PHHE 489:
Practicum in Public Health

Preceptor Guide

Public Health and Health Education Programs
School of Nursing and Health Studies
Northern Illinois University

February 2013
Undergraduate Public Health Practicum Description
The NIU Public Health Practicum is a major requirement for all full and part-time students. It provides opportunities for students to gain relevant practical experience by completing a minimum 360 hour community-based practicum, working within a local public health unit, state and federal governmental agency, or non-governmental organization. The practicum experience will provide an understanding of the practical realities of public health, and in particular there area emphasis (health administration, environment and health, health promotion, or general public health), and expose students to other public health organizations and collaborative working relationships. Work to be completed to meet these objectives must be jointly approved by the student, the site preceptor and the practicum coordinator.

Student Practicum Deadline
Students must notify the NIU Public Health Practicum Coordinator by the appropriate semester deadline of their final decision and acceptance of a practicum site.
- Fall Practicum: August 1
- Spring Practicum: December 1
- Summer Practicum: May 1

If the above deadline falls on a non-NIU business day (weekend, holiday, unscheduled closure day), the next business day will serve as the deadline.

These deadlines are approximately two business weeks prior to the earliest start of practicum each semester. Only extenuating circumstances are considered for extensions to the above deadlines (military responsibilities, medical circumstances, etc.).

Student Learning Objectives
Upon successful completion of the practicum experience, students will:
1. Integrate conceptual classroom knowledge into real-world experiences;
2. Establish career goals by providing a transition from theory to practice;
3. Complete project-oriented work in a public health site;
4. Gain confidence, competence and satisfaction in completing individual projects, and gaining insight into personal skills and attributes;
5. Apply undergraduate level skills in a public health context;
6. Build relationships with front line public health and health professionals; and
7. Engage in activities that will advance a student’s career potential.

Additional Rational for Student Practicum
1. Help the student gain an understanding and appreciation of the roles, duties, and responsibilities of full-time professionals in public health;
2. Expose the student to professional organizations and associations;
3. Encourage participation in activities on local, state, and national levels;
4. Provide the student with leadership opportunities;
5. Give the student an opportunity to participate in program planning, implementation and evaluation of programs within various health-related agencies and organizations; and
6. Give the student a health-related career.
Agency/Site Approval
All students in the public health program are required to meet with the practicum coordinator to identify a practicum site and preceptor, and obtain the approval of the practicum coordinator. No students may start a practicum without approval and registering for the course: PHHE 489.

Student Compliance within Practicum
Failure for students to comply with given NIU or department policies, or deadlines for assignments may result in removal of the student from the practicum site and/or failure of the practicum course.

Public Health Program Contact Information
Public Health and Health Education Programs
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL  60115
Fax: (815) 753-5406

General PHHE Office Number
(815) 753-1384

Assignment E-mail
PHHE489@niu.edu

A copy of this guide and the student handbook can be found online at:
http://www.chhs.niu.edu/public_health/undergraduate/practicum.shtml

Rebecca Pritchard   Jennifer Thorndyke
Practicum Coordinator    Practicum Supervisor
rpritchard@niu.edu    jthorndyke@niu.edu
(815) 753-6328     (815) 153-1324
Affiliation Agreement

Affiliation agreements are required for all practicum sites.

What is an affiliation agreement?

An affiliation agreement is a legal document spelling out the responsibilities of and between the practicum site and the university. It is an agreement between institutions, not individuals. The agreement is essentially a risk management document which protects all parties should difficulties arise in the course of a practicum.

Why is the affiliation agreement important?

The affiliation agreement is an important document in that it provides legal, university-level recognition of an agreement between the university, the College of Health and Human Sciences, the public health program and an outside agency. Without an affiliation agreement on file with the University Office of Legal Services, the university does not officially sanction the student’s practicum.

If an Affiliation Agreement is not already active with a site, a representative from the College of Health and Human Sciences will contact the site prior to the student starting the practicum.

Preceptor Expectations

Preceptors are selected based on their credentials and experience in the area of the student’s specialization, the learning objectives of the practice experience, and the preceptor’s willingness to participate in the program.

