**Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Epidemiology and Biostatistics Practicum (PubH 6000) and Culminating Experience (PubH 6015)**

***(1) What is the difference between the Practicum and Culminating Experience?***

The **Practicum** is a credit/no credit course which consists of a Practice Activity - defined as a planned, supervised, and evaluated experience in a public health organization. The Practice Activity can, for instance, consist of key elements of a primary research or surveillance project such as design, data collection and analysis, or a secondary analysis of an existing data base. The Practice Activity enables the student to apply new skills in the context of public health, and must not be directly related to the student’s day-to-day work. If the student does conduct the Practice Activity at his/her place of employment, this must be a separate activity for which the student is not remunerated. Students are also required to complete a series of online modules in the DEB Epidemiology-Biostatistics Skills Building Modules Blackboard Community.

The **Culminating Experience (CE)** is a credit/no credit course where students apply the epidemiologic methods and skills acquired in the program in the integration, analysis, interpretation and presentation of data. It consists of the following four products that stem from research and practice involving a specific public health issue: (a) Concept Paper, (b) Proposal, (c) Final Report or Manuscript, and (d) Oral Presentation. Although it is not mandatory, students often link the CE with the Practicum. This way, the CE serves as the integration of the application of the methods and the interpretation of results. However, if the Practicum and CE are not linked, the student should plan to do the Practicum first.

Registration for 6000 and 6015 is done via a registration transaction form (RTF).

For more information, please refer to the syllabus on the website.

***(2) Are there requirements before registering for the Practicum?***

Yes. Prior to enrolling in the Practicum, you must complete the following:

*Course Prerequisites*

* PubH 6002 Biostatistical Applications for Public Health
* PubH 6003 Principles and Practice of Epidemiology
* PubH 6021 Essentials of Public Health Practice and Leadership I
* PubH 6247 Design of Health Studies

*Co-Requisites*

* PubH 6853 Use of Stat Packages for Data Management/Data Analysis
* PubH 6022: Essentials of Public Health Practice and Leadership II
* Complete the online offerings in the Dept of Epidemiology and Biostatistics Skills Building Modules Blackboard Community

*Recommended Courses*

* PubH 6011 Environmental and Biological Foundations of Public Health
* PubH 6006 Management and Policy Approaches to Public Health
* PubH 6007 Social and Behavioral Science Methods
* PubH 6252 Advanced Epidemiologic Methods

*Other prerequisites*

* Students must take the online training courses relating to research with human subjects and personal health information (HIPAA) (CITI, <http://www.citiprogram.org/>).
* Students must have participated in a Department of Epidemiology and DBB mandatory Practicum Orientation, designed to highlight the department-specific requirements and expectations for completing the Practicum and CE courses.
* Students must meet with their Departmental Practicum Director.
* If applicable, students must have submitted Student Project Oversight forms before participating in the Practicum.

In addition, students must have identified a site, a Preceptor, posted a Practicum plan online, and had the Practicum Director (PD) sign off on the plan.

Only after all of these requirements are met, can the student submit a Registration Transaction Form (RTF) to the PD for signature and enrollment in the Practicum course.

***3) When should I begin the Practicum planning process?***

It is never too early to begin thinking about your Practicum. Most full-time MPH students complete their Practicum during their second year of study.

**You should plan to** **begin this process no later than the semester before you intend to begin the Practicum/APEx**.

***(4) What is the difference between my Academic Advisor and my Faculty Advisor?***

The GW Academic Advisor assists the student in planning the course work for completion of the MPH in Epidemiology or Biostatistics.

The GW Faculty Advisor works in conjunction/together with the Practicum and Culminating Experience (CE) Course Directors to guide students in the Practicum and CE process. GW Faculty Advisors are generally faculty members in the Department of Epidemiology and DBB and often have research interests or experience in the student’s Practicum and/or CE area of study. The GW Faculty Advisor reviews and approves: (a) the student’s Practicum plan; (b) the Concept Paper; (c) the Proposal; (d) the Final Report or Manuscript; and (e) the PowerPoint presentation. The GW Faculty Advisor also contributes to the student’s final CE grade.

