

General Fact Sheet for Practicums

Department of Global and Community Health, George Mason University

What Is a Practicum?

The practicum is much like an internship, where a practicum student will work for a public health-related organization under the direction of a site supervisor to gain and/or perfect the student's public health skills. This is a hands-on experience. The practicum should be directed by the site supervisor and consist of learning **PUBLIC HEALTH-RELATED SKILLS** — not general office skills such as answering phones or filing — that the student can carry with him or her into the field after graduation.

Students also may participate in a site's or site supervisor's research projects, if applicable, but the student should understand that the research belongs to the site and/or site supervisor and the site and site supervisor are responsible for obtaining appropriate institutional review board (IRB) approval for any research conducted with human subjects.

How Many Hours Is a Practicum?

The practicum student must complete a total of 200 hours during the semester.

What Makes a Good Practicum Site Supervisor?

Someone who:

- Is willing and eager to mentor a public health practicum student.
- Treats the practicum student as s/he would an employee with the site/organization.
- Understands that the practicum experience is an **UNPAID** internship.
- Clearly delineates his or her expectations of the practicum student for the duration of the practicum experience.
- Provides the practicum student with the organization's policies regarding technical standards and professional and ethical conduct.
- Students should understand that during the MPH practicum experience, the site supervisor is, for all intents and purposes, akin to an "employer" and the student is an "employee," with the understanding that the
 - (1) practicum student are not required to receive monetary compensation or other benefits as would an employee, but payment for practicum work is allowed;
 - (2) practicum site and site supervisor are hosting the practicum student intern voluntarily;
 - (3) practicum site and site supervisor are under no obligations beyond the scope of this guidebook;
 - (4) practicum site and site supervisor may "fire" or "terminate" the practicum student anytime during the practicum experience if the student fails to meet the organization's technical, professional, and/or ethical standards.
 - (5) termination of a student must be submitted in writing on organizational letterhead and mailed to the Department of Global and Community Health (see address below).
- Works with the practicum student to develop a "Practicum Description" that outlines tasks, goals, and objectives for the practicum experience as well as a "Work Schedule."
- Establishes the level of supervision s/he will provide the practicum student.
- Establishes the primary and secondary means of contact with the practicum student. For example, in-person, office phone, cell phone, e-mail, etc. Again, this is entirely up to the site supervisor.
- **Contact the Practicum Instructor when necessary: Dr. Ali Weinstein, Associate Professor, Global and Community Health, George Mason University, 4400 University Drive, MS 5B7, Fairfax, VA 22030, aweinst2@gmu.edu.**