

Practicum in Public Health

As developing public health professionals, your academic experience has been largely confined to the classroom. While enriched by your networking with students in the MPH Program and other public-health related programs on campus, your course to date has revolved around mastering the basic sciences of public health, punctuated by midterms, reports, and final examinations. The practicum experience (EPP 297) is a setting in which you apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom to the real world. It is a “culminating experience” in which you gain practical experience working on a project related to your area of interest and career goals in public health. The practicum is a unique opportunity to synthesize and integrate knowledge acquired through coursework and other learning experiences and to apply these in a professional-practice setting.

Our location near the state capital –the center of a populous region with varied public health needs– allows for numerous practicum placement sites. For example, the California Department of Public Health (CDPH), world-renowned for its prevention programs, provides internship opportunities in areas such as chronic disease and injury control, maternal and child health, communicable disease control, occupational and environmental health, HIV prevention, and rural health. In addition, opportunities are available through county public health offices. Students may also seek out practicum sites of their own choosing.

Inevitably, finding a practicum site will involve some hunting. Contacts with public health professionals participating in the EPP 290 seminar are an excellent resource. In addition, the MPH office has a list of potential and previous preceptors. This is not an exclusive list; i.e., you are free and encouraged to find your own site and preceptor. In fact, finding one’s own site and preceptor has been the norm among our students.

Your practicum will have the most value if you prepare in advance. This syllabus is meant to guide you through these preparations and the practicum experience.

Organizational overview: The practicum comprises 240-300 hours of effort, corresponding to 8-10 quarter units in total. The majority of this work traditionally occurs in the Spring Quarter. The course meets also in the Winter Quarter (two units) to complete various milestones in preparation for the main work done in the Spring Quarter.

Students are encouraged, however, to begin early, including identifying a practicum site and doing preparatory readings in the Fall Quarter.

Units: The EPP 297 course currently offers a total of 8-10 units over Winter and Spring Quarters, corresponding to 240-300 hours. This typically translates to six hours per week over the Winter quarter (2 units) and 18 hours per week (for an additional 6 units) or 24 hours per week (for an additional 8 units) during the Spring Quarter. Not all of this time must be spent at the practicum site. Depending on arrangements with the site supervisor, students may spend part of the time completing library work, report writing, or at a field placement. However, the student and preceptor should meet at least weekly to assess and plan progress.

Grading: Grading is on a Pass/Fail basis. Please see the descriptions for the Winter and Spring Quarter for the basis of grading.

Location: The location for the every-other-week meeting during the Winter and Spring Quarters will be arranged and communicated to the class. The remainder of the practicum activities will depend on the specific aims of each student's practicum experience.

Goals and objectives: The overall goals and objectives are those organized into eight domains in the Student Handbook. In addition, there are specific course goals and objectives that are discussed subsequently for the Winter and Spring Quarters.

Dramatis personae:

<p>Instructor of record (IOR)</p> <p>The IOR is responsible for the overall conduct of the course and for final grades.</p>	<p>Stephen A. McCurdy, MD MPH Professor and Director UCD MPH Program Division of Environmental and Occupational Health Department of Public Health Sciences, TB 169 University of California, Davis 530-752-8051 FAX 530-752-3239 samccurdy@ucdavis.edu http://phs.ucdavis.edu/</p>
<p>UCD Faculty advisor</p> <p>The faculty advisor assists the student in identifying an Area of Emphasis and an appropriate practicum site and project. The advisor also reviews and comments on progress, including the student's final report. The faculty advisor should attend the June symposium at which the student presents his or her practicum work.</p>	<p>As assigned at the beginning of the academic year</p>
<p>Practicum Site Preceptor</p> <p>The site preceptor works with the student to identify an appropriate set of activities for the practicum experience. The site preceptor need not have an MPH or other health degree, but should be experienced in the area in which the student will work. The site preceptor should meet with the student at least weekly to assess and plan progress. The site preceptor also reviews and comments on progress, including the student's final report. The site preceptor should attend the June symposium at which the student presents his or her practicum work.</p>	<p>According to practicum site and project</p>

Expectations for the nature of the practicum project: The project is meant to provide real-world experience in public health. It is *not* meant to be solely a research project. Clearly, research is an important part of public health and may be a component of a project, but we do not want students to simply take a data file and analyze it. Similarly, students should not be asked to be the main person conducting a study, as this would effectively consume all of their time and prevent them from obtaining a broader public health perspective in the field. Ideally, students will identify preceptors working on existing public health projects in which the student can participate. Students can then identify an area within the project for concentration, while retaining the broader public health context. Although students may conduct projects that are of their own design, care must be exercised to assure that such projects retain a broad public health context and are not simply “data dredging” exercises.

Examples of appropriate projects:

Develop or assist with a program promoting healthy diet among high school students

Develop or assist with an evaluation of access to mammography among women on MediCal as part of a program to improve access

Develop or assist with a program for tobacco prevention in elementary schools

Examples of inappropriate projects:

Analyze a data file of dietary preferences among high school students, looking for associations with obesity. (This could become appropriate if it were not the main activity of the project, and the student uses the data to help focus an obesity prevention project.)