***(5) How do I find a Practicum site and Site Preceptor?***

You are expected to take a proactive role and demonstrate initiative in selecting a Practicum site and Site Preceptor. The following are resources that you may find helpful in securing your experience:

* Web resources:
  + Milken Institute SPH Health Practicum Website, <http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum>
  + Handshake https://gwu.joinhandshake.com/edu
* Your departmental Practicum Director
* Your GW Academic Advisor and other GW Faculty

***(6) Do I have to pick a Practicum site from the Milken Institute SPH Practicum website?***

No. Students can identify a Practicum site through the website, through discussions with other students and faculty members, or they can seek out their own Practicum site.

***(7) I think I’ve found a good Practicum opportunity. What do I do now?***

* Meet with your Practicum Director to determine if the proposed Practicum opportunity is suitable. The site and site preceptor must meet Practicum qualifications.
* After your site has been approved you may begin developing your APEx Proposal in conjunction with your Site Preceptor
* Include your Site Preceptor’s details in your APEx proposal template. Once the template is complete, email it to your PD for review and approval.
* Register for the Practicum course (using an RTF) at the time that your Practicum plan has been approved.

***(8) How do I know if I have to go through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process?***

Students must work with their GW Faculty Advisor to decide whether the topic for a proposed Practice Activity must be submitted for IRB approval. The IRB is a committee mandated by federal law to protect the rights and welfare of human subjects participating in research activities. The IRB achieves its primary function, protecting the rights and welfare of subjects participating in research, by educating researchers and carefully reviewing proposals for conducting human research.

**If you are working with data or accessing any health records, you must ensure that you are allowed to access the data.** This **must** be done **prior to looking at, downloading, or analyzing any data!** Another example of a situation where IRB review might be required is if the student has been conducting research with the intent to publish. Most projects do not need to be reviewed by the full IRB, and instead can be reviewed and approved by the SPH’s Student Project Oversight Committee.

***(9) How do I submit my project to the Student Project Oversight Committee***

* All students participating in projects related to school requirements (dissertation, MPH culminating experience (CE), MPH Practicum, Biostatistics Consulting Practicum, Field Lab Experience, independent study, etc.) require oversight of their projects. This is not only for human protection / IRB reasons but also so the Department can monitor what types of projects are being conducted by students and ensure proper oversight.
* Before beginning any school project involving seeing or handling data derived from humans, students must complete the determination process and have a determination about next steps made.
* Student requirements for project oversight are not always the same as faculty requirements. For example, certain types of studies may be considered non-human subjects research (NHSR) for faculty but due to their sensitive subject area, exempt review is required for students.
* Approval for the project itself is not implied by the completion of the determination project; students still need to work with faculty and staff to ensure the project is approved and meets academic requirements.
* It is the faculty advisor’s responsibility to ensure that students have a determination on file for projects that meet academic program requirements. Students cannot begin their projects until process is completed. Faculty advisors are ultimately responsible for each of the students that they advise on research projects.

***Process:***

* 1. Once Practicum Director (PD) approves practicum plan, they will advise student to complete the Student Project Oversight form here: https://cri-datacap.org/surveys/index.php?s=T3783HC8Y4
  2. Final determinations will be sent to the student, faculty advisor, and PDs
  3. RTF forms for the Practicum, CE, Field Lab Experience, Final Project, or Independent Study, students will not be approved until a determination has been made and all relevant approvals are in place.
* NOTE: For more information, please consult the Student Project Oversight Process on the DEPI/DBB Practicum-CE Resource page [here](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/departments/epidemiology/departmental-resources-students)

***(10) If the study I am working on already has IRB approval, do I need to get approval again?***

Students will sometimes work with institutions other than GW that have their own IRB. The general rule is that students do not have to complete an IRB submission for GW once the IRB used by the site has approved the project. However student still need to complete a Student Project Oversight submission to verify institutional approval and to make sure they are still following proper regulatory guidelines.

