Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences (BCHS)
Graduate School of Public Health
University of Pittsburgh

Master of Public Health

Community Practicum Student Handbook
BCHS 2503

2020-2021

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For more information about the master's program in Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, the program requirements, and the practicum, please visit our department's website:

www.bchs.pitt.edu

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About this manual:

This handbook is intended to be a guide for students in planning for and completing their community practicum experience in BCHS at Pitt. Content may change without notification, so it is incumbent on the student to be in contact with the Practicum Co-Coordinators.

To clarify several terms that are used in this handbook:

Academic Advisor refers to the BCHS faculty member to whom the student has been assigned for academic advising and registration. In most cases, the Academic Advisor will also be responsible for overseeing the student's practicum plans and activities and evaluating the student's e-portfolio.

Community Practicum refers to a required, supervised practical public health experience of at least 200 hours that BCHS students undertake in (usually) a community-based agency or organization.

e-Portfolio refers to the electronic portfolio students build throughout their course of study and which they use to track their practicum activities and experiences.

Essay/Thesis Advisor refers to the BCHS faculty member who serves as the chair or the main reader of that manuscript. In most cases, this will be the student's academic advisor.

Practicum Co-Coordinators refers to the BCHS faculty who are responsible for overseeing the practicum program.

Preceptor refers to the person at the community agency or organization who agrees to oversee the student's work at that site.

OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNITY PRACTICUM

The supervised community practicum (BCHS 2503) provides the student with a practical public health field placement experience. Students apply skills they have acquired in their studies and learn by doing. The field placement fills gaps in the student's experience and may augment and enrich a developing field of interest on the part of the student. The practicum gives the student an opportunity to understand how agencies interact with other entities in their communities and develop a full appreciation of how public health practitioners work in community settings with families, health and social service organizations, policy and governmental institutions and coalitions. In addition, the practicum introduces students to public health professionals who may play an important role in their career development. Commonly, students' practicum experiences lead to the essay or thesis work, though this is by no means required.

Each semester the Practicum Co-coordinators schedule a community practicum workshop for master's students. This is an opportunity for master's students to get general information about the practicum and to ask questions. In addition, students should meet individually with their faculty advisor to plan practicum activities and complete paperwork in conjunction with their preceptor.

COVID-19 CONSIDERATIONS
Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all community practicum requirements must be met remotely whenever possible. A waiver must be obtained from the school first if a student's practicum requires an in-person experience. The form for applying for the wavier can be found here:
https://publichealth.pitt.edu/Portals/0/Main/Academics/Forms/Practice%20Experience%20Exemption%20Request%20Process%20FORM.pdf?ver=2020-10-05-142355-467

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM OBJECTIVES

Each MPH student (see exceptions below) is required to complete at least two credits of practicum for graduation, with a minimum of 200 hours of work. Because this practical experience significantly contributes to students' experiences and integration of classroom learning, we encourage students to participate in more than the required 200 hours. The community practicum provides the student with the opportunity to:

1) Apply knowledge and skills acquired in community and behavioral coursework to the real world of public health practice;
2) Experience the reality of community-based public health work from a provider's and community's perspective;
3) Develop as a public health professional in community and behavioral health;
4) Benefit the host agency or organization; and
5) Network with other public health professionals.

JOINT DEGREE PROGRAM STUDENTS

Students in the joint BCHS/GSPIA degree program complete the 300 hours of practical experience expected for GSPIA. Students register for BCHS 2503 to receive credits for their experience. Students in the joint BCHS/Social Work degree program meet the requirements of the practicum in BCHS through their Social Work field placements, and thus do not have to register for BCHS 2503 but can register for practicum credit hours if so desired. Students in the joint

BCHS/Anthropology program meet the practicum requirements through their fieldwork in Anthropology and thus do not have to register for BCHS 2503 but can register for practicum credit hours if so desired.

CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS

A variety of certificate programs are available to Pitt Public Health students, each with their own practicum requirements. Practicums completed for certificates count towards the MPH requirements. Some certificates may require more than 200 hours of practicum; check with your certificate advisor.

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM TIMING

There are no prerequisites for the practicum. However, students are strongly urged to have taken the equivalent of two full terms of credits (a minimum of 18 credits) in public health before undertaking their practicum.

The community practicum is usually completed in the term following two terms of coursework. Under some circumstances, with preceptor permission, the practicum can be completed over two terms or more. Students are expected, in the end, to complete at least 200 hours of work for the practicum; however, this can be completed in more than one agency or organization. For example, a student can complete 120 hours of a needs assessment at Agency A, and write 80 hours of a heath curriculum at agency B.

CHOOSING A SITE

Students often ask, "How do I find a practicum site?" Sometimes, finding a site for a practicum may seem daunting. In truth, there are many ways that students identify a practicum. Students may locate practicum experiences on their own, in the area or outside of Pittsburgh, either domestically or internationally. In these cases the student should consult with their Academic Advisor to verify that the opportunity qualifies for practicum credit. Practicum sites can be places the student already volunteers, works with, interns at, or is simply interested in learning more about. If a student does not have an idea for a practicum, the next step is to speak to the Academic Advisor to help identify community agencies that would be possibilities. Consider summer internship or fellowship programs such as Bridging the Gaps or the Pittsburgh Summer Institute. If the Academic Advisor is not able to help find an appropriate venue, the Practicum Co-Coordinators can help find practicum opportunities. An option is for students to assume additional unpaid responsibilities at their place of employment, with the permission of their employer. This work must extend beyond or be something other than regular work duties and allow application of the knowledge and skills being learning in the classroom. **Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the student to find an appropriate practicum.**

Choice of site must be discussed with the Academic Advisor, who is responsible for verifying that all paperwork pertaining to the practicum is up to date.

Some questions to think about when choosing a site are the following:

1) Will working with this agency offer you the kind of experience you want to gain?
2) Will doing your practicum with this agency give you an opportunity to apply what you have learned in your coursework?
3) Is this practicum placement in line with your academic and career goals?

BCHS does not prohibit students from pursuing paid practica. In most cases, however, students should not expect to receive a stipend for the practicum. In all cases the student must meet agency requirements, such as background checks and the like.

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM CONTENT

Students must identify five competencies that will be addressed through the activities during their practicum work. Three competencies must be selected from the 22 CEPH MPH foundational Competencies available in the e-Portfolio, and 2 may be from the BCHS departmental competencies or developed by the student. Students will also have to produce two deliverables for their agency or organization, to be identified in collaboration with the preceptor.

Students are encouraged to seek out practicum experiences that align with their research and/or career interests. For instance, a student interested in women's health might choose to do a community practicum at Planned Parenthood.

The content of the community practicum is determined by several factors:

1) the student's interest;
2) the agency's focus;
3) the agency's need.

As noted above, decisions about the exact nature of the practicum work will be made by the student, the Academic Advisor, and the agency preceptor. Practicum work may involve design of evaluations, development of surveys, implementation of an evaluation plan, administration of surveys, critical literature reviews, design/implementation of health promotion initiatives, community based participatory health planning or an assessment of a community's strengths and/or needs.

Actual practicum work undertaken by BCHS students includes the following:

1) design and implement a telephone survey of clients of western Pennsylvania well-baby clinics, to determine where clients were seeking health care subsequent to the clinics' closing;
2) develop and implement an educational STD/HIV prevention curriculum for homeless women;
3) develop and implement an educational nutrition/exercise program for pregnant teens;
4) evaluate an HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment program in rural Tanzania using ethnography;
5) conduct a literature review on childhood obesity;
6) plan and coordinate a conference on schizophrenia for rural mental health care providers;
7) design, facilitate and analyze focus groups evaluating an internship program;
8) develop and distribute print materials for pregnant women in Allegheny County about reducing their exposure to lead;
9) interview Haitians about their use of traditional healers and assess barriers to accessing hospital services and ;

10) develop progress and outcome measures for clients of a program that provides housing and support services to homeless women.