Conduct an epidemiologic analysis of equine encephalitis cases in Sacramento County. (This could become appropriate if it were not the main activity of the project and the student uses the data as part of an encephalitis control project.)

Evaluate physician compliance with secondary prevention recommendations for stroke patients at hospital discharge. (Again, if the student is the main person on this, this would consume all time and leave the student with a narrow, research-predominant experience. This project could be appropriate if the research component is part of a larger whole. For example, the student could review compliance data, using it to inform development of an educational program designed to boost compliance among discharging physicians.)

A cautionary note on human-subjects requirements: Epidemiologic studies involving human subjects require approval by the UC Davis Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process can be complicated and time consuming, and for this and other reasons, we recommend against such studies for the MPH Practicum project. (Analysis of previously collected or public data also requires IRB approval, but is simpler. Analysis of such data therefore is feasible as part of an MPH Practicum project. However, it should not be the entirety of the project, as discussed above.)

Practicum Symposium: A symposium session will be scheduled in early June. Each student will be allocated approximately 15 minutes for their presentation during one of these sessions. The presentation should be 10 minutes long with an additional 5 minutes allocated for questions at the end of the talk. The student should prepare the oral presentation as if it were to be given at a professional conference. A maximum of 10 slides may be used. The colloquium sessions

will be attended by all MPH students, faculty and faculty advisors, as well as the EPP 297 practicum advisors, when possible.

Practicum Written Report: The final report captures the essence of your project. It represents the opportunity for you to organize your project and communicate it clearly to the reader. I recommend the format below.

Format for final report

Each section should start on a new page. You may depart from the suggested section headings if it is appropriate. The report should be approximately 15-20 pages in length, double-spaced, using size 12 New Times Roman or Arial font. It must be properly written, properly punctuated, and properly spelled. I recommend using Strunk & White's "Elements of Style," although other style manuals are acceptable.

Title page: including name and date

Table of contents:

Executive summary: 1-2 pages. This is a brief summary of the context, what you did, the results, and implications and recommendations for further work.

Introduction: Including background and public health context for your project. This involves a review and referencing in your text of relevant literature. (You will find EndNote very helpful here.)

Methods or specific activities:

Describe the specific activities you undertook in your project

Results:

Describe what you achieved in your practicum experience. For example, if you were involved in developing an education program for high school students related to tobacco prevention, indicate what educational materials you developed, how many speaking engagements you had, the number of students contacted, etc.

Discussion:

The discussion usually includes the following elements:

Initial one or two paragraph summary of what was done and your main results

Strengths and limitations of your project and/or results

E.g., "This diabetes education project worked well among Hispanics, but may not be as successful in other ethnic groups."

How your project fits in with existing knowledge and its public health context

Implications of your project and/or findings for public health

Recommendations for further work and public health measures (*Very important!*)

Acknowledgments: Give credit to your supervisors, the population served, etc.

References: Use EndNote or similar. Vancouver Style

Advance Preparation (prior to Winter Quarter):

1. Identify an Area of Emphasis and consider possible practicum sites. Most helpful in this will be attendance at the EPP 290 Topics in Public Health Seminar and discussions with your UCD advisor, other faculty, and fellow students. I encourage you to make contacts with potential practicum site preceptors to determine feasibility. Included here is a letter for potential practicum site preceptors to assist their understanding of the experience and their role.

2. Obtain a copy of Strunk & White's "Elements of Style." Read it. Use it. (You may use another style manual of your choice, if you prefer.) You will prepare a final report at the end of the Spring Quarter. The report must be properly written, punctuated, and spelled. "Properly written" means coherent sentences in thematic paragraphs and a logical flow of ideas. "Properly punctuated" means your use of commas, semicolons, periods, colons, etc. is correct. The Strunk & White text is also extremely valuable for reports for other courses.

3. Download a free copy of EndNote from the UCD library website (<http://www.lib.ucdavis.edu/dept/instruc/research/endnote/>). This will save you a major amount of time in referencing your final report. In addition, you will find it very helpful for reports for other courses. (You may use an equivalent referencing program if you wish.)

EPP 297: CALENDAR OF IMPORTANT DATES

Milestone	Date of completion
Prior to Winter Quarter	
Identify Area of Emphasis	End of Fall Quarter
Obtain and read copy of Strunk & White or similar style manual	End of Fall Quarter
Obtain EndNote or similar referencing program	End of Fall Quarter
Winter Quarter	
Biweekly meetings	To be arranged
Identify practicum site and preceptor	End of Winter Quarter
Complete Practicum Agreement Form	End of Winter Quarter
Draft slide show (max. 10 slides)	End of Winter Quarter
Draft Introduction section for written report	End of Winter Quarter
Spring Quarter	
Biweekly EPP 297 course meetings	To be arranged
Weekly meetings with practicum site preceptor	As arranged
Mid-quarter review by UCD faculty advisor	Early May, 2008*
Late-quarter review of draft written report by UCD faculty advisor	Late May, 2008*
Slide presentation at symposium (max. 10 slides)	June 9, 2008*
Written report due	End of Spring Quarter
Evaluation of practicum by student	End of Spring Quarter
Evaluation of student by practicum site preceptor	End of Spring Quarter

*Dates are approximate and will be finalized in Spring Quarter