recommend their community preceptor

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	4.52
Willing to offer suggestions when needed	4.51
Available to provide useful feedback concerning my work	4.44
Helpful in accomplishing project milestones	4.34

Student Satisfaction with Faculty Sponsors

- 99% of students reported that they would recommend their faculty sponsor, with 51% indicating that they would highly recommend

Student Comments

- My practicum site offered a wonderful learning environment and offers many opportunities for a great practicum experience.
- The community is a good atmosphere to learn.
- My faculty sponsor and community preceptor were excellent mentors and I feel that any student would be benefited by completing a practicum under their instruction.
- The practicum experience provided a very relaxed learning atmosphere. The community preceptor was very understanding and flexible and this helped the learning process.
- I love the environment and people with whom I worked.
- The community site had a lot of different public health activities going on, and many of the departments are taking innovative approaches to addressing issues.
- Very educational and enjoyable experience.
- It was great spending time in an urban underserved community.
- It was an excellent site with many learning opportunities. I would highly recommend.
- My community preceptor was an amazing facilitator for my learning experience.
- My practicum site offered a wonderful learning environment and offers many opportunities for a great practicum experience.
- The community is a good atmosphere to learn.
- Always willing to provide insight and guidance.
- I had an excellent community preceptor and my faculty sponsor provided me with a good framework for the practicum.
- My community preceptor was very approachable and understanding about the problems faced by students.
- Excellent at understanding my goals.
- Very helpful and knowledgeable.
- A great inspiration and motivation throughout my practicum.
- She provided great feedback and advice.
- Very good learning experience.
- Always available for questions, guidance, and instruction.
- Great experience, fantastic opportunity and exposure!
- I have nothing but praise for (my preceptor). He understood how public health work and he is an alumnus of UTHSC SPH.

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 competencies

Question	Rating on a Scale of 5.00 Average
Develop an understanding of public health practice	4.48
Formulate an idea from concept to completion of project	4.57
Understand the organizational structure	4.41
Develop skills to work as a team	4.73
Work with diverse groups and cultures	4.60
Problem solving skills	4.67
Develop leadership skills	4.38
Navigate the work environment	4.69

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	4.73
Motivation, maturity, and initiative	4.74
Ability and willingness to work with others	4.83
Proficiency in using appropriate methods and techniques	4.70

Community Preceptors Satisfaction with Students

- All community preceptors were satisfied with the performance of the students, with 98% rating student performance as good or very good
- 97% 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

- The student was reliable, resourceful, professional, flexible, works well with others, determined.
- I was impressed by the student's commitment and willingness to learn.
- The student showed extreme resourcefulness in solving difficult laboratory safety issues related to public health preparedness.
- Your student was responsible, resourceful, dedicated, intelligent, enthusiastic, hard-working, and attentive to details.
- She listens carefully and is able to work independently to accomplish given assignments.
- Her research and writing skills are excellent.
- Quick learner, flexible, able to problem solve, excellent teacher.
- Intelligence and adaptability are excellent; Cooperative and sensitive to work & life balance.
- My student had the ability to look at a project and analytically work through the process from the initial concept to completion.
- Hard working, clear thinking, goal-oriented student.
- Produced high quality work in a short time, always beats deadlines, thinks ahead and asks questions without hesitation.
- Quick thinker and a practical problem solver.
- The student is always eager and willing to learn.
- She has really fit in with our team and the different communities we've been working with.
- Good written communication skills. Accepts and uses constructive feedback about his work.
- Excels in her ability to work within the context of a foreign culture. Her command of the Haitian Creole language and her ability to relate to study participants, especially regarding sensitive subject matter, is outstanding.
- Very hands on and asked a significant amount of good questions.
- Extremely conscientious and highly skilled. She was very easy to work with and took charge when given just basic instructions/directions. She is very much a "go getter."
- Proactive, great strength, ability to work well under pressure.
- High motivation and understanding of the nature and peculiarity of the task.

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 93% 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.