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A Note from the Associate Dean for Public Health Practice

Thank you for your interest in serving as a Practicum Preceptor. We appreciate your dedication to your work and your willingness to engage with our students. The Practicum is an essential planned, supervised, and evaluated component of the public health professional degree program, and critical to the career development of our students. Beyond providing work experience it is an opportunity to learn from you who are experts in your sectors, and to apply some of their classroom training to the practice of public health. It is important that our students are able to work with a Preceptor who understands their need for professional development, guidance, and mentorship. If you have any question about public health practice at GW SPH, please feel free to contact me via email at pndv@gwu.edu to set up an appointment.

Pierre Vigilance, MD, MPH
Associate Dean for Practice
Associate Professor of Global Health
Milken Institute School of Public Health
At The George Washington University

Introduction

As a requirement established by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH),

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

(CEPH, School of Public Health Accreditation Criteria, Amended June 2005).

In accordance with these requirements, all MPH students in Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University (GWSPH) are required to satisfactorily complete a practice experience, known as a practicum, before graduation.

In the following pages, you will find a detailed description of the Practicum process and the role of a Site Preceptor. We hope this will facilitate your participation and ensure a solid partnership with the GWSPH. We thank you for your interest in participating in our program.

Since practical knowledge and skills are essential to a successful career in public health, a planned, supervised, and evaluated practicum is an essential component of a public health professional degree program. The goal of the practicum is to provide an opportunity for students to synthesize, integrate, and apply practical skills, knowledge, and training learned through courses, to gain professional experience in a public health work environment, and to work on public health practice projects that are of particular interest to not only themselves but also the community at large.

The school’s location in the nation’s capital allows for a variety of unique experiences within a multitude of practicum sites. To help facilitate this experience, GWSPH has created this
guidebook\(^1\) to give you an overall picture of the practicum experience.

**What is an MPH Practicum?**
The practicum is a partnership among GWSPH Students, The George Washington University, and sponsoring agencies/organizations. In this partnership, GWSPH is represented by Practicum Advisors and sponsoring organizations are represented by Site Preceptors (Preceptors). Each party in this mutually beneficial relationship assumes certain responsibilities, performs specific functions, and accrues benefits. The practicum is guided by a set of goals and objectives, which are based on the needs and resources of all parties involved.

A practicum provides the opportunity to integrate and apply classroom learning in a public health setting, enabling students to observe and learn from you, professionals in the field. Students will contribute to a community’s resources and to the solution of public health problems, while developing practical skills and personal confidence as a public health professional.

\(^1\) Individual departments and academic programs may have *additional* materials.
School-wide Practicum Standards
Although certain elements of the practicum vary by department, the following are practicum standards for all MPH students:

- The practicum must be conducted in a public health or related setting;
- The practicum must be supervised by an experienced public health or related professional;
- The student must complete at least 120 hours of work
- Students will receive credit or no credit by their academic department based on evaluation of a Final Report including a reflection by the student and their Preceptor’s evaluation of their performance.

Roles and Responsibilities
During the practicum the student will work under the supervision of the Practicum Advisor, and the Preceptor, who agrees to directly supervise the student during the practicum experience. Decisions on the specific objectives, activities, and division within the organization are determined through discussions and agreements amongst the Preceptor, the student, and the Practicum Advisor. The roles and responsibilities of a Preceptor are outlined below.

Preceptor
1. Visit the Practicum Website  https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum
2. Create an account in the Practicum System in GWork for Public Health
3. Negotiate payment/stipend with Student, if applicable
4. Review and approve the Student’s Practicum Plan
5. Engage student in work and provide constructive feedback and guidance to the student
6. Provide guidance for professional conduct
7. Complete the following on the Practicum Website:
   a. Midpoint evaluation form in conjunction with the student
   b. Final site preceptor evaluation of student and practicum
8. Address student’s reports of problems, including site safety issues and/or harassment

An Overview of the Practicum Experience

What kind of organizations can be an MPH practicum site?
In general, a practicum site has the following elements:
- Serves a public health, health services, or social impact mission or supports an agency or department with such a mission
- Addresses significant public health, health services or social problems
- Offers students the opportunity to learn from public health professionals in a supervised environment

