

# **Practicum Guidelines**

**Revised 4/2/09**

## **Practicum Overview**

### **Purpose**

The practicum provides a structured public health practice experience whereby students can take a population based approach to a public health problem and apply the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom.

### **Requirement**

All MPH students will complete the one-credit, pass/fail practicum experience. In general, fulfillment of the practicum requirement should begin when the student has taken between 12 and 30 credits. Students should have completed the following core courses:

- Health Care in the United States
- Introduction to Biostatistics
- Introduction to Epidemiology
- Behavioral and Social Factors in Public Health
- Health Economics and
- Environmental Influences on Human Health.

The practicum can be done either in one semester or spread out over more than one but must be completed within one year of registering for the practicum. Every student keeps a log of hours spent at the practicum site and, at the end of the practicum submits all the required paperwork and poster board presentation illustrating their experience to the practicum coordinator.

As an alternative, students may, with permission of their faculty advisor, enroll in a 3-credit field experience course. The practicum guidelines will be utilized for both the field experience course and the practicum. However, because the field experience is a 3 credit course, it requires additional hours and a more extensive report.

### **Types of Practicum**

The practicum experience can take many forms, all under appropriate supervision at the practicum site and by school faculty. It can be a structured project within a health agency or other relevant community based organization, an administrative internship, or research- oriented project. If the student is fulfilling the practicum requirement at his/her place of employment, the site supervisor cannot be the student's work supervisor and the student needs to go "above and beyond their normal work duties". The site supervisor should have a Master of Public Health degree or a master's degree in a related field, or the equivalent combination of education and experience. The site supervisor meets with the student on a regularly scheduled basis to provide guidance and a community health perspective. The student and his/her academic advisor, site supervisor and practicum coordinator will determine the place, scope, and duration of the practicum (Practicum Agreement). Students are required to submit a draft of their practicum application to the practicum coordinator before they initiate their practicum. In general, practicum sites will meet the following criteria: It will

- enable the students to apply specific skills or competencies learned in the academic program.
- provide logistic support to the student (e.g. desk, telephone, patient records, data, etc.)
- match the educational/ experiential needs of the student.
- The site supervisor will have a community-based/public health perspective.

The practicum experience should be at least the equivalent of one month of full-time work (approximately 140 hours). Students will not be approved to graduate until all documentation for the practicum is completed and approved by the practicum coordinator.

## **Practicum Responsibilities**

The practicum is a structured and integral component of the MPH educational experience. Field practicum sites and projects vary greatly but all must meet the learning objectives and criteria established by the school. Three groups of people work together to facilitate a successful practicum experience.

### ***Faculty Advisor***

1. Identifies students who are ready to be linked to the practicum coordinator.
2. Based on the students program plan, discusses internship opportunities prioritizing those most appropriate for the student's educational goals and needs.
3. Helps establish realistic goals and objectives for the practicum.
4. Communicates as needed with the student, site supervisor, and practicum coordinator before the start of the practicum in order to process the Practicum Agreement and Practicum Application.
5. Meets with the student, site supervisor and practicum coordinator within the initial period of the practicum to discuss progress and to resolve any problems.
6. Reviews and provides feedback to the student on the Practicum Report.
7. Maintains frequent contact with the student, site supervisor and practicum coordinator, to assure quality and to resolve any problems that arise.

### ***Practicum Coordinator***

1. Communicates with the faculty regarding the ongoing identification of students who require a practicum experience.
2. Identifies, along with the faculty advisor and the student, an appropriate site where the student can meet the educational objectives validated by the faculty advisor.
3. Provides outreach and development of new practicum sites and the maintenance of proven high quality sites through ongoing site visits and utilization of evaluation reports.

4. Develops the Placement Directory, a file of currently available practicum opportunities. Solicits new proposals annually and maintains contacts within the public health community to encourage the submission of additional placement opportunities.
5. Maintains ongoing communication with students and faculty regarding practicum opportunities.
6. Meets with individual students after they have communicated with their faculty advisors in order to clarify their placement needs and interests and to provide them with access to practicum site opportunities.
7. Sends confirmatory email/ letter/phone call to the student, site supervisor and faculty advisor when the site supervisor and student indicate that mutual interest and agreement has been reached.
8. Develops a practicum database to enable easy access for reporting purposes and quality assurance.
9. Maintains student placement records.

