PUBH 595 (formerly PUBH 591), Practicum
Guidelines for Master of Public Health Degree Candidates

All Practicum defenses are stored in your file according to SPCHS policy. They may be used for educational purposes by current or future MPH students preparing for their defenses.

Practicum Goal

The goal of the School of Public and Community Health Sciences (SPCHS) practicum is to provide students with the opportunity to apply public health academic theory and acquired skills in research and service in a practice setting.

I. Practicum Overview

All graduate professional public health degree students must develop skills in basic health concepts and demonstrate the application of these concepts through a practice experience that is relevant to students’ areas of specialization.

The school must provide opportunities for professional public health degree students to apply the knowledge and skills being acquired through their courses of study. Practical knowledge and skills are essential to successful practice. A planned, supervised and evaluated practice experience is an essential component of a professional public health degree program. These opportunities can take place in a variety of agencies and organizations and should include local and state public health agencies to the national and international non-governmental agencies and organizations. An essential component of the practice experience is supervision by a preceptor qualified to evaluate the professional competence of the student. Schools must have well-defined learning objectives, procedures and criteria for evaluation of the practice experience. Individual waivers, if granted, should be based on well-defined criteria; the possession of a prior professional degree in another field or prior work experience that is not closely related to the academic objectives of the student’s degree program should not be sufficient reason for waiving the practice requirement.

While there are advantages to a practice experience conducted full-time in a concentrated block of time, this is not always possible for students. Schools should be sensitive to the constraints of students and may develop alternative modes for providing practice experiences. If the student can do a placement only in his or her regular place of employment, the assignment must extend beyond or be something other than his or her regular work duties and allow application of the knowledge and skills being learned. There should be regular assessment and evaluation of practice placement sites and preceptor qualifications.

II. Selection of Practicum Sites

It is the student’s responsibility to find, arrange, and complete a satisfactory practicum experience that fulfills program requirements. The faculty, department, and the school can, and will assist students, but the student retains the final responsibility. Faculty advisors are not expected to find placements. One of the benefits of this process is that each student will learn to contact and communicate with

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1 CEPH Accreditation Criteria - School of Public Health Self-Study, June 2011, section 2.4, page 15.
professionals in their field. Under certain circumstances, students may complete a practicum at their place of employment. The work site must provide students with opportunities to integrate MPH course content with professional practice. The practicum must be clearly differentiated from the student’s employment. Students are also encouraged to apply for funding to support their practicum experience.

A list of previously utilized practicum sites with mentor contacts is available on the website or by contacting the SPCHS office. Additionally, University of Montana Internship Services also provides assistance with developing practicum sites.

Each practicum site should have the following characteristics:

A. The site enables the student to develop further and apply specific skills or competencies learned in the academic program (e.g., assessment, program planning, evaluation, management, data analysis, policy development, etc.).

B. An opportunity to work with a practicing professional who is functioning as a leader or in a similar capacity for a public health institution, private agency, or organization is the basis for the field practicum. The site should provide a mentor who is willing and able to spend regularly scheduled time with the student and provide guidance.

C. The site should afford the student contact with public health practitioners. Students should have the opportunity to attend as many, and as varied as possible, managerial meetings involving a variety of people in the organization, such as the medical staff, administrators, health educators, and other professionals. In this way, the student gains a wide perspective about the types of issues, concerns, and processes that occur in the provision of public health.

D. The site should be a good match with the needs of the student. The student should be assigned one or more specific projects to carry out during the field practicum. The projects should be designed so the student has the principal responsibility, perhaps working with others in the organization, and the result should be a product, written or otherwise, that is of value to the organization. The number and types of projects performed by the student are left to the discretion of the onsite supervisor in recognition of the agency’s needs, time constraints, and the student’s interests and capabilities.

E. The site should exhibit a willingness to provide support, ranging from a desk, a computer, and a phone to stipends or salary, transportation, and lodging.

F. The student should conduct other smaller functions within the organization that contribute to an understanding of the complexities that the organization faces. Any reasonable activity in which the student contributes to the organization through assisting other individuals, and which provides a learning experience for the student, are appropriate.

G. The student should undertake any other activities that the site supervisor may assign and which have mutual benefit, thus further exposing the student to the organization and the complexities of its working environment. The site supervisor should exhibit a willingness to gradually increase student responsibility and independence over the duration of the practicum experience.
H. The student develops an understanding of the political context within which public health activities are conducted.