The following provides a general overview of the processes involved in completing the practicum experience.
Prior to Student Placement:
Preceptors are required to complete a Company / Contact Form (Preceptor Profile) online through the GWork for Public Health database. As part of the Preceptor Profile, Preceptors will be required to submit a one-page bio sketch or resume which can be uploaded as part of their Preceptor Profile. The Practicum Advisor and the Associate Dean for Practice will review and approve these materials, and you will receive log-in credentials. For step-by-step instructions on the completion of the Preceptor Profile and Project Description, go to Page 8 of this guidebook.

Interviewing and Selecting MPH Practicum Students
In most circumstances, you will meet our students via networking, referral from a fellow student, or a colleague, so an informal interview will already have taken place. Students who are unfamiliar with your work will have the chance to view your project description online, and may reach out to you to schedule an informal conversation about your work.

The Practicum Plan
Students work with their Preceptor and their Practicum Advisor to design, review, and approve their Practicum Plan. As part of the plan, the Preceptor and the student will identify learning objectives related to the student’s program-specific competencies for the practicum experience. The student will submit the Plan online for review and approval by the Preceptor as well as the Practicum Advisor. All Preceptors need to approve the plan by logging into GWork for Public Health

Learning objectives are statements of what the student will achieve during the practicum or will be able to do once the student has completed the practicum. You will evaluate these objectives at the mid-point and the final evaluation of the practicum.

Learning objectives must:
- Be linked to the student’s program-specific practicum competencies (Program-specific competencies are listed here: https://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum under Core Competencies.
- Build the student’s professional skills
- Be prepared in conjunction with and approved by the Site Preceptor, Academic Advisor and Practicum Director.

Examples of appropriate learning objectives (LO) are as follows:

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<th>Competency</th>
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Assess environmental and occupational exposures.

Use air monitoring equipment correctly for taking meaningful workplace samples.

Apply knowledge of global health patterns and determinants in support of global health research.

Conduct a needs assessment in response to avian influenza in Uganda.

Assessing the methodology and quality of research results.

Synthesizing and summarizing health care policy news as it relates to children, low-income families, and Medicaid.

**Supervising the Practicum Experience**

Students will work under your guidance to carry out the practicum project in accordance with the expectations set forth in the *Practicum Plan*. The practicum will entail a minimum of 60 hours of fieldwork per credit hour, 120 hours in total for most MPH students. The practicum may be finished in as little as three weeks, but should not take more than 2 semesters (28 weeks) to be completed.

When students are working, they are required to log in to the [GWork for Public Health](http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum) and make note of their hours. As the hours are completed, the system will track and subsequently prompt the student and Preceptor to fill out required, time-sensitive materials such as the Midpoint and Final Evaluations.

**Evaluating the Practicum Experience**

There are two types of evaluations that preceptors complete for the practicum:

- A mid-point evaluation that will be completed by the student during the practicum;
- Final evaluations will be completed at the end of the practicum experience by both the Preceptor and the student.

The midpoint evaluation will be completed with the student and any changes to the *Practicum Plan* must be submitted by the student to the Practicum Director and Academic Advisor.

The student’s final evaluation of the practicum experience will be evaluated for credit or no credit by the Preceptor and the Practicum Advisor based on the reflections they document as relate to: the learning objectives, skills built, challenges faced, rewards, and contributions to career goals. The student will have access to review the Site Preceptor’s final evaluation of their performance.

**Practicum Website**

The [Practicum Website](http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum) (http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum) provides you with one location for:

- Policies and requirements
- Required forms
- Program-specific materials
- Listing of practicum opportunities
- Tools and resources

*All Forms must be filled out electronically and submitted through the GWork for Public Health*
Practicum Training sessions will be available to provide you with an overview on how to use this site and address any questions you may have. Instructions for the primary site functions you will use are below.

Using the Practicum Website (http://publichealth-gwu-csm.symplicity.com/)

**IMPORTANT:** Before registering in the practicum system, please watch the brief preceptor training videos available here: http://publichealth.gwu.edu/content/preceptor-training-videos. These videos provide instructions on how to use the practicum system.