Major responsibilities usually assumed by preceptors include:

1. Sign the Student Contract outlining work agreement and logistics.
2. Assist in the development of the Learning Plan (activities, objectives, supervision and obtainment criteria) to be achieved by the student during the practice experience. Students Learning Plans should include at least three of the CDC’s Ten Essential Public Health Services:
   i. Monitor health status to identify and solve community health problems
   ii. Diagnose and investigate health problems and health hazards in the community
   iii. Inform, educate, and empower people about health issues
   iv. Mobilize community partnerships and action to identify and solve health problems
   v. Develop policies and plans that support individual and community health efforts
   vi. Enforce laws and regulations that protect health and ensure safety
   vii. Link people to needed personal health services and assure the provision of health care when otherwise unavailable
   viii. Assure competent public and personal health care workforce
   ix. Evaluate effectiveness, accessibility, and quality of personal and population-based health services
   x. Research for new insights and innovative solutions to health problems
3. Provide the student with space within the organization in which to work while doing the practice experience.
4. Orient the student to the organization, project staff and constituents. As necessary, ensure that student is aware of pertinent regulations (e.g. privacy of client information [HIPAA]).
5. Provide direct guidance and supervision of the student, or designate an appropriate co-preceptor to provide regular supervision.
6. **Meet periodically with the student** to assess progress, and provide feedback to improve competencies.

7. **Notify the Practicum Coordinator if there is a substantial change** in the student’s duties, preceptor availability, hours, compensation (if any) or work site.

8. **Evaluate student and practicum activities.** Preceptors are asked to perform a *Mid-Point Evaluation* once the student has reached between 180-200 hours of work, and a *Final Evaluation* on the student prior to the completion of the practicum experience. All responses are confidential between the Preceptor and Practicum Coordinator. The evaluations can be emailed, faxed or mailed to the Practicum Coordinator at the contact information provided on the previous page.

**Student Expectations and Assignments**

**Expected Knowledge and Skills of an Undergraduate Public Health Student**

Undergraduate students in Public Health can be expected to have knowledge in: health theory, health policy, health promotion strategies, community health planning, special population needs, communication strategies, research and evaluation strategies and environmental health. Undergraduate students in Public Health can be expected to have the following skills: needs assessment, program development, research and evaluation, health communication and computer technology.

**Professional Expectations**

Students are expected to present and conduct themselves as a professional at all times. This includes maintaining the policies, procedures, privacy, dress code and standards of conduct for the practicum site, in addition to expectations for course assignments, communication and NIU student conduct standards. Issues in professionalism will be considered a serious offense and may result removal from the practicum site, and/or failure of PHHE 489: Practicum in Public Health.

**Assignments**

Students are required to complete the following before and during their practicum:

- public health practicum contract
- learning plan
- time sheets and daily activity logs
- practicum project (description and evaluation)
- professional learning experiences (two)
- interim progress report
- site visit (if selected)
- student final evaluation
- students are also expected to give their preceptor the appropriate paperwork at least two weeks prior to their due date to complete the preceptor mid-point evaluation and final evaluation

The following pages outline the assignments and requirements that students are to complete during their practicum. You are being provided a description of each in order for you to better plan for your student’s practicum experience. Please note that all assignments and requirements are the student’s responsibility to complete. Students are also responsible for making photocopies of all assignments before mailing or faxing them to the practicum coordinator. It is for the student’s protection to have copies of all assignments in case the assignments get lost in the mail or during fax transmission.
Public Health Practicum Contract

The contract is a document that the preceptor and student develop together. It stipulates the student’s pay status, length of the practicum, schedule of work, and contact information for the student and preceptor. It provides the foundation of what is expected of the student while out on practicum. The student is responsible for securing the preceptor’s signature on the contract and also is responsible for providing copies of the signed contract for the preceptor and the practicum coordinator.

