Practicum Overview

Your Practicum must be within the Public Health field allowing you to develop core MPH competencies. Other than that… the sky’s the limit! Your Practicum will allow you to turn your classroom knowledge into real-world skills. A good Practicum project will be challenging, related to your interests, and hone desired professional skills that are learned within the classroom.

Your Practicum project should be a minimum of 240 hours, but these hours may be completed over multiple semesters. During your field hours, you will be supervised by a Public Health expert at your host organization. Outside of your Practicum project, the academic portion of the Practicum is housed in our online Practicum Portal.

Your deliverables are the culmination of your Practicum. Upon submitting your Final Review in the Portal you will provide at least two deliverables that are actual work products from your fieldwork at your Practicum site. These work products must be agreed upon between you and your Practicum supervisor during the proposal phase. The deliverables you submit will demonstrate your growth as a Public Health practitioner and the attainment of core MPH competencies.

“Knowledge is of no value unless you put it into practice.”
– Anton Chekhov
4 Quick Facts About Practicum Flexibility

1. You are eligible to begin your Practicum after passing your first 16 credits.

2. You can start your Practicum during any semester.

3. Your Practicum may be completed over multiple semesters.

4. You may complete some of your Practicum hours remotely.

The Practicum is designed to be flexible with very few hard and fast rules. This flexibility is appealing to students and supervisors alike.

We understand that each student’s situation is different – some have max course loads, some have full-time jobs, and others may be at a host organization that can only support the student for a few hours per week.

Use the flexibility of the Practicum to your advantage so you get the most out of this experience.
As a part-time student with a full-time job you’ll want to take full advantage of the flexibility of the program. Below are a few tips to help incorporate the Practicum into your busy life.

• Don’t wait! It might seem overwhelming to think about a Practicum so early in the program, especially as a part-time student, but starting earlier will help minimize stress in the long run.

• Keep in mind the program’s flexibility: you are allowed to complete remote hours, the Practicum can be completed over multiple semesters, and you can find organizations who will be flexible in working with you and allow you to complete a small amount of hours per week.

• As a full-time employee, if you are currently working in an organization that has public health-related work, you are encouraged to take full advantage of this. Part-time students are permitted to complete a Practicum project at their place of employment as long as the project is outside of the day-to-day responsibilities of their normal job.

• Even if a project cannot be secured at your place of employment, if you are working in a public health setting you are surrounded by colleagues who may have potential networks for Practicum opportunities.
As an international student there are other aspects of the Practicum for you to consider. It is important to understand all of these additional policies to ensure you have a successful Practicum experience and do not jeopardize your Visa status.

- International Students are not permitted to begin their Practicum until successful completion of CORE courses and an additional semester.

- You must receive approval for Curricular Practical Training (CPT) prior to beginning work at your Practicum site (this includes on-site trainings and orientation). Please note that failure to comply with this policy may result in termination of your student Visa, and could require you to leave the country.

- CPT authorizes an international student to complete field-work for their program. Thus, CPT must be used for your Practicum regardless of whether it is paid, unpaid, on campus, or off campus.

- International students are only permitted to work full-time (40 hours or more) during the Summer, and part-time (20 hours or less) during the Spring or Fall semester.

- While the Career & Practicum Office can answer basic questions, any specific questions regarding Visas, CPT, OPT, employment, deadlines, etc. should be directed to ISSO.
The Four Phases of Practicum

1. Create a practicum search plan for yourself early on so you are informed, prepared, and ready when you begin your search.

2. Use the information and knowledge gained during the creation of your plan to take action on your plan.

3. Solidify the details and proposed deliverables of your Practicum once you receive an offer to get your proposal approved prior to your start date.

4. Succeed in your Practicum by applying yourself, managing your portal check-ins, completing your Practicum, and building your network for the future.

It is important to get as much out of your Practicum experience as possible. This does not simply end with your time spent on the project.

The Practicum process allows you to develop professional and practical skills outside of the specific job-related ones. These skills can include networking and communication, job hunting, planning and time management, and more.

The entirety of the Practicum can be summarized into four major phases, which will be the breakdown of the proceeding pages. We will touch on each phase to ensure you are able to take as much from your experience as possible.

“The BUSPH Practicum allowed me to practice communicating results and statistical analysis as well as epidemiological principles. From this work with Tufts Medical Center, I gained experience in organizing and analyzing large databases. The experience was invaluable in learning how to professionally present research to a wide audience.”

