PHHE 489:  
Practicum in Public Health

Brief Guide for Preceptors

Public Health and Health Education Programs  
School of Nursing and Health Studies  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL  60115

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**Student Requirements**

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.

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.

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

You have now reviewed what is expected of you as a preceptor. Following are the knowledge and skills you can expect of a public health student:

*Knowledge:*
- Health theory (e.g., health belief model, social learning theory, transtheoretical model, theory of planned behavior)
- Health policy (e.g., delivery systems; state, federal, and local levels; finance, reform, *Healthy People 2010*)
- Health promotion strategies (e.g., intervention in smoking, stress management, nutrition, weight management, physical activity, safety, international health)
- Community health planning (e.g., PRECEED/PROCEDE, PATCH)
- Special population needs (e.g., children, women, minorities, elderly)
- Health communication strategies (e.g., social marketing, risk communication)
- Research and evaluation strategies (e.g., proposal development, epidemiology, statistics, literature reviews)
- Health content issues across the lifespan (e.g., physical, psychosocial, and policy)

*Skills*
- Needs assessment (e.g., individual, group, and community levels; physical and psychosocial evaluation)
- Program development (e.g., exercise, stress management, smoking cessation, weight loss)
- Research and evaluation (e.g., critique and application of health data, proposal development, survey development, interview techniques, evaluation techniques)
- Health communication (e.g., campaign planning, print, radio)
- Computer technology (e.g., data management, word processing, PowerPoint presentations, spreadsheets)

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

- affiliation agreement (if one is not currently active with the site)
- public health contract
- learning plan
- time sheets and daily activity logs
- practicum project
- critical incident reports
- interim progress report
- site visit
- student 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, except for the affiliation agreement. Students are also responsible for making photocopies of all assignments before mailing or faxing them to the practicum coordinator/undergraduate adviser. 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.

The Affiliation Agreement

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 and health education programs and an outside agency chosen by the student and the programs. Without an affiliation agreement on file with the University Office of Legal Services, the student's practicum is not officially sanctioned by the university.

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.
The 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. 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.

The Learning Plan

The learning plan is the document outlining 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. Kemper et al (2004) provides great suggestions about activities that preceptors could use with students in the learning plan:

“There are a variety of strategies that allow the student to develop confidence and to gain experience in public health competencies. Every agency has projects at various stages of completion, so a student might not experience a project from start to finish. Even though a preceptor might feel that some of the things they do in the course of a work day would not be useful learning experiences for the student, it is important to remember that the student is developing an awareness of professionalism, office-place dynamics, and behind-the-scenes work that goes into improving health for the individual, community or population. Exposing public health students to the process as well as to the creation and delivery of health solutions is valuable to their development. These activities 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 Sheets and Daily Activity Log

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

Students are also required to write a daily activity log on the back of their time sheets. Students should write the day of the week followed by 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. Instead of one larger task, such as the ones presented above, it could be a series of smaller, related activities. 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.

Critical Incident Reports

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 critical incident reports. Each critical incident report 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 write a report 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 population served as well as report on their progress toward meeting their learning plan objectives.
**Site Visit**

The practicum coordinator will schedule a visit with the preceptor and student at the practicum site. The learning plan and activities will be reviewed and the student’s progress and performance will be discussed. In rare circumstances, an actual site visit may not be possible. The practicum coordinator will call the preceptor and student instead.

**Student Final Evaluation**

Students are required to complete a final 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 and turn in this report on time.

**Preceptor Final Evaluation**

At the end of the practicum, preceptors are asked to provide feedback on the intern’s performance. This feedback will help prepare the students for their imminent professional roles and help them to become better practitioners. An evaluation form will be provided to preceptors during the site visit and preceptors are asked to fill it out by the end of the practicum. Please refer to Appendix V for an example of the evaluation and guidelines to follow when filling out the evaluation form. Preceptors can fax the completed form to (815) 753-5406 or may mail it to the following address:

Rebecca Pritchard, MPH  
Practicum Coordinator and Undergraduate Adviser  
Public Health and Health Education Programs  
School of Nursing and Health Studies  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL  60115