Making the Most of Your Practicum/Internship Experience

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Your Roadmap for a Successful Experience

Before
- How to find site that is a good fit for you
- Benefits to you

During
- Expectations of you & your site
- Develop your professional image
- Connect with people at your site/ networking
- Navigate the work environment of your site

After
- Your post experience tasks
- Network and keep in touch
- Recommendations
- Job opportunities
BEFORE | How to find a site

- Talk to your advisor *(check academic requirements)*
- Talk to student services liaison
- Review department procedures and manual
- Talk with senior students
- Ask where others have gone
- Review school requirements

How to find a site... cont.

- Check Pitt Bridges, MPH Practicum Web page, and/or consult with Career Services *(advisors must approve site)*
- Research what you are interested in
  - Google
  - Web sites (see handout of resources)
- Use LinkedIn Groups
  - Connect with Pitt Public Health alumni
- Be creative
Benefits to you

- Develop practical skills in a public health setting
- Develop personal confidence as a public health professional
- Contribute to a community resource or program
- Provide glimpse of future career and preferred settings
  - Insights
  - Experiences

Applying for a practicum

- Cover Letter Basics: To whom are you writing?
  Cover letter is the place to demonstrate that you WANT to be engaged in …

- CV or Resume?
  Resume demonstrates that you have capacity or transferable skills to add value to their organization.
**Cover Letter Basics**

1st paragraph
Briefly introduce yourself. Tell your contact what you want and how you know about the organization/position. If you have one, mention your referral's name and why you are writing.

2nd paragraph
Give a concise overview of your interests and/or experience and the skills that qualify you as a suitable candidate. Do not go into as much detail as the reader will find in your resume. Refer him/her to the enclosed resume for additional information paragraph.

3rd paragraph
State confidence in your abilities to learn AND contribute.

Final paragraph
Express appreciation of his/her consideration and mention that you are looking forward to hearing from or meeting with him/her. Repeat contact information.

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**Interview prep**

- Research organization
- Telephone or in person
- Practice answering typical interview questions and behavioral questions
- Develop questions for the interviewer(s)
- Know location of interview and arrive early
- Be aware of gatekeepers
- Dress professionally
- Bring typed list of at minimum 3 professional references
DURING | Expectations

- OF YOUR SITE
  - “Real world” experience

- OF YOUR PRECEPTOR
  - Feedback
  - Learning opportunities

- OF YOU!
  - Be a part of the team and become engaged
  - Act with public health ethics and standards in mind
  - Professional image
  - Set goals (learning goals vs. performance goals)

Goal Setting at the Site

- Two major areas for which you can have multiple goals:
  - Developing/ increasing competence: hard and soft skills
  - Developing growing community: peers, bosses, colleagues, mentors, those whom you would like to know and those whom you might help

- You may not have an end-goal in mind when starting the practicum but setting goals related to each of these will allow you to practice leading in any environment and increase your impact on your circle of influence.
Navigating the work environment

- Develop professional image
- Remember to always act professionally
- Don’t expect everything to be prepared for you when you arrive on first day
- Set-up a system for staying up-to-date on project developments and for your accomplishments and tasks

Navigating the work environment... Cont.

- Offer to share ideas
- Be observant
- Be willing to do work outside of your project
- Make daily notes of your tasks and accomplishments
- Compile observations and consider providing them to your supervisor in a written report
Navigate the work environment... Cont.

- Have regular meetings with your supervisor
- Tackle all tasks with enthusiasm and a positive attitude
- Avoid negativity
- Never shun a chance to learn more about the site
- Get as much exposure as possible

Professionalism | Definition

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines professionalism as "the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person"; and it defines a profession as "a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation."

How do we begin?
Start early!
Think of someone you would consider to be a “True Professional”.

What behaviors do you observe?

What about their appearance, speech, etc.?
Professionalism | Conduct

- Following through with commitments including:
  - communicating about problems early on,
  - being responsive (emails, phone calls).
- Knowing norms/expectations
  - what is/isn’t paid (lunch, commute, parking),
  - dress,
  - learning some basic etiquette: work lunches, first impressions, interviews, etc.
- Self regulation
  - handling disappointment professionally (calm business-like demeanor, diplomatic, fair),
  - knowing when to listen rather than talk,
  - being aware of ramifications (even legal) of your words

Professionalism | Conduct (continued)

- No social media about work (confidentiality)
- Avoiding gossip (including other people’s news)
- Texting/ Facebooking/ Social Media
  - know norms around texting and personal calls
- You are representing us!
Professionalism | Communication

- Being responsive (emails, phone calls)
- Not responding within 24 hours to a call for an interview
- Requests for action need to be responded to promptly, even if it is to explain why you need a little time to respond fully or to act
- In general, acknowledge receipt of message/info/request
- Formality of language
  - email salutations and spoken language
  - not overly familiar or slang
  - Be aware of generational differences

Professionalism | Character

Highly valued characteristics:
- integrity,
- positive attitude,
- conveying confidence, and
- showing initiative.
Developing Competencies

- Meeting academic competencies
- Look for opportunities to grow your own skills
- Potential to contribute to organization as a whole
- Is there an opportunity to:
  - Collaborate on a research project?
  - Publish an article or contribute to a book?
  - Present at a professional meeting?
  - Take a class or teach another?

Developing Community

- Make the most of your practicum connections
- Community requires communicating 😊
- How is this different from networking?
- You need relationships with peers, bosses, and would-be collaborators as well as folks whom you admire in your field
Professionalism | Appearance

- Appropriate for place and task
  - Think modesty
  - Finding out norms – ‘casual Fridays’, versus board meetings, meetings with funders, meetings with community members, piercings, tattoos
- Crazy colors for nails or hair
- Overall grooming & hygiene

It’s Your Experience!

- Don’t be afraid to ask questions
- Take initiative
- Find a mentor
- Network, network, network
- Leave with tangible accomplishments
- Enjoy yourself
AFTER | Post-practicum tasks

- Evaluate experience
- Save notes for yourself to recall experience
- Thank you notes
- Ask for recommendation letter
- Update your resume
- Update your LinkedIn profile and connect with those from practicum
- Stay connected to practicum organization
- Job opportunities

THANK YOU!
Any questions?
Other ideas to share?

Tip: Use Pitt Bridges
www.pittbridges.pitt.edu to make an appointment with Career Services for resume/CV and/or interview preparation.
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Sources


• The New Professional Image in Public Health, Betty Addison, John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health


• After Graduation: Preparing for the Workplace, Joan Anson, Pitt Public Health 2014

• It's Your Career: Take Charge! (for LEND Trainees), Joan Anson, Pitt Public Health 2015

Workshop developed by Joan Anson, MSEd, Director of Career Services and Robin Leaf, MEd, Educational Programs Coordinator, 2013