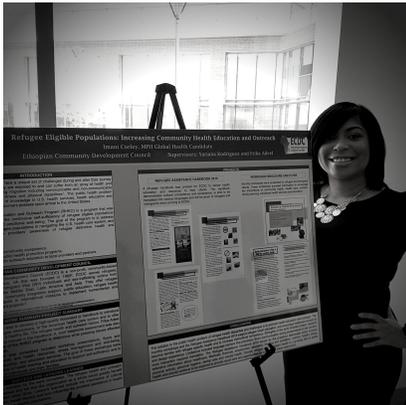# MPH

Practicum Handbook

Dear Student,

The practicum is an exciting time of your studies. It is when you take what you've learned about public health in the classroom and apply it in the real world. You are not all alone in this journey. While we encourage you to practice critical thinking and problem-solving, the MPH faculty, your practicum supervisor, and others are here for support and guidance. This is a learning experience for you and we anticipate that you will gain the confidence and skills to be a successful, productive member of the public health workforce.

Pay attention to the "Student Tips" throughout the document with advice from students who have gone before you! Also review "Advice from Previous Mason MPH Practicum Students" in the Appendix for even more advice.

Student Tip
Do not think about this as being a requirement for your degree, but a job to start your new career.

Dear Practicum Supervisor,

We are grateful to you for supporting George Mason University MPH Program students during their 200-hour practicum. We know that it is a significant investment of your time to guide students in the development of their workforce skills. We thank you for this investment in the future of public health.

Very sincerely,
- Dr. Patrice Winter, Professor and Practicum Coordinator
- Ms. Kelly Beckwith, Assistant Director of Academic Programs
- Dr. Carolyn Drews-Botsch, Professor and Chair
- Ms. Sarah Liu, MPH Program Coordinator

Table of Contents

MPH Practicum Overview

Background and Purpose

Since 2013, the George Mason University Master of Public Health (MPH) Program has been accredited by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). As part of CEPH accreditation, Mason must provide evidence that all MPH students demonstrate competency attainment through a practicum (also called an applied practice experience), which may involve governmental, non-governmental, non-profit, industrial, and for-profit settings or appropriate university-affiliated settings.

These practicum requirements are in two courses over two semesters.

- **GCH 780, Practicum Seminar** is a zero-credit, online course that helps students identify and arrange their practicum placements in a structured environment. Students complete GCH 780 the semester before enrolling in GCH 790.

  After the practicum site is secured, students develop three practicum objectives. Students also select three Foundational Competencies and two Concentration Competencies that will be met during their practicum. Students should identify competencies that they believe will be enhanced by their practicum experience.

- **GCH 790, Practicum in Public Health**
  Prerequisites: Students must have taken GCH 780 and completed at least 21 credits in the MPH Program.

  The required 200-hour practicum gives students the opportunity to practice and improve professional skills in a supervised setting.

Funding for the Practicum Experience
When/if funding opportunities are open and available, students will be notified via email. Applications are usually due well in advance of the practicum start date. There are two Mason-sponsored opportunities that are often available.

- The Office of the Provost may offer High Impact Grants for students enrolled in GCH 790.
- University Career Services may offer the Unpaid Internship Scholarship to students enrolled in GCH 790.

Practicum Requirements in Detail

GCH 780: Practicum Seminar

GCH 780 is a zero-credit, online course that helps students identify and arrange their practicum placements in a structured environment.

There are two parts to GCH 780.

(1) Career Readiness

Students complete activities in the Learning Management System on overall career readiness, including networking, and working on interprofessional teams.

(2) Searching for and Securing a Practicum Site

Students are ultimately responsible for finding a suitable practicum site and completing all paperwork by the deadline posted in the Learning Management System. Students are supported in their practicum search by the Practicum Coordinator, are provided with an online database of potential practicum sites, and receive practicum applications in the Learning Management System that are specifically for students in GCH 780.

Student Tip

Start early and apply to as many sites that interest you as possible! Don't wait on *one* internship to get back to you.

Practicum paperwork completed in GCH 780

Once a student is offered a practicum placement, they must complete the required, legal university paperwork with handwritten (not electronic) signatures. This includes:

⟹ **Practicum Information Cover Sheet**: This form contains pertinent contact information about the practicum placement.

