Public Health Practicum (PH 295) is an 8-unit required course for all MPH students. The course allows students to gain hands-on experience through an approved site at an organization in the field of public health. Practicum requires that each student research and interview with potential sites before drafting a proposal for the practicum project. It is preferred that students select a site from the Graduate Practicum Catalog, but with advance notice, new sites may be considered.

Please email Stephanie Uiga 6-8 weeks in advance of the time you wish to start your practicum to give time for the new site to be reviewed. Guidelines for the “New Site Approval Process” are listed at the end of this document. The catalog includes sites that have agreed to accept, train and supervise Public Health students in the ongoing activities of the organization.

**You and the site must agree on a project for your practicum that will make a significant contribution to the site.** All students are required to complete 240 practicum hours. Some sites may wish the student to spread the hours over 2 quarters to accommodate a specific project.

### Timeline for Practicum Enrollment Procedure

**ONE OR TWO QUARTERS PRIOR TO PRACTICUM PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

- Research potential placements by viewing the placement catalog.
- Prepare a resume and cover letter. If you would like assistance with your resume and interviewing skills, please visit the Career Center in Student Services I.

**6-8 WEEKS PRIOR TO PRACTICUM PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

- Consult your desired site(s) to see if any special application procedures or job requirements such as a background check are required.
- Contact 2-3 practicum sites and arrange to meet the site preceptors.
- Discuss possible projects for your proposal at the meetings.
- If your site is not listed in the catalog and needs to apply, contact Stephanie Uiga to start the process. Some sites, especially government agencies and large private organizations such as hospitals, require lengthy affiliation agreements that must be reviewed by UCI Risk Management prior to departmental signature. This process can take anywhere from 2 weeks to 2-3 months depending on the complexity of the contract.

**1-4 WEEKS PRIOR TO PRACTICUM PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

- Accept an offer from a site. Let the other sites you applied to know you accepted a placement.
- Confirm the placement dates and schedule for working hours with the preceptor at the site.
- Draft your practicum proposal. Guidelines for drafting your proposal can be found in the PH 295 syllabus on the Graduate Practicum website.
- Contact Stephanie Uiga to see if an affiliation agreement needs to be signed.
PRACTICUM PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

- Submit the course enrollment form accurately and fully.
- Submit your proposal to your Faculty Mentor for approval.

AFTER SUBMITTING YOUR PROPOSAL

- Sign and return the university liability waiver and sign up for UC TRIPS insurance.
- Complete all the core competency courses and advance to candidacy by passing both parts of the Comprehensive Exam. You must pass the exam before starting the practicum.
- Check with Stephanie Uiga to obtain permission to enroll in PH 295.
- Check with your site preceptor to make sure you have completed all requirements for participating in site activities prior to showing up at the site for your first day of fieldwork. It is the student’s responsibility to provide the site with any necessary information such as proof of immunizations, certificate of professional liability insurance, background check results, etc as required by the site.

During Your Practicum

Keep track of your hours at the site on the Graduate Practicum Log form. Do not depend on your site preceptor to keep track for you. A total of 240 hours must be completed for the graduate practicum. You may arrange to complete your hours over a two-quarter period if it better suits your tasks at the site. In fact, some sites may require a two-quarter commitment. We do not recommend that you spend more than 24 hours per week at your site unless it is during summer and you have no other classes. No student may work more than 40 hours per week at a site, even in summer. It is recommended that you set up a schedule of weekly meetings with your site preceptor to track your progress on your proposed project and discuss any problems that arise. Please refer to the syllabus for your section of PH 295 for information on course meetings and class assignments. Try to learn as much as you can about the organization and the best way to work effectively in your new setting. Attend a site orientation if one is offered or ask your preceptor for a site handbook. Your site preceptor will receive a handbook from the Program in Public Health to guide him or her in supervising your practicum experience.

You may also be asked to share your experiences in your practicum with your classmates and your faculty preceptor (the instructor for your section of PH 295). If you have a problem at the site or with your site preceptor that cannot be resolved, please inform the GSAO and your faculty preceptor.

