Student Practicum Manual
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Contact:
Bridget Brooks
MPH Program Coordinator, UND
701-777-6368

Stefanie Meyer
MPH Program Coordinator, NDSU
701-231-6549
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**Introduction to the Practicum**

The *Student Practicum Manual* is intended to guide the North Dakota Master of Public Health (ND|MPH) degree candidates in selecting and completing the Practicum, which is an essential educational component of the program. The Practicum is a planned, supervised practical experience, which is strategically designed to provide an opportunity to support and apply academic knowledge and acquired skills to a specific public health project. In short, the Practicum is a hands-on experience in the field of public health that provides opportunities to apply and test public health concepts and theories in practical settings and improve learning related to the MPH program’s public health competencies. The Practicum is also designed to benefit the Practicum Organization.

The Practicum accounts for 3 academic credits in the ND|MPH program. Concepts and competencies learned from MPH coursework are integrated through a minimum 240-hour Practicum experience. The Practicum is conducted in partnership with an agency or organization (hereafter “the Practicum Organization”) that provides a public health service, in the broad sense of public health. The Practicum Organization may be a public health department, another government agency such as the Indian Health Service, or a non-governmental organization such as a hospital, other health care provider, or a community service organization. A Practicum Team assists the student to define, plan, and implement the Practicum. The team consists of a Preceptor, who works in the Practicum Organization, and the MPH Program Coordinator, who oversees the Practicum process and ensures that all requirements of the Practicum are met. Both team members must approve the Practicum before work begins.

The overall objectives for the student during the Practicum experience are to:

- Apply knowledge, techniques and tools acquired in the classroom;
- Gain practical experience in a public health and/or community health setting;
- Develop skills in the field of study;
- Learn how one particular organization functions; and
- Explore a potential career choice.

Ethical and professional conduct is essential to the Practicum experience. As an individual training to be a public health professional, each ND|MPH student is expected to conduct him or herself ethically and professionally according to the standards of the ND|MPH program, the University of North Dakota, North Dakota State University, and the Practicum Organization.

**Public Health Competencies & the Practicum**

The curriculum for the MPH degree is competency-based in order to comply with current efforts to improve the quality, relevance, and accountability of graduate public health education. The Practicum is designed to extend and deepen ND|MPH students’ competency experiences. The Practicum must include an experience that will enhance at least one of the MPH program’s core public health competencies. These are:

- **Biostatistics Competency**: Develop statistical reasoning; and apply statistical methods in addressing, analyzing, and solving problems related to public health. Health Policy and Management Competency: Understand the organization, cost, financing, quality, and equity of the health care delivery system; the role of the health care delivery system in maintaining the health of populations; and current health management and policy issues.
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• **Epidemiology Competency:** Understand patterns of disease and injury in human populations; how this knowledge is derived; and how this knowledge is used to control health problems in populations.

• **Environmental and Occupational Health Competency:** Understand the environmental and occupational factors including biological, physical and chemical factors that affect the health of a communities and workers.

• **Social and Behavioral Science Competency:** Understand the behavioral, social, and cultural factors related to individual and population health and health disparities over the life course; and how this knowledge is used to improve population health.

**The Practicum Process**

For students, the Practicum process consists of identifying a Practicum Organization and Preceptor with a Practicum project they can offer to the student; writing a Practicum Proposal that describes the Practicum and obtaining approval for the Practicum Proposal from the Practicum Team; completing all requirements to begin the Practicum and enrolling for the course; implementing the Practicum as outlined in the Practicum Proposal; and providing all required forms in order to be graded. Each of these steps is discussed below. The forms required are listed below.

• **Forms required prior to enrollment in the Practicum:**
  - Form A: Practicum Organization & Preceptor
  - Form B: Practicum Proposal

• **Forms required in order to receive a grade in the Practicum:**
  - Form C: Practicum Logbook
  - Form D: Preceptor’s Evaluation
  - Form E: Student’s Evaluation

In addition to providing the forms listed above, the student must provide the final product or report, upon which the Preceptor’s evaluation is based to a large degree, before the grade can be assigned.

**Selecting a Practicum Organization & Preceptor**

Students are introduced to the Practicum at Orientation, as well as at a presentation in the late fall or early spring of their first year. There are several key ideas conveyed in these presentations. First, the Practicum is a practical public health experience that benefits the Preceptor’s organization, as well as furthers the student’s learning and professional goals. Second, the Practicum should come toward the end of their MPH core studies. Summer is a good time to complete the Practicum, but it can be done at other times during the year as well. Third, the Practicum can take many forms including:

• Research project, or part of a research project
• Community health intervention, or part of one
• Public policy analysis or part of one
• Other project that relates to the planning, implementing, managing, or evaluating of a public health service, program, or initiative.
Also during the first year, each student makes an appointment with the MPH Program Coordinator, Faculty Advisor, and/or the MPH Program Director to discuss and/or get ideas for the Practicum. There is no specific time for these meetings, and some students schedule appointments earlier in the first year and others later. The meeting consists of discussion, brainstorming, problem solving, and clarifying to ensure that the student understands the basic requirements of the Practicum. A typical misconception is that the Practicum is a research project that has no connection to a public health-related agency or organization.