⟹ **Experiential Learning Agreement**: This is the legal agreement between Mason, the student, and the practicum site.
   - Page 1: Practicum Information Form Cover Sheet, including names, addresses, dates, and signatures
   - Page 2-6: Experiential Learning Agreement which includes:
     - Practicum placement description, provided to the student by the practicum supervisor.
     - Work schedule (hours per week), agreed upon by the student and practicum supervisor.
     - Practicum objectives, developed by the student.
     - Five MPH competencies that will be addressed throughout the practicum experience.
     - Preliminary description of the two "work products" to be produced during the practicum.
     - Syllabus for GCH 790
   - Pages 7-9: Attachment A. Have practicum site review. Some sites make edits or need extra time to review.
   - Page 10: Attachment B. Practicum Student Participation Consent Agreement. Complete and sign.

See the Learning Management System for current templates and information. Information in LMS takes precedence over information in this handbook.

The practicum paperwork is a binding, legal document. Students should complete this paperwork in consultation with the practicum supervisor and the Practicum Coordinator. It may take additional time to finalize the paperwork, so plan accordingly to meet all deadlines.

> **!** **Failure to have completed paperwork in by the final deadline may mean that the student will not be able to do the practicum in the next semester.**

Developing High-level Practicum Objectives

While the job description is a basic overview of what will be done during the practicum, practicum objectives further explain three specific responsibilities. That is, practicum objectives break down the job description into three actionable parts of the experience. Students write the practicum objectives from the job description, in consultation with the practicum supervisor and Practicum Coordinator.

Practicum objectives are written using Bloom's Taxonomy. Review https://stearnscenter.gmu.edu/knowledge-center/course-and-curriculum-redesign/blooms-taxonomy/ for more information. To be high-level, choose only from the "analyzing", "evaluating", and "creating" levels. More information is provided in the online course.

Selecting Competencies

There are 22 foundational competencies, established by CEPH, and 5-7 concentration competencies, established by public health faculty. These competencies are skills and knowledge that employers might expect an MPH graduate to have when starting in the workforce. A full list of competences is listed toward the end of this document.

In the Experiential Learning Agreement, students select three foundational and two concentration competencies that will be addressed during the practicum. Students select competencies that align with the job description, and should be areas the student would like to further develop through the experience. Students should confirm with the practicum supervisor that the competencies would be met through the practicum experience, as the work products created during the practicum experience must show evidence of competency attainment.

Review Practicum Paperwork Examples in the Appendix.

Making Revisions to Practicum Paperwork Once the Practicum Has Started

It is possible to revise the practicum paperwork once it is signed; this usually happens during the practicum (i.e., while a student is enrolled in GCH 790). These changes must be agreed upon by the student, the practicum supervisor, and Practicum Coordinator. There is a form to modify practicum paperwork in the online course. The most common revisions are to:

- Practicum objectives,
- Practicum competencies, or
- Who serves as practicum supervisor.

Note: It is not necessary to revise the initial description of the work products, as they evolve as the student does the work, in consultation with the practicum supervisor.

Grading

The Practicum Coordinator grades GCH 780 as satisfactory/non satisfactory (S/NS).

Students who do not find a practicum placement during GCH 780 or who want to delay when they complete the practicum requirements may receive an in-progress (IP) grade as long as the other course requirements (i.e., the career readiness section) are completed. Students should discuss this option with the Practicum Coordinator as early as possible.

GCH 790: Practicum in Public Health

Prerequisites: Students must have taken GCH 780 and completed at least 21 credits in the MPH Program.

The required 200-hour practicum gives students the opportunity to practice and improve professional skills in a supervised setting. The practicum site should support the students' career goals, to the extent possible, and the work a student completes during the practicum should be mutually beneficial to both the site and the student. Success is based on each student's competency attainment, which is assessed on the quality of the two work products, as well as through reflective journals, a poster presentation, a site visit by the Practicum Coordinator, and the Practicum Supervisor assessment.

Students will complete their practicum requirements within the dates of the semester they are enrolled in GCH 790, unless otherwise specified in the Experiential Learning Agreement. Refer to the Office of the University Registrar's calendar for official university semester dates.

Student Tip

Time management is very essential … as you are held responsible for all the tasks that are expected from you in school, at work, and in your practicum.

