

Tulane University
School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

PRACTICUM HANDBOOK

Approved by Executive Committee - March 2007

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The Practicum Requirements

This booklet introduces you to the practicum requirement and provides guidance as you create and fulfill that requirement. Except in rare circumstances, every student must complete the practicum requirement before being awarded a master's degree (see p. 18 for waiver criteria).

It is ***your responsibility*** to know your options in advance and to discuss your plans thoroughly with your advisor.

Your practicum must be approved by your advisor before you begin it. In addition, your advisor and preceptor must sign off on all required paperwork when you complete your practicum.

We urge you to be creative. This is an opportunity for you to use your education creatively in a practical setting. Every practicum has the potential to result in an innovative contribution, a new health promotion idea, an American Public Health Association meeting presentation, a publishable paper. It's up to you!

THE PRACTICUM DEADLINES

Review of practicum reports, posters, presentations, and/or seminars, and final practicum sign-off by departmental advisors must be completed

- by December 1 for December graduation,
- by May 1 for May graduation, or
- by August 1 for summer graduation.

All necessary practicum requirements and contact hours must be completed by these deadlines.

THE PRACTICUM DESCRIPTION

The practicum is a planned and supervised practice experience which:

- Is coordinated and developed by the student, the preceptor, and the faculty advisor
- Has been ***pre-approved*** by the faculty advisor
- Applies measurable learning objectives to real-world public health practice, that includes a minimum of 200 contact hours (*some departments require a minimum of 300 contact hours: please confirm your department's requirements with your advisor*)
- Includes an initial student plan and placement agreement which must be completed by the student, and signed by the preceptor and the advisor (see p. 8 and p. 9).

- Incorporates student activities that are coordinated and evaluated in writing by the student's preceptor and faculty advisor
- Includes a midway progress report when 100-150 hours have been completed, signed by the preceptor and the advisor (see p. 11)
- Includes a final student evaluation by the preceptor and the advisor (see p. 12)
- Includes a student self-assessment of the accomplishment of the practicum goals and objectives (see p. 16)
- Includes a final written report and a 500-word (or less) abstract prepared by the student assessing the activities and the attainment of the learning objectives (see p. 16)
- Includes any additional departmental requirements, such as a poster, presentation, or seminar: verify your department's requirements with your faculty advisor.
- Includes a review of the student's report and preceptor's evaluation by the faculty advisor, and final review and sign-off by the advisor and the department chair.

Your department or faculty advisor has examples of successful practicum projects.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

An individualized practicum plan, developed for each practicum, is a collaborative effort among the student, faculty advisor, and preceptor. A practicum plan identifies joint responsibilities of the practicum project; the practicum's measurable learning objectives; and available technical and programmatic support to achieve the objectives.

Student roles and responsibilities

In collaboration with the practicum coordinator, the advisor, and appropriate specialty track faculty, students are responsible for the following:

- Identify potential practicum topics based on area of specialization, previous experience, career interests, and career goals. Your department and faculty advisor will help you to identify opportunities, a prospective site, and preceptor.
- Develop a practicum/project plan including learning objectives, a timeline, milestones, and final deliverables: you must secure approval of your plan by your preceptor and your faculty advisor.
- Provide a mid-project written progress report to the preceptor and faculty advisor.
- Participate in periodically scheduled progress review meetings with your preceptor and your faculty advisor.
- Submit a final practicum report describing your project; the activities you undertook; and your results, findings, and recommendations.
- Conduct a self midterm and final evaluation of your practicum experience
- Complete any additional department requirements such as poster, presentation, and/or seminar: verify all additional departmental requirements with your advisor.

Advisor roles and responsibilities

The advisor provides general oversight of the practicum. In this role, the faculty advisor engages in the following activities:

- Helps identify prospective sites.
- Provides advice to students about site selection and the development of the specific practicum plan.
- Reviews overall progress of the student during the practicum process.

Preceptor roles and responsibilities

The preceptor's responsibility includes the following:

- Provide technical and administrative oversight to the student throughout the practicum period.
- Provide periodic feedback and guidance to the student in writing and/or through meetings.
- Review the student's progress through formal mid-term and final evaluations.
- Collaborate with the advisor to address overall project issues as necessary

Frequently Asked Questions

When do I begin the practicum?