After the meeting with the MPH Program Coordinator, the student must identify the Practicum Organization and Preceptor and develop the Practicum Proposal. The Preceptor and MPH Program Coordinator approve the Practicum Proposal before work begins.

**Practicums in the Place of Employment**

Students are able to use their place of employment as the Practicum Organization if the following conditions are met:

- Practicum project is unique and separate from the student’s employment responsibilities
- Practicum Preceptor is not the student’s usual supervisor

**Writing the Practicum Proposal**

Developing a Practicum Proposal (Form B), which must be approved by the student’s Practicum Team, ensures that there is a well-defined project with clear goals and an identified ‘product’ that signals completion of the student’s obligation. The student is ready to proceed to the next step once the Practicum Team has signed the Practicum Proposal. The Practicum Proposal must contain all of the following elements in this order:

**A. Background**
- Practicum Organization & Its Public Health Mission
  - Describe the public health service(s) that the Practicum Organization provides
- Preceptor’s Role in Practicum Organization
  - Describe the Preceptor’s role in providing the public health service(s) of the Practicum Organization

**B. Project Description**
- Brief Summary of the project
- Goals & Objectives (in bullet form)
  - The Practicum Proposal should state the goal(s) for the Practicum and the associated objectives. The goal(s) and objectives will be the basis for evaluating the student’s performance during the Practicum.
  - Include “product(s)” or “deliverable(s)” as one of the Practicum’s goals
- Practicum’s Contribution & Importance to Practicum Organization

**C. Contributions to MPH Learning**
- Relationship to Mission of ND|MPH and Student’s Specialization
- Core Competencies Addressed by the Practicum

**D. Timeline**
- Create a timeline that shows the time allotted to each goals and objective
Enrolling in the Practicum

Once the Preceptor has approved the Practicum Proposal, the signed copy must be given to the MPH Program Coordinator, Faculty Advisor, and/or the MPH Program Director along with Form A: Practicum Organization & Preceptor. The MPH Program Coordinator then reviews, approves, and signs the Practicum Proposal and gives the student permission to enroll. Students may register for 1 to 3 credits, repeated up to 3 times if appropriate. MPH 594/794 requires a permission number to enter in Campus Connection for successful enrollment.

Students should aim to complete the Practicum Proposal during their last semester of core courses or the summer session following their final semester of core courses.

Please note that before given permission to enroll, students also need to have completed:

- All MPH core courses (or be in the last semester of core courses) and be in good academic standing
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) training in Human Subjects Protection
- Health Insurance Portability and Accountability (HIPAA) Training
- Any requirements of the Practicum Organization such as immunizations
- A criminal background check

Training in Human Subjects Protection

Both NDSU and UND use the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) course, an online training program. ND|MPH students are required to complete the course for Social/Behavioral Researchers. **Training must be completed at least 1 month before registering for the Practicum hours.**

At UND and NDSU, instructions for completing Human Subjects Protection training are found on the Institutional Review Board website:

   - At NDSU: [http://www.ndsu.edu/research/institutional_review_board/training.html](http://www.ndsu.edu/research/institutional_review_board/training.html)

HIPAA Training

Instructions on how to complete HIPAA Training should be obtained from the MPH Program Coordinator at either UND or NDSU.

Criminal Background Check

A certified background check is required within 30 days prior to enrolling in the Practicum. The MPH Program Coordinator will provide instructions and program code when the student is ready to enroll.

   - At UND: [http://www.verifiedcredentials.com](http://www.verifiedcredentials.com)
   - At NDSU: [www.certifiedbackground.com](http://www.certifiedbackground.com)

Completing the Practicum

The student must meet regularly with the Preceptor to review progress, gain input and advice, solve problems that have arisen, and ensure that the student is meeting the goals of the Practicum. All students must maintain a Practicum Logbook (Form C) throughout in order to document that they have
fulfilled the 240-hour requirement of the Practicum. When the Preceptor is satisfied that the Practicum is complete (that is, has met the goals and objectives of the Practicum), he or she completes the Preceptor’s Evaluation (Form D) and provides it to the MPH Program Coordinator. The student completes the Student’s Evaluation (Form E) and provides this, the Practicum Logbook (Form C), and the final project or ‘deliverable’ to the MPH Program Coordinator. The MPH Program Coordinator will review all forms for completion.

Grading the Practicum

When all forms are provided and reviewed by the MPH Program Coordinator, the Practicum can be graded. The Practicum is graded A, B, C, or S based upon the Preceptor’s evaluation of the student’s performance. The grading process will be coordinated with the Faculty Advisor and/or the MPH Program Director. The MPH Program Coordinator enters the Practicum grade assigned by the Preceptor.