While the online course site will provide additional detail, the following comprise the major requirements of the practicum.

Work Products

Students demonstrate competency attainment through the creation of two practical, non-academic work products that were produced for the site's use and benefit. Examples of suitable work products include project plans, grant proposals, training manuals or lesson plans, surveys, memos, videos, podcasts, presentations, spreadsheets, websites, photos (with accompanying explanatory text), or other digital artifacts of learning. See the Appendix for an example of the rubric for the work products.

Reflection papers, contact hour logs, scholarly papers prepared to allow faculty to assess the experience, poster presentations, and other documents required for academic purposes may not be counted toward the two work products.

Contact Hours and Time Sheet

Students must log a minimum of 200 contact/supervised hours at the practicum site, performing work that complies with the job description and objectives agreed upon by the student, practicum supervisor, and Practicum Coordinator at the time of registration.

All contact hours must be completed within the dates of the course – no earlier than the first day of class and no later than the last day of class unless specified in the Experiential Learning Agreement. Contact hours should be tracked each week using the Practicum Time Sheet, and the time sheet will be signed by the practicum supervisor, and submitted to the Practicum Coordinator at the end of the term.

> **! Falsifying a time sheet is an honor code violation.**
> **Ramifications may include failing the course or dismissal from the university.**

Journals

Journals chronicle a student's experiences at the practicum site. The purpose of these journal entries is to help track important events, achievements, challenges, and competencies addressed throughout the experience. The journal entries:

- Provide thoughtful insight on the work completed in the practicum.
- Reflect on the interprofessional nature of public health work.
- Assist in the synthesis of the competencies.

Practicum Poster Presentation

The poster presentation is a quick summary of major aspects of the practicum. Students present their posters in-person at the end of the semester in which they complete their practicum. More information, along with a template, is provided in the online course site.

Example of a practicum poster

Supervisor Evaluation and Site Visit

Students act as an ambassador of George Mason University while completing the practicum. Professionalism, engagement, and the quality of work will be evaluated in two ways.

- Practicum Supervisor Evaluation: The practicum supervisor will receive an email from the Practicum Coordinator with a link to a survey. The survey is meant to capture supervisors' feedback regarding the practicum experience, including the quality of the two work products. Supervisors are encouraged to discuss the evaluation with the student.
- Site Visit: The Practicum Coordinator will make a short (15-20 minute) site visit to all practicum sites either in-person or on Zoom.

Grading

The Practicum Coordinator grades GCH 790 on the graduate A-F scale. The grade for GCH 790 is determined by quality of the two work products, the time sheet, journals, poster presentation, the practicum supervisor evaluation, and site visit.

Practicum Definitions and Responsibilities

Practicum Student

Practicum students are graduate students in the MPH Program at George Mason University who are taking GCH 790 for credit. Students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and respectful manner at all times while representing the practicum site.

Professional Workplace Behavior

It is expected that students display appropriate professional workplace behavior at their practicum site. While this topic is covered in GCH 780, appropriate professional workplace behavior includes:

- Arriving to the workplace on time, when expected.
- Communicating with the practicum supervisor about schedule.
- Communicating with the practicum supervisor if directions are unclear.
- Focusing on doing the job well.
- Completing work assigned to you on time.
- Dressing appropriately for the work environment.
- Not doing schoolwork, spending time on social media or browsing the internet while at the practicum site.

Review "Understanding Realistic Workplace Expectations" in the Appendix.

Communication Expectations

Students who feel the practicum is deviating from the original agreement, or have troubles meeting expectations or managing obligations, should speak with their practicum supervisor to discuss their concerns and find solutions. Resolving issues early in the practicum is essential to achieving a successful and meaningful experience. Do not wait until the final weeks, as this may result in a need to repeat the course.

Students who encounter difficulties working with their practicum supervisors should contact the Practicum Coordinator as soon as possible. In addition, the student must contact the Practicum Coordinator if a practicum supervisor can no longer fulfill their duties due to job change, illness, or other reasons.

Students who also work full-time during their practicum find that time-management skills are essential to maintain good work/life balance. The Office of Learning Services has time management resources for students at https://learningservices.gmu.edu/academic-skills-videos/time-management/. LinkedIn Learning, free to all Mason students, also has time management tips and resources.