You may register for and begin your practicum only after you have completed a significant portion of the core and programmatic requirements including, to the greatest extent possible, the school core courses and all specialty track core courses.

Students who register for the practicum are considered full-time and may qualify for financial aid and deferment of student loans during that semester.

Is it necessary to get my advisor's approval to begin the practicum?

YES! It is absolutely necessary!

The practicum must be approved by your faculty advisor before you begin. Though you may use other resources in the school (other faculty, clinical consultants, the Career Service Center), you **must** communicate with your faculty advisor about your plans.

Your faculty advisor has final approval!

How and where do I start?

Talk with your advisor about when you will be eligible to begin the practicum (*e.g.*, whether you have completed appropriate coursework).

Discuss with your advisor what options are available to you.

Many students are accustomed to selecting courses from a roster and waiting to be told the contents and specific requirements. The practicum differs substantially, because you are responsible for identifying and securing an appropriate project. You must develop your own goals and objectives for the practicum in consultation with your advisor and preceptor.

You are responsible for initiating and following through with the entire practicum process!

How do I find a practicum placement?

Finding a placement is much like finding a job. You are responsible for working with your advisor to identify a practicum placement. However, many people can help you. Talk with your faculty advisor, other faculty, research faculty, the Career Services Center, and students who have completed their field experience requirement.

In collaboration with your advisor, identify agencies that are working on health issues that are of interest to you. Don't limit yourself to the New Orleans area. Explore options throughout the state, region, country, and even the world. Call agencies and find out if they have student internship positions available, or if they may be open to exploring such a possibility. TUSPH&TM students have completed practicum experiences across the state and region, at federal agencies and private organizations in Washington, DC, and in other countries.

Remember to keep your faculty advisor informed throughout the process. Your preceptor must be an appropriate/qualified supervisor.

Do I register for the practicum?

Yes, register for SPHL 998 for the semester during which you begin the practicum.

Can I still graduate if my practicum isn't completed?

NO! You cannot graduate or earn your degree until all documents are completed and approved, and all requirements are met.

Is the practicum requirement ever waived?

In rare circumstances, the practicum requirement may be waived for those with documented actual practice experience in a field of public health. See p. 18 for the waiver criteria and process.

Practicum Resources

YOUR FACULTY ADVISOR

Remember: your faculty advisor has the last word on your practicum, so it's wise to establish communication early on.

Also, keep in mind that your advisor is probably the most familiar with your particular academic program and learning needs. So, it is important to involve your advisor at the beginning of your search and to keep him or her informed throughout the process.

LOUISIANA OFFICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

To explore opportunities at the Louisiana Office of Public Health, contact
Maya Begalieva, MD, PhD, MPH, Clinical Assistant Professor
Community Health Sciences, Tidewater, 2318
504.988.2673
mbegali@tulane.edu

CAREER SERVICES CENTER

This is a major resource for students seeking internships and/or jobs, and a great place to get ideas! Here, you will find binders full of listings, directories, and other useful information, such as how to prepare a resume and how to hone your interviewing techniques.

The center is in suite 2460 (in the Office of Admissions and Student Affairs) in the Tidewater Building.

BULLETIN BOARDS

Remember to check the bulletin boards in your department, the student commons, the elevators, the lobby and check them frequently. Throughout each semester you will find new listings of internships and jobs that may be used to fulfill the practicum.

THE WOMEN'S HEALTHY PAGES

This is a resource guide to New Orleans area women's health projects. It will give you ideas about local agencies to contact. Copies are available in the Community Health Sciences library on the 23rd floor of the Tidewater Building.

MD/MPH PROGRAM OFFICE

Students in the MD/MPH Combined Degree Program should contact the MD/MPH program office for practicum options available through the MD/MPH rotation. This option is only available to MD/MPH students.

The Practicum, Step-by-Step

1. Meet with advisor and complete your learning objectives.

Begin to work on your learning objectives. Meet with your advisor to discuss your general interests and your intent to fulfill the practicum requirement.

2. Identify a practicum experience.

Identify an agency and a qualified preceptor at that agency for your placement, in collaboration with faculty, and/or Career Services. Placements may be paid or non-paid. However, make sure you are setting up your practicum in such a way that you are creating an opportunity to integrate the knowledge you have gained in the classroom and apply this to a “real life” setting. Don’t be afraid to be innovative and consider a range of opportunities, and don’t be held back by the notion “it’s never been done before.” **Fill out Form A: Getting Started** (see p. 8).