REGISTRATION AND ADVISING

Students register for BCHS 2503 with their Academic Advisor's section (note their specific CRN). Students do not have to complete the community practicum in the term for which they have registered for BCHS 2503. However, if work is not completed in that term, students will receive an "I" (incomplete) grade, which remains on the transcript until the work is completed and all required forms and products submitted (see below). At that time, a Change of Grade will be requested by the Academic Advisor, and the "I" will be cleared. No student can graduate with an "I" grade in BCHS 2503.

The Academic Advisor is responsible for verifying that all required paperwork has been submitted, and that all necessary school and departmental competencies have been met. The Practicum Co-Coordinators are available to assist with advising if it should become necessary.

PRACTICUM E-PORTFOLIO

All MPH students at Pitt Public Health are required to complete an e-Portfolio. The e-portfolio is a tool to document your completion of competencies during your practicum. Students are responsible for completing the requirements of the e-Portfolio and the Academic Advisor is responsible for verifying that all required paperwork has been submitted, and that all necessary school and departmental competencies have been met. For the latest requirements on the Practicum e-Portfolio, please see: https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/home/academics/academic-handbook-degree-requirements/mph-e-portfolio.

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION

An agency or organization preceptor must be identified at the chosen practicum site. This person must agree to be responsible for overseeing the student's work in the agency and to serve as the contact point for the BCHS Community Practicum Program. The Academic Advisor and the Practicum Co-Coordinators will work with the student and agency preceptor to define the student's responsibilities at the agency, and once agreed on, to complete the Practicum Learning Agreement form (see Appendix).

The preceptor acts as the student's supervisor in the field. In addition to receiving on-site guidance from the preceptor, the student will meet regularly with the Academic Advisor.

If at any time problems with the agency arise, the student should bring these to the attention of the Academic Advisor and the Practicum Co-Coordinators so that they may be addressed in a timely fashion. If at any time problems with the student arise, the agency should contact on of the Practicum Co-Coordinator immediately so that the issues can be resolved.

The placement preceptor completes an evaluation of the student's performance at the conclusion of the practicum. *The preceptor will be granted access to the online Practicum Final Preceptor Evaluation and the student will be responsible for completing the End of Practicum Student Evaluation.* The required forms are available on the Pitt Public health website:

. In addition, BCHS students must also compete a log of hours worked on the practicum. While the exact format of the log is up to the student, a sample form and sample log are listed in the Appendix. The purpose of the log is to provide the student with an opportunity to carefully record activities engaged in throughout the practicum experience. Students are encouraged to view the log not as a time sheet, but rather as a tool for recording specific tasks, skills, and challenges they encountered in the course of their practicum that they may wish to remember when constructing a resume or answering interview questions when it comes time to look for a job.

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM REQUIREMENTS

Students must complete in a timely manner all paperwork required for the practicum. Students are also expected to, via their ePortfolios, identify five competencies their practicum will address. Three of these competencies must come from a pre-defined list of school-wide, CEPH-approved competencies, and two must be specific to their program, or can be crafted by the student. The list of competencies are available in the ePortfolio.

Students are expected to keep a log that includes hours worked, tasks completed and any problems encountered (see example in the Appendix). Keeping a detailed log of work has several benefits. It allows for clear communication between the student and preceptor about how project time was allocated. It helps students to see how they manage time on an independent work project. It also can be a surprisingly helpful tool for resume development. Looking back over a detailed log will yield a list of skills developed and can help provide useful answers to common interview questions such as "Tell me about a time when you faced a challenge and overcame it."

The Department is strongly committed to developing students' ability to work closely and respectfully with communities. To that end, this handbook includes a Code of Ethics adapted from the Society of Public Health Educators (SOPHE) (see Appendix), so that students are kept aware of the issues involved in dealing with community agencies, public health practitioners, families and others.