### ***Site Supervisor***

1. Provides an orientation to the public health program/setting of the practicum inclusive of organization chart, mission statement, target population, copies of routine reports, and copies of applicable research studies.
2. Provides a list of pertinent readings/articles.
3. Completes all necessary forms regarding the practicum inclusive of the Practicum Agreement and Site Supervisor Evaluation of Practicum forms.
4. Explains work rules and procedures, provides necessary resources for the project, and assists in establishing access to the various data systems to be used by the student.
5. Communicates with the faculty advisor, practicum coordinator and the student on an ongoing basis in order to discuss progress and resolve problems.

### ***Student***

1. Meets with the faculty advisor to discuss and validate the educational goals and objectives of the practicum.
2. Meets with the practicum coordinator after receiving validation from the faculty advisor in order to discuss practicum opportunities.
3. Provides an up-to date resume to the practicum coordinator.
4. Communicates with faculty advisor, site supervisor and practicum coordinator to discuss progress and resolve problems during the practicum experience.
5. Completes and submits in the format provided in these Guidelines, all necessary forms regarding practicum inclusive of Practicum Application, Practicum Report, Student Evaluation of Site, and Site Supervisor Evaluation of the Practicum on a timely basis. The student is responsible for obtaining the necessary signatures on all forms.
6. Schedules a final checkout appointment with the practicum coordinator and faculty advisor.

## **The Practicum Application**

The *Practicum Application* sets forth the proposed scope of the practicum experience, including the learning objectives to be achieved by the student, the proposed activities and the timeline for deliverables.

In preparing the Practicum Application, each student should communicate with his/her faculty advisor, the practicum coordinator and the site supervisor to ensure common understanding of the learning objectives and proposed activities of the practicum. The Practicum Application must be approved by the site supervisor, faculty advisor and practicum coordinator preferably before the practicum begins and no later than the end of the first week of the practicum.

### **Application Format**

The narrative part of the Practicum Application includes the following:

- Student Practicum Title/Position
- Description of the practicum site and project: 1 or 2 paragraphs
- Learning objectives and goals: What the student is going to learn as a result of the work
- Activities/methods for accomplishing the learning objectives and goals: What the student is going to do
- Proposed product or deliverables
- Timeline for proposed goals and activities
- Competencies

### **Writing Learning Objectives**

Learning objectives are written as measurable statements of the results the student wishes to achieve. Learning objectives are concise statements of the competencies, skills, knowledge, or understanding the student plans to achieve. They should be specific, reasonable and obtainable within a particular timeframe. Generally two or three learning objectives for the practicum are necessary. They should be written in the present tense and use action verbs that describe how learning will be demonstrated.

The following steps should help the student to formulate good learning objectives.

**Step 1: Write down all the activities and duties that you will engage in throughout the practicum.**

Example- data analysis

**Step 2: Write down the resources needed from yourself and the organization to accomplish each of the listed activities.**

Example- need data, knowledge of how data were collected, time, software, knowledge of software, computer, work space, and what is the purpose of the analysis?

**Step 3: Write the outcome for each of the listed activities.**

Example- The data analysis is being used to help with the quality control survey of how a program is utilized.

**Step 4: Develop learning objectives considering the activities, resources needed, and outcomes written in steps 1-3 above. What is going to be learned?**

- Example- 1) Gain proficiency in statistical software to analyze the given data.  
2) Assess how data must be “cleaned” to prepare for proper analysis  
3) Apply data analysis product toward overall evaluation of program

The following is a list of verbs which may be helpful in the development of your objectives.

KNOWLEDGE

Define  
List  
Name  
Record  
Repeat

COMPREHENSION

Describe  
Discuss  
Explain  
Identify  
Report  
Review

APPLICATION

Employ  
Illustrate  
Interpret  
Practice  
Translate  
Utilize

ANALYSIS

Analyze  
Compare  
Differentiate  
Examine  
Inspect  
Relate

SYNTHESIS

Arrange  
Create  
Compose  
Design  
Manage  
Prepare

EVALUATION

Appraise  
Assess  
Evaluate  
Measure  
Revise  
Select

**Competencies**

The learning objectives that the students develop contribute to the competencies that they have identified to be developed throughout their practicum. Competencies are listed in the school’s catalog and on individual course syllabi. Students will be asked to use the *Student Evaluation of Practicum Site* form to assess whether they have met the competency. Site supervisors will be asked to also provide feedback on whether the students have met the competencies identified in the practicum application.

**Poster Presentation**

At the completion of the practicum each student prepares and presents a poster that summarizes their experience, and reports on it to a wider audience of students, faculty, and agency personnel.