Student Tip
Use calendars, agendas, and to-do lists to stay organized and meet all deadlines.

Dismissal from a Practicum Site

In extreme cases, students may be dismissed by their practicum supervisors for unprofessional behavior or unsatisfactory work. If a student is dismissed from the practicum site, they may not count hours logged at the site toward the practicum requirements. Depending upon the infraction(s), students who have been dismissed may or may not be allowed to continue a practicum at a second site. This is determined by the Practicum Coordinator or the Mason Honor Committee.

Students who lose a practicum placement during the course at no fault of their own will be allowed to count hours logged toward the requirements and may find another placement. However, there is no guarantee that students in these situations will be able to find an appropriate second placement and obtain the required hours within the term and may have to retake the course in a subsequent semester.

Practicum Coordinator

The Practicum Coordinator is a faculty member in the Department of Global and Community Health at George Mason University. The Practicum Coordinator will:

- Assist students in finding acceptable practicum sites during GCH 780.
- Monitor students at their practicum sites during GCH 790.
- Communicate with practicum supervisors before and during a student's practicum placement.
- Be available to students throughout the practicum search and practicum placement for feedback and support.
- Evaluate overall student performance for grading of GCH 790.

Practicum Site

The organization ("practicum site") hosting the practicum student must agree to the terms and conditions of George Mason University as described in the Experiential Learning Agreement.

Completing Practicum at Current Workplace

Students may already work in the field of public health. If a student plans to do a practicum at their current place of employment, the student must speak with the Practicum Coordinator early in the process (during GCH 780). The practicum duties cannot be the student's normal work duties, in the same department, or with the same supervisor.

Practicum Supervisor

The practicum supervisor is an employee at the practicum site and agrees to supervise a practicum student. The practicum supervisor cannot be a student's relative.

The practicum supervisor must:

- Have at least a master's degree in public health or a closely related field, or a significant amount of professional experience in the area in which the student will work.
- Provide guidance to the practicum student through regular meetings/check-ins.
- Attend the site visit of the Practicum Coordinator and student (arranged by the student).
- Complete an electronic survey assessing student's professionalism, work ethic, performance, etc.

Practicum supervisors acknowledge that the student is learning and practicing public health workforce skills. Practicum supervisors are allowed to dismiss practicum students during the course for failure to

meet professional expectations. However, this should be a last resort after other plans of remediation have not been successful, and only occur after communication with the student and the Practicum Coordinator.

Student Tip
Find confidence in yourself to validate your hard work – you may not do everything perfectly, or even correctly on the first try and that's okay.

Work Product

A work product is a something that a student creates during their practicum experience that shows evidence of the student's competency attainment. Work products must be produced for the site's use and benefit. Examples of suitable work products include project plans, grant proposals, training manuals or lesson plans, surveys, memos, videos, podcasts, presentations, spreadsheets, websites, photos (with accompanying explanatory text), or other digital artifacts of learning. Students must submit at least two work products. See the Appendix for an example of the rubric for the work products.

Master of Public Health Competencies

Foundational Competencies

Evidence-Based Approaches to Public Health
1. Apply epidemiological methods to settings and situations in public health practice.
2. Select quantitative and qualitative data collection methods approach for a given public health context.
3. Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming, and software.
4. Interpret results of data analysis for public health research.

Public Health & Health Care Systems
5. Compare the organization, structure and function of health care, public health and regulatory systems across national and international settings.
6. Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community, and systemic levels.
7. Assess population needs, assets, and capacities that affect communities' health.

Planning & Management to Promote Health
8. Apply awareness of cultural values and practices to the design, implementation, or critique of public health policies or programs.
9. Design a population-based policy, program, project, or intervention.
10. Explain basic principles and tools of budget and resource management.
11. Select methods to evaluate public health programs.

Policy in Public Health
12. Discuss the policy-making process, including the roles of ethics and evidence.
13. Propose strategies to identify stakeholders and build coalitions and partnerships for influencing public health outcomes.
14. Advocate for political, social, or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations.
15. Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity.

Leadership
16. Apply leadership and/or management principles to address a relevant issue.
17. Apply negotiation and mediation skills to address organizational or community challenges.

Communication
18. Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors.
19. Communicate audience-appropriate (i.e., non-academic, non-peer audience) public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation.
20. Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content.