III. Practicum Learning Objectives

While each practicum will be topic-driven and hence different, the objectives and format will generally be the same. The learning objectives of the Public Health practicum are aimed at providing students the following opportunities:

- Apply and test public health concepts and theories in practice settings;
- Implement one or more of the ten essential services of public health;
- Utilize problem-solving skills to assess and analyze public health issues;
- Propose and, to the extent possible, implement effective intervention strategies;
- Justify the importance of interdisciplinary teamwork to address public health problems; and
- Learn to function successfully as a public health professional in a work setting.

Students will also negotiate 3-5 learning objectives that are specific to the practicum project. Learning objectives should relate to the overall learning objectives for the practicum (see above). The student should think carefully about these learning objectives as they are a description of what the student hopes to achieve through the experience. The learning objectives should be specific and expressed in a way that the student and mentor team can assess whether the student met the objectives.

Students will also state which UM MPH program competencies are to be addressed by accomplishing the learning objectives. Program competencies are located on the public health website.

A. Required Steps of the Practicum Process

You must have completed 12 credits of MPH core courses prior to enrolling for the Practicum. To satisfy the Practicum requirements you will:

1. In collaboration with your MPH Advisor:
   a. Select a Practicum Academic Mentor and obtain their consent to supervise the practicum experience.
   b. Meet with the Practicum Academic Mentor to discuss the selection of the site and site mentor, development of the Practicum Proposal, and project timelines.

2. Establish a Practicum Review Committee and obtain consent from each member. The 3rd committee member may be selected from SPCHS faculty, adjunct or program faculty and alumni.  
   Complete prior to enrollment.

3. In collaboration with the Practicum Academic Mentor and your Site Mentor:  
   a. Schedule a meeting that includes the Practicum Academic Mentor, Site Mentor, and Student to finalize the details of the practicum plan and review the roles and responsibilities of each member of the team. Meetings can occur in person, over the phone, or using any other real-time communication support system.
b. Negotiate and complete the Practicum Proposal Form. The proposal must be approved by the Site Mentor and Academic Mentor before beginning the Practicum Project.

c. Obtain all required signatures.

d. Provide copies of the completed document to the MPH Advisor, the Practicum Academic Mentor, the Practicum Site Mentor, and Public Health Program Coordinator.

*Complete prior to enrollment.*

4. Enroll in PUBH 591 Practicum Course.

   If you do not register the following semester after proposal approval, the proposal will need to be resubmitted. You may begin work on the project before registration if the Proposal is approved. Registration requires an override; contact the Program Coordinator.

   *Complete prior to enrollment.*

5. Complete a 200 hour practicum which fulfills all the Learning Objectives. 40 of these hours can be devoted to preparing the written and oral presentations. *Complete at least four weeks prior to the oral presentation.*

6. Write a report of the Practicum activities and demonstration of public health competencies. The Practicum Academic Mentor will review initial draft(s) of the report, which you will submit to your Practicum Review Committee prior to the oral presentation.

   *Complete at least four weeks prior to the oral presentation.*

7. In collaboration with the Practicum Academic Mentor, schedule an oral presentation with all members of the practicum review committee.

   All three members of the practicum review committee must attend the oral presentation. Follow the checklist for arranging a practicum defense located at the end of this document. *Initiate after submission of draft to Practicum Academic Mentor and at least two weeks prior to the oral presentation.*

8. In collaboration with the Program Coordinator:

   a. Schedule a room for the oral presentation, reserve required equipment, and arrange Practicum paperwork completion.

   *Complete in conjunction with Requirement #7.*

9. Present an oral presentation of the Practicum project/experience to your Practicum Review Committee. *The presentation must be completed by the end of finals week to receive credit for that semester.*
The written report should be approximately 15 pages in length, excluding appendices, and printed double-spaced using 12-point type. The report should include the information below and follow this outline (and suggested section page lengths):

- **Executive Summary**: Summary of key points of the Practicum (1-2 pages)
- **Introduction**: Describe any specific projects on which you worked on in your Practicum. Provide the background of project including the significance of the public health issue being addressed. Was your project(s) substantially different from what you expected to be doing? Include a description of the organization in which the project is being carried out, its purpose or mission statement, and its funding sources (2-3 pages)
- **Discussion**: Describe your role in the project, including activities and outcomes. Assess whether the Practicum goals and objectives were successful in addressing the problem. Include barriers that were identified. List each of the Learning Objectives that you expected to achieve in your Practicum Proposal. Respond to each objective with how, or if, it was achieved in this Practicum. Were there other standard learning objectives that you achieved in this Practicum that were not anticipated? Describe them. (5-8 pages)
- **Personal Assessment**: Describe how this Practicum has contributed to your understanding of public health practice. What classes, knowledge, and skills acquired through your education benefited you most during this Practicum? In what ways did you benefit from the Practicum experience? Reflect on the assumptions you brought to the Practicum, how did your perspectives on public health change throughout the Practicum experience? Reflect on how you will use what you learned in this Practicum in your future personal, professional, and/or academic endeavors. If appropriate, identify if and how the Ten Essential Services of public health were applied during the MPH Practicum (2-4 pages)
- **Conclusions and Recommendations**: Anticipated or suggested further action on the project further action on the project resulting from project work and outcomes (1-2 pages)
- **References and Bibliography**: Use a standard manuscript style, such as APA or AMA Guidelines