1. A poster requires students to assess their experience critically and to place it in a relevant context for a scientific or other professional/ business audience. It is a format that can be adapted to all types of practicum experiences. Students design and conduct a practicum that will be less observational and more analytical and hands-on.
2. Students, whose practicum is not research-oriented or amenable to a scientific format, may present their project in the format of a “business/professional” poster. Such posters may be useful for a variety of purposes, e.g., to describe innovative programs, educate or entice constituents, or raise funds.
3. At some time in their professional careers, virtually all MPH graduates will be required to prepare a poster and participate in a poster session at a professional meeting. This is a good opportunity to learn this skill and participate in a poster session attended by one’s peers and colleagues.

### **Guidelines for Posters**

Practicum students should begin to think about the nature, focus, and content of the poster right at the beginning of the practicum. Thinking about the end product in advance can help focus on the practicum learning objectives and activities. Students should also discuss the development of the poster with the Practicum Coordinator throughout the practicum experience. Students are encouraged to sign up for “Poster Making” classes at the NYMC Health Sciences Library.

The following guidelines are offered to help create an excellent poster that will enhance the learning experience.

#### ***Poster Materials***

- Please use the poster maker at the New York Medical College’s Library.
- PowerPoint can be used to create the images for the poster. However, do not simply tack up a series of PowerPoint slides, with bulleted text. Charts, photographs and/or other graphics should be included to make the poster visually appealing and interesting.
- Optional: Students may wish to have a hard copy of any product generated and/or “props” that will help convey the message of the poster.

#### ***Poster Content***

The poster should contain the following information:

- **Title**
- **Student Name and Academic Department**
- **Introduction/Background**, including:
  1. Name, location and brief description of organization
  2. Learning Objectives proposed in the practicum application. .
  3. Description of population served or program participants

- **Practicum Activities and Rationale**, including strategies employed to complete work. Depending on the nature of the practicum, the activities may include a description of how the student's activities fit into a larger project.
- **Results and Outcomes**, including key findings and lessons learned.
- **Meaning and Context of Findings**.
- **Recommendations and Insights** about how the work could be advanced or what should be done with the findings to improve the health of the public.

### *Poster Style*

No matter how wonderful the practicum experience and how brilliant the poster content, people will only learn from it if the material is presented effectively. **A poster is a visual medium.** The design should get the **main** points across easily, attract colleagues and engage them in conversation. There are several excellent sets of detailed guidelines available on the web: <http://www.nymc.edu>

**Click on library. Then Click on information. Then click on poster.**

The overarching themes of all of these (and other sets of guidelines) are:

- **Organization:** Use headings to help readers find what they are looking for (practicum setting, objective, result, conclusions, etc). Most suggest a columnar format: top to bottom, left to right. You may want to include arrows to direct the reader. Use pleasing and balanced arrangement of graphics, text, colors.
- **Less is more:** Keep the verbiage to a minimum. Do not simply tack up pages of text. Some suggest a maximum of 50-75 words of text on a page. All text should be in fonts large enough to be read from 3- 6 feet away (minimum font size: 18pt). Title should be in larger font sizes to be read from far away. Use simple fonts (e.g. Arial, Helvetica); do not use more than 2 types of fonts. Note: double-check the spelling in the text.
- **Colors:** Dark colors on a light background are easiest to read. Use a theme of 2-3 colors; avoid overly bright (neon) colors.
- **Graphics:** Use graphics (simple charts, tables, graphs) and photos as appropriate. Remember: a picture can be worth a thousand words. Not only do they help tell a story, they also help attract the audience.

(Generally students should schedule an appointment to print out their posters at least one week in advance with the library staff.)

### **Exemption from Practicum Requirement**

Students who believe their previous work experiences fulfill the practicum requirement must submit the Practicum Waiver Application to their academic advisor at least 18 months prior to graduation. In general, students requesting exemption from the practicum requirement must document at least three years of work experience encompassing broad based and diverse areas of public health practice. The

documentation accompanying a waiver application is expected to fully demonstrate that the student would have nothing to gain from a practicum experience. The student must document that he/she has met all of the criteria required for granting a waiver. The faculty advisor will review the application and make an appropriate recommendation to the practicum coordinator. All waiver requests must be approved by the practicum coordinator, and a waiver review committee.

