**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Field/Laboratory Experience (PubH 6016.10)**

***(1) What is the Field/Laboratory Experience Requirement?***

The overall purpose of the Field/Laboratory Experience requirement is to introduce students in the MS PHMEID Program to a supervised practical experience to reinforce the classroom and laboratory work in their academic program. Experiences generally take place in one of the following areas:

* Infectious disease research;
* Public health laboratories; or
* Qualifying public health entities (local, state or federal public health department, multilateral health organization, private contractor, etc.) to introduce them to epidemiologic research, particularly, surveillance and its tie-in with laboratories either in the United States or in an international setting.

Students choosing a laboratory-focused experience will gain concrete experiences in key laboratory functions. This includes but is not limited to gaining experience in specimen collection, use of test kits, specimen storage and transport, chain of custody procedures, specimen processing in the laboratory, Good Laboratory Practices, general quality control issues, use of basic lab instrumentation, issues of biosafety, and exposure to one or more key laboratory test methods.

Students seeking a more epidemiology-focused experience will carry out the field placement in contexts where they will be exposed to epidemiologic research, surveillance, and the relationship between the laboratory and public health epidemiologists.

For more information, please refer to the syllabus on the website, or contact Prof. Ann Goldman-Hawes, annieg@gwu.edu or Prof. Joe Schmitthenner, jschmitthenner@gwu.edu.

***(2) What is the difference between the Field/Lab Experience and the Final Project?***

The Field/Laboratory Experience requirement is intended to introduce students in the MS PHMEID Program to a supervised practical experience to reinforce the classroom and laboratory work in their academic program. Students choose between focusing on a laboratory-focused experience vs. an epidemiology-focused experience.

The Final Project requirement is a credit/non-credit course (Pubh 6280), which consists of the synthesis and summary of data in an area of the students’ interest in epidemiologic, bench or field research. Successful completion of the project includes submission of a concept paper and a final report or oral presentation. The final project is supervised by a faculty mentor, and students are evaluated by their project preceptors. For more information, please visit the MS PHMEID resource page on the Department of Epidemiology website or contact one of the Final Project Course Facilitators. They are:

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Students are able to link the work conducted as part of the Field/Laboratory Experience with that of the Final Project. This should be discussed in advance with the Course Directors and Site Preceptor.

***(3) Are there any requirements before registering for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

Yes. Before a student can enroll in the Field/Laboratory Experience course, they must complete the following epidemiology and microbiology courses. These courses are:

*Course Prerequisites*

* PubH 6002 Biostatistical Applications for Public Health
* PubH 6003 Principles and Practice of Epidemiology
* PubH 6245 Infectious Disease Epidemiology

In the event a student has not completed one of these courses, the student should seek permission from one of the Program Directors prior to enrolling in the Field/Laboratory Experience.

In addition, the student must have completed the following requirements:

* Attend the GWU Biosafety training course (offered every semester).
* Attend the MS Field/Lab Experience Orientation (offered every semester).
* Complete CITI and HIPS on-line training (<http://www.citiprogram.org/>).

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

***(4) What is the procedure/planning process for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

Before beginning the field placement, students and Site Preceptors develop a contract that outlines the learning objectives that will be met and defines the project activities. Site Preceptors are asked to certify the student’s hours and evaluate the student (certification and evaluation documents can be sent via mail, fax, or email) and students are required to produce a brief report on their experience.

***(5) When should I begin planning for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

It is never too early to begin thinking about your Field/Laboratory Experience. Most full-time MS students complete their Field/Laboratory Experience after their first two semesters of study.

**You should plan to** **begin this process no later than the semester before you intend to begin the Field/Laboratory Experience**.

***(6) How do I identify a Field/Laboratory Experience Site Preceptor?***

The following are resources that you may find helpful in securing your experience:

* Web resources:
	+ Milken Institute SPH Practicum Website, <http://publichealth.gwu.edu/academics/practicum>
	+ GWork for Public Health, <http://publichealth.gwu.edu/services/career-center/jobs>
* Your departmental Field/Laboratory Experience Course Director
* Other GW Faculty and Program Directors

***(7) When do I need to register for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

Once you have completed the steps mentioned above, you can enroll in the course.

***(8) I’m already in a job/internship/fellowship; can this count as my Field/Laboratory Experience?***

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

* Your Site Preceptor cannot be your current supervisor.
* The content and activities of the Field/Laboratory Experience must be distinct from your regular work, and must be outlined in your contract.

***(9) Do I have to complete the Field/Laboratory Experience in one semester?***

No, you can complete the Field/Laboratory Experience in one semester or if you started after the semester began, you can carry it out into the next semester. Be sure the time frame you envision is pre-approved by your Course Director and Site Preceptor (e.g., clearly stated in your contract). You only need to register once for the Field/Laboratory Experience.

***(10) Am I able to receive financial compensation for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

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 Field/Laboratory Experience. In most cases, because of the limited duration and nature of the experience, 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).

***(11) How can I obtain funding for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

The Department offers the Practicum Research Fellowship Awards which recognize academic achievement and service in the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics and provide partial financial support for Practicum, Culminating Experiences, Field/Lab Experiences, and Final Projects. For more information, please visit: http://publichealth.gwu.edu/departments/epidemiology-and-biostatistics/practice-experience

Additionally, the SPHHS 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://sphhs.gwu.edu/services/students/funding

***(12) Am I able to complete my Field/Laboratory Experience*** ***overseas?***

Yes. This takes additional, early planning on your part. It is suggested that you meet early in the process with your Course Director to discuss your interests. Once you have chosen a Field/Lab Experience overseas. You will be responsible for contacting GW’s Office of International Programs at oip@gwu.edu to obtain permission and register your trip.

***(15) What is the method of evaluation for the Field/Laboratory Experience?***

Students will receive a letter grade based upon the review of the contract, the Site Preceptor’s evaluation, and the student’s Field/Laboratory Experience Report.

***(16) If I require assistance with data analysis during my Field/Laboratory Experience or the Final Project, 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 Course Director or the SAS Coach, Dr. Angelo Elmi at afelmi@gwu.edu.

***(17) Do I need to obtain IRB approval for my Field/Laboratory Experience or the Final Project?***

**Student Project Oversight**

* 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**

* Students should complete the REDCap form as soon as they have a project lined up, even if the proposal is not approved; this will expedite the process.
* The Practicum/CE Coordinators and the Associate Chair will be notified a determination is waiting. In the unlikely event that there is no response within 7 working days, please write to manyadm@gwu.edu to confirm receipt.
* The Associate Chair will review the submission and ask the student and faculty advisor (if applicable) for clarifying information by email. The faculty advisor will receive a copy of the submission for their records so they can confirm accuracy of what the student has submitted. The email notes will be copied into REDCap for documentation.
* Final determinations will be sent to the student, faculty advisor, and Practicum/CE Coordinators.
* RTF forms for the Practicum, CE, Field Lab Experience, Final Project, or Independent Study, students will not be approved until this process is complete.

**NOTE: For more information, please consult the Student Project Oversight Process on the DEPI Practicum-CE Resource page**.