– Angelo Denofrio, MPH ’18
Planning for your Practicum should take place at the beginning of the semester before you intend to start (roughly 3-4 months). The Career & Practicum Office has a “Practicum Plan Template” that can assist you during this phase. **We recommend you complete or start your Practicum prior to your final semester due to ILE registration deadlines/requirements.**

Start by thinking about your interests and the type(s) of careers you’re interested in pursuing post-graduation.

Once you have identified your interests it’s time to start researching organizations and/or industries that excite you. Make a list of these organizations, conduct research of their mission, jobs and work, and identify any previous Practica at the site using our Past Practicum Database.

**Practicum Plan Checklist**

- Attend a Practicum Q&A
- Understand Practicum Requirements
- Identify Your Interests
- Research Organizations
- Identify Skills You Would Like to Develop
- Explore Past Practica at Target Organizations
- Meet With a Practicum Manager

**Keep in Mind: Large Program Deadlines**

If you are interested in completing your Practicum in pharmaceuticals, administrative internships at hospitals, or consulting be advised that many of these larger organizations begin looking for interns in Fall for the following summer.
1) What Makes A Good Practicum?

- Two Deliverable Work Products
- 240 Minimum Hours
- Develops 5 Core Competencies
- Develops Key Desired Skills
- Public Health Related
- Student’s Realm of Interest
Once you have gathered enough information to have established an understanding of what you would like to do for your Practicum and what kind of opportunities exist, it’s time to put your plan into action. Utilize the various resources available to you to help you succeed.

It is recommended students start with Handshake as 100+ jobs & internships are posted each week. Look for posted internships with your target organizations, and look for internship postings that will allow you to develop your targeted skills. However, while Handshake is a great resource, it should not be the only one you use.

Networking is an important piece of acting on your plan. Networking will allow you to identify opportunities that are not posted, and allow you to build valuable connections that will follow you through your Public Health career.

"Don’t wait until you are ready to take action. Instead, take action to be ready.
– Jensen Siaw
There are many resources available to you while you are looking for a Practicum project. Many are offered through BUSPH, but others – such as external job boards and networking – are universal tools. It can seem overwhelming to navigate all of these resources, but understanding how to properly utilize each resource will be a great asset in your Practicum search.

It is very important that you meet with a Practicum Manager early in your search. Practicum Managers are available to:

• Help you figure out your career path
• Understand the public health job market
• Market yourself and build networks
• Target and apply to employers who want BUSPH students
• Make your application stand out
• Evaluate & negotiate offers

The BUSPH Career & Practicum team is also here to help you understand the resources available to you as well as brainstorm ideas. They are a dedicated resource who will be at your side for every step of your career journey.

“I think it’s important for students to know, that you may not get the practicum you want or think is best for you, but you will ultimately learn so much from this experience so everyone should keep their options open.”

– Dana Hatab, MPH ’18
Not all opportunities exist as job postings. In many situations some of the best opportunities may arise organically through conversations with alumni, employers, faculty, etc. Roughly 26% of students will find their Practicum through networking.

To properly tap the hidden Practicum market, you will conduct outreach to organizations to identify projects based on the organization’s needs. This does not mean you are doing a self-directed study, but rather using networking as a tool to carve a role for yourself in a desired location.

It is important to keep in mind that you cannot do your Practicum at BU unless you will be working with an external organization or stakeholders. Additionally, if you have a full-time job, it is possible to do your Practicum at your workplace as long as it is a separate project and not related to your current role.

Keep in Mind:
Affiliate Agreements
Some organizations may require a legal contract between BUSPH and their organization. This is called an Affiliate Agreement. Affiliate agreements require Boston University’s legal department to work with the desired location, and often take several months to sign and approve. Should affiliate agreements be mentioned by an employer please contact Lisa Toby (ltoby@bu.edu) in the Career & Practicum Office ASAP.
Once you have an offer from an organization you wish to use as your Practicum it’s time to solidify the experience. Getting the offer is the first step but, in order to turn your internship into a successful Practicum, there are a few extra steps that should be taken.