Specification of Responsibilities

Practicum Organization

- Provide a mentored, practical learning experience related to public health for the student.
- Provide a qualified person (employee or affiliate) to mentor the student (the Preceptor).
- Certify that it has in place policies that protect ND|MPH students and employees from sexual harassment and discrimination while they are onsite during the Practicum. Practicum Organization agrees to provide the University with copies of its non-discrimination and sexual harassment policies.
- Provide a name badge, as necessary.
- Provide an orientation to each ND|MPH student at the beginning of the experience, which includes an overview of site’s mission and goals and physical facilities, personnel and other operational systems needed for the student to function appropriately at the site.

ND|MPH Program

- Ensure that the student has completed sufficient coursework to conduct the proposed Practicum.
- Complete a background check of the student within 30 days prior to approving the student for the proposed Practicum.
- Ensure that the student has completed IRB and HIPPA training before undertaking the proposed Practicum.
- Ensure that the student has health insurance coverage.
- Ensure that the student has vaccinations and medical tests in compliance with requirements of the Practicum Organization.
- Notify the Practicum Organization if at any time a student files a grievance in which the Practicum Organization is a party.

Preceptor

- Guide development of the Practicum Proposal and approve its final form (Form B) with signature.
• Supervise the student during the conduct of the Practicum and communicate to the student any deficiencies of performance and provide the student with an opportunity to correct any deficient areas prior to the completion of the experience.
• Communicate progress and coordinate grading with the Faculty Advisor and/or the ND|MPH Program Director.
• Sign the student’s Practicum Logbook (Form C), which records hours worked and tasks performed.
• Complete an evaluation of the student’s work on the Practicum (Form D) and provide to the ND|MPH program with grade.
• Treat as confidential student educational records, which are subject to the Federal Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA).

**MPH Program Coordinator**

• Provide the student with a copy of the Practicum Manual and all required Practicum Forms.
• Meet with the student to describe the Practicum and brainstorm possible Practicum projects.
• Provide a list of possible Practicum Organizations with contact persons for which the ND|MPH program has a Memorandums of Understanding to serve as a Practicum Organization.
• Provide information on the IRB process, if necessary for a Practicum.
• Review the Practicum Proposal (Form B) to ensure that it meets the criteria to go forward and approve with signature.
• Intercede on the student’s behalf if necessary to clarify student and Preceptor roles and facilitate understanding and agreement as to goals, conduct, commitment, and deliverables.
• Collect and review for completion all Practicum deliverables including Forms A, B, C, D, and E and the final project.
• Ensure that all requirements of the Practicum are met.
• Ensure that the student receives a grade for the Practicum.

**ND|MPH Student**

• Develop a Practicum Proposal that describes the project – its purpose, rationale, goals, timeline, and products – and obtain approval of the Practicum Proposal (Form B) from the Practicum Organization & Preceptor (Form A). Provide Forms A and B to the MPH Program Coordinator.
• Meet regularly with the Preceptor during the course of conducting the Practicum.
• Comply with the policies, procedures, and operational standards of the Practicum Organization.
• Behave professionally at all times including attention to punctuality and meeting deadlines.
• Provide the Practicum’s final project to the Preceptor and MPH Program Coordinator at completion.
• Complete all paperwork required for the Practicum including the Practicum Logbook (Form C), the Student’s Evaluation (Form E). Provide these to the MPH Program Coordinator. The Preceptor will have access to the results of the student evaluation upon request.
• Comply with the Practicum Organization’s privacy rules and policies related thereto and sign any necessary confidentiality agreements.
**Professionalism & Ethics**

Students must consistently demonstrate the core attributes of professionalism. The UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences and NDSU College of Pharmacy have defined the following behaviors as indicators of professionalism:

- Commitment to Excellence
- Honesty and Integrity
- Respect for Others
- Empathy and Compassion
- Professional Responsibility
- Social Responsibility
- Altruism

Students must possess the emotional health necessary for full utilization of their intellectual abilities, the exercise of sound judgment, and the development of mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with members of the academic program and community. They must have a high level of compassion for others, motivation to serve, integrity, and a consciousness of social values and possess sufficient interpersonal skills to interact positively with people from all levels of society, all ethnic backgrounds, and all belief systems. Academic dishonesty and professional misconduct are considered unacceptable. If there is doubt about whether or not academic or professional conduct is appropriate, students should query the guidance provided in university and ND|MPH bulletins. These are available at:

UND Code of Student Life policy:

NDSU College of Pharmacy policy manual, Section 3.01:

**Appendix: Practicum Forms**

- Form A: Practicum Organization & Preceptor
- Form B: Practicum Proposal
- Form C: Practicum Logbook
- Form D: Preceptor’s Evaluation
- Form E: Student’s Evaluation