WELCOME

Welcome to the Master of Public Health (MPH) Program at the University of Louisville School of Public Health and Information Sciences (SPHIS)! This Handbook is designed to provide you the information you need in order to be a successful practice site mentor.

If you have questions not addressed in this handbook, please do not hesitate to contact the MPH Program Office by phone or e-mail. We appreciate your support of our students and the program!

MPH Program Office — Contact Information

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THE PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

The practice experience is a unique opportunity for graduate students to integrate and apply practical skills and training learned through coursework and prior experiences in a professional public health work environment. The School of Public Health and Information Sciences (SPHIS) requires all students to participate in a practice experience, as required by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

Concentration Selection
At the conclusion of the first semester, students will select a concentration. Students must identify their concentration in one of these five areas: biostatistics, global health, epidemiology, health behavior, and health policy or health promotion. Students must declare their concentration by December 1 of the first academic year (based on a fall semester matriculation). For students that matriculate at a time other than the fall semester or are part-time students, the time of their concentration declaration will vary.

Once a student has selected a concentration they begin looking for a practice site. The site is a place where the student should gain “hands on” public health experience. Public health work environments include not-for-profit organizations, hospitals, local health departments, and for-profit firms. We encourage students to identify practice sites that reinforce skills learned in their chosen concentration.

The Practice Experience
The practice experience is designed to be completed over the span of three semesters. During the first semester, the students develop a practice experience learning agreement (Appendix 5 of PHPH – 677) that describes the work plan and specific deliverables for the practice experience. This is developed in conjunction with the practice site mentor.

A practice experience should include:

- Project-oriented work in a public health site
- Application of graduate level skills in a public health context
- Opportunities to engage in activities that will advance a student’s career potential and goals

Throughout the remaining semesters, the students conduct the work of the practice site. During their final semester the student will write a final report describing their practice experience (Appendix 1 of PHPH – 679) and make an oral presentation (Appendix 2 of PHPH – 679).

Site Mentor
The individual within the agency or organization charged with the responsibility of overseeing the student’s duties and experience at the practice site.

The site mentor is responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the learning agreement are in line with the needs of their agency or organization. The site mentor serves as the point of contact for the MPH program. Activities of the site mentor typically include:
• Participation in any School of Public Health and Information Sciences (SPHIS) sponsored mentor orientations, meetings, and seminars
• Participation in preparation of the student learning agreement, including the identification of foundational and concentration specific competencies to be addressed through the practice experience activities
• Regularly monitoring the student’s progress towards fulfillment of the learning agreement
• Discussing the student’s performance with the faculty mentor
• Participation in the preparation and review of the student’s final paper and oral presentation
• Completing the final student evaluation (Appendix 4 of PHPH-679)

Additionally, the site mentor is encouraged to facilitate the student’s learning experience by making the student aware of opportunities available within the organization that are relevant to the practice experience, targeted competencies, professional interests and development, and overall growth as public health professionals.

Faculty Practice Site Mentor
• Each practice experience student is assigned a faculty practice experience mentor from faculty in the student’s concentration area
• The faculty mentor is charged with the responsibility of understanding all requirements of the practice experience and ensuring that the student satisfies those requirements
• The faculty mentor serves as a section director for the Public Health Practice Experience Course (PHPH-679) and is responsible for assigning and reporting the grade the student receives for the course

Academic Program Concentration Directors:

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Practice Site
• The practice site is the location at which the student conducts his or her practice experience. Typically, the practice site’s location and agency or organizations are one and the same. It is the responsibility of the practice site to ensure that all necessary materials (e.g., work space, work equipment, etc.) are in a location conducive to carrying out the practice experience. Should the agency or organization be unable to provide needed
materials, it should notify the student in consultation with the student’s faculty mentor and the MPH program director prior to accepting a student at the site.

Practice Experience Funding
- The practice site is responsible for any costs of supplies, printing, postage, and other out-of-pocket costs associated with student assignment, excluding travel costs of the student or university personnel, unless university has agreed in writing to assume all or part of these costs. If the practice site cannot cover costs associated with the assigned responsibilities, the student must either identify resources to cover the cost or select another practice site.

Time Requirement
- There is not a defined number of hours that must be completed as part of your practice experience. With this being said, the number of hours for the experience will vary based on the student’s learning objectives and the deliverables. Student should work with the site mentor to determine what will be expected based on the learning agreement.