Learning Plan

The learning plan is the document outlining all the major activities the student will perform while on practicum. The student and preceptor should work together to develop the objectives or purpose of each activity, how these activities will be monitored, and the attainment criteria for each. These activities can include:

- attending meetings (e.g., business, budget, planning, coalition, sales, professional, or organizational)
- reviewing organizational material (e.g., vision, mission, annual goals, evaluation plans, organizational charts, proposals, annual reports)
- interviewing experts or leaders at the organization
- observing existing programs (e.g., intervention classes, screenings, rehabilitation facilities, training classes, community events, needs assessment data collection)
- assisting in or taking the lead in the assessment, planning, development, or evaluation of existing programs (e.g., literature searches, Internet searches, telephone calls, data collection, data entry, data analysis, networking, goal and objective writing, budget development, material development, communications, instruction, health fairs, health risk screenings, community surveys, program development)
- participating in the daily operations of the business or organization (e.g., making professional business calls, entering or reviewing data for reports, doing an inventory or review of health information resources, coordinating and scheduling meetings for a coalition or task force)

Time Sheet and Daily Activity Log

Students are required to complete 360 clock hours of practicum to receive academic credit. Preceptors are responsible for signing the time sheet/daily log every week. Students can e-mail or fax the signed forms to the practicum coordinator every week. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure they have enough copies of the time sheet for their use during their practicum.

The time sheet requires the number of hours worked each day, a weekly total and the running total for the entire practicum. The daily log should include a brief description of what their major activities and responsibilities were for that day. This is not a personal journal where students write down feelings and emotions; it is simply a log of work the students performed each day on the internship. Students should keep it simple and brief – no more than 3 or 4 sentences per day at most.

Practicum Project

The practicum project is a work activity determined by the preceptor and the student. This project should suit agency goals and fit with the practicum learning objectives. It is NOT the same as the whole learning plan of the practicum; rather, it is one activity or duty that can be described and carried out by itself. Examples of projects done by previous students include:

- designing a fitness program (including handbook) for employees of a health department
- creating a series of brochures for an alcohol/drug abuse prevention program
- setting up a computerized database for an agency
- researching reported reasons for well failures for a county health department’s environmental health section
- compiling a report on senior membership programs to present to the hospital board of directors
The preceptor and the student will decide the nature of the project. The purpose of the project is to help the student increase his or her skills in a designated area and to further agency goals/objectives.

At the completion of the project students are required to write a reflection of their project. The reflection should describe what they learned from the project, how their skills were increased, what the project contributed to your practicum agency and how the project will be used in the future. We also encourage students to submit project materials (brochures, presentations, etc.) to be kept in their files.

**Professional Learning Experiences**

Students are required to complete two reports during the course of their practicum. Each report will allow them to reflect and write about two particular events that occurred during the practicum and that had an impact on them. These are called professional learning experiences. Each professional learning experience will describe an incident or moment during the practicum which changed the student’s perspective about the work, or showed them something about themselves in terms of their learning plan, their role as an intern in a working organization, or their goals for working in the health field. The two reports must be turned in during the course of the practicum.

**Interim Progress Report**

Students are required to complete an online assessment detailing their progress on their practicum around the midpoint, or 180 hours, of their practicum experience. Students describe their practicum agency in terms of its mission, target population and populations served as well as report on their progress toward meeting their learning plan objectives and their project.

**Site Visit**

Site visits will be randomly conducted. If you would like to request a site visit, all efforts are made for the Practicum Coordinator to work with you in finding an appropriate time and date. Site visits are used to discuss the student’s progress and the overall practicum experience as well as any additional special circumstances.

**Student Final Evaluation**

Students are required to complete a final online evaluation report at the end of their practicum experience. The details are listed in the Student Practicum Handbook. It is the student’s responsibility to complete this report on time.

**Role of the Practicum Coordinator**

- Develop and maintain affiliation with public and private agencies where appropriate practicum placements may be made.
- Serve as a resource and consultant to students in defining practicum goals and selecting an appropriate placement.
- Consult with Practicum Supervisor concerning selection, experience and student’s progress while working at the agency.
- Visit with the student and preceptor on-site as appropriate.
- Act as a student and site/preceptor mediator when appropriate.
- Perform the necessary administrative functions relative to the site placement.
- Complete forms as needed.
- Review all student and preceptor evaluations (with Practicum Supervisor) and make a determination for student practicum grade.
Role of the Practicum Supervisor

- Consult with Practicum Coordinator concerning selection, experience and student’s progress while working at the agency.
- Visit with the student and preceptor on-site as appropriate.
- Keep individual student files with all practicum forms, assignments and general student information.
- Act as a student and site/preceptor mediator when appropriate.
- Review all student and preceptor evaluations (with Practicum Coordinator) and make a determination for student practicum grade.
The questions below are confidential between the preceptor and practicum coordinator at NIU.

