Introduction to Practicum

Office of Public Health Practice

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Learning Objectives

• Define practicum

• Identify the basic steps for developing and completing a practicum project

• Recognize factors that influence your practicum timeline

• Find resources to help you plan your practicum
Jingwei Fan
Baylor College of Medicine


Alison Winters
Safe Mothers, Safe Babies (SAFE)

Source: Stories from the Field. The University of Texas School of Public Health Student Practicum Experiences. Summer 2012 – Regional Campuses.
**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.
Who Must Complete a Practicum?

• All MPH and DrPH students must complete a practicum.

• MS and PhD students may also complete a practicum for academic credit.

• No waivers.
Academic Credit

• Both degrees require **3 academic credits** in practicum

• **3 academic credit hours** = minimum 180 contact hours in the practicum experience

• More than 3 academic credit hours in practicum **do not** count toward your degree.
Why Should YOU Do a Practicum?

10. Explore public health careers
9. Define/refine professional interests & goals
8. Acquire skills in a workplace setting
7. Be evaluated by public health practitioners
6. Apply your classroom learning
5. Because our accreditor (CEPH) requires it
Why Should YOU Do a Practicum?

1. Get a job!
2. Make a meaningful contribution to public health
3. Produce a product that will increase your job prospects
4. Establish valuable contacts in the public health community
5. To demonstrate competency attainment
Matthew Duncan
Indoor air quality in a midrise building
Robert C. Oth, MD, PhD
Decision-Analytic Modeling Project
Compared effectiveness of CT vs MRI for children undergoing cancer surveillance
Practicum Project Examples

- Conduct a disease surveillance
- Design public health training materials or curriculum
- Implement a quality improvement project
- Evaluate infection control measures
- Investigate shortfalls in a public health policy and recommend improvements
- Launch a public health advocacy campaign
Practicum Stages

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

• Attend lectures or other networking opportunities
• Review “Find a Practicum” on the practicum website
• Ask your faculty advisor or another faculty member
• Talk with your student peers
• Contact an organization that interests you
Practicum Timeline

- Plan *well* in advance.
- Plan at least one full semester prior to your practicum start date.
- For an international projects, plan about 8-12 months in advance.
Suggested Timeline

**Semester 1**
- Explore ideas
- Discuss ideas with faculty advisor
- Identify potential preceptors & faculty mentor

**Semester 2**
- Begin to plan project
- International projects: 8-12 months
- Develop & submit learning contract
- Register for practicum course

**Semester 3**
- Work on and complete project
- Evaluate experience
- Update CV or resume

**Semester 4 +**
- Maintain contact with preceptor

OPHP = Office of Public Health Practice = Practicum office
Other Considerations

- **International students**: At least 2 weeks for Curricular Practice Training approval.

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

- **International projects**: At least 6 months for approval of preceptor agreements and about 8 weeks for travel approval.
Linda Garcia
Investigated the etiology of an outbreak of unexplained kidney disease in sugarcane workers in Nicaragua
Key Elements

With the assistance of your faculty mentor and preceptor, you will

1. Select 5 public health competencies
2. Define at least 2-5 learning objectives
3. Complete at least 2 final products
Completing Your Practicum

Your faculty mentor will assign a pass or fail grade based on

- Learning objectives
- Final products
- Any additional work assigned by your faculty mentor
- Preceptor’s evaluation of your work
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.
Thank You!

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.