Issues at the Practice Experience Site
- If for any reason the student experiences difficulty of any kind, personal, professional or otherwise, the student is to communicate those difficulties to their faculty mentor and their site mentor to ensure prompt action is taken to resolve the difficulties. If the issues causing the difficulties are not resolved by the student, faculty mentor, and site mentor, the MPH Program Director and the Office of Student Services should be notified.

Leave Enrollment
- A total of 3 credit hours of PHPH 677, PHPH 678, and PHPH 679 is required to complete the practice experience.
SITE REQUIREMENTS

Completion of the affiliation agreement and student practice site agreement: The affiliation agreement is a legal agreement that addresses all items pertaining to university’s guidelines for student field work. The agreement must be in place prior to students beginning any work. If your site is not an approved site, an agreement will need to be put into place. Please send the following information to Program Coordinator Bryan Mathis (bryan.mathis@louisville.edu) or reach out to him on his work phone, 502-852-6263, so he can initiate the contract process.

- Legal name of site:
- Name (of site person signing agreement/responsible for contractual matters):
- Title:
- Address:
- Phone number:
- Email address:

Practice experience learning agreement: The learning agreement specifies the goals, objectives, and deliverables of the practice experience (Appendix 5 of PHPH - 677). The goals, objectives and deliverables are determined by the site mentor and the student. The student is expected to achieve or carry out all items contained in the learning agreement. However, the learning agreement is a living document and can be modified as needed based on agreement by the student, site mentor and faculty mentor. The learning agreement must be approved and signed by the site mentor and the faculty mentor. A copy of the signed learning agreement is maintained by MPH Program Office. If substantial changes (determined by the faculty mentor) are made in the learning agreement during the performance of the practice experience an updated practice experience learning agreement should be submitted to the MPH Program Office.

Submission of student practice evaluation form: Students are to request that each site mentor complete a student evaluation form (Appendix 4 of PHPH - 679). This survey will be completed electronically through a web based survey package. The site mentor will receive a notification email and several reminders until the survey is completed. It is the student’s responsibility to also remind the site mentor to complete the survey.

The focus of these evaluations is to assess the student’s performance at the practice site. Each site mentor is asked to complete an evaluation for each student. The goal of this evaluation is to assess specific competencies related to the practice experience, identify any potential issues with the student’s performance at the site, and to determine if the site is willing to have additional students in future.
ESTABLISHING WORK STANDARDS

Students can be valuable contributors in the work setting. They are energetic and eager colleagues. At the same time, they are not full time employees in the agency. Because of this, they need clearly defined expectations for their work standards that should both be reasonable and attainable and should include specific directions that are appropriate within your agency.

1. **Orientation**: Students need a basic orientation to the agency. Orientation may include: an overview of the mission of the agency or organization; guidelines and resources for performing whatever tasks will be assigned to the student; office policies and procedures, and professional dress code. Additional orientation basics may include: introduction to others in the office with whom the student is likely to interact, a tour of the facilities, library and demonstration on office equipment use.

2. **Adequate work resources**: Students need to have access to the resources needed to accomplish the objectives of the practice experience. These may include desk and computer, phone with appropriate access to long distance, name badges, access cards, time sheets or other items as deemed necessary.

3. **Assignments**: a) The students need defined timelines. Because they are often balancing school assignments with their practice experience, they need to be able to assure that both can be completed without jeopardizing either one b) Students benefit from experiencing the internal operations of the worksite that may go beyond the objectives of the practice experience. These include things such as, observing management discussions, participating in strategic planning, and attending seminars c) Students benefit from being able to apply what they have learned in graduate school to the operations of the agency. They also benefit from trying to perform beyond their own comfort level.

4. **Regular Contact and Supervision**: Student and the site mentor should have opportunities to meet regularly.

   - **Developing Work Plans**: The student should work with the site mentor to develop objectives for the practice experience and form a work plan that is achievable. The work plan ideally should expose the student some in-depth exposure to issues pertinent to the agency or organization’s activities.

   - **Regular Meetings**: The subject matter of these meetings may include evaluating the student’s performance over the course of the prior week, discussing the activities of the agency or organization, and analyzing particular successes and problems that arise in the course of the practice experience. The site mentor may also assist the student in developing insights into public health practice, organization’s work, and otherwise provide guidance that can assist the student in launching his or her own career. This kind of mentoring can have a tremendous educational value to the student, transcending even the value of the practice experience.