### **Waiver Criteria**

1. The student must document previous public health practice where public health concepts have been applied. Public health concepts include: knowledge of the core functions of assessment, policy development; the assurance of a population based approach to health problems and their prevention; working with community partners.
2. The student must document that specialty knowledge in his/her area of concentration has been applied previously using a population approach to health problems.
3. The student must document that his/her previous public health experience was broad based, diverse, of sufficient time (minimum of three years work experience) and involved the application of many skills that complement his/her main area of academic training.
4. The student must document that specialty knowledge in the area of concentration has been applied previously using a population-based approach in a supervised field context to health problems.
5. Physicians and other students with advanced degrees, with prior clinical experience, but with no supervised experience in an agency taking a population based approach to a community, would not necessarily justify a waiver.
6. The student's prior experience must be applicable to future goals.
7. A few examples of areas which might be considered for a waiver could include:
  - Developing policies and intervention strategies to meet public health needs.
  - Conducting relevant research on population-based health problems.
  - Establishing health objectives, priorities, and needs assessments.
  - Assessing, monitoring or conducting surveillance of health problems/services in a designated population.

## *Practicum Application*

Student Name:

ID number:

Agency/Organization:

Agency Physical Address:

Mailing address if different:

Site Supervisor Name, Degrees & Title:

Phone number:

Fax number:

Email address:

Faculty Advisor:

Phone number:

Fax number:

Email address:

Practicum Proposal:

Start date:

End date:

Nature & scope of proposed project:

Objectives:

Strategies to be used:

Site resources to be used (if special permission is needed to gain access to data, records, etc. how it will be arranged):

Identify which competencies you will be developing during the course of your practicum:

Final product:

## *Practicum Agreement*

I have participated in the development of the practicum proposal and agree to the conditions specified above. If it is necessary to change any of the specified conditions, I agree to make the changes known to each of the persons whose signatures appear below.

Student \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Site Supervisor \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

## *Practicum Report*

Student name:

Site of Practicum:

Practicum Site Supervisor:

Period of Practicum: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

1. Profile of Practicum Organization:

- a) Mission/purpose/goals of the organization
- b) Mission/ purpose/goals of the student
- c) Organizational structure
- d) Services and programs offered
- e) Population served (include demographic/census data)
- f) Other information

2. Description of student's project:

- a) Introduction (include description of project, lit search, why is it important)
- b) Objectives
- c) Methods
- d) Presentation of results and public health implications (products, i.e. poster board presentation)

3. Final product of project (attach document, display, etc. if applicable):

4. Did this project further your educational/career goals? Explain

5. Would you recommend this practicum site to other students? Explain

Accepted:

Faculty Advisor \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Dean \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Credits granted (if any) \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_

## *Practicum Waiver Application*

This form must be accompanied by a resume of relevant employment/experience. The resume should include the name of the agency/s, the job title/s and responsibilities, the approximate number of hours of the experience and the name and position of the site-based supervisor. Additionally, the student must document that he/she has met the criteria for waiver of the practicum.

**The waiver request must be submitted to the student's faculty advisor at least 18 months before the expected date of graduation.**

I request a waiver of the MPH Practicum requirement. I have acquired skill and experience in the application of public health principles to solve community health problems through prior field-based experience/employment.

Student \_\_\_\_\_  
Name Signature Date

Program \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor \_\_\_\_\_  
Name Signature Date

Reviewed by waiver committee \_\_\_\_\_ Approved Not Approved

Practicum  
Coordinator \_\_\_\_\_  
Name Signature Date

Approved \_\_\_\_\_  
Dean's office signature Date

*Site Supervisor Evaluation of Practicum*

Student Name:

Agency/Organization:

Site Supervisor:

Practicum Period: from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Was the student well matched to the site? Please explain

Did the student meet your expectations? Please explain

Did the School give the necessary and expected support? How could it be improved?

What suggestions do you have for future MPH placements in your organization?

Did the student meet the competencies and objectives identified on the practicum application? Please explain

Site supervisor \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Student \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

When completed please return this form to:

\*\*\*\*\*

**STUDENT EVALUATION OF PRACTICUM SITE**

**ID:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Last Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**First Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the criteria which best describes your experience in each of the following domains:

<b>1 = Did not meet expectations</b>	<b>2 = Met expectations</b>	<b>3 = Exceeded expectations</b>
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Access to supervisor	1	2	3
Level of guidance and supervision from site supervisor	1	2	3
Access to agency resources	1	2	3
Access to faculty advisor	1	2	3
Level of guidance and supervision from faculty advisor	1	2	3
Meeting the competencies and objectives you identified on the practicum application	1	2	3
Using the same criteria, rate your overall experience	1	2	3

**Would you recommend this agency/organization to other students? Why or why not?**