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

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

The Practicum, a requirement of PubH 6022, 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 DEPI Epidemiology 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 6015 is done via a registration transaction form (RTF). Students in the MPH Epidemiology program register for 6015.13, while the MPH Biostatistics students register for 6015.10 by filling out an RTF and asking the PD they are working with to sign and process the form.

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& 6022 Essentials of Public Health Suite
- PubH 6247 Design of Health Studies

Co-Requisites
- PubH 6249 Use of Stat Packages for Data Management/Data Analysis
- PubH 6022 Epidemiology and Biostatistics Practicum
- Complete the online offerings in the DEPI Epidemiology Skills Building Modules Blackboard Community
Recommended Courses

- PubH 6009 Fundamentals of Program Evaluation
- PubH 6011 Environmental & Biological 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 (DEPI) mandatory Practicum Orientation, designed to highlight the DEPI specific requirements and expectations for completing the Practicum and CE course
- Students must meet with their Departmental Practicum Director
- Students must have submitted their Student Project Oversight Form

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 begin their Practicum

(3) When do I need to register for the Practicum?

You do not need to register for the Practicum. The Practicum is a portion of PubH 6022. You will receive credit for PubH 6022 after the completion of your Practice Activity.

(4) 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 experience.

(6) 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 or Department of Biostatistics and BioInformatics (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 (if applicable); (b) the Concept Paper; (c) the Proposal; (d) the Final Report or Manuscript; and (e) the PowerPoint presentation. The GW Faculty Advisor also determines the student’s final CE grade.

(7) 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](http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum)
  - Milken Institute SPH Jobs Database, [http://publichealth.gwu.edu/studentres/careers/jobs/](http://publichealth.gwu.edu/studentres/careers/jobs/)

- Your departmental Practicum Director
- Your GW Academic Advisor and other GW Faculty

(8) 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.

(9) 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.
- Sign-in to the Milken Institute SPH Practicum Website ([https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum)) and begin filling out your Student Profile
- After your site preceptor has registered and posted a practicum project, begin completion of your Student Practicum Plan in conjunction with your Site Preceptor.

Register for the Practicum course (using an RTF - [https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/forms](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/forms))

(10) Complete the Student Project Oversight Form

As soon as the specifics of your Practicum Plan have been declared and approved by your Practicum Director you should submit your Student Project Oversight Form and associated Endorsement Forms. You may not begin your Practicum until this has been reviewed and approved through this process. Links to these forms can be found at: [https://publichealth.gwu.edu/research/sphhs-office-research-excellence](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/research/sphhs-office-research-excellence)

(11) If the study I am working on already has IRB approval, do I need to get approval again?
No, you will not need to receive additional IRB approval unless something regarding the study has changed, the IRB Protocol you were added to has been closed, or you are working with high risk subject matter. More information about University Policies can be found here: https://publichealth.gwu.edu/research/sphhs-office-research-excellence

(13) 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.
- Your Site Preceptor cannot be an immediate/first-degree relative and/or does not have a conflict of interest that prevents them from objectively providing feedback of student performance.
- The content and activities of the Practicum must be distinct from your regular work, and must be outlined in your Student Practicum Plan.

(14) What is the DEPI Epidemiology Skills Building Modules Blackboard Community?

The Department of Epidemiology (DEPI) has determined that there are several skills essential to the practice of epidemiology that our MPH students should have. The DEPI thus created a series of online and on-site offerings to accompany the Practicum and the Culminating Experience (CE). They are housed in DEPI Blackboard Community to efficiently provide these offerings to students in a series of learning modules. Some of these offerings are optional while others are required. There are also two on-site required activities for building career and oral communications skills. Students will be advised of the on-site activities through the DEPI Blackboard Community. These include the Annual DEPI Career Skills Building Workshop and Practice Sessions for the CE Presentations.

(15) 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 (i.e., clearly stated in your Student Practicum Plan). You only need to register once for the Practicum.

(16) 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).

(17) 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 visit: http://publichealth.gwu.edu/departments/epidemiology-and-biostatistics/practice-xperience.

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.

(18) Am I able to complete my Practicum abroad?

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 SPH Practicum website and you will need to register with the International Program Office through the link on the SPH Practicum website. Please refer to the SPH International Policy and Instructions (https://passport.gwu.edu/index.cfm?FuseAction=Programs.ViewProgram&Program_ID=2134) for more information.

(19) 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 (i.e., clearly stated in your Concept Paper). 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.

(20) 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 (small registration fee) 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 again for continuing enrollment.

Necessary steps include (adapted from the Milken Institute SPH Student Handbook, Academic Year 2010 – 2011):

- For Fall and Spring semesters, you must register for one or more credit hours to maintain enrollment status.
If you have finished all other course work, you must enroll in Continuous Research.

- During the Summer session, if you have completed all other coursework, you must register for Continuous Enrollment (small enrollment fee).
- For more detailed information, please refer to the Student Handbook ([https://publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/images/Grad%20HNDBK%20Fall%202019%20FINAL_2.pdf](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/images/Grad%20HNDBK%20Fall%202019%20FINAL_2.pdf))

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 to maintain enrollment status.

(21) **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 Practicum Plan will identify: 1) the Practicum site where you will complete the Practicum, 2) the person who will serve as the Site Preceptor, 3) the learning objectives of the Practicum, 4) a description of the Practicum activities you will undertake, and, 5) if applicable, a timeline for the Student’s products or deliverables. The Preceptor will review the plan, which must be signed off by a Practicum Director before s/he can register for the course. The Preceptor must sign off on the plan within the first 24 hours of the student beginning the Practicum on-site.

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; this also requires the approval of the GW Faculty Advisor and Site Preceptor.

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

The Culminating Experience is a Credit/No credit course. 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 competencies outlined in the Practicum course syllabus by the Site Preceptor and the Practicum Director and their PubH 6022 Course Instructor. Evaluations for the Practice Activity will take place at both the midpoint and the end of the activity via two work-related products. The student’s Site Preceptor will be responsible for evaluating the student’s performance, and the student will also evaluate his/her 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.

(23) **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 “Practicum Equivalent Experience.”

Please refer to this section of the Milken Institute SPH Practicum Handbook, [https://publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/images/Grad%20HNDBK%20Fall%202019%20FINAL_2.pdf](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/sites/default/files/images/Grad%20HNDBK%20Fall%202019%20FINAL_2.pdf).

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

(24) 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 on the SPH Practicum website: [https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum](https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum)

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

Students can seek statistical programming support from 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 or the SAS Coach, Dr. Angelo Elmi at afelmi@gwu.edu.

(26) 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?

Yes! Assuming that the faculty member is in need of assistance and accepts you onto their appropriate IRB/other research oversight protocols you may certainly work with them.

(27) 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.