Inter-professional Practice
21. Integrate perspectives from other sectors and/or professions to promote and advance population health.

Systems Thinking
22. Apply a systems thinking tool to visually represent a public health issue in a format other than standard narrative.

MPH Concentration Competencies

Community Health Promotion

1. Utilize appropriate social, behavioral, and communication theories, concepts and models in health promotion research and practice.
2. Synthesize research findings from the scientific literature to inform health promotion research and practice.
3. Apply quantitative and qualitative research methods in health promotion research and practice.
4. Design population specific health promotion materials, methods, and evidence-based interventions.
5. Advocate for evidence-based policy changes to improve health, reduce health disparities, and eliminate inequities.

Epidemiology

1. Utilize data and literature to recognize domestic and global public health problems pertinent to the overall population and to demographic, cultural, or other subgroups of the population.
2. Identify determinants or risk factors of human health and disease.
3. Select appropriate study design(s) to investigate a public health.
4. Communicate epidemiologic evidence to lay and scientific audiences.
5. Conduct systematic reviews that appropriately summarize epidemiologic literature.
6. Implement strategies for minimizing bias in epidemiologic studies.
7. Conduct a reproducible data analysis project.

Food Security and Nutrition

1. Conduct systematic research literature reviews on the effect of nutrition programs, policies, and practices.
2. Apply the concepts and science of food and nutrition in formulating strategies aimed at improving individual and population health outcomes.
3. Integrate the social, cultural, historical, political, biological, and environmental factors to plan and evaluate public health nutrition programs.
4. Evaluate health and nutritional status of individuals and communities.
5. Apply the basic principles of food selection to support healthy dietary practices amongst individuals and population.

Global Health

1. Compare the major causes of morbidity and mortality across high-, middle-, and low-income regions.
2. Explain the social, economic, and environment determinants of health.
3. Apply ethical approaches in global health research and practice.
4. Propose sustainable and evidence-based multi-sectoral interventions.
5. Apply monitoring and evaluation techniques to global health programs, policies, and/or outcomes.
6. Display critical self-reflection, cultural humility, and ongoing learning in global health.

Health Equity and Social Justice

1. Critically evaluate the ways in which social and ecological determinants of health contribute to inequities in population health.
2. Develop strategies to create systemic change that address poverty, oppression, and inequities.
3. Analyze strategies to engage stakeholders and build coalitions and partnerships to influence policy and create change.
4. Integrate relevant strategies, methodologies and measures for behavioral health interventions that advance health equity and social justice.
5. Evaluate digital innovations and computing techniques to counter the digital divide and improve health equity.

Health Policy

1. Apply the effective use of research and various policy analysis tools for supporting policy development, implementation, and evaluation.
2. Demonstrate ability to write and speak in a clear, logical, persuasive, and grammatical manner for policy-related situations and audiences.
3. Lead and facilitate constructive interactions with individuals and various policy stakeholder groups to achieve optimum decision-making in policy advocacy, development, implementation and analysis.
4. Critically evaluate policy issues, ideas, events, and process in advance of policy development and decision making.
5. Select, perform, and interpret appropriate statistical analyses.

Public Health Practice

1. Coordinate with emergency management agencies and other stakeholders to prepare for and respond to public health emergencies.
2. Explore legal and regulatory actions to improve and protect the environment and the public's health.
3. Synthesize evidence from the scientific literature to inform public health policy, research, and practice.
4. Apply principles of effective project management in public health practice.
5. Analyze the social and ecological determinants of health disparities, inequities, and inequalities.
6. Recommend evidence-informed policies and programs to address current or emerging public health problems among specific populations.

Appendix

Practicum Paperwork Examples

The following table shows examples of clearly written practicum placement descriptions, high-level practicum objectives, competencies selected for the practicum placement, and an initial description of the synthesis paper from past MPH students' paperwork. These examples are for illustrative purposes only.