3. Prepare placement activities.

Students must outline both learning objectives and the responsibilities and activities of the practicum experience. These objectives, responsibilities, and activities must be approved and signed by the faculty advisor, preceptor, and student. **Attach your goals and objectives to Form B: Placement Agreement** (see p. 9).

4. Register for the practicum experience.

Register for the practicum in the semester that you will be carrying it out. The registration code is SPHL 998. For the purposes of financial aid, you will be considered a full-time student while you are registered for the practicum.

5. Keep a daily log.

Once you start your practicum, keep a daily log of all activities. You can record your activities in journal or log format. Record and track the number of hours of the internship and activities/events of the internship. Your advisor may ask to see your log from time to time. **Attach your log as an appendix to your final report** (see p. 16).

6. Complete Form C: Practicum Progress Report.

Midway through your experience (after you have completed approximately 100-200 hours), **have your preceptor sign Form C and then submit the signed form to your faculty advisor** (see p. 11).

7. Prepare your final practicum report.

You must complete a formal written report, in which you

- describe fully your practicum experience;
- include background information of the agency with which you worked; and
- address how you accomplished your goals and objectives were accomplished.

The report should be a professional document, thorough and complete, including a draft outline. (See p. 16 for a complete description of the report outline.)

Also in your final written report, include your feedback on the preceptor and the placement.

The final report should be submitted to your Faculty Advisor by the appropriate deadline: December 1, May 1, or August 1, or other deadline established by your faculty advisor (*e.g.*, MD/MPH students are required to turn in the final report at the conclusion of the MD/MPH rotation block).

8. Give your preceptor Form D: “Preceptor’s Evaluation of Student Performance.”

At the end of your field experience, give your preceptor Form D: Preceptor’s Evaluation of Student Performance. The completed form must be submitted to the faculty advisor by the appropriate deadline. (See p. 12.)

9. Complete Form E: Practicum Completion Form.

Form E (see p. 15) requires signatures of the student advisor, the preceptor, and the department chair. This form must be submitted by the student to SPH&TM’s Office of Admissions and Student Affairs by the appropriate deadline (see p. 1).

Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
PRACTICUM FORM A: Getting Started

Students must complete this form and secure the preceptor's signature and the advisor's approval *before the student begins the practicum.*

Student name _____

Social Security number _____

Student program & department _____

Expected semester of graduation _____

Practicum learning objectives and cross-cutting competencies:

Description of **planned** practicum experience:

Agency/Program name _____ Phone number _____

Address _____

SIGNATURES

Student _____ Date _____

Advisor _____ Date _____

Preceptor _____ Date _____

Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
PRACTICUM FORM B: Placement Agreement

Student name _____

Address _____

Phone & email _____

Agency _____

Address _____

Preceptor name & degrees _____

Phone & email _____

Tulane SPH&TM advisor _____

Phone & email _____

I. The student agrees to:

- A. Acquire as much information about the agency as possible before beginning the placement.
- B. Determine, with the agreement of the agency preceptor and university faculty advisor, goals and objectives of the practicum. (These must be attached to this form)
- C. Be aware of all provisions of the practicum expectations and agreements.
- D. Provide the agency with a personal resume.
- E. Consider him- or herself an integral part of the mentoring agency and to follow the rules and regulations of the agency.
- F. Maintain complete client confidentiality.
- G. Prepare thoroughly for each task to be carried out related to the placement.
- H. Exhibit professionalism in all aspects of the internship including attendance, appointments, meetings, and discussions with supervisors and others.
- I. Consult with the agency preceptor when unsure of appropriate measures needed.
- J. Complete a minimum of 200 hours of contact time in the agency and to keep a log of activities. In some cases, the minimum 200-hour contact time may be completed in more than one agency if an integrated practicum plan is approved by the faculty advisor.
- K. Complete and forward to university faculty advisor all documentation by deadlines.

II. The university faculty advisor agrees to:

- A. Assist the student in arranging the practicum.
- B. Prepare the student for the field experience.

Practicum Form B: Placement Agreement (continued)

- C. Provide advice and guidance to the student through visits, telephone contact, or e-mail, and in response to reports.
- D. Call the student in for a conference whenever a potential problem appears to have arisen.
- E. Provide academic resources as needed.
- F. Remove the student if the faculty advisor deems that either the student or the setting is inappropriate.