1. Email sphpract@bu.edu to request access to the SPH Practicum Portal. Include your BU ID in the email.
2. Set up a meeting with your site supervisor to discuss the details of your Practicum
   a) Let your Supervisor know that they will have a small part in the portal during each phase (roughly 10-15 minutes)
   b) Work with your supervisor to select the 4 required competencies (5th competency is pre-selected).
   c) Additionally, discuss the two required deliverables with your site supervisor to identify potential work products you will be submitting to the school. If there are confidential or proprietary issues please work with your supervisor to find a solution that is appropriate for both the Practicum requirements and your host organization (for example, redacting the sensitive information).
   d) We understand that it may be difficult to determine deliverables prior to starting the project, and welcome changes & updates throughout the project.

Once you have made a plan with your supervisor it’s time to input your Practicum information into the portal to create your Practicum Proposal.

“Since my concentration at BUSPH was Health Law, Bioethics, and Human Rights, I was able to combine my public health training and knowledge of institutional, systemic issues with the on-the-ground client interaction from my Practicum.”
– Farah Famouri, MPH ’17
The Practicum Portal is where the entire academic portion of the Practicum is managed. The portal is designed to ensure the process is seamless, easy, and accessible so your Practicum can progress on time.

You may obtain Portal access by emailing sphpract@bu.edu only when you have accepted an offer from a host organization and have a project to use as your Practicum.

Your Practicum is managed over three stages: Proposal, Midpoint Review, Final Review. During each stage your Practicum will be evaluated by three different parties – Practicum Staff to ensure all information needed is provided, your site Supervisor to ensure your project is going according to plan, and Practicum Faculty for content and competency achievement.

At any point during the process one of the aforementioned parties may request additional information or revision before advancing to the next reviewer. It is important to make any requested updates to the Portal in a timely manner to ensure your Practicum progresses on time.

Upon approval of your Practicum Proposal the SPH Registrar will enroll you in PH976 within 48 hours. You will be enrolled in PH976 for each semester in which your Practicum continues.

Upon completion of your Final Review you will receive a passing grade for your Practicum. Practicum grading is typically done toward the end of each semester (if you complete in the Fall, you should receive a grade toward the end of the Fall semester).
Practicum Guidelines

1. No hours or work products completed prior to the Practicum Approval process and Registration will count toward your Practicum requirement. This is why it is very important you submit your Proposal 2-3 weeks prior to your start date. If your site supervisor requires you to start immediately please contact the Practicum office and we will work with you.

2. Complete Midpoint Review within 14 days of the halfway point in your practicum experience. You should calculate the midpoint date of your practicum in order to plan to submit in a timely manner. You will also receive email reminders (the system will calculate your midpoint date) prompting you to complete the Midpoint Review.

   It is the responsibility of the student to communicate with their supervisor and ensure that their portion is completed in a timely manner.

3. Submit Final Review within 2-3 weeks of end date listed in practicum proposal.

   If you are completing the practicum in your final semester and expect to graduate, submit by the deadlines below to allow sufficient lead-time for Staff review and Supervisor & Faculty approvals: December 15 for January grads, May 1 for May grads, August 23 for September grads.

In order to be successful in PH976 (MPH Practicum) it is important to comply with Practicum Guidelines which will keep you on track to receive a passing grade.

Failure to comply with deadlines may result in receiving an F for PH976. Thus, it is very important to ensure you are adhering to deadlines, and updating the school if your Practicum start/end date change.
The Practicum Proposal is a place for you to provide the school all the details of your chosen Practicum project.

A Successful Practicum Proposal will:

• Include site name, address, location, site supervisor contact information, projected start and end dates, total projected hours, paid or unpaid, your certificate(s), and how you found your Practicum

• Have a Practicum description that details background information on your site, outlines your project, and discusses your role within said project

• Have four selected competencies (the fifth is provided for you)

• Detail deliverables you anticipate providing to demonstrate competency in each selected area. Only two deliverables are required, but more are welcome. Deliverables may cover multiple competencies. We understand that projects may change over time, and thus any changes to your project should be made to your proposal.

• Inform the school of any potential confidentiality or proprietary issues with deliverables.

Please note – in order to have a successful Practicum Proposal you should provide as much detail as possible about your project and your deliverables.

A good rule of thumb is to use roughly two paragraphs to describe your host organization, the project you will be working on, and your role within that Project.

For deliverables you should be sure that your work product is clearly defined, as well as a relation to the associated MPH competency. A good format for deliverable descriptions is: NAME OF DELIVERABLE: DELIVERABLE DESCRIPTION.

