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 practicum site preceptor.

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!

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THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

The practicum 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 that do not meet the criteria for waiving the practicum, to participate in a practicum experience, as required by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

Concentration Selection
At the close of the first year and prior to the start of the second year of the program, students will select a concentration. Students must identify their concentration in one of these five areas: biostatistics, global health, epidemiology, health behavior, population health management 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 practicum 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 practicum sites that reinforce skills learned in their chosen concentration.

The Practicum
The practicum is designed to be a 336 hour project, to typically be completed over the span of three semesters. During the first semester, the students develop a ‘learning contract’ that describes the work plan and specific deliverables for the practicum. This is developed in conjunction with the practicum site preceptor.

A practicum 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 practicum. During their final semester the student will write a final report describing their practicum experience, prepare an electronic poster and make an oral presentation.

Practicum Site Preceptor
The practicum site preceptor is 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 preceptor is responsible for ensuring that the objectives of the learning agreement are in line with the needs of their agency or organization. The site preceptor serves as the point of community contact for the MPH program. Activities of the site preceptor typically include:
- Participation in SPHIS sponsored preceptor orientations, meetings, and seminars
• 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, oral presentation, and electronic poster
• Completing the final student evaluation

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

**SPhIS Practicum Mentor**

The practicum mentor is a faculty member from the area of concentration selected by the student. After students have selected their concentration they are assigned to a faculty mentor from that department. This faculty member serves as the student’s faculty practicum mentor and leads the student’s practicum experience.

The faculty mentor responsibilities for the practicum are to:
• Assist, as needed, the student in identifying a practicum site and specific practicum related activities;
• Assure that the following components of the practicum are completed prior to starting the practicum: the site profile, the affiliation agreement, the student practice site agreement, and the learning contract;
• Assure that for any practicum experience requiring IRB approval, all requirements are met prior to initiating the practicum;
• Work with the student to develop a calendar for timely completion of practicum;
• Meet regularly with the student to assure the student is making progress towards completion of the requirements of the practicum;
• Ensure that all required evaluations are completed and submitted to the MPH program;
• Provide critical feedback to the student in the completion of the final written report, electronic poster and oral presentation materials; and,
• Evaluate and assign grades the practicum experience.

**Academic Programs:**

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**Practice Site**

The practice site is the location at which the student conducts his or her practicum. 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 practicum. 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.

**Practicum 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 practicum activity.

**Practicum Enrollment**
A student generally cannot enroll in the practicum until the core courses have been completed. A total of 3 credit hours of PHPH 679 is required to complete the practicum. Generally, students register for 1 hour in the spring of their first year, then 1 hour in the fall of their 2nd year and 1 hour in the spring of their 2nd year.

**Practicum Documents**
The practicum documents are located in the appendix of the MPH Student Practicum Experience Manual, which can be found at: https://sharepoint.louisville.edu/sites/sphis/acprogs/mph/mphpe/default.aspx

The documents include:
- Learning agreement
- Site profile
- Student evaluation of practicum experience
- Site preceptor student evaluation
- Written report guidelines
- Oral presentation guidelines
- Electronic poster guidelines
- Practicum syllabus
STUDENT STEPS TO COMPLETE THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

1. **Selection of practice site and site preceptor:** Selection of a practice site involves not just finding a site but identifying a site mentor, obtaining the organization’s agreement to both serve as the site and to sponsor the project, working with the MPH program to ensure the affiliation agreement is in place.

2. **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. This document is to be completed and processed by the MPH Program Coordinator. Once the practice site agrees to host students, the agreement must be in place prior to students beginning any work. Each party maintains a signed copy of the agreement. The process for executing an affiliation agreement can be found on SharePoint at: [https://sharepoint.louisville.edu/sites/sphis/acprogs/mph/mphpe/default.aspx](https://sharepoint.louisville.edu/sites/sphis/acprogs/mph/mphpe/default.aspx)

   Questions regarding this should be directed to MPH Program Coordinator, Judy Hollkamp at 502-852-6263 or judy.hollkamp@louisville.edu

3. **Completion of the practice site profile:** A guideline for preparing the practice site profile is provided in Appendix 2 of the MPH Practicum Experience Manual. The completed profile is reviewed with and submitted to the faculty mentor via Blackboard.

4. **Completion and approval of the practicum experience learning agreement:** The learning agreement specifies the goals, objectives, and deliverables of the practicum (see Appendix 1, MPH Practicum Experience Manual). 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 Office of Student Services. If substantial changes (determined by the faculty mentor) are made in the learning agreement during the performance of the practicum, an updated practicum agreement should be submitted to the MPH Program Office.

5. **Recording performance of activities specified in learning agreement at the practice site:** It is recommended that students keep a written journal while performing their practice activities. Entries may include:
   - Brief synopsis of activities for that week
   - Specific accomplishments or activities completed
   - Problems that occurred, and how they were resolved
   - Experiences that provided for learning and professional growth, specifically in reference to the MPH core and concentration specific competencies

   This written journal facilitates preparation of the final written report of the practicum. A suggested format is for the student to draft an email at the end of each week, outlining relevant details of their practicum activities, and send the email for storage in a practicum
At the end of the practicum, students can compile the messages into their student journal.

6. **Preparation of the written report, oral presentation, and electronic poster describing the practicum experience:** On completion of the activities at the practice site, the student must prepare a written report, an oral presentation, and an electronic poster. The student’s faculty mentor and site preceptor provide guidance in the preparation and review of the written report, oral presentation, and electronic poster. Guidelines for preparation of these materials are in Appendices 5, 6, and 7, respectively in the MPH Practicum Experience Manual.

The student will upload electronic copies of all deliverables to the Blackboard site by noon on the Thursday before commencement. This is a program requirement in order to meet your degree requirements.

7. **Submission of practicum evaluation forms:**
   - **Student evaluation of practicum experience** - On completion of the practicum each student must complete an evaluation of their practicum experience. See Appendix 3 in the MPH Practicum Experience Manual. This survey will be completed electronically through a web based survey package. The student will receive a notification email and several reminders until he/she completes the survey.

   - **Site preceptor evaluation of student:** Students are to request that each site mentor complete a student evaluation form. See Appendix 4 of the MPH Practicum Experience Manual. 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 practicum site. Each site preceptor is asked to complete an evaluation for each student. The goal of this evaluation is to assess specific competencies related to the practicum, 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. The MPH Program office receives the evaluation electronically and the individual evaluations are reviewed by the MPH Advisory Committee each year.

8. **Grading of Practicum:** Refer to the syllabus in Appendix 8 in the MPH Practicum Experience Manual. Students are normally required to begin the practicum by registering for 1 credit hour in the spring of their first year, with the remaining 2 credit hours spread over the fall and spring semester prior to graduation. Variation in the practicum registration pattern is available for part-time students, but all students must complete the 3 credit hours. The grade for the practicum is not assigned until completion of the entire practicum. The faculty mentor assigns the grade for the practicum. Components that the student’s faculty mentor typically consider for the practicum grade include:
   - Identification of the practicum site and the community mentor
   - Completion of the community site profile (Appendix 2 of the MPH Practicum Experience Manual)
   - Completion of the activities specified by the learning agreement which includes as part of
its focus the specific competencies related to the practicum (Appendix 1 of the MPH Practicum Experience Manual)

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 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 the resources needed to accomplish the objectives of the practicum. 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 practicum 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 practicum. 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 supervisor should have opportunities to meet regularly.

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

   b) 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 practicum. The site supervisor might 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 tremendous educational value to the student, transcending even the value of the professional practical experience the student gains through the practicum.