III. The agency preceptor and the agency agree to:

- A. Aid the student in outlining the practicum goals and objectives before beginning. (Attach the goals and objectives to this form.)
- B. Explain the structure and function of the agency.
- C. Help the student plan a specific program.
- D. Invite the student to agency, interagency, and community meetings.
- E. Supervise the student.
- F. Provide a model of professional work habits and attitudes.
- G. Evaluate student performance on forms provided.

Along with the learning objectives, but different from them, students must outline the responsibilities and activities of this practicum. Provide these in the space below or attach them to this form.

By signing this agreement, all parties agree to the roles and responsibilities outlined above and a coordinated plan that outlines the duties and activities of this practicum.

SIGNATURES

Student _____ Date _____
Advisor _____ Date _____
Preceptor _____ Date _____

Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
PRACTICUM FORM C: Practicum Progress Report

Students must complete this form *midway through the practicum (after 100 to 200 contact hours)* and secure the preceptor's signature and the advisor's signature.

Student name _____

Student program & department _____

Expected semester of graduation _____

Briefly describe your progress to date: If your objectives have changed, attached a copy of your revised objectives.

SIGNATURES

The student is currently making successful progress on the agreed upon practicum.

Student _____ Date _____

Advisor _____ Date _____

Preceptor _____ Date _____

Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
**PRACTICUM FORM D: Preceptor's Evaluation of Student
Performance**

Student name _____

Instructions to the student:

Complete the mailing information for your departmental advisor below, and submit this evaluation form to your preceptor at the end of your practicum.

Your preceptor will mail this completed form to:

Faculty advisor name _____

_____ Department

Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine

1440 Canal Street, Suite _____

New Orleans, LA 70112

Instructions to the preceptor:

Please complete this multi-page evaluation form and discuss the results with the student. Mail the signed original to the student's advisor at the address above.

(see next page)

Practicum Form D: Preceptor's Evaluation of Student Performance (continued)

Date _____

Student _____

Preceptor (rater/grader) _____

Agency _____

Unit or Department _____

Phone & email _____

Please rate the student according to the following numerical scale:

- 5- Excellent 3- Satisfactory 1- Unsatisfactory
 4- Above Average 2- Needs Improvement

| <i>Performance Standards and Criteria:</i> | 5 Exc | 4 Abv avg | 3 Sat | 2 Needs Imp | 1 Unsat |
|---|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Initiative: Degree to which the student can be relied upon to do the job without close supervision. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| Quality of work: Freedom from errors and mistakes; accuracy; consistency with the practicum objectives and the job description. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| Quantity of work: Work output relative to staff in comparable jobs. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| Job knowledge: Appropriate background knowledge of job-related behaviors, techniques, skills, and procedures to perform effectively. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |

Practicum Form D: Preceptor's Evaluation of Student Performance (continued)

| <i>Performance Standards and Criteria Continued:</i> | 5 Exc | 4 Abv avg | 3 Sat | 2 Needs Imp | 1 Unsat |
|--|------------------|--------------------------|------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|
| Application: Application of formal educational preparation to the practice setting. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| Cooperation: Willingness to work harmoniously with others in getting jobs done. Readiness to observe and conform to the policies of the agency. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| Dependability: Compliance with deadlines and standards of performance. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |
| Attendance: Punctuality, including daily arrival and departure at scheduled times; absent only for a good cause. | | | | | |
| Comments: | | | | | |

Additional preceptor comments: _____

SIGNATURE

Preceptor _____ **Date** _____

Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
PRACTICUM FORM E: Practicum Completion Form

To be completed by the student *as soon as he or she has completed the practicum*, and signed by the preceptor, and delivered to the advisor for departmental signatures.

The original is filed with SPH&TM's Office of Admissions and Student Affairs (suite 2460, Tidewater Building). A copy of this form with the abstract attached should remain with the faculty advisor.

