Part I. Practicum Overview

Contacts

Penn State MPH Program Contact

Director, Penn State MPH Program
Dr. Roger T. Anderson

Practicum and Service Committee

Practicum Director
Name: Teresa T. Kern, PhD
Title: Practicum Director
        Associate Director for Tracking and Evaluation
        Penn State MPH Program

Email: tkern@psu.edu
Phone: 717-531-2004
Fax: 717-531-0146

Practicum Site Contact

Practicum Site
Name:

Practicum Site Preceptor
Name:
Title:
Email:
Phone:
Fax:

MPH Student

Name:
Email:
Phone:
BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Penn State Master of Public Health (MPH) program requires that all students complete three credits of practicum experience (PHS 895A -Master of Public Health Internship) prior to graduation. The goals of the practicum are to:

1. Build and strengthen students’ public health practice skills.
2. Increase students’ comprehension of and analytical skills relevant to the field of public health.
3. Provide students with the opportunity to contribute to the field of public health in a substantive way.
4. Build students’ professionalism.

The practicum provides students with a unique opportunity to gain professional experience and apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom to real-world public health settings and real-time public health issues. The practicum is critical to students’ academic and professional development and their ability to become competent in the practice of public health.

Students complete their practicum experiences at Practicum Sites (e.g., public health agencies, organizations, institutions) and work on substantive projects that (1) contribute to their growth as future public health professionals and (2) help advance the mission of the sites at which they are placed. A student completes a minimum of 135 hours over a semester at the practicum site, an average of 10 hours per week. The practicum is for academic credit. However, a practicum site may choose to offer a stipend. The possibility of monetary compensation is to be negotiated directly between the student and practicum site. The Penn State MPH program is not involved in these negotiations.

Students are matched with Practicum Sites based on their respective academic and professional interests and goals. At each Practicum Site, students report to an on-site Preceptor. The Preceptor supervises the student’s practicum experience, monitors student progress and performance, and serves as the student’s primary point of contact at the practicum site. Practicum sites, Preceptors, and students are supported by the Penn State MPH program Practicum Director, Teresa T. Kern, PhD, who oversees the practicum requirement and serves as the practicum sites, Preceptors, and students’ primary contact at the MPH program. Please see Roles and Responsibilities for more information.

The practicum organizations which participate in this program have the opportunity to observe and evaluate potential recruits, to expand particular programs and services, to provide better or additional services to their clientele, or to complete special projects or educational programs. They also provide input to the Penn State MPH program on issues from curriculum relevancy to professional needs and concerns.

Definition of Roles

Practicum Site: The public health agency, organization, or institution at which the Penn State MPH student completes the practicum experience.

Preceptor: A staff member, employed by the Practicum Site, who supervises and mentors the Penn State MPH student on site during the practicum experience.

Practicum Director: Teresa T. Kern, PhD, the Penn State MPH program representative who oversees the MPH program’s practicum requirement.

Rev. 1/2013
PRECEPTOR QUALIFICATIONS

The Penn State MPH program maintains the following eligibility criteria for on-site Preceptors:
- Safety preparedness
- Educational and Work Experience requirements:
  - Graduate degree, or
  - Baccalaureate degree plus a minimum of two years of work experience in public health or related fields at the practicum site
- Decision-making authority at the practicum site and in a position or role that facilitates optimal learning opportunities for MPH students
- Ability to commit sufficient time to MPH student supervision and mentoring
- Adherence to Roles and Responsibilities for Preceptors

SUPPORT FOR THE PRACTICUM SITE AND PRECEPTOR

The Penn State MPH program strives to promote a successful practicum experience for students, practicum sites, and Preceptors. In support of this mission, Teresa T. Kern, PhD, the Penn State MPH program Practicum Director, serves as the practicum site and Preceptor’s primary contact and is available to address concerns and provide assistance over the phone, via email, or in person, as requested.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

MPH Student

- Complete all required pre-planning and planning forms.
- Complete all assignments that are required as part of PHS 895A: Master of Public Health Internship.
- Participate in ongoing evaluation of progress with the Preceptor and Penn State MPH program Practicum Director.
- Participate in the identification, planning, and implementation of the practicum experience with the Penn State MPH program Practicum Director and the Preceptor.
- Demonstrate self-direction by actively seeking learning experiences and being prepared to complete tasks.
- Complete the CITI training for human subjects protection (required of all Penn State MPH students in the first academic year).
- Apply to the Penn State Hershey Institutional Review Board (IRB) if determined necessary by the Penn State MPH program Practicum Director and Preceptor. Certain practicum experiences may involve the collection of data or intervention delivery that involves human subjects. The Practicum Director and Preceptor will assist students in determining whether submitting an application to the IRB is necessary.
- Maintain a work schedule agreed upon with the Preceptor, and inform the Preceptor of any anticipated absences or delays in arrival times.
- Accept and act in accordance with the direction provided by the Preceptor, practice professional workplace behavior, and maintain confidentiality.
- Maintain an open line of communication with the Preceptor.
Preceptor

**Before the Internship**
- Meet with prospective student and jointly develop realistic objectives for the internship experience.
- Work with the student to complete the Memorandum of Understanding, establish a weekly work schedule and to develop a specific project with defined goals, objectives, deliverables, and timelines for completion.
- Complete the Preceptor Qualifications Form and return to Practicum Director.
- Discuss the arrival of the student and the student’s role during the internship with appropriate preceptor personnel.
- Assure adequate work space, office supplies, and support services are available to the student upon arrival.
- Ensure all pre-arrival arrangements have been made with other offices and that those arrangements have been communicated to the student, Human Resources, and other relevant staff.