The following attachments must be included, but do not count towards the 15 page limit.

- Attach the Site Mentor’s Evaluation of Student Performance (sent to the site mentor by the Program Coordinator).
- Fill in the Faculty Grading Rubric with your Learning Objectives as proposed for your Practicum, and other Learning Objectives that you achieved but perhaps did not anticipate. Attach this grading rubric to your report.
- Appendices may be added to the report but do not count towards the 15 page requirement.

Written Report Due Date:

The Practicum Academic Mentor will review the initial drafts of your report. The student must submit the written report that has been reviewed and approved by the Practicum Academic Mentor to each of the Practicum Committee members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled presentation date.
IV. Presentation Guidelines

Written Practicum: Your Practicum Academic Mentor will review initial drafts of your report. The student must submit the written report that has been reviewed by the Practicum Academic Mentor to each of the Practicum Committee members at least two weeks prior to the scheduled presentation date.

Oral Presentation: The oral presentation demonstrates the student’s ability to prepare and give a professional report of his/her Practicum experience to an informed audience. Students should use a method of displaying their work (such as PowerPoint) to facilitate the presentation. The presentation should be 30-40 minutes in length with additional time for questions (schedule 60 for the entire process).

a) Your committee will use the Learning Objective Rubric: Faculty Version as a guide to evaluate your practicum.

b) Faculty will evaluate the presentation among themselves before sharing the status of completion with the student.

c) The presentation is open to all interested faculty, students, staff, and the interested public.

The Practicum Site Mentor is required to attend. Accommodations using virtual meeting technology can be made with advance notice with the Program Coordinator, if committee members and/or the student are unable to attend in person.

a) After the Oral Presentation, electronic copies of the final approved report should be distributed to all committee members and the Program Coordinator.

VI. Additional Information

The purpose of the Practicum Defense Checklist is to guide the student in arranging the logistical details of the oral presentation. This checklist does not supersede the Practicum Guidelines.

A. Forms Required Prior to Enrollment
- The Practicum Proposal Form must be completed, signed and submitted to the Program Coordinator prior to enrollment and the start of the on-site practicum experience.

B. Forms Required Upon Completion
- The Practicum Approval Form must be signed by all members of the Practicum Review Committee at the conclusion of the oral presentation.

- The purpose of the Student Practicum Site Assessment is to provide students with an opportunity to relay important information about the challenges, strengths, and concerns of the Practicum site and site mentor to the UM MPH program. This is a confidential document that will be used internally by the UM MPH program only. Return it before the Practicum Defense to the Program Coordinator.

- The purpose of the Site Mentor’s Evaluation of Student Performance in the Practicum is for the student and the SPCHS to hear the site mentor’s perspective on the value of the practicum. This will be made available to the student, who will respond to the assessment in one page or less, and attach both the site mentor evaluation and his/her response to the Practicum Report.
• The purpose of the Faculty Grading Rubric is to ensure that the required elements of the Practicum report and oral defense are clear to the committee members and that a formal system for evaluating the student’s Practicum is followed.

**C. Committee Role Descriptions**

1. Practicum Chair (core faculty member): The Practicum Chair may be but does not need to be the students’ MPH program advisor. The Practicum Chair ensures that the practicum project meets the academic requirements of the MPH program, approves the proposal, monitors and evaluates the practicum experience, reviews initial drafts of the written document and audiovisual materials for use at the oral presentation, attends the oral presentation, and approves/disapproves the student’s successful completion of the practicum.

2. Practicum 2nd Member (core, adjunct or program faculty member): The second committee member review the written report (not including appendices), attend the oral presentation, and approves/disapproves the student’s successful completion of the Practicum.

3. Practicum 3rd Member (Site Mentor): The site mentor supervisors the student on site and provides guidance during regularly scheduled meeting times. The practicum third committee member review the written report (not including appendices), attend the oral presentation, and approves/disapproves the student’s successful completion of the Practicum.