Introduction to Practicum

Office of Public Health Practice

Janelle Rios, MPH, PhD: Director
Holly Cieslikowski: Project Specialist
Laura Rademacher, MEd: Educational Programs Coordinator II

Contact: Practicum@uth.tmc.edu

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Welcome

This presentation is an introduction to the practicum program at the UTHealth School of Public Health.
By the end of this presentation, you should be able to

• Understand why practicum is required for the MPH and DrPH degrees
• Identify the basic steps for developing and completing a practicum
• Recognize factors that influence your practicum timeline
• Find resources to help you plan your practicum
What is a Practicum?

**Practicum** is an applied practice experience that is planned, supervised, and graded.

Practicum provides students an opportunity to work closely with public health professionals and apply their classroom education to real-world public health problems.
Practicum Requirements

All MPH and DrPH students must complete a practicum project and earn **3 academic credits** in the practicum course.

- MS and PhD students may also complete a practicum for academic credit.
- You earn **3 academic credit hours** for ~ 180 contact hours in practicum.
- If approved by your faculty mentor and practicum director, you may register for more than 3 practicum credit hours. However, these additional credit hours do not count toward your degree.
Why is a Practicum Required?

- Practicum provides a setting for our students to demonstrate public health competencies.
- Public health practitioners have expressed strong interest in our practicum program.
- Practicum experiences help our graduates find jobs in public health.
- The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), the accrediting body for schools of public health in the U.S., dictates that our MPH and DrPH students attain public health competencies through applied practice experiences.
Why is a Practicum Required?

Practicum is a unique opportunity for you to

- Apply your classroom learning and acquired skills in a workplace setting
- Explore public health careers
- Define and refine your professional interests and goals
- Establish valuable contacts in the public health community
- Make a meaningful contribution to public health
- Be evaluated by public health practitioners
- Produce a final product that will increase your job prospects
Practicum consists of three stages...

- Plan Your Practicum
- Develop Your Learning Contract
- Complete Your Practicum
Planning Your Practicum

Prior to beginning your practicum, you will select

• a **faculty mentor** to guide your practicum
• an **organization** to host your practicum
• a **preceptor** at the host organization
How to Find a Practicum

Below are a few ways you can find a practicum opportunity, host site, or preceptor.

• Review the list of opportunities available at “Find a Practicum” on the practicum website: https://inside.uth.edu/sph/practica/.

• Ask your faculty advisor or another faculty member for recommendations.

• Attend lectures by visiting guests and take advantage of other networking opportunities.

• Talk with your student peers, many of whom work or volunteer in the field of public health.

• Contact an organization that interests you and develop a practicum on your own.
With the assistance of your faculty mentor and preceptor, you will develop a practicum project. In this project you will

1. Address a public health need, problem, or question
2. Define at least 3-5 learning objectives
3. Complete at least 1 final product*

*As of fall 2018, practicum projects must include at least 2 final products.
Ideas for a Practicum Project

Some ideas for a practicum project include

- Conduct a disease surveillance
- Design public health training materials or curriculum
- Design or implement a quality improvement project
- Design or conduct a survey on a public health topic
- Evaluate infection control measures
- Investigate shortfalls in a public health policy and recommend improvements
- Launch a public health advocacy campaign
Learning Contract

Once you have selected a practicum project and site, you are ready to develop your learning contract.

In your learning contract, you will

- List learning objectives
- Identify your faculty mentor and preceptor
- Describe final product(s)
- Identify the number of hours* you plan to spend in this practicum experience

*1 hour of academic credit = ~60 hours in practicum
Your learning contract requires approval by

- Your faculty mentor
- Your preceptor
- Office of Public Health Practice director

Once your learning contract is approved, you will receive a registration code for the practicum course.
Completing Your Practicum

Most students complete their practicums within a single semester.

At the end of your practicum, your faculty mentor will assign a pass or fail grade based on

- Achievement of your learning objectives
- Final product(s)
- Any additional work assigned by your faculty mentor such as a reflection paper
- Preceptor’s evaluation of your work
Practicum Timeline

Planning well in advance is important for developing a successful practicum.

You should begin planning at least one full semester prior to your practicum start date.

If you want to do an international practicum, you should start planning at least 12 months in advance.
Other Considerations

When considering the best time to start your practicum, please note that you will need to allow additional time for the approvals below.

- **International students**: Allow at least 2 weeks for Curricular Practice Training (CPT) approval.

- **International practicum**: Allow at least 6 months for approval of preceptor agreements and about 8 weeks for travel approval.

- **Host site prerequisites**: Some host organizations require a background check, orientation or training, or specific agreements for our university to review and approve.
Suggested Timeline

Semester 1
- Explore ideas

Semester 2
- Discuss ideas with faculty advisor
- Identify potential preceptors and faculty mentor
- Begin to plan a project

Semester 3
- International practicum: notify OPHP 6 months prior
- Develop and submit learning contract
- Register for practicum course

Semester 4
- Complete practicum
- Evaluate experience
- Update CV or resume

OPHP = Office of Public Health Practice = Practicum office
For additional information and resources, please explore the School of Public Health’s practicum website at https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/.

What is a practicum?
A practicum is a unique learning experience that is planned, supervised, evaluated, and graded. Practicum experiences allow students the opportunity to apply classroom education towards a real-world public health problem in a work setting. Each experience varies according to the student’s interests and preceptor’s needs and must be mutually beneficial for the student and the community preceptor. Each practicum culminates in the submission of at least one final product that is planned and approved by the community preceptor and the faculty mentor before the student begins the experience. Students have the option to undergo several practicum experiences.
Before starting your learning contract, please review the Practicum Orientation: [https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/orientation-training-materials/](https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/orientation-training-materials/).
Thank you for reviewing this presentation!

Please e-mail any questions about practicum to Practicum@uth.tmc.edu.

This practicum mailbox is checked each business day and is the quickest way to receive a reply to your question.