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1. **Introduction**

Thank you for your interest in mentoring and facilitating a practice experience (Practicum) for an MPH student!

The Practicum is a partnership among Milken Institute School of Public Health (GWSPH) students, The George Washington University as represented by your department’s Practicum Director/Advisor (PD), and sponsoring agencies/organizations as represented by the Site Preceptor. 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.

As a requirement established by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH), a practice is required for all degree-seeking students enrolled at an accredited school of public health, accreditation Criterion 2.4 states,

“All graduate professional public health 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, 2011)

CEPH further interprets this criterion by stating,

“Practical knowledge and skills are essential to successful practice. A planned, supervised and evaluated practice experience is an essential component of a professional public health degree program. These opportunities can take place in a variety of agencies and organizations and should include local and state public health agencies to the extent possible and appropriate. Opportunities may also include those in appropriate local, state, national, and international non-governmental agencies and organizations. An essential component of the practice experience is supervision by a preceptor qualified to evaluate the professional competence of the student. Schools must have well-defined learning objectives, procedures, and criteria for evaluation of the practice experience.” (CEPH, 2011)

Per 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.

Since practical knowledge and skills are essential to a successful career in public health, a **planned, supervised** and **evaluated** Practicum is an integral 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.

In this guide, you will find a detailed description of the Practicum process and the role of a Site Preceptor. We hope this will help facilitate your participation and ensure a solid partnership with GWSPH. Thank you again for your interest in our program!

2. What is an MPH Practicum?
The Practicum is a partnership among Milken Institute School of Public Health (GWSPH) students, The George Washington University as represented by your department’s PD, and sponsoring agencies/organizations as represented by the Site Preceptor. 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.

School-wide Practicum Standards
Although certain program-specific 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 field) professional as outlined below:
  - Doctoral-level degree (e.g., PhD, DrPH, MD, ScD, EdD, PsyD) and current, full-time, relevant professional public health experience; or
  - Master of Public Health (MPH) degree and at least three years of full-time, relevant professional public health experience; or
  - Other Master-level degree (e.g., MS, MA, MHA, MEd) and at least five years of full-time, relevant professional public health experience, or
  - Bachelor level degree and at least ten years of full-time, relevant professional public health experience.
- The student must complete at least 120 hours of supervised public health fieldwork;
- Students will receive a grade of Credit or No Credit by their academic department based in part of a recommendation by the Site Preceptor via a Final Evaluation in addition to a Student Self-Evaluation of the Practicum experience.
3. Roles and Responsibilities
During the Practicum, the student will work under the supervision of the PD, and the Preceptor, who agrees to supervise the student during the Practicum experience directly. Decisions on the specific objectives, activities, and division within the organization are determined through discussions and agreements amongst the Preceptor, the student, and the PD. The roles and responsibilities of a Preceptor are outlined below.

Site Preceptors
- Review the GWSPH Preceptor Practicum Guidebook
- Review and approve the student’s Practicum Plan.
- Engage with the student onsite and provide constructive feedback and guidance, including but not limited to skill acquisition and professional conduct.
- Verify the student’s weekly hours.
- Complete the following:
  - Midterm Evaluation in conjunction with the student, and
  - Final Site Preceptor Evaluation.
- Negotiate payment or stipend the student, if applicable.
- Address any reports from the student of concerns, including but not limited to site safety issues and sexual harassment.

4. 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; and
- Have well-defined activities that will enable students to apply their knowledge and skills.

Before Student Placement:
Students are required to register their Practicum Site and Preceptor in our online practicum system, STEPS by Exxat. As part of the Preceptor Profile, student are required to submit a CV or resume which is uploaded to STEPS. The CV/resume is only visible to the student’s PD and the Associate Dean for Applied Public Health (ADAPH).
Once submitted, the student’s PD will review and your registration and approve. Once approved you will begin receiving email notifications from the system.

For step-by-step instructions please see our Exxat Preceptor Manual.
Interviewing and Selecting MPH Practicum Students

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

If your organization requires a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), an Affiliation Agreement (AA), or the like, please contact the student’s PD directly. All contractual agreements are reviewed by the University Office of General Counsel (OGC) and may require a significant amount of time for full execution.

Note: GWSPH is not responsible for student background checks, drug testing, immunization records, or other screening requirements. If your organization requires this type of verification as part of the hiring process, it is imperative that you discuss this with the student early and directly.

5. The APEX Proposal

Students work with their Preceptor and their PD to design, review and approve their Applied Practical Experience Proposal. As part of the proposal, the Preceptor and the student will identify activities that apply to the student’s school and program-specific competencies for the Applied Practical experience. The student will submit the Proposal online for review and approval by the Preceptor as well as the PD. All Preceptors must approve the plan by clicking on the email notification from STEPS by Exxat.

