MPH Practicum – Preceptor Roles and Responsibilities

All UC MPH students are required to complete supervised public health practice through the Practicum course, regardless of prior work experience. The applied public health Practicum Experience should align with the mission and competencies of the UC MPH Program. Students should also design their Practicum to fit their career goals.

Objective: The goal of the public health Practicum is to demonstrate attainment of MPH competencies (both core and concentration) through applied practice experiences in public health. Specifically, students must demonstrate that their Practicum experience addresses at least 5 competencies from the MPH Program.

Products: As the work products of the Practicum Experience, students are required to complete Practicum Forms A-E, a Practicum Experience Summary Report, and a final presentation in addition to the specific products required by their Practicum Field Site.

WHAT IS A PRACTICUM?

A Practicum is a unique opportunity for graduate students to integrate and apply practical skills and training learned through coursework and prior experiences in a professional public health work environment. The Practicum should be related to a student’s academic goals and professional interests to enhance the student experience. The UC MPH Program requires all students to participate in a Practicum experience, as required by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH).

A typical Practicum experience requires students to work a minimum of 120 hours under the direct supervision of a Practicum Preceptor and the guidance of the MPH Practicum Director. An ideal Practicum experience should be:

- Project-oriented work in a public health site
- Allow students to apply graduate level skills in a public health context
- Offer opportunities to engage in activities that will advance a student’s career potential and goals

An MPH Practicum is a student-planned, preceptor-supervised, and evaluated practice experience. Each Practicum should:

- Be based on well-defined competencies/learning objectives
- Include a process to track and evaluate student performance, competency achievement and practical experiences
- Be supervised, primarily, by a qualified Practicum Preceptor (a public health practitioner qualified to evaluate the professional competence of the student)

PRACTICUM SITE

Students will identify a Practicum site for their public health practice experience. Students will practice under the supervision of a preceptor. Ideal Practicum Sites include:

- Governmental, non-governmental, non-profit, hospitals, local health departments, industrial and for-profit settings or appropriate university-affiliated settings
- To be appropriate for applied practice experience activities, university-affiliated settings must be primarily focused on community engagement, typically with external partners
University health promotion or wellness centers may also be appropriate

**PRACTICUM PRECEPTOR**

A Practicum Preceptor will provide direct supervision to the student. Often, they will serve in a mentoring role, providing the students with valuable guidance, insights, and lessons that can only be gleaned from years of professional experience. Practicum Preceptors should have working knowledge of the public health agency, the community served, and the content area. Ideally, the Preceptor will have a MPH degree or a terminal degree in a related field, or the equivalent combination of education and experience.

Preceptors are expected to:

1) Develop mutually agreeable goals and objectives with the Practicum student(s) at the beginning of the experience.

2) Discuss, outline and align the student’s public health practice activities and duties in order to fulfill the goal of the Practicum;

3) Supervise the student’s practice on-site to direct and ensure completion of tasks/responsibilities and a minimum of 120 hours of practice;

4) Provide feedback to the student and the MPH Program by evaluating the student’s performance at the end of the experience to aid in determining major component of the student’s final grade;

5) Provide feedback and suggestions to help improve the student’s practice and the Practicum course in the future.

The preceptor may communicate with the MPH Program as needed to ensure the student’s practice meets the goals of both the MPH Program and the Practicum site (UC MPH Program Director: charles.doarn@uc.edu).

**WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A PRACTICUM PRECEPTOR?**

- Aid students in fulfilling their Practicum requirement
- Benefit from students offering support on your current projects
- Raise awareness of your organization
- Reserve the opportunity to hire the best
- Serve as a valuable mentoring resource to UC MPH Program
- Contribute to the development of new public health professionals

**PRACTICUM PROCESS**

1) **Initial Contact** – Students will identify and contact the potential Practicum site to discuss opportunities to conduct a Practicum and determine an employee to be the Practicum preceptor.

2) **Practicum Meeting** – Students will meet with the Practicum Director to discuss the details of
their Practicum plans, including the Practicum site, preceptor and project details.

3) **Establishing Practicum** – All practicum experiences require objectives that are mutually agreed upon between the Preceptor and the student. Students and Preceptors should discuss the project plans, student objectives and activities, Practicum instructions, MPH core competencies, and future career goals.