	Epidemiology concentration	Health Policy concentration	Global Health concentration
Practicum Placement description	Intern will engage in routine activities, such as compiling and presenting monthly communicable disease surveillance reports and quality assurance reviews. Other activities, such as assisting with outbreak tasks, conducting applied research, attending internal meetings, and other duties will be performed as the need arises.	Student will assist in organization and development of resources for communities and policymakers, prepare abstracts and drafts for Science Director, conduct literature searches and research related to future and ongoing projects, and contribute to the development of programs aimed at bettering health in communities experiencing environmental health related crises.	-Assist and accompany client to medical or immunization appointments -Assist refugees with health insurance enrollment -Conduct orientations to prepare community members to access to US health services -Provide trainings on safety, health and hygiene - Assist program manager with maintenance of case files
Practicum Objectives	Conduct at least one epidemiological analysis on a communicable disease issue affecting the community. Compile at least three epidemiological surveillance reports from health department data. Create and deliver at least one formal presentation to the health department staff.	Analyze prior research (scholarly and grey literature), legislation, and documents related to environmental health issues, policies and programs. Develop materials/reports for potential policymakers and stakeholders using research data. Design plans and/or programs that address gaps in current policies/programs concerning environmental health agents.	Develop intercultural community competency. Design and present public health promotion programs. Conduct refugee health outreach education to local providers and partners.
Foundational Competencies	F-1: Apply epidemiological methods to the breadth of settings and situations in public health practice F-3: Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming, and software F-19: Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation	F-4: Interpret results of data analysis for public health research F-14: Advocate for political, social, or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse populations F-15: Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity	F-5: Compare the organization, structure and function of health care, public health and regulatory systems across national and international settings F-7: Assess population needs, assets, and capacities that affect communities' health F-19: Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation
Concentration Competencies	EPID-2: Identify determinants or risk factors of human health and disease. EPID-6: Implement strategies for minimizing bias in epidemiologic studies.	HTHP-3: Apply the effective use of research and various policy analysis tools for supporting policy development, implementation and evaluation. HTHP-7: Critically evaluate policy issues, ideas, events and process in advance of policy development and decision making.	GLOH-7: Develop public health programs and strategies responsive to the diverse cultural values and traditions of the communities being served. GLOH-8: Demonstrate the effective written and oral skills for communicating with diverse audiences in the context of professional public health activities.

Advice from Previous Mason MPH Practicum Students

Finding a Placement

- I would try to keep your options open by looking at as many places as possible. I would never be afraid to speak out on what your needs are. It is important to be your own advocate so you can feel respected, included, and free to have a good work/life balance.
- Look for a practicum site during the first year of the program and develop your network. Do not think about this as being a requirement for your degree, but a job to start your new career. Bring ideas to the table when you are meeting with potential sites on projects that you can work on and skills you bring to the table - this will impress the site and they may take you up on one of the ideas you suggested.
- Even if an organization may not have a job/internship opening on their website, you should not be afraid to email or contact them about your interest in interning with them. I applied to multiple places but the ones I heard back from were the ones I personally contacted.

Course Requirements

- Start working on your [work products] as soon as you can. It catches up fast if you don't.
- Do your journals every week, do not wait until the last minute. Communicate with your supervisor and let them know your needs so you can have a positive experience.
- Scheduling is so important. Break down larger projects, such as the practicum final report, into manageable chunks and take it day-by-day.

At the Workplace

- As professionals in the field, we must provide a high quality of work. Act professional, do your best and work hard.
- My advice to students as they begin their practicum is to make connections with your supervisor and lean on her or him for networking opportunities. I think it is important to have a bond with your supervisor because she or he might know of other professionals or job openings that they can help you get.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions; everyone here is really willing to help you learn and answer questions. One of the best experiences I've had during my entire graduate career!

Time Management

- What you put into your practicum is up to you! Really milk it for all it's worth. It is hard to balance school, full time job, internship, and a social life - but you have to prioritize.
- Schedule your time, with personal time included, so that the juggling of so many different responsibilities doesn't consume you for the semester. Time management is everything!
- This was the most challenging time-management semester I've ever had in all my time in higher education. Establishing a schedule or a calendar at the beginning of the semester with all my practicum and non-practicum course assignments was crucial to me being able to find time to complete all my assignments and not neglect any aspect of my education.