In the event that the student's project involves research with human subjects, the student is required to complete the Research Integrity and Human Subject Modules, and to submit an application for IRB approval. Modules and application information are available on Pitt's Human Subject Protection office web site (http://www.hrpo.pitt.edu).

APPENDIX:

COMMUNITY PRACTICUM FORMS

For the latest in School-wide Practicum Forms, please see
https://www.publichealth.pitt.edu/home/academics/other-academic-resources/forms

Community Practicum Checklist

Pre-Practicum Planning:

☐ No later than the middle of the second semester, student meet with their Academic Advisor, and, if necessary, a Practicum Co-Coordinator to plan the practicum (at least one month prior to beginning work).

☐ The student makes contact with the agency being considered to discuss possible practicum arrangements (at least one month prior to beginning work).

☐ The student, Academic Advisor, and agency preceptor agree upon practicum responsibilities and complete Practicum Learning Agreement (at least two weeks prior to beginning work).

☐ If necessary, the student completes the IRB Research Integrity and Human Subjects modules (at least two weeks prior to beginning work) and IRB application (must be approved prior to starting research).

☐ Some agencies require that a specific form be signed releasing the agency from any liability. Such forms must be approved by the Dean's Office (at least two weeks prior to beginning work).

Mid-Point:

☐ Student reviews the practicum with the Academic Advisor (after completing 75 hours of work and prior to completing 100 hours of work).

Completion:

☐ The preceptor verifies the deliverables are submitted (within two weeks of completion of work).

☐ The preceptor completes the online Practicum Final Preceptor Evaluation (within two weeks of completion of work).

☐ The student completes the End of Practicum Student Evaluation (within two weeks of completion of work).

☐ The Academic Advisor verifies that the competencies were met (via ePortfolio).

☐ The student submits the time log (via ePortfolio).

Sample Student Community Practicum Log

Student:_____   Agency:_____
_____

Date	# Hours Worked	Task(s) Completed	Problem(s) Encountered?	Problem(s) Addressed How?

Date	Hours Worked	Tasks Accomplished	# Hours
6/7/2011	8:30-4:45	became familiar with COvNO research project, emailed contacts about speaking in GH obstetrics course, got ID badges	8.25
6/10/2011	8:00-5pm	contacted IRB and began completing modules, continued email	9
6/14/2011	8:30-12	correspondence on GH OB/GYN interest group	3.5
1/9/2012	9:00-12pm	met with Dr. C r and Skyped with Lauren about future tasks	3
1/10/2012	9:00-1pm	read careHPV protocol, became familiar with OSIRIS website	4
1/11/2012	8:30-12pm	started translating acceptability protocol, worked on SPSS for pre/post tests	3.5
1/12/2012	8:30-2pm	completed translating acceptability protocol, worked on SPSS of health promoter data	5.5
1/13/2012	8:30-1:30pm	attempted more SPSS on health promoter data, read and began editing Atkinson Foundation grant	5
Week Total Hours			41.75
1/17/2012	8:30-1:30pm	read Blumenthal article on VIA, worked on Atkinson Grant	5
1/19/2012	8:30-3pm		6.5
1/20/2012	8:30-2pm		5.5
Total Hours			58.75
1/23/2012	8:30-11	worked on Atkinson grant	2.5
1/24/2012	8-1pm	worked on Atkinson grant, defined parameters for HP survey	5
1/26/2012	9am-2pm	met with Barb Folb at GSPH to get help with HP survey lit search, Atkinson grant	5
1/27/2012	8:30am-1:30pm	Atkinson grant/ preliminary HP survey research	5
Week Total Hours			17.5
1/30/2012	8:30-1:30pm	read articles for HP survey project/researched for HP survey	5
1/31/2012	8:30am-1:30pm	started writing HP survey questions, researched survey design	5
2/2/2012	9am-2pm	worked on HP Survey	5
2/3/2012	8:30-2pm	Met with Dr, Musa, worked on HP survey	5.5
Week Total Hours			20.5
2/6/2012	11-1pm	HP Survey	2
2/7/2012	8:30am-1	HP Survey	4.5
2/9/2012	8:30am-12:30pm	HP Survey	4
Week Total Hours			10.5
2/13/2012	8:30am-2:30pm	translated focus group guide, made demographics table, formatted knowledge retention quiz, looked at website for improvements	6
2/14/2012	8:30am-4pm		7.5
2/16/2012	8:30am-4pm	adherence paper background, website improvements	7.5
Week Total Hours			31.5