**During the Internship**
- Ensure student is provided with orientation to the organization. This usually includes a tour of the facility, information about the organization’s mission, history, policies and organizational structure.
- Include student in both organization and outside meetings where possible.
- Complete midterm and final (on-line) evaluations of the student’s performance.
- Discuss the evaluation results with the student.
  - The student completes a self-assessment as well. The self-assessment mirrors the Preceptor’s evaluation.
- Meet with the student regularly (bi-weekly, at a minimum) to review student progress, provide guidance, answer questions, and communicate expectations.
  - Supervise the student’s practicum experience, monitor student progress, competency, performance, and serve as the student’s primary point of contact at the organization.

**After the Internship**
- Maintain contact with the Practicum Director regarding future internship placements and other opportunities of mutual interest.
- Inform the Practicum Director of upcoming needs with regard to requests for interns to assist with specific needs. This may include requests for students during certain times or for students with specific skills to assist with projects on which the preceptor would like some assistance.

**Penn State MPH Program Practicum Director**
- Serve as the practicum site, Preceptor, and student’s primary contact on behalf of the Penn State MPH program.
- Work with the Preceptor to identify appropriate practicum projects.
- Provide the Preceptor with resources necessary for student supervision.
• Communicate expectations to the student regarding attendance, performance, and behavior during the practicum experience.
• Actively address concerns the Preceptor or practicum site may have about the practicum project, student progress, and other practicum-related issues that may arise.
• Be accessible to both students and preceptors by phone throughout the entire practicum.
• Encourage students and preceptors to give constructive feedback regarding academic and professional preparation provided by Penn State MPH program.
• Provide opportunities for preceptors to meet with each other and with department faculty to learn more about the MPH program and provide feedback about preceptor program.

MPH COMPETENCIES

All curricular requirements of the Penn State MPH program are competency-based. Competencies are the public health knowledge and skills that are required for effective practice in the field of public health.

By the end of the Penn State MPH program, students are expected to be proficient in two sets of competencies: core competencies and track-specific competencies. Core competencies are required of all students, and represent the five core areas of public health – Biostatistics, Environmental Health Sciences, Epidemiology, Health Services Administration, and Social and Behavioral Sciences – and a sixth area called Public Health Principles and Practice. Track-specific competencies are required of students in a specific track or area of specialization, including Community and Behavioral Health, Epidemiology and Biostatistics, and Health Services Organization and Policy.

A Note about Competencies

Competencies are different from learning objectives. Learning objectives describe the knowledge and skills that students will demonstrate upon completion of a course. They are the building blocks of competencies. Multiple learning objectives may help students build towards one competency.

The practicum provides a unique opportunity to build and strengthen public health competencies by placing students in real-world public health settings to address real-time public health issues. Students will choose practicum experiences that directly link to Penn State MPH program competencies and their selected track. Through the practicum, Penn State MPH students will seek to build on one or more of the MPH public health competencies they identify with the Preceptor for the Memorandum of Understanding.

PRECEPTOR EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS

The Preceptor will complete two student evaluations during the course of the practicum experience, a midterm and a final evaluation. The midterm evaluation of the student counts towards five percent of the student’s final grade. The final evaluation of the student counts towards 15 percent of the final grade.
The evaluations of students provide the Preceptor with the opportunity to evaluate the student’s progress and reflect on the student’s practicum experience. They also provide the Preceptor with a place to discuss the student’s strengths and areas for improvement.

Before submitting the evaluations to the Practicum Director, the Preceptor is expected to meet with the student to discuss the evaluation results. This allows the student to fully benefit from the Preceptor’s feedback and recommendations. Students are encouraged to use this time to explore future areas for professional growth and improvement.

Thank you for serving as Preceptor and mentor to a Penn State MPH program student. We appreciate your candidness of student performance evaluation.
**FORMS AND TOOLS REQUIRED FROM PRECEPTOR**

Preceptors will complete five (5) forms. These forms will provide the framework for student progress, assessment, and overall performance for Practicum grade assignment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preceptor Qualifications Form</td>
<td>To determine if the Preceptor meets the eligibility criteria.</td>
<td>Completed prior to start of internship. The Preceptor completes and returns (pdf) to Dr. Kern: <a href="mailto:tkern@psu.edu">tkern@psu.edu</a>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of Expectations</td>
<td>To define for the Preceptor the Practicum experience expectations.</td>
<td>Dr. Kern will send to the Preceptor before the student arrives on-site. The Preceptor signs and returns (pdf) to Dr. Kern.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
<td>To define an agreed upon expectation between the Preceptor and student to include schedule, MPH competencies, and tasks.</td>
<td>The Preceptor discusses and completes with student; then sends back to Dr. Kern (pdf) with signatures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Evaluation of student</td>
<td>A checklist to assess student progress in developing competencies as a public health worker is ongoing assessment of student performance. The document will be sent by Dr. Kern at the midpoint of the Practicum.</td>
<td>The Preceptor discusses with student; then sends back to Dr. Kern (pdf) with signatures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Evaluation of student</td>
<td>A FINAL evaluation of student progress in developing competencies as a public health worker as a Practicum student. The document will be sent by Dr. Kern toward the end of the Practicum.</td>
<td>The Preceptor discusses with student; then sends back to Dr. Kern (pdf) with signatures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>