Understanding Realistic Workplace Expectations

Graduate School	Workplace
Graduate school is all about your learning and development.	Work is focused on your contribution to reaching a business or institutional goal, not on your personal development. You reach your goals by helping the organization reach its goals, but your personal goals are not the central focus of work.
At graduate school, the focus was on your earning grades.	Work focuses on some identifiable output that you are responsible for, but that is not specifically about you.
In graduate school, you have been the consumer of many services focused on your learning and your development.	Work is about being a producer, generally for someone else.
Graduate school often allows for negotiation in activities, assignments, and even outcomes; you decide what you want to do. Graduate school may often appear artificial; activities are created with limited obvious relation to the real world.	Work tends to be more inflexible in times, deadlines, appearance, and outcomes. It is the real world with real impacts, responsibilities, and consequences.
In college and perhaps also in graduate school, you have taken many different kinds of classes and have been urged to develop general interests.	While a broad range of interests and skills is valued at work, it is your ability to make a unique contribution. To have the most value at work, you must specialize and demonstrate specific and relevant skills others don't have.
Graduate school activities were usually highly directed; someone told you very specifically what was expected and what you needed to do.	Work requires more self-direction and problem-solving in reaching the organizational goal that are your responsibility.
In graduate school, much of the work was content based; you were expected to learn certain fact-based material for the test, assignment, or other graded evaluation.	Work requires complex critical thinking, which combines content skills with intellectual and observational skills.
Your work in school often has provided lots of praise, including high grades.	Work rarely offers lavish praise, but instead frequent criticism.
During college and graduate school, you may have had a lot of flexibility. You could usually set your own schedule, including your class schedule.	Work rarely allows for much flexibility in days worked, hours worked, or what you do during work hours. Schedules and activities are often prescribed for you.
In college and graduate school, you could often spend time with peers of your own choosing.	At work the groups are mixed, and you don't get to pick who you work with.
College and graduate school may be appearance-oriented and supports your looking cool and casual.	Appearance at work is expected to be mature, and you are expected to look busy, not casual.

Adapted from University Career Services

Frequently Asked Questions about the Practicum

Why doesn't the Practicum Coordinator assign me a practicum placement?
Searching and finding a practicum site helps students practice the skills needed for the job search. There are many benefits to students finding a practicum site that meets personal and professional needs.

How many practicum placements should I apply to?
Most practicum placements are competitive. University Career Services suggests students apply to at least 20 sites! We suggest you apply to at least five sites, and make sure you follow the directions closely for each application. There are usually interviews associated with a practicum placement. Career readiness skills, including resumes, cover letters, and interviewing are reviewed in GCH 780.

Can my practicum be paid?
Students may have paid or unpaid practicums. The paid practicums typically are more competitive, harder to find, and have earlier application deadlines. For students doing unpaid practicums, University Career Services may offer an Unpaid Internship Scholarship. Check Handshake for the University Career Services for the application.

I already work in public health. Do I have to do a practicum?
As an accredited program, we cannot waive the practicum requirement.

Can I do my practicum at my current job?
General guidelines stipulate that the practicum duties cannot be the student's normal work duties, in the same department, or with the same supervisor. If you want to do your practicum at your current workplace, we advise that you speak with the Practicum Coordinator early in the process.

What happens if I don't get a practicum placement while in GCH 780?
If you are unable to secure a practicum placement by the deadline in GCH 780, you will get a grade of "In Progress" (IP) and will continue to search for a suitable placement in the next semester.

What do I do after I get an offer at a practicum site?
First – congratulations! If it is a new site that has not hosted an intern from Mason, contact the Practicum Coordinator before you accept. If it is a site that other Mason students have worked in the past, feel free to accept the offer – that is, if it something you want to do. Do not pursue other practicum sites after you accept a position at a practicum site.

How many hours must I complete for the practicum?
You must work a minimum of 200 hours at your practicum site. There is a time sheet template to record your hours, which your practicum supervisor will sign at the end of the semester. Students work out with their practicum supervisor how many hours will be worked each week to get the required number of hours. Some students work full-time at their practicum site and complete the 200 hours quickly; other students work 12-15 hours per week and complete the 200 hours over the full course of the semester.

What are the practicum start and end dates?
Typically, the practicum start date coincides with the beginning of the semester/term, and the 200 hours are completed by the date of the poster presentation (listed in the online course site). Alternate arrangements may be possible; speak with the Practicum Coordinator as early as possible in the process.