Completing your Practicum

At the end of the practicum, students are expected to integrate concepts and principles of public health gained through their coursework with translational field experience. The culmination of the practicum experience is the preparation and submission of a paper on the practicum experience as directed by the PH 295 syllabus. Your project and its results should also be summarized in poster format. You must also give an oral presentation of the main contributions of the paper in a written report to your faculty preceptor and any other pertinent persons such as your site preceptor. Your faculty preceptor is authorized to approve the satisfactory completion of the practicum experience before the final grade is awarded. If the written document is not found to be satisfactory, the faculty preceptor may assign a grade of I for Incomplete and direct
you to continue to work on the project. You must earn a grade of S for “Satisfactory” in PH 295 to successfully complete the practicum experience. The site preceptor will be asked to complete an evaluation of your performance at the site. The form will be sent to site preceptors by Public Health Practicum staff. As your hours at the site come to a close, please remind your site preceptor to complete the evaluation. You will also be asked to complete an evaluation of the practicum site.

**Important Practicum Policies**

1. If you wish to switch sites after you have submitted your proposal, see the Graduate Student Affairs Officer immediately. It may or may not be possible depending on timing and resources. Approval for a site switch is not guaranteed.

2. Hours for the practicum cannot be counted towards the required 240 hours until the student has received notice that he or she passed both parts of the comprehensive Exam.

3. Students are not allowed to start work at sites that have not been vetted in the approval process prior to the start of the placement period. In order to submit your proposal and online course enrollment form, you must first be accepted by the placement site.

4. Students are required to ensure that their site preceptor submits an evaluation form to Public Health at the end of the fieldwork experience.

5. If you are conducting research as part of your practicum project, you must obtain IRB (for human subjects) or IACUC (for animals) approval as appropriate. The university has information on obtaining this approval if your site preceptor cannot assist you in this process.

6. Your site preceptor may not be a faculty member at UCI or any other university. In most circumstances, you can find a non-faculty member at the site who can assume a supervisory role in place of the faculty member. This non-faculty member preceptor must be in place before the practicum project will be approved.

**Guidelines for the New Site Approval Process**

There are three crucial steps that must be taken before any new site can be considered for approval:

1) You must make contact with the site and meet with a site representative to discuss the parameters of the graduate practicum and suitable projects for a proposal.

2) After talking with the site, you should inform the Graduate Student Affairs Officer of the proposed site. The GSAO may refer you to the Chair if the appropriateness of the site is in question, particularly with foreign or out-of-state sites.

3) When prompted, you will refer the contact person at the site to the GSAO continue the process.

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The GSAO will send the site an application to become a graduate practicum site. A site that has been approved for the undergraduate public health practicum at UCI is not automatically approved to offer placements to graduate students. Sites within driving distance will be visited. At the minimum, the GSAO will talk to the proposed site preceptor for the project to make sure he or she understands all the requirements of graduate practicum. New sites will be considered on a case-by-case basis. If approved, the site will be added to the catalog unless the opportunity will not be offered to future students.

**Here are some general guidelines to keep in mind when looking at prospective new sites:**

*For foreign or out-of-state opportunities, it is particularly important to seek out organizations whose operations are well-established in that region of the world. This is for safety reasons and will greatly improve your practicum experience.*

*While it is expected that sites will be willing to accept more practicum students after you, one-time offers will be considered on a case-by-case basis. For instance, projects that address disaster relief can be short-term and unforeseen and might be considered if the agency offering the practicum was established in that part of the world before the disaster took place.*

*If the site cannot be vetted in person or by phone, we prefer sites that have an established connection to UCI through a UCI faculty member or a history of partnerships with universities who send interns to the site.*

*If you are looking to introduce a new site into the catalog, please keep in mind that agencies or sites that are run by universities will not be approved. The idea behind the practicum is that you be exposed to the world of public health outside of academia. Practicum is designed to give you an idea of how a typical public health agency operates and the issues it faces, such as working with government entities, searching for funding, office dynamics, interfacing with the community, and so on.*

*A potential site should have someone who can act as your preceptor. Qualifications for a site preceptor are:*

- A professional degree in public health (e.g. MPH, PhD, DrPH, etc) or the healthcare professions (MD, RN, DO, etc)

        **OR**

- An advanced degree (Masters or PhD) in a related field and 2 years of experience or more including the supervision of interns

*Note: Exceptions may be granted for individuals with significant (10+ years) working experience in public health or a related field with previous experience supervising interns.*