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Code of Ethics *

Responsibility to the Public

The ultimate responsibility of public health professionals is to promote, maintain, and improve individual, family, and community health. When a conflict of issues arises among individuals, groups, organizations, agencies, or institutions, health professionals consider all issues and give priority to those that promote wellness and quality of living through principles of self-determination and freedom of choice for the individual.

> Public health professionals support the right of individuals to make informed decisions regarding health, as long as such decisions pose no threat to the health of others. They encourage actions and social policies that support and facilitate the best balance of benefits over harm for all affected parties. Public health professionals accurately communicate the potential benefits and consequences of the services and programs with which they are associated and accept the responsibility to act on issues that can adversely affect the health of individuals, families, and communities.

> Public health professionals are truthful about their qualifications and the limitations of their expertise and provide services consistent with their competencies. They actively involve individuals, groups, and communities in the entire educational process so that all aspects of the process are clearly understood by those who may be affected.

> Public health professionals respect and acknowledge the rights of others to hold diverse values, attitudes, and opinions. They provide services equitably to all people.

Responsibility to the Profession

Public health professionals are responsible for their professional behavior, for the reputation of their profession, and for promoting ethical conduct among their colleagues

> Public health professionals maintain, improve, and expand their professional competence through continued study and education; membership, participation, and leadership in professional organizations; and involvement in issues related to the health of the public. They model and encourage nondiscriminatory standards of behavior in their interactions with others.

> Public health professionals contribute to the development of the profession by sharing the processes and outcomes of their work.

> Public health professionals are aware of possible professional conflicts of interest, exercise integrity in conflict situations, and do not manipulate or violate the rights of others. They give appropriate recognition to others for their professional contributions and achievements.

Responsibility to Employers

Public health professionals recognize the boundaries of their professional competence and are accountable for their professional activities and actions.

Public health professionals accurately represent their qualifications and the qualifications of others whom they recommend. They use appropriate standards, theories, and guidelines as criteria when carrying out their professional responsibilities.

Public health professionals accurately represent potential service and program outcomes to employers. They anticipate and disclose competing commitments, conflicts of interest, and endorsement of products. Public health professionals openly communicate to employers, expectations of job-related assignments that conflict with their professional ethics. They maintain competence in their areas of professional practice.

Responsibility in Research and Evaluation

Public health professionals contribute to the health of the population and to the profession through research and evaluation activities. When planning and conducting research or evaluation, public health professionals do so in accordance with federal and state laws and regulations, organizational and institutional policies, and professional standards.

Public health professionals support principles and practices of research and evaluation that do no harm to individuals, groups, society, or the environment. They ensure that participation in research is voluntary and is based upon the informed consent of the participants. Public health professionals respect the privacy, rights, and dignity of research participants, and honor commitments made to those participants, including treating all information obtained from participants as confidential unless otherwise required by law.

Public health professionals take credit, including authorship, only for work they have actually performed and give credit to the contributions of others. When public health professionals serve as research or evaluation consultants discuss their results only with those to whom they are providing service, unless maintaining such confidentiality would jeopardize the health or safety of others. They report the results of their research and evaluation objectively, accurately, and in a timely fashion.

* adapted from SOPHE