Do I have to go to my practicum site during Spring Break?
Only the university has Spring Break – not the practicum site. Unless you arrange it ahead of time with your practicum supervisor, you are expected to continue to accrue hours at your practicum site during Spring Break.

Once I've started to complete the paperwork, when should my practicum supervisor sign it?
For sites that regularly host Mason MPH students, the paperwork process is routine. However, at new sites or with federal government agencies, the turnaround time may be several weeks. If you need clearance, it can take months. It is best to share the paperwork with your practicum supervisor early in anticipation of delays. For example, some sites' legal teams may go back and forth with the Practicum Coordinator regarding Attachment B.

Once you have secured a practicum site, fill out the Experiential Learning Agreement as completely as possible, seeking practicum supervisor input where appropriate. If there is time (at least 5 days before the due date), send a draft to the Practicum Coordinator for feedback. After that, you and the practicum supervisor can sign and initial the pages for approval. You can send in your paperwork anytime you complete it – there is no need to wait until the deadline.

What should I do at my practicum site once I start?
At your placement, you should:
- Arrive on time.
- Network with your new colleagues to learn more about the work they do.
- Ask questions when you don't understand something.
- Reflect upon what tasks, topics, or duties you like and don't like.
- Update your resume with the new skills learned.
- Add your practicum placement to your LinkedIn profile.

What is involved in the practicum poster presentation?
The poster should summarize the main work done in your practicum. The poster presentation provides an opportunity for practicum students to share their experiences with faculty, guests, and fellow students. A good poster will provide enough information to generate interest from the audience, but does not tell the whole story. Students should be prepared to give a 2-3 minute elevator pitch about their practicum experience several times as different people stop by.

Work Product Rubric

<u>Background</u>
During the practicum, students must demonstrate competency attainment through the creation of at least two practical, non-academic work products that are created for the site's use and benefit. A total of five competencies must be evidenced among the two products. Examples of suitable work products include project plans, grant proposals, training manuals or lesson plans, surveys, memos, videos, podcasts, presentations, spreadsheets, websites, photos (with accompanying explanatory text), or other digital artifacts of learning.

<u>Competencies</u>
There must be a total of 5 competencies (3 foundational and 2 concentration) demonstrated in at least 2 work products. If the student needs more than 3 work product boxes to show the 5 competencies, copy and paste additional boxes below to review the products.

<u>Assessment and Review</u>
Students must complete the document below, including the area of self-assessment.

The practicum (site) supervisor should review and comment in this document after the student's self-assessment, and both should sign. The student will upload the final document to Blackboard at the end of the semester for the final review by the Practicum Coordinator.

The Practicum Coordinator will discuss the rubric with the student and practicum supervisor at the site visit.

Work Product	Response/Comment
Short description of work product	
Competency (1 or more) used in this product *List number and text of each competency*	
What is the evidence of the competency in the work product? (2-3 sentences)	
How is this product useful to the site?	
Site Supervisor Comments	
Site Supervisor Score (see below)	
Practicum Coordinator Comments	

Scoring Rubric

1	2	3	4
Does not address the knowledge and skills outlined for this competency or effectively apply them in a real-world setting. More than one component (knowledge, skills, or application) is entirely missing or incorrect.	Demonstrates some understanding of the knowledge and skills outlined for this competency, and application in a real-world setting. More than one component (knowledge, skills, or application) has insufficient depth/detail, contains inaccuracies, does not effectively address the real-world need, or otherwise does not fully demonstrate competence, or one component is entirely missing.	Demonstrates understanding of the knowledge and skills outlined for this competency, and application in a real-world setting. One component (knowledge, skills, or application) has insufficient depth/detail, contains inaccuracies, does not effectively address the real-world need, or otherwise does not fully demonstrate competence.	Demonstrates clear mastery: detailed understanding of both the knowledge and skills outlined for this competency, and effective (appropriate and sufficient) application in a real-world setting.
			Adapted from Cornell University MPH Program

Checklist

Students, do you:
- Have at least two work products created at your practicum site for their use
- Have 5 competencies listed total for those work products
- Demonstrate evidence of the competencies being used in those work products

Site Supervisors, did you:
- Comment on each work product
- Score each work product
- Discuss your comment and score with the student

Students must upload completed rubric in PDF or Word (with student and practicum supervisor comments) to Blackboard by the due date.