4) **Practicum Forms** – Students are required to complete the following forms to provide the MPH Program with the details of their Practicum, planned activities and objectives, and a Preceptor and student evaluation. Completion and submission of these forms is the responsibility of the Practicum student.
   a. **Form A - Practicum Application Form**
   b. **Form B - Field Placement Practicum Questionnaire**
   c. **Form C - Intended Field Practicum Activities Agreement**
   d. **Form D - Site Supervisor Final Student Evaluation** – Form D must be completed by the Practicum Preceptor and submitted as a PDF file *BY THE STUDENT* on Canvas at the end of the semester. It is recommended that you meet with the student to discuss the completion of objectives and overall evaluation. This provides the student with an experience similar to performance evaluations that typically occur in the workplace.
   e. **Form E - Student Evaluation of Agency Form**

5) **MPH Program Practicum Deliverables**
   a. **Practicum Report** – Students must submit a summary of their Practicum experience that describes the organization, their project and activities, and the attainment of at least 5 MPH competencies.
   b. **Practicum Presentation** – Students are required to give a presentation on their Practicum experience at the end of the semester. Preceptors are encouraged to attend the presentation seminar.

**ESTABLISHING WORK STANDARDS**

Students can be valuable, energetic, and eager contributors in the work setting. At the same time, they are not full employees in the agency or organization. Because of this, they need clearly defined expectations for their work standards that should both be specific, reasonable and attainable within your agency.

1) **Orientation** – Students need a basic orientation to the agency or organization. Orientation may include: an overview of the mission of the agency or organization; guidelines and resources for performing assigned tasks; office policies and procedures and professional dress code. Additional orientation basics may include: introduction to key contacts, tour of the facilities and demonstration on office equipment use.

2) **Adequate work resources** – Students need to have access to the resources needed to accomplish the objectives of the Practicum. These may include desk and computer, phone name badges, access cards, time sheets or other items as deemed necessary.

3) **Assignments**
   a) Students need defined timelines. Students must balance school assignments with their Practicum experience to assure that both can be completed. Timelines and due dates aid students in planning for success.
   b) Students benefit from experiencing the internal operations of the worksite that may go beyond the objectives of the Practicum. These include things such as, observing management discussions, participating in strategic planning, and attending seminars.
   c) Students benefit from applying skills they have learned in graduate school to the
operations of the agency. They also benefit from trying to perform beyond their own comfort level.

4) **Regular Contact and Supervision** – Preceptors and Practicum students should have opportunities to meet regularly.

   a) **Developing Work Plans** – Preceptors and Practicum students should develop objectives for the Practicum experience and form a work plan that is achievable. The work plan ideally should expose the student to a broad range of activities, decision-making processes, and issues pertinent to the organization’s activities.

   b) **Regular Meetings:** The subject matter of these meetings may include performance evaluation, discussion of the organization’s activities, and assistance in developing insights into public health practice, and otherwise provide guidance that can assist the student professionally. This kind of mentoring can have tremendous educational value to the student.

   c) **Evaluation:** At the end of the Practicum, the Preceptor will be asked to complete an evaluation form assessing the student’s performance. The student will also assess their experience working with the organization. It is encouraged that the Preceptor and the student meet to discuss the content of the evaluation. This can be a powerful learning experience for the student and it mirrors what will be experienced in the workplace.

**What makes a good Practicum objective?**

All Practicum Experiences should be based on 3-5 objectives linked to the MPH Program’s competencies. The student will provide the Preceptor with the MPH competencies. The Preceptor and the student should meet, construct and discuss objectives at the beginning of the Practicum. It is recommended to use the 'SMART' guidelines in order to assure that each objective is:

- **Specific** - A specific objective has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general one. To make an objective specific, make sure to include the Who, What, When, Where and Why (e.g. A general objective would be "Get in shape." A specific objective would be "I will join and attend a health club at least three times per week for three months in order to lose 15 pounds.")

- **Measurable** - Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each objective. Ask yourself "How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?" In the objective above, the 15 pounds is what makes it measurable.

- **Attainable** - Objectives should be achievable given the resources and time available.

- **Realistic** - Objectives are realistic when the skills needed to reach the objective are available and the goal fits with the overall strategy and goals of the organization.

- **Timely** - When setting objectives, you should ensure that there is an understanding of a begin date, end date, and how much time it will take to reach the objective within the timeframe. In the objective above, the 3 months is the time frame for achieving the goal.

***Preceptors and Students may contact the MPH Practicum Director (Charles Doarn - charles.doarn@uc.edu) with any questions, problems or concerns.***