You will evaluate the student’s progress and performance at the mid-point and the final evaluation of the Applied Practical Experience.

6. Supervising the Practicum Experience

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

When students are working, they are required to log in to the online practicum system, STEPS by Exxat, and make a 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.
7. Evaluating the Practicum Experience

There are two types of evaluations that preceptors review/complete for the Practicum:

- A process evaluation referred to as the **Midterm Evaluation** that will be completed by both the student and Preceptor during the Practicum; and
- An outcome evaluation referred to as the **Final Evaluation** will be completed at the end of the Practicum experience by both the Preceptor and the student.
  - The student will complete a final self-evaluation of the experience, and
  - The Preceptor will evaluation the student via a separate final evaluation.

The **Midterm Evaluation** will be completed with the student, and the student must submit any changes to the APEx Proposal to their PD.

The Final Evaluation and Final Self-Evaluation of the Practicum experience will be evaluated for a grade of Credit or No Credit by the Preceptor and the PD based on the reflections they document as relate to the competencies, 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 [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 (e.g., APEx Proposal, evaluations) must be filled out electronically and submitted through the STEPS by Exxat online practicum system.*

Site Preceptor training sessions will be available to provide you with an overview of how to use this site and address any questions you may have. Please reach out to us at [sphprac@gwu.edu](mailto:sphprac@gwu.edu) should you require any assistance or training resources.

8. Using the Online Practicum System: **STEPS by Exxat**

Site Preceptors should review the short but very informative User Manual. Please contact us at [sphprac@gwu.edu](mailto:sphprac@gwu.edu) should you wish to participate in a virtual training session for the online practicum system. A step-by-step User Manual is located in the Appendix B.
9. **Financial Compensation**

Participation in the Practicum is not predicated on the availability of remuneration but 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 before 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, we encourage you to discuss the possibility of renumeration with your student if it is fiscally possible for your organization.

**Thank you for your support and mentorship of GWSPH MPH students, and your commitment to the future of the public health workforce!**
## APPENDIX A: GWSPH Contact Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Practicum Contact</th>
<th>Email</th>
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**Office of Applied Public Health**

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- Director for Office of Applied Public Health: Dr. Jennifer Skillicorn, skilli_j@gwu.edu
- Office of Applied Public Health: sphprac@gwu.edu
APPENDIX B: The Online Practicum System Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Go to STEPS by Exxat: the Online Practicum System

Reviewing and Approving a Practicum Plan

1. You will receive an email from the GWSPH online practicum system, Exxat. Open the email.

2. Click on the link in the email
Reviewing and Approving a Practicum Plan

1. Review the student’s Practicum Plan (scroll down – each menu is collapsible for ease of viewing)
2. You can then request more information (click on “More Information Needed”) or approve the plan (click on “Approve”)
3. Note: You may be asked to review again – if the PD asks for additional information from the student you will be asked to repeat these review and approval steps.
Complete the Preceptor Endorsement Form
Reviewing the Midpoint Evaluation

- Students are required to submit a Midpoint Evaluation once they log 60 practicum hours

1. You will receive an email from the GWSPH online practicum system, Exxat. Open the email.

   ![Email Image]

2. Click on the link in the email
Reviewing the Midpoint Evaluation

1. Review the student’s Initial Plan (scroll down – each menu is collapsible for ease of viewing)
2. Click “Next”
Reviewing the Midpoint Evaluation

1. Review the student’s Midpoint Evaluation

2. Click “Approve and Next”

3. Provide a brief Midpoint Evaluation of the student’s progress

4. Click “Submit”
Reviewing the Final Evaluation

- Students are required to submit a Final Evaluation once they complete 120 practicum hours – Preceptors must also submit a Final Evaluation of the student’s work.

1. Open the email from Exxat

2. Click on the link in the email
Reviewing the Final Evaluation

1. Review the student’s Initial Plan (scroll down – each menu is collapsible for ease of viewing)
2. Review the completed Midpoint Evaluation
3. Click “Next”
Reviewing the Final Evaluation

1. Review the student’s Final Evaluation (scroll down – each menu is collapsible for ease of viewing)
2. You can then request more information (click on “More Information Needed”) or approve the plan (click on “Approve”)
Complete the Final Evaluation

1. Complete the form to evaluate the student’s overall work during the practicum → Click “Submit”

We strongly encourage perceptors to provide constructive, usable feedback not only for the student but also for our program. Your feedback is reviewed closely and taken very seriously in our program evaluation and quality improvement processes.

Thank you again for your interest and time in precepting for an MPH student. Please do not hesitate to contact us directly at sphprac@gwu.edu should you have questions, concerns, or would like to engage in more applied learning opportunities with our students.