A good practicum experience is an essential part of public health training. The practicum is designed to give students the opportunity to apply their public health skill sets in a real world setting and to give students the practical skills that they will need for career success. Although a real world experience, the practicum provides for mentoring of students by both a faculty advisor and a public health professional preceptor from the host facility.

Accreditation Requirements

The Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH; ceph.org) accreditation requirements state that, “The school must provide opportunities for professional degree students to apply the knowledge and skills being acquired through their courses of study. Practical knowledge and skills are essential to successful practice. A planned, supervised and evaluated practice experience is an essential component of a public health professional degree program. These opportunities can take place in a variety of agencies or organizations but should include especially local and state public health agencies to the extent possible and appropriate.” The CEPH requirements call for written practica documentation including methods for approving preceptors and faculty supervision of students, the means by which the practica are evaluated, and identification of the agencies and preceptors used in practica. A well-designed practicum should also support achieving the core competencies as identified by the Association of Schools of Public Health (asph.org, core competency version 2.3).

Practicum Length and Content

The duration of the practicum is a minimum of 200 hours of mentored work at the host site. The purpose of the practicum is to strengthen students’ skill sets in designing, implementing, and/or evaluating public health programs in a real world setting. Each practicum will include a statement of the practicum goals, the learning objectives, the activities that support those objectives, and the products or services provided to the host agency. Practicum experiences will be evaluated by the practicum preceptor, the student and the faculty advisor.

Roles of the Student, the Practicum Preceptor and the Faculty Advisor

The practicum preceptor will orient the student to the host agency by acquainting the student with the physical and organizational structure of the agency and with the agency’s mission, supervise the student as s/he designs a practicum proposal, and oversee the work of the student as s/he completes the program of study. The preceptor will arrange for regular supervisory meetings with the student that will, as necessary, include the faculty advisor. The student will work with the preceptor to design a practicum contract that lists the key goals of the practicum and makes clear how these goals will be addressed through the completion of specific activities and/or specific products for the host agency. The faculty advisor will supervise this work through regular meetings with the student and meetings, as necessary, either in person or by phone, with the practicum preceptor and the student. The student, practicum preceptor and faculty advisor will compete evaluations of the practicum experience separately.