There is a character limit in the portal entry fields, so please work within that limit to be detailed yet concise.
What is a MPH Core Competency?

There is a list of 22 core foundational competencies that cover a broad spectrum of Public Health-related knowledge. Each certificate also has a few competencies associated with it. These competencies are fairly broad and designed flexibly to fit all types of Practicum projects.

For your Practicum you are required to develop competency in five of these areas. One of those, “Perform effectively on interprofessional teams” is selected by default. Thus, it is up to you and your supervisor to determine what remaining four competencies will be developed over the course of your Practicum.

What is a Deliverable?

Deliverables are actual work products that you create at your Practicum site that you will deliver to the school to demonstrate growth in your selected competencies.

Some examples of deliverables are community health assessment reports, literature reviews, communication plans, SAS code, an analysis report of large data sets, a market analysis report, and so many other possibilities.

You are required to submit a minimum of two deliverables to demonstrate these competencies have been met, but all five of the selected competencies must be addressed. Thus, it is common for students to have more than two deliverables.
How to Create a Successful Proposal

Selection of competencies and deliverables are the most important parts of your Practicum Proposal. Here are a few quick tips to keep in mind when creating your Proposal:

- **Think creatively regarding competencies.** They are broad to fit all aspects of public health and, while a competency may not sound 100% relatable at first read, it doesn’t mean it doesn’t relate.
- **Each competency must have a matching deliverable.** This does not mean you need five deliverables (you need only two), but all competencies must be addressed by your submitted deliverables. Additionally, each box must have a deliverable listed even if it is the same deliverable as another box.
- **There must be a correlation between a competency and a deliverable.** Rather than just listing the deliverable you must also describe the deliverable and how it relates to the competency. Thus, each box must be different, even if the deliverable is the same. Be sure to provide as much detail as possible (3-4 sentences should suffice).
- **A clear format makes approval easier.** A good rule of thumb for your deliverable boxes is **Deliverable Name: Description.**
- **Selections are not permanent.** Your competencies and deliverables are not locked in once you submit. Public health roles are constantly changing, and thus you may find yourself in a situation where your original deliverables or competencies no longer pertain to your project. You can update these at any time as long as you are informing the school in the midpoint and final reviews.
- **It’s OK to not know.** Sometimes it may be difficult or not possible to identify some or all competencies and/or deliverables prior to starting. That’s OK! You are encouraged to speculate based on your best guess what your deliverables and competencies may entail, and make a note in each box that these deliverables could change by the midpoint review.
Please note – in order to have a successful Practicum Proposal you should provide as much detail as possible about your project and your deliverables. A good rule of thumb is to use roughly two paragraphs to describe your host organization, the project you will be working on, and your role within that project.

For deliverables you should be sure that your work product is clearly defined, as well as a relation to the associated MPH competency. A good format for deliverable descriptions is: **NAME OF DELIVERABLE**: **DELIVERABLE DESCRIPTION**. There is a character limit in the portal entry fields, so please refrain from being overly verbose.

This is where you will describe your Practicum project. This should be 1-2 paragraphs that provide considerable detail regarding your Practicum organization, your project, and your role within that project.

These are the competency dropdowns. The fifth is given to you, so you will use these four to select your competencies. Two competencies need to be foundational (#1-#22) and the other two can be foundational, functional (#23+ depending on your functional area), or a combination of the two.

These are the deliverable boxes. Each box needs to include a deliverable, and a description of the deliverable relating it to the associated competency. You only need two deliverables at a minimum, so it’s ok if deliverables repeat. What does need to be different though is the described association between the deliverable and the competency. Thus the deliverable can remain the same, but the description must be different based on the associated competency.
Sample Competency & Deliverable Selection: Data Research Intern

#3: Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming and software, as appropriate.

Statistical Analysis Report: I will use R to analyze collected patient information for trends and patterns that may help determine risks for Hepatitis C among the targeted population and create a report highlighting key trends.

#41: Synthesize the results of epidemiologic and statistical analyses to craft public health messages in written/oral presentations for both public health professionals and external audiences.

PowerPoint Presentation: Based on my analysis of the patient results I will create and deliver a PowerPoint presentation to 5 PI’s in the Infectious Disease department describing my findings and results of the research.

#19: Communicate audience-appropriate public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation.

