GRADUATE PRACTICUM AND CULMINATING EXPERIENCE IN PUBLIC HEALTH

PH-295

Professor: All Faculty Members

Course Scheduling

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COURSE INFORMATION

Catalogue Description: Graduate Practicum and Culminating Experience in Public Health (8). Provides opportunities for hands-on experience for graduate students at agencies or organizations engaged in public health practice. Students are matched with placement sites based on academic preparation and students’ career goals. The practicum report integrates into a synthesis culminating experience. Prerequisites: Public Health 290 and 291.

Grading: Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory only.

Course Schedule: The Practicum is offered quarterly and during the summer session.

Course Website: EEE website address varies quarterly. For general information, visit the Program in Public Health website: http://publichealth.uci.edu

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES (COMPETENCY GAINED)

Through this course, students will learn to apply theory, paradigms, principles, and methodologies obtained through formal course work to inform public health practice across community, government, private industry or other institutional settings relevant to public health.

COURSE FACULTY
All Public Health Faculty Members are Eligible to Instruct PH-295

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

One of the recommendations of the Associations of Schools of Public Health for MPH core competencies, and a main criterion for accreditation of MPH programs by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH)\(^1\) is that MPH students must complete a “planned, supervised, and evaluated practice experience” in public health. The University of California Irvine MPH degree fulfills this requirement through the capstone course entitled “Graduate Practicum and Culminating Experience in Public Health.”

The Graduate Practicum and Culminating Experience gives students the opportunity to work in an agency that focuses on public health issues at various levels of organization. Students are expected to apply concepts, principles and theories learned in didactic courses on the core competencies and cross-cutting themes of public health to the solution of problems assigned during the practicum period. The practicum experience should facilitate students’ ability to synthesize and integrate academic knowledge and skills in a professional setting for public health practice.

COURSE PREREQUISITES

Students must:

1. Complete the required MPH core courses in order to register for PH-295.
2. Advance to degree candidacy by passing the comprehensive examination.
3. Write a practicum proposal that must be approved by the course faculty before starting the practicum.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Each MPH student will:

1. Write a practicum proposal that is mutually acceptable to the student, the preceptor at the specified public health agency, and the course faculty.
2. Pursue opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and skills gained from tutorial courses (core competency courses and cross-cutting themes) in a public health practice setting.
3. Explain the relevance of the practicum project to the agency’s vision, responsibilities, and activities.
4. Exhibit professionalism in all work situations (for example, ethics and responsible conduct, behavior, dress, oral and written communication).
5. Submit a manuscript and give an oral presentation and/or poster that describe accomplishments during the practicum period. The writing and presentations must demonstrate synthesis and application of public health courses and competencies.

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STEPS REQUIRED TO INITIATE AND COMPLETE THE PRACTICUM

(1) All students who plan to enroll in the practicum must attend the MPH Seminar titled “Preparing for the Graduate Practicum” or view the web cast.
(2) Complete, as appropriate, a tutorial on ethics/responsible conduct of research (for example, through tutorials provided by the National Institutes of Health (http://bioethics.od.nih.gov/casestudies.html#research).
(3) Meet with a faculty member to discuss the development of the Practicum Proposal and project timelines after attending the seminar or viewing the video.
(4) Completion and submission of “liability waiver” agreement form: (http://publichealth.uci.edu/ph_docs/grad/mph_grad_practicum_intro).
(5) Completion and submission of the University of California Traveler Insurance Coverage form: (http://www.uctrips-insurance.org/).
(6) Complete the practicum enrollment form and obtain all required signatures before registration: (http://publichealth.uci.edu/ph_docs/grad/mph_grad_practicum_intro).

The proposal must be approved by the preceptor and the course faculty before beginning the practicum project. If the student does not register the following regular academic quarter after proposal approval, the proposal will need to be resubmitted for review.

(7) Student will be given a registration authorization code after satisfactorily completing the pre-enrollment requirements. Student may begin work on the project before registration, if the proposal has been approved.
(8) Attend at least one session in person or through computer conference with fellow students to share information about the practicum experience with focus on how the core competencies and cross-cutting themes in public health are being integrated in the practicum experience.
(9) Complete 240 hours of engaged time to implement the practicum proposal at the practicum agency.
(10) Write and submit a manuscript describing the practicum activities and outcome of the project with information on the integration of public health competencies. The manuscript must be submitted at least one week before the oral presentation or poster session. Manuscripts will typically be submitted online through the EEE Drop-Box.
(11) Give an oral defense of the practicum report and compose a poster presentation of the practicum experience (see details under Presentation Instructions/Guidelines).
(12) Submit a culminating experience electronic portfolio developed throughout the curriculum, and that includes written reflection on how the core and emphasis area competencies were accomplished.