1. In general, briefly describe the contribution of the intern to your organization and how things are progressing.

2. Is the practicum following the learning plan, or have there been changes?

3. What most impresses you about the student?

4. What would you like to see the student focus on in his or her own professional development?

5. How might we improve our student's academic preparation at Northern Illinois University in order to make students more successful while at the internship?

This form can be sent via FAX to 815-753-5406 or to my direct e-mail at rpritchard@niu.edu.

Thank you for your input and guidance to our students!
Becky Pritchard
Public Health Practicum Coordinator & Undergraduate Adviser
Northern Illinois University
AGENCY/PRECEPTOR EVALUATION OF PRACTICUM STUDENT

Student Name: 

Agency: 

Preceptor: 

Signature: 

The questions below are confidential between the preceptor and practicum coordinator at NIU.

1. Please rate the student with respect to the following personal characteristics by circling the appropriate number*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relations with others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest and enthusiasm</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional attitude</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judgment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written communication</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal appearance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL EVALUATION</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Please rate the student’s understanding of the following aspects of health care:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>or N/A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Determinants of health &amp; disease</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the health care system</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social, political &amp; economic issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Please rate the student's ability to handle and analyze information needed to perform well in your area of health care.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Overall contribution to the agency?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poor</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. If you were asked to assign a letter grade to this student for their performance, what grade would you assign?

5. What were the student’s major strengths?

6. In what areas would you say the student most needs to grow?

7. If an appropriate open position were available, would you hire this student to work in your organization? Why or why not?

8. Are there any areas of our student’s educational background that you feel could be added to, improved, or made more complete? What are these?

9. Other comments:

Thank you very much for your efforts on behalf of public health program interns. Please e-mail completed evaluations to:

E-mail: rpritchard@niu.edu or FAX (815) 753-5406 or Becky Pritchard, MPH
Practicum Coordinator
NUHS/PHHE, Wirtz Hall
Northern Illinois University
DeKalb, IL 60115

* If you had no opportunity to observe these behaviors/characteristics please indicate with N/A at the end of the line.
Evaluating Student Performance

The following guidelines can be used to evaluate the student’s performance at the end of their practicum experience. Preceptors are required to rate students on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest rating. Preceptors are encouraged to share their evaluation responses with the student in order to help the student’s professional growth.

9 or 10: Excellent Rating
The student achieved outstanding accomplishments as demonstrated by exceptional skill development in public health assessment, planning, program development, program implementation, and evaluation. For most of the following areas, the student demonstrated:

• outstanding enthusiasm, dependability, confidence
• ability to complete assignments, high-quality work needing little revision
• exceptionally mature judgment and sense of responsibility
• initiative for solving problems on his or her own
• effective communication skills
• ability to accomplish an exceptional amount of work

6, 7 or 8: Good Rating
The student achieved higher than minimum requirements to meet his or her objectives and demonstrated above-average quality of work for the skill goal. The student demonstrated:

• above-average dependability, self-assurance, level of interest in work being done
• ability to proceed independently with his or her work, very good work quality
• above-average ability to make decisions
• ability to learn work readily
• ability to work well with others
• ability to accomplish more than average amount of work

3, 4 or 5: Adequate Rating
The student met minimum requirements for objectives. The student demonstrated:

• average diligence and interest in the work being done
• moderate dependability, maturity, and confidence
• average quality of work, work needed to be reviewed and revised regularly
• average ability to make good decisions
• average understanding of the work being done
• ability to complete work assigned but does not initiate work or solutions
• ability to work satisfactorily with others

1 or 2: Poor Rating
The student did not meet minimum requirements for objectives. Student failed to demonstrate professional behavior on more than one occasion. In addition, the student demonstrated two or more of the following:

• somewhat indifferent attitude about the experience or work
• sometimes neglectful and careless about responsibilities
• below-average work quality, needing considerable revisions, numerous errors
• lack of self-assertion and need to be pushed to complete tasks
• immature, extremely timid, or brash
• consistently uses bad judgment
• slow in learning work or assigned tasks
• difficulty working and communicating with others
• irregular attendance