Practicum Orientation

Office of Public Health Practice

Janelle Rios, PhD, Director
Holly Cieslikowski, Project Specialist
Laura Rademacher, MEd, Counseling Specialist

Contact: Practicum@uth.tmc.edu

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Welcome

This presentation will provide you with an overview of practicum and its requirements.
Learning Objectives

By the end of this presentation, you should be able to

• Understand the purpose and goals of practicum
• Explore practicum ideas and opportunities
• Understand the roles of each member of your practicum team
• Learn the necessary steps to prepare for and complete your practicum
• Become familiar with the practicum learning contract
• Understand how your practicum is graded
What is a Practicum?

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

A requirement of our MPH and DrPH degree programs, practicum provides our students the opportunity to apply classroom education towards solving a real-world public health problem.
All MPH and DrPH students are required to complete a practicum.

- MS and PhD students may also complete a practicum for academic credit.
- Requires ~ 180 hours in the practicum experience for up to 3 academic credit hours.
- Additional academic credits for practicum may be considered as electives, if permitted by your degree planner for your program and your faculty advisor.
- Requires at least one final product approved by your preceptor and faculty mentor.
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 Do a Practicum?

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 Stages

Practicum consists of three stages...

1. Plan Your Practicum
2. Develop Your Learning Contract
3. Complete Your Practicum
Plan Your Practicum

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

You should begin this planning at least one full semester prior to starting your practicum.

If planning a practicum outside the U.S., you should begin planning at least 6 months prior to starting your practicum.
Plan Your Practicum

Input from your faculty advisor

Consider your career interests, goals, and timing.

Explore practicum ideas and opportunities.

Review practicum requirements, including additional requirements for certain programs and concentrations.

Identify your preceptor and faculty mentor.

Contact your preceptor and faculty mentor to help plan your practicum.
Ideas for a Practicum

There are many ways to find a practicum. A few options include

- 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.
Ideas for a Practicum

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
Where Can I Do My Practicum?

- Government agency
- Healthcare facility
- Non-profit organization
- Health research entity
- Research institute
- Private company
While preparing for your practicum, you will collaborate with a practicum team.

- Student
- Preceptor
- Faculty Mentor
As a graduate student, it is your responsibility to initiate the steps for your practicum. Developing the leadership skills to conceive of and follow a project through to completion is one of the goals of this experience.

Specifically, your responsibilities include

- Complete this online orientation.
- Identify a practicum site and project that is appropriate for your major division and concentration(s).
- Select a preceptor and faculty mentor.
Student’s Role on Practicum

• Seek additional approvals for practicum with special considerations (discussed in the next section).
• Develop and submit your learning contract.
• Register for the practicum course.
• Follow policies and procedures of the host organization.
• Complete the assigned practicum projects.
• Submit your final product(s).
• Complete a final evaluation.
What is a Preceptor?

**Preceptor:** a member of the organization hosting your practicum who agrees to supervise and mentor as you complete your practicum.

Ideally, your preceptor’s needs for service should closely align with your career interests and goals. Remember, one of the benefits of practicum is that it can provide you with meaningful work experience.
Preceptor’s Role on Practicum

- Assists you with developing a practicum and final product(s) that addresses both your interests and the needs of the host site.
- Helps you define learning objectives.
- Reviews and approves your online learning contract.
- Provides the necessary training and guidance for you to safely and successfully complete your practicum.
- Supervises your practicum.
- Completes an online evaluation of your performance at the end of the semester.
Faculty Mentor (aka, faculty sponsor): Your faculty advisor or another UTHealth School of Public Health faculty member with whom you have an academic relationship or whose interests or research relates to your project.

Typically, your faculty advisor serves as your practicum mentor, but you may select another UTHealth School of Public Health faculty member for this role.
Faculty Mentor’s Role on Practicum

- Assists you with identifying a practicum.
- Assists you with defining your learning objectives and developing a meaningful final product(s).
- Reviews and approves the final learning contract.
- Monitors the progress of your practicum.
- If necessary, intervenes if you encounter problems with your practicum host site.
- Makes additional practicum assignments, if needed, to evaluate your performance.
- Assesses your performance on the practicum and assigns a grade (pass, fail, or incomplete).
Special Considerations

In the next slides, we’ll discuss additional approvals that may be required for your practicum.