***(11) I’m already in a job/internship/fellowship; can this count as my Practicum?***

You may complete the Practicum requirement at your current place of employment, internship, or fellowship; however, if you decide to do so, you must abide by the following:

* The site and Site Preceptor must meet the Milken Institute SPH Practicum qualifications.
* The content and activities of the Practicum must be distinct from your regular work, and must be outlined in your Student Practicum Plan.

***(12) What is the Dept Epidemiology and DBB Skills Building Modules Blackboard Commun***ity***?***

The Department of Epidemiology and DBB has determined that there are several skills essential to the practice of epidemiology that our MPH students should have. A required course, PubH 6261.10 was offered for MPH Epidemiology and Biostatistics students to acquire those skills. This course has been eliminated, freeing up one credit which must be used and which students can use for electives.

The DEPI and DBB restructured the skills building course into a series of online and on-site offerings to accompany the Practicum and the Culminating Experience (CE). They are housed in DEB Blackboard Community to efficiently provide these offerings to students in a series of learning modules. Some of these offerings are optional, others are required. There are also two on-site required activities for building career and oral communications skills. All new DEB MPH students will be included in the Blackboard Community as they enter the program. Current students who did not take the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics Skills Building Seminar

Students will be advised of the on-site activities through the DEB Blackboard Community. These include the Annual DEPI and DBB Career Skills Building Workshop and Practice Sessions for the CE Presentations.

***(13) Do I have to complete the Practicum in one semester?***

No, you can complete the Practicum in one semester or carry it over into a second semester. Be sure the time frame you envision is pre-approved by your Practicum Director and Site Preceptor (e.g., clearly stated in your Student Practicum Plan). You only need to register *once* for the Practicum.

***(14) Am I able to receive financial compensation for the Practicum?***

Yes. However, this is a matter to be negotiated between you and the Site Preceptor. The possibility of payment is not a consideration in the approval of the Practicum. In most cases, because of the limited duration and nature of Practicum placements, they are unpaid.

It is your responsibility to cover any fees that may be associated with your site (e.g. required immunizations, personal protective equipment, and travel).

***(15) How can I obtain funding for the Practicum?***

The Department offers the Practicum Research Fellowship Awards which recognize academic achievement and service in the Department of Epidemiology and provide partial financial support for Practicum and Culminating Experiences. For more information, please contact PDs

Additionally, the Milken Institute SPH and Public Health Alumni Association have partnered to launch the Capital Connection Fund, which provides financial assistance for students to take advantage of off-campus research, internships, conferences and other professional development activities. For more information, please visit: <http://publichealth.gwu.edu/services/students/funding>.

***(16) Am I able to complete my Practicum overseas?***

Yes. This takes additional, early planning on your part. It is suggested that you meet early in the process with your Practicum Director. You will have to post your practicum plan on the SPHHS Practicum website and you will need to register with the International Program Office through the link on the SPHHS Practicum website. Please refer to the SPHHS International Policy and Instructions (<https://passport.gwu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgram&Program_ID=2134>) for more information.

***(17) How long do I have to complete my Culminating Experience?***

The Culminating Experience should be completed in one semester; however, it is often necessary to carry it out over multiple semesters. Be sure the time frame you envision is pre-approved by your Practicum Director, GW Faculty Advisor, and Site Preceptor (e.g., clearly stated in your Student Practicum Plan). You only need to register once for the Culminating Experience. If a student has registered for the Culminating Experience and finds that they need more than one semester to complete it, they should contact their Practicum Director to take appropriate action.

***(18) When do I have to enroll for continuing research or petition for continuing enrollment?***

Students who continue to work on their Practicum and/or their Culminating Experience after they have finished all other course work must be careful to maintain their enrollment status until they complete their degree. This means that if they have completed all other course work they must be registered for Continuous Enrollment or Continuous Research (value of one academic credit). This is done via a new form. Please ask the Practicum Directors or Student Records.

Additionally, students who take more than two semesters to complete the Practicum and more than one semester to complete the CE will have to enroll in either continuing research or petition for continuing enrollment.