PROJECT SELECTION

A compendium of approved practicum agencies is available online: (http://publichealth.uci.edu/ph_docs/grad/mph_grad_practicum_intro). Students should identify a general topic area for their practicum and meet with faculty for assistance in identifying and facilitating agency selection.
EVALUATION OF THE PRACTICUM
Students and their preceptors are expected to complete a post-practicum evaluation form. The student is responsible for making sure that the preceptor completes and submits the evaluation, including verification of number of hours spent on the practicum project. Faculty mentors will provide final grade based on criteria described below.

GRADING CRITERIA
The graduate Practicum in Public Health is graded as “Satisfactory” or “Unsatisfactory” based on:

1. Written evaluation by the student’s preceptor.
2. Evaluation of the final report and presentation/poster/electronic portfolio.
3. Completion of the required number of hours on the practicum project.

GUIDELINES FOR PRACTICUM PROPOSAL
The practicum proposal must be approved by the faculty and preceptor before beginning work on the project. It is acceptable to visit a prospective practicum site and to preliminary explore day-to-day activities prior to enrolling in the practicum course. These preliminary hours will not count toward the actual practicum period.

To be approved, practicum proposals must include:

(1) A completed Practicum Enrollment Form
(2) An ~1,500 word proposal with the following information:

A. The major goal of the practicum, consistent with student’s academic concentration
B. A description of planned set of specific objectives and activities to meet the goal.
   The following guidelines are useful in writing specific objectives:

i. **Specific** – A specific objective has a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general one (for example: A general objective would be “My project will lead to an increase in vaccination rates in Orange County.” A specific objective would be “My project will lead to a 20% increase in vaccination rates against H1N1 flu virus in Santa Ana by June 2011”).

ii. **Measurable** – Establish criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each objective. Use questions such as “How much? How many? How will I know when it is accomplished?” to frame your criteria. For example, in the specific objective above, the 20% increase is measurable.

iii. **Attainable** – You should be able to accomplish your objectives given the resources and time available. If not, provide specific suggestions for follow-up by future workers.
iv. **Realistic** – Be realistic in identifying skills that you already have or need to develop for pursuing your objectives. Make sure that the goals and objectives accommodate the vision and responsibilities of the agency.

v. **Timely** – Include a time-line in your proposal. Typically, this is best done in a Table format with specific time periods allocated to each objective. For example, the 240 hours required for the practicum should be distributed over the specific set of objectives.

C. A description of public health concepts that you expect to be important to the success of the practicum project. Address at least two of the five core disciplines and four of the seven cross-cutting themes.

**GUIDELINES FOR THE WRITTEN REPORT**

The written practicum report should be 8,000 – 12,000 words in length, excluding appendices. Reports should be double-spaced using 12-point type, and paginated. The report should be written as a document that makes sense to both the academic (faculty) and practitioner (preceptor) reviewers. You may use the first person (“I did this…”) because it is based on personal experience. Students are strongly encouraged to keep a weekly diary of events and activities during the practicum period. The paper will be evaluated according to the quality of the following sections:

1. **Title:** The title should succinctly capture the essence of the project.
2. **Abstract:** A summary or overview of the key points of the project (No more than 300 words in length).
3. **Introduction:** Literature review and background of project. Include a description of the public health question being addressed, its significance and how it fits with the vision and responsibilities of the agency. Describe the main features of the agency, their resources, organization structure, and your position in the team (~1,000 – 1,500 words).
4. **Discussion:** Discuss your role and activities in the practicum project. Provide a critical assessment of whether the proposal goals and objectives were appropriate in addressing the problem. Identify barriers and how you overcame or succumbed to them (approx. 4,000 – 6,000 words).
5. **Personal Assessment:** How has the practicum experience contributed to your understanding of public health practice? Discuss the relevance of the public health core competencies and cross-cutting themes to your practicum experience. Revisit your practicum proposal to include at least two of the five core disciplines and four of the seven cross-cutting themes (approximately 1,000 – 2,000 words).
6. **Conclusions and Recommendations:** Provide concluding thoughts and identify opportunities for improvement and further action on the project (~1,000 – 2,000 words).
7. **References and Bibliography:** Use a standard manuscript style, such as the American Journal of Public Health ([http://ajph.aphapublications.org/misc/ifora.pdf](http://ajph.aphapublications.org/misc/ifora.pdf)).

8. **Appendices:** Appendices are acceptable for inclusion, but they will not count toward the manuscript length requirement. All the materials that you developed as a part of the practicum project (e.g. survey questionnaires; GIS maps) should be included in the appendix.

9. **Submission of Report:** The written report is due one week prior to the oral presentation date or the poster session.

**GUIDELINES AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE FINAL PRESENTATION**

**POSTER PRESENTATION**

Posters presentations use a combination of visual imagery and precise text to highlight key features of a project. Depending on the nature of the practicum project, this format can be effective for focusing the reviewers’ attention on particular successes or challenges. Students are expected to be at their posters during the period assigned to them by the graduate director to give a brief overview and to respond to questions from reviewing. Poster formatting guidelines will be distributed along with the assignment of poster presentation schedules. The poster will be available for viewing by all faculty members, students, staff, and the general public.

