

MPH Field Experience in Public Health (IPHS 650)

The field experience (practicum) is a component of the capstone experience and is required of all MPH students in Community Health Sciences. The experience provides the student with a practical experience in a public health setting requiring the student to apply and integrate the skills and knowledge learned during their graduate study.

Overall Objective: Students will learn relevant skills in a public health practice setting.

Learning Objectives - Through the field experience, MPH students will be able to:

1. Integrate public health theory, knowledge, and skills in a practice setting;
2. Experience the “realities” of public health practice - organizational structure, local and organizational politics, program administration, community relationships, program coordination;
3. Complete a defined project(s) in an area of public health practice including core public health functions such as a needs assessment, program plan, program evaluation, policy development, educational campaign, applied research project;
4. Gain/expand/develop skills and knowledge in an area of interest not covered in depth elsewhere in the student’s educational plan;
5. Demonstrate competence in a public health practice area(s);
6. Demonstrate leadership, teamwork, communication skills and creativity in the development of a public health practice activity.

Requirements: Most CHS students are required to complete a 5 credit (320 contact hours) practicum. A few students may qualify for a reduced practicum of 3 credits (192 contact hours) depending on their prior public health experience and career goals. To qualify for a 3 credit practicum, a student would need to have had at least two years paid experience in a public health setting. At the time of the initial submission of the student’s program proposal, the faculty advisor must submit a letter documenting how the student’s experience has met the CHS practicum objectives, thereby allowing the student to request a reduced practicum.

The field experience is waived infrequently; however, this requirement may be waived for students who have had three or more years paid relevant public health practice experience in a field of public health that is similar to the one in which they currently are preparing to pursue a career. A petition to waive the field experience must be submitted at the time the student’s initial program proposal is presented to the CHS Graduate Studies Committee for approval. The petition must include a description of the nature and extent of the student’s prior experience, and describe how that experience is related to the student’s future public health career goals. It must specifically describe how the student’s prior experience fulfills each of the overall learning objectives for the field experience listed above. Prior completion of a clinical degree (e.g., MD, RN) and/or clinical experience does not justify a waiver of the field experience. The petition must include a separate, signed statement from the advisor that specifies the reasons why the advisor does or does not support the petition. A student who is eligible for the waiver may still elect to include up to 5 semester hours of a field experience in his or her program.

Planning: Students must be in good academic standing and have completed all MPH course requirements prior to registration for IPHS 650. Students must have the approval of their faculty

advisor prior to registration for the field experience. The field experience may be taken in a single semester or over several semesters. Students who take their field placement across two semesters should register for the full credit during the first semester. The student will receive an incomplete until a final grade (satisfactory or not satisfactory) can be given.

A CHS Roundtable Discussion is scheduled during the academic year to provide the student with more information about how to plan for or create a field practicum opportunity, steps toward a successful field experience and journaling techniques. See the current Roundtable Discussion schedule on the CHS website for the date when this will be held. Handout materials are available online.

Planning for the field practicum should begin at least six months before its projected starting date. This begins with the student developing his/her own educational objectives with the approval of the faculty advisor. Placement recommendations are discussed with the advisor. The CHS Academic Coordinator maintains a listing of students' past field experiences and other agencies that have expressed a desire to have students placed within their organization. On occasion, students may identify a site on their own or the advisor may suggest one. Selection must be agreed upon by both the student and the advisor.

Before visiting sites, students should develop an informational packet including their resume, courses taken, skills, and practicum objectives to show the agency's representatives. They should also take a Preceptor's Handbook that describes the academic requirements of the field experience. Once a site location has been selected and the agency agrees, an agency representative will be designated as the student's preceptor.

The following three forms are due at least one month prior to registration for the Field Experience (IPHS 650):

1. The Field Learning Agreement identifies the student's educational objectives, specific assignments the student will have at the agency, interaction with and knowledge of other employees and their functions, and contact with other organizations to which the agency relates. The student and preceptor with the advisor's approval mutually develop the plan. A copy of the preceptor's resume should also be attached.
2. The Agreement for Student Placement in a Practice Setting must have original signatures by authorized practicum facility personnel on each of two required copies. In many cases, this form may be optional. The student should check with the CHS Academic Coordinator about this requirement.
3. The IPHS Registration Form will document the advisor's permission for the student to register for their practicum.

All forms must be completed and returned to the CHS Academic Coordinator at least one month prior to beginning field placement. Students may NOT register for IPHS 650 unless these forms have been submitted and approved by the faculty advisor.

International students are recommended to contact the UIC Office of International Services (312-996-3121) for Curricular Practical Training Approval (CPT). Students with a F-1 visa seeking a paid placement must have CPT approval. Allow 2-3 weeks to process this request).

Reflective Journal and Summary Report: During placement, students are to keep a journal recording their weekly experiences. The purpose is to provide the student with an opportunity for self-reflection and synthesis of the practicum. Students are also expected to prepare a written Summary Report. The Summary Report should include:

1. Description of activities performed during placement, noting any deviations from the field learning agreement.
2. How well did the field experience integrate what the student learned in their formal MPH course work?
3. What the student gained from the experience, identifying problems if they occurred.
4. Extent to which the student's educational objectives (identified in the Field Learning Agreement) were achieved.
5. Extent to which overall field experience learning objectives (identified on preceding page) were achieved.

Performance Evaluations: The preceptor supervises and evaluates the student's on-site performance. During placement it is expected that there will be communication between the faculty advisor and the student, and between the faculty advisor and the preceptor, particularly when questions or issues arise. At midpoint through the placement period, contact is made by the advisor to discuss the student's progress. In addition, two weeks before the practicum is to be completed, the Academic Coordinator distributes evaluation forms to both the preceptor and the student.

The faculty advisor will determine the final grade for the practicum. This is based on the preceptor's evaluation, the student's evaluation, the written Journal and Summary Report and any other relevant information. Students are graded on a satisfactory/not satisfactory basis. If a student's work is unsatisfactory, a student may be required to complete an additional practicum experience.