Departments or offices outside the Office of Public Health Practice (our practicum office) and your academic department may provide these additional approvals.

Therefore, when planning your practicum, it’s important to allow time for these offices to review and approve any special considerations for your practicum.
Special Considerations

International Students

- Notify your international advisor of your intention to pursue a practicum.
- Follow the procedure for outlined on the Practicum website at [https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/](https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/) under the International Students tab.
- The Office of International Affairs (OIA) must approve your practicum as Curricular Practical Training (CPT).
- OIA approval usually takes about 10 business days.
Special Considerations

International Travel for Practicum

Students traveling internationally for practicum must submit details of their travel for review and approval.

- **Before booking your travel, review and follow the travel guidelines** described on the Practicum website at [https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/](https://sph.uth.edu/practicum/) under the International Travel tab.

- You must allow adequate time to prepare, submit, and receive approval of these travel documents.
Special Considerations

International Travel Approvals

- International travel requires approval from the Office of Public Health Practice and the SPH Dean’s Office. Travel lasting longer than 29 days also requires approval by the UTHealth President’s Office.

- Approval by all 3 offices usually takes about 6 weeks if there are no travel warning associated with your travel. At peak registration times, this approval may take longer.

- Travel to countries under a U.S. State Department travel warning require approval by the Office of Global Health Initiatives. This approval usually takes 2-3 weeks.

- If you have concerns about travel approvals, please send your questions to Practicum@uth.tmc.edu before booking your flight.
Special Considerations

If you are in any of the following concentrations of study, verify with your concentration advisor that your practicum is suitable for your concentration:

- Global Health
- Health Disparities
- Leadership Studies
- Maternal and Child Health
- Physical Activity and Health
Special Considerations

There are also special practicum provisions for the programs listed below. Please contact the Office of Public Health Practice for additional information, if you participate in any of these programs.

- Archer Fellows
- Community Health Practice (CHP) Core III
- DrPH STEER MD/MPH
- Texas Tech MD/MPH
The Learning Contract is an agreement between you, your preceptor, and your faculty sponsor that identifies your practicum’s learning objectives and outlines your work.
Learning Contract

Before you can register for the Practicum course, you must submit your learning contract online through the practicum system.

To ensure an on-time approval, submit your learning contract at least 1 week prior to the regular registration deadline.

The learning contract requires approval by

- Your preceptor
- Your faculty mentor
- Office of Public Health Practice
In the next slides, we’ll look briefly at each section of the learning contract.

To begin your learning contract, login to the online practicum system at https://sph.uth.edu/practica/external/learning_contract/login. Your login username and password is the same as your UTHealth network username and password.

You may save your work, log out of the system, and return to your learning contract multiple times until you’ve submitted the contract for approval.

Save your work often! Save before submitting your learning contract.
Learning Contract

In the first section of the learning contract, indicate how you communicated with your preceptor and faculty sponsor while planning your practicum.

New Learning Contract

Before Proceeding
Please indicate how you have communicated with your community preceptor and faculty sponsor.

I have communicated with my Community Preceptor in the following ways:

☐ Face to Face
☐ Email
☐ Phone
Other

I have communicated with my Faculty Sponsor in the following ways:

☐ Face to Face
☐ Email
☐ Phone
Other
In Part I, provide information about your program and your preferred phone number, as shown below.
In Part II, select the essential public health services in which your preceptor has experience. You may need your preceptor’s assistance to complete this section.

1. **Monitor** health status to identify and solve community health problems.
2. **Diagnose and investigate** health problems and health hazards in the community.
3. **Inform, educate, and empower** people about health issues.
4. **Mobilize** community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems.
5. **Develop policies and plans** that support individual and community health efforts.
6. **Enforce laws and regulations** that protect health and ensure safety.
7. **Link** people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable.
8. **Assure** competent public and personal health care workforce.
9. **Evaluate** effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services.
10. **Research** for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems.

In Part III, provide the start and end date of your practicum and the estimated total hours per week: the number of weeks x number of hours should equal about 60 or more hours for each hour of academic credit (180 hours for a 3-hour course).

Select the term that best describes your practicum setting and indicate how you found your practicum. In most cases, preceptors do not provide a stipend for practicum. If your practicum will require you to travel internationally, indicate this here.
Learning Contract

In Part IV, enter the name and contact information for your faculty mentor (sponsor).