**ORAL PRESENTATION**

Verbal communication is an effective tool in public health practice. MPH students should be prepared to summarize a professional report to an informed audience from various backgrounds. PowerPoint software is preferred for preparing the 60-minute long presentation. The main points should be presented in 30 – 45 minutes with the remaining time reserved for questions and discussion. The faculty committee will evaluate the presentation on the basis of clarity and depth of coverage of the main issues. The committee should consist of the faculty mentor in the student’s area of interest, another member whose expertise is in a different sub-discipline. The preceptor may be invited, but her/his attendance is not required. Students are responsible for contacting faculty and scheduling the time and location of the presentation, which will be open to all interested faculty members, students, staff and the public.

**ELECTRONIC PORTFOLIO**

Each MPH student is assigned an individual electronic portfolio upon matriculating into the program. Students are expected to use this for documenting learning experiences, reflecting on what they have learned, integrating their acquired knowledge, and showcasing their work as
they progress through their studies. Faculty mentors review the folios quarterly, and the final product is submitted to faculty supervisor for approval as part of the culminating experience before a grade is assigned for PH-295 and graduation is certified.

**PRACTICUM COURSE FORMS**

All forms needed for processing the practicum are available on our website:

(http://publichealth.uci.edu/ph_docs/grad/mph_grad_practicum_intro).

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION**

**PRACTICUM PERSONNEL**

The **Course Director** is the faculty member responsible for the implementation of the academic objectives of the Graduate Practicum in Public Health. Additional faculty members with core or adjunct appointments in the Program in Public Health serve as advisors or members of the **Practicum Faculty Committee**. Additional support for the course is provided by the **Graduate Student Affairs Officer**. The faculty and staff are available to assist students in their quest to identify practicum opportunities, to develop strong proposals, and to complete their projects successfully. The final practicum grade is determined by the course director. Students may of course consult with other faculty members at any time during the practicum preparation and implementation period.

The **Practicum Preceptor** is typically employed by the practicum agency, and is responsible for supervising the student’s activities at the practicum site. The preceptor may collaborate with the student in the development of the practicum proposal, and introducing the student to the “work culture” of the practicum agency. The preceptor is expected to keep track of the student work hours and professional habits, and to provide feedback to the course director at the end of the project.

Each student is assigned a **Faculty Mentor** at the beginning of joining the MPH program. Students should consult with their faculty mentor about their plans for the practicum.

Students are encouraged to consult with other faculty members who may serve on practicum faculty committees or assist students to identify practicum opportunities or provide advice on how to overcome specific challenges during the practicum period.
PRACTICUM WORK INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECT

Some practicum experiences may include working with human subjects. Students in such situations must ensure that all protocols have been approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Students should consult the Human Subjects office website, http://www.research.uci.edu/ora/hrpp/index.htm, to be familiar with Human Subjects Research and the IRB process. Practicum agencies may also require additional human subject approval. Most practicum projects are expected to be practice-based and do not require review by IRB.

PRACTICING PROFESSIONALISM

Permanent employees at the practicum agency are professionals who expect interning students to demonstrate standard level of professionalism. It is important for practicum students to observe, learn, and comply with behavioral and dress codes adopted by the practicum agency.

PRACTICUM AGENCY REQUIREMENTS

Public health agencies serve diverse constituencies and employees, including practicum students are expected to abide by all safety rules, regulations, policies and procedures of the agency and all sites visited during the practicum period.

BACKGROUND CHECKS ON HEALTH STATUS AND RECORD OF CRIMINAL ACTIVITY

Some practicum agencies may require background checks on their employees, including practicum students. Students must comply with the requirements of the practicum agency accordingly.

DISABILITY AND OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

Students may seek exemptions, adjustments or other special treatment according to the Americans with Disabilities Act (http://www.ada.gov/) regarding the implementation of the
practicum project. Such students should plan to consult early in the process with the course director.

STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES FOR ACADEMIC CONDUCT

All courses taught in the Program in Public Health enforce strict codes of academic conduct and integrity. The Graduate Practicum in Public Health is not exempt from these codes. Faculty members expect of students enrolled in the practicum course, honesty and courtesy in all proceedings of the course, including interactions with other students, faculty members and staff. Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Inappropriate conduct includes cheating, plagiarism, falsification of records and/or official documents, data fabrication, and intentional misuse of materials or equipment. Faculty members expect that all manuscripts and presentations submitted for evaluation represent the student’s own efforts and appropriate credit must be give to sources of information. All students are expected to be familiar with and abide by the UC Irvine Academic Senate Policy on Academic Honesty: (http://www.senate.uci.edu/senateweb/default2.asp?active_page_id=754). Questions of academic dishonesty arising within the Program are treated on an individual basis.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The preparation of this practicum syllabus and guidelines benefitted from consultation of published documents and guidelines including those of the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) and the Association of Schools of Public Health (ASPH). Other sources of information include practicum guidelines of Schools of Public Health at the University of Washington, Seattle; University of California, Berkeley; The University of New Mexico; The University of Iowa College of Public Health; Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University; and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.