There are situations wherein a student can petition for continuous enrollment while completing the Culminating Experience. Be sure to stay in touch with your Practicum Director and Site Preceptor to maintain enrollment status.

***(19) What is the difference between the Practicum plan and the concept paper?***

Before a student can sign up for the Practicum, they must identify a site and a Preceptor, as well as post a Practicum plan on the Milken Institute SPH website. The proposal will identify: 1) the Practicum site where you will complete the Practicum, 2) the person who will serve as the Site Preceptor, 3) the 5 competencies the student will meet by completing the practicum 4) a description of the Practicum activities you will undertake, and, 5) a minimum of two work products/deliverables. The Preceptor will review the template, which must be signed off by a Practicum Director before the student can register for the course.

For the Culminating Experience, the first requirement is the development of a concept paper which describes the work that will be done and how it will be carried out. The Concept Paper is written to aid in the identification of a GW Faculty Advisor who reviews it to assess the appropriateness of the proposed CE’s scope as well as its feasibility and advises the student on expanding the Concept Paper into a Proposal which also requires the approval of the GW Faculty Advisor and Site Preceptor.

***(20) What is the method of evaluation for the Practicum and Culminating Experience?***

Both the Practicum and Culminating Experience are Credit/No credit courses. For the Practicum, students will be evaluated on how well they have accomplished the objectives for their Practice Activity based upon the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics competencies outlined in the Practicum course syllabus by the Site Preceptor and the Practicum Director. Evaluations for the Practice Activity will take place at both the midpoint and the end of the activity. The student’s Site Preceptor will be responsible for evaluating the student’s performance, and the student will also evaluate their own experience.

For the Culminating Experience, students will be assessed on how well they accomplish the objectives for the CE through the evaluation of their (a) Concept Paper, (b) Proposal, (c) Final Report or Manuscript, and (d) Oral Presentation. The GW Faculty Advisor and Site Preceptor will each complete an evaluation of the student’s performance. The student will be evaluated with feedback from the Site Preceptor and/or the GW Faculty Advisor with input from Departmental faculty attending the Oral Presentation.

***(21) Is it possible to be exempt from completing the Practicum requirement?***

There are no automatic exemptions or waivers of the Milken Institute SPH Practicum. In rare situations, it is possible to receive an “Expedited Portfolio Review”. Please refer to this [webpage](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/oaph/apex) for qualifications for an Expedited Portfolio Review.

Note: If you wish to apply for this, you must **file a request by petition during your first semester of matriculation.**

***(22) What modules do I have to complete for the CITI Training?***

All MPH students must be sure to complete the Social and Behavioral Researchers Module for the CITI Training. As a result of the work you are doing, you may be required to complete the Biomedical Researchers module as well. This is something that you may wish to discuss with your GW advisor and the staff of the Office of Human Research which receives the IRB submissions.

For more information, check the CITI training instructions in the GWSPH Graduate Student Handbook.

***(23) If I require assistance with data analysis during my Practicum or Culminating Experience, where can I find it?***

Students can seek statistical programming supportfrom DEB faculty on epidemiologic methods issues such as:

* Study design
* Sample size calculations
* Data management and analysis (SAS Coach)

If you require assistance, please contact your assigned Practicum Director

***(24) There is a professor in the Department of Epidemiology or DBB who is conducting a research project I am interested in. Can I work with that faculty member?***

A GW faculty member can only serve as Site Preceptors for a student’s Practicum, if the work proposed benefits and directly interacts with an outside or community organization. These opportunities are approved by your Practicum Director, and should be sent to them before a formal agreement is made in order to obtain approval.

***(25) Why do I have to make two oral presentations for my CE?***

All students must present their final CE PPT to their site preceptor and colleagues on site before they make their Final Oral Presentation at GW. In cases where the GW Faculty Advisor is the “site preceptor” they must present to them before making the Final Oral Presentation. This gives students an opportunity to practice before the final presentation as well as hear and prepare for questions they might have to field during their Final Oral Presentation.