Part IV: Faculty Sponsor Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Name *</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last Name *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email Address *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Part V, provide the details show below for your practicum. These fields are described in greater detail on the next two slides...

Part V: Project Details

| Project Title * |  |
| Competencies * | Please read the competencies from the degree program you are in for this semester - MPH or DrPH. In checking this box and submitting this learning contract, you agree to work toward the cross-cutting competencies during your practicum. |
| Learning Objectives * |  |
| Final Product * | Describe what you will create or complete for your final product. Additionally, describe how your final product will be used by your host organization. |
Learning Contract

Project Title:
• A succinct title that describes your practicum.

Learning Objectives:
• Clear statements of what you will be able to do once your practicum is complete.
• Statements should be specific, measurable, and observable.

Competencies:
• Descriptions of the capabilities needed to apply a set of related knowledge, skills, and abilities. The practicum experience allows students to formally demonstrate attainment of at least 5 competencies (3 of which must be listed as MPH foundational competencies).
Learning Contract

Final Product:

- Should be a tangible representation the work completed during your practicum
- Should be of high quality and of value to both you and the preceptor
- Examples include
  - Well-written report
  - Manuscript suitable for publication
  - Scientific journal article
  - Well-referenced presentation to decision makers or a professional society
  - Detailed training manual and a comprehensive protocol
In the final section of the learning contract, indicate how often your practicum team intends to meet.

After you’ve completed each section, submit your learning contract.

Your preceptor and faculty mentor will receive an e-mail request to review and approve (or reject) your learning contract.
Register for Practicum

- The practicum team will review your learning contact after it has been approved by your faculty mentor and preceptor. Please allow a minimum of 3 business days for this administrative approval.
- Once your practicum has been fully approved, the practicum team will e-mail you a registration code.
- Register for Practicum PH 9997.
- You receive 1 academic credit hour for approximately 60 hours of practicum experience or 3 credit hours for 180 practicum hours.
Once your learning contract is fully approved, you may register for the practicum course and begin your practicum.

If you are an international student, remember that you must receive approval from the Office of International Affairs before beginning your practicum.
Complete Your Practicum

• Conduct the activities and meet with the practicum team, as described in your learning contract.

• Complete your final product(s) and share these products with your practicum team.

• Complete any assignments, beyond the learning contract, set by your faculty mentor.

• Reach out to your faculty mentor or the Office of Public Health Practice if you encounter problems with your practicum.

• If you need to make changes to your learning contract, send these changes to Practicum@uth.tmc.edu.
At the end of the semester, your faculty mentor will assign a pass or fail based on

• Your achievement of your learning objectives
  ✓ Your faculty mentor may assign additional coursework or request more information from you to determine if you are meeting these objectives.

• Your completion of the final product(s)

• Your preceptor’s evaluation of your work
  ✓ The Office of Public Health Practice will e-mail a survey to your preceptor.
  ✓ The Office of Public Health Practice will forward a copy of the preceptor’s completed evaluation to your faculty mentor.
Practicum Grade

Send a copy of your final product(s) to your faculty mentor about 1-2 weeks before the end of the semester. If this is not possible, please contact your faculty mentor about a timeline for turning in your final product.

If you find that you are unable to complete your practicum hours and/or your final product(s) during the semester you enrolled, consult with your faculty mentor.

- If your faculty mentor is in agreement, he/she can assign a grade of incomplete and you may complete your practicum the next semester.
- Notify the Office of Public Practice that you complete your practicum next semester.
- You must complete your practicum before you can receive credit for the course.
At the end of the semester, you’ll receive an e-mail asking you to complete an online survey to evaluate your opinion of the practicum program and solicit your ideas for improving the program.
Practicum Website

For more information and resources, please go to the School of Public Health home page and click the Practicum tab.
Practicum Website

Resources on our website include

- Step-by-step guidance for students
- Guidance for preceptors
- Guidance for faculty mentors
- Checklist of practicum requirements
- Guidance for international students
- International travel guidelines

- Listing of practicum opportunities
- Frequently asked questions
Questions?

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

This mailbox is checked regularly and is the quickest and most reliable way to receive a reply to your question.
Thank you for reviewing this presentation!

Good luck with your practicum. We truly hope it is a rewarding experience!