Using The Practicum System in GWork for Public Health

**Step 1: Create Preceptor Profile**
1. Go to http://publichealth-gwu-csm.symplicity.com/
2. Select “Employer”
3. Select either “Register” or “Register and List A Project Proposal”. If you simply want to create a preceptor account in the system, select the former. If you would like to submit a project proposal at the same time as your preceptor account, select the latter.
4. Fill out the preceptor application form. You will be asked for both information about your company and yourself. Before you begin, make you have selected “yes” for the question “Are you registering as a Practicum Preceptor?” This will cause a few additional fields to appear in the form that must be completed in order for you registration to be approved.

5. If you selected “Sign Up and Post Job” on the original registration screen, after finishing the Company/Contact form, you will be taken to the job posting form. Before you begin, be sure to
select “School of Public Health Practicum” in the position type field. Otherwise, your project proposal will not be listed as a practicum in our system.

6. Once your preceptor application/project proposal has been submitted, it will need to go through our approval process. Once your profile is approved, you will receive an email with instructions on how to login to the system and set your password.

Step 2: Sign In to Preceptor Account

After your registration is approved, you will receive a welcome email which will contain a link that allows you to sign in for the first time. Each time you come back to the system after the initial login, you will need to follow the below process to login.

1. Go to http://publichealth-gwu-csm.symplicity.com/
2. Select “Employer”
3. Sign in with your email address and password. If you’ve forgotten your password, use the “Forgot Password” link to reset it.

Step 3: Create a Project Proposal

1. After logging into the system, click on the “Job Postings” link the left navigation. It will be nested under the Jobs/Project Proposals tab.
2. On the job postings page, click the “Post a Job” button.

3. Before filling out the rest of the form, be sure to select “School of Public Health Practicum” in the Position Type field. This will ensure that your project proposal is listed as a practicum opportunity in our system.
4. When you get to the “Application Submission Method” field, select “Other”. Then entire your email (or the appropriate contact information) in the “How to Apply” field.

5. Once you have submitted your project proposal, it will also need to be approved before it can be viewed by students in the system. Approvals can take up to one business day.

6. To review or edit an existing project proposal, simply select the “Job Postings” tab in the left navigation. Then click on the job post you wish to edit.
Step 4: Practicum Plan Approval

1. You should receive an email alert when a student has successfully submitted a project plan to your proposal. This email will contain a direct link to the approval form (you will not need to login to the system). However, you can also access and approve the plan through the system interface.

2. First, select “Approvals” in the left navigation. It will be nested under “Practicum”.

3. You will be taken to a screen with all of your currently active practicum plans. In the “Employer Approved” field, change the dropdown to “Pending”. This should list any plans that you need to approve. Simply select “Review” and “Approve”.

Step 5: Midpoint Evaluations

1. You should receive an email alert when a student has successfully submitted a midpoint evaluation with a link directly to the approval form. However, you can also access and approve through the system interface.

2. Select “Evaluations” in the left navigation and then the “Midpoint Evaluations” tab.
3. Select “Review” to view the student’s evaluation and then approve/request changes.

**Step 6: Final Student Evaluations (Final Step)**
1. You should receive an email alert when it is time to fill out the final student evaluation.
2. After logging in, navigation to “Evaluations” in the left navigation (under “Practicum” tab).
3. Select the “Final Evaluations” tab.

4. To evaluate student, select the Evaluate student link under the student’s name
Practicum Training

Financial Compensation
Participation in the practicum is not predicated on the availability of remuneration but on the quality and value of the educational experience. Financial compensation for the practicum, if available, is a matter to be negotiated between you and the student prior to the commencement of the practicum experience.

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. However, preceptors are advised that the student must pay tuition to the University for a two-credit hour course (approximately $2,000) in order to receive credit for the practicum.
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<th>Department</th>
<th>Contact</th>
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**Milken Institute School of Public Health Practicum Contacts**

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*Thank you for your commitment to shaping our future public health workforce. We greatly appreciate your time and support!*