Student name _____

Social security number _____

Student program & department _____

Expected semester of graduation _____

A *final practicum report* has been submitted to the advisor. Yes _____ No _____

An *abstract (500 words or less) of the completed practicum report must be attached.*
An *abstract* is attached. Yes _____ No _____

An *evaluation from the preceptor* has been received. Yes _____ No _____

Practicum Schedule/Completed Yes _____ No _____

SIGNATURES

Student _____ Date _____

Preceptor _____ Date _____

Agency _____ *Phone* _____

Advisor _____ Date _____

Department chair _____ Date _____

Outline for the Practicum Report

Approved by Executive Committee: March 6, 2007

PRACTICUM REPORT OUTLINE

The practicum report is a formal, professional, written document. The report should thoroughly and completely describe your practicum experience. The final report should be submitted to your faculty advisor by the appropriate deadline (see p. 1 for deadlines).

Your final report should include the following content:

- ***Title and author***
- ***Abstract:*** In 500 words or less, describe the goals of the project, activities, and results
- ***Environment:*** Briefly describe the host organization. Background information for the agency should include the agency's or unit's public health mission and goals, major activities, number of staff, etc. Indicate the dates of your practicum and number of hours per day/week. Describe financial assistance you received, if any.
- ***Practicum rationale:*** Briefly outline the public health need that the practicum is meant to address.
- ***Goals and objectives:*** State your goals and objectives for your practicum.
- ***Activities and outcomes:*** Describe the activities/tasks you performed. Address how you accomplished your goals and objectives. Identify any barriers or limitations you encountered. Include a summary of activities. List/describe any written documents or products which were produced as a result of your practicum.
- ***Discussion:*** Provide a discussion based on the work accomplished. Was the need for the project addressed satisfactorily? Indicate positive and negative aspects of the experience. What lessons did you learn about public health practice from your experience? Would you recommend this agency as a placement site for future students? Why or why not? Include your feedback on the preceptor as well as the agency.
- ***Recommendations:*** Provide recommendations based on the project. How can/will the agency benefit from your project?
- ***Self assessment:*** Evaluate the level of success you achieved in realizing your goals and objectives.
- ***Appendix:*** An appendix includes work accomplished during the practicum: copy of reports or documents written, materials produced, agenda of training held, your daily log, and other items as deemed appropriate.

PRACTICUM POSTER OUTLINE

Verify with your departmental advisor if a poster is required for your practicum experience.

The poster should be a professional, visual description of your project and should approximate a poster presentation at a national conference. Elements of the presentation should include:

- Title and author
- Agency/program description
- Learning objectives
- Description of activities
- Outcomes
- Lessons learned

Practicum Waiver Criteria

Approved by Executive Committee: October 31, 2006

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BACKGROUND/RATIONALE

The purpose of the practicum in the master's degree programs is to provide practical training to supplement didactic study for the development of public health professionals. The practicum is a valuable and essential component of training for students who have not worked or have minimally worked in a public health field, or for those making a career change to a new field. Mid-career students are traditionally practicing professionals who already have practical experience in their field gained on the job and have returned to graduate school to obtain the theory and academic credentials for advancement in their profession. Therefore, for those with documented actual practice experience in a field of public health, a waiver of the practicum requirement should be considered.

CRITERIA FOR GRANTING A WAIVER OF THE PRACTICUM

*The practicum requirement will be waived for students who meet **all four of the criteria** below:*

1. At least 3 years of documented prior work experience in a field that is closely related to the academic objectives of the student's degree program
2. Employment that results in possessing the set of skills commensurate with those intended to be achieved through the practicum
3. Documentation that the student possesses those skills
4. Approval of the waiver request by the faculty advisor and department chair

For those entering students with in-depth public health experience of at least 2 years (for example, returning Peace Corps volunteers), the required number of hours in the practicum will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

DOCUMENTATION OF PRACTICE EXPERIENCE

The following are required:

1. Resume or documentation of 3 years' full time work experience in the field of study directly related to the degree program being pursued, with a description for each position, the relevant public health activities, and degree of responsibility.

OR

2. A job description that covers practice experience related to the field of study and describes the areas of practice and type and length of experience.

AND

3. One of the applicant's letters of recommendation must be from a supervisor describing and documenting the applicant's relevant practice experience.

PEACE CORPS MASTER'S INTERNATIONALIST PROGRAM

In order for the Peace Corps assignment to qualify for the practicum, *all of the following are required:*

1. A well-defined and documented practicum project approved by the faculty advisor no later than the mid-service mark, 15 months in country.
2. A practicum report distinct from the summary (3-5 page) report required for the State Department.
3. An additional "culminating experience" different from, but possibly related to, the assignment.