Data Extraction, Collection, and Analysis Report: I will need to work with various stakeholders both at BMC and virtually with the CDC liaison to develop the patient questionnaires for the report.

#1: Apply epidemiological methods to the breadth of settings and situations in public health practice.

Data Extraction, Collection, and Analysis Report: I will conduct patient interviews to collect and extract data that will then be used for the CDC’s STD Surveillance Network Report.

#21 Perform effectively on interprofessional teams

Data Extraction, Collection, and Analysis Report: I will use R to analyze collected patient information for trends and patterns that may help determine risks for Hepatitis C among the targeted population and create a report highlighting key trends.

Competencies are designed to fit all types of Practica, and thus the language is set up in a way to be flexible. Think abstractly when picking your competencies, as they do not need to match word for word with your Practicum. Competency #21 is required for all Practica. Additionally you must select at least two foundational competencies (#1-#22) the other two may be foundational, functional (any competency # above 22 is a functional competency and are broken up by certificate), or a combination of both. You may not select a competency outside of your functional area.

You only need two deliverables at a minimum, but often projects will allow for more than this requirement. Regardless of how many deliverables you plan to submit all five competencies should be demonstrated by these deliverables. It’s OK for one deliverable to be used for multiple competencies (all 5 boxes should be filled in in the portal), but the language should be changed when appropriate. As seen above for the Data Extraction, Collection, and Analysis Report it satisfies two deliverables, but you must explain how the deliverable relates to the chosen competency. Whereas the PowerPoint satisfies two competencies as written.
Once your Proposal is approved, you are ready to begin your Practicum project. It is now time to take as much out of your experience as possible, network, learn, and efficiently manage your midpoint and final reviews in the Practicum portal.

Treat your Practicum as an extension of your schooling and engage yourself as much as possible. It’s important to learn everything you possibly can during your time at your host organization. Your Practicum will be a huge asset to market yourself post-graduation, so the more you do the more impressive your resume will look. Network with your colleagues, involve yourself in projects, volunteer for opportunities, and apply yourself. You never know who will be a helpful connection when you begin job searching, and it is always possible a Practicum could evolve into a full-time position.

During each phase of the Practicum Portal you will receive numerous email reminders from the portal to complete your action items. These are designed to keep you on track.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** It is very important to stay in contact with the Practicum Office (sphpract@bu.edu) during your entire Practicum. Our support does not end when you secure a project. If at any point during your Practicum should you feel stuck or confused please contact a Practicum Manager!

Below are a few examples of situations when you should contact our office:
- Your Practicum end date changes
- You need additional support learning a certain skill outside of your Practicum (GIS, SAS, R, etc.)
- You are having issues with your supervisor
- You are having portal issues
- There is a change to your Practicum and you are unsure how to proceed

“My practicum let me explore some of the more theoretical concepts learned in the classroom through case studies actually displayed in a community health center. I would do my Practicum again if given the chance!”

— Alyssa Benalfew, MPH ’19
The Midpoint Review is a check in and should be completed within 14 days of your Practicum halfway point. This will also allow your supervisor to provide feedback to you on your performance thus far.

A Midpoint Review should:
• Inform the school of any changes you have made to your proposal. Any changes you mention need to be made to your Practicum proposal in order to reflect the scope of your work.
• Inform the school if you are on track for completion.
• Provide the school with an update on how your Practicum is progressing, and any challenges you are facing.
• Assess your development of the five selected competencies
• Provide the school feedback or information confidentially about your experience thus far.
The Final Review is time for reflection, and the last step before receiving a grade. This is essentially a more in-depth version of your Midpoint Review.

A Final Review should:
- Inform the school of any changes you have made to your proposal.
- Inform the school if you have completed your hours.
- Allow for an in-depth reflection on your development of each of the five competencies.
- Describe your experience.
- Include a detailed confidential review of your host organization and site supervisor.
- Provide detailed feedback on the Practicum process and portal for the school to use to make adjustments for future years.
- Upload all of the deliverables detailed in your proposal into the portal. It is important to have an organized naming method for your deliverables so staff and faculty can identify the right deliverable for each competency.

Your Proposal should be reflected in your Final Review. Meaning that all deliverables detailed in your proposal should be what you are turning in, all competencies should be accurate, and the details of your project should be up-to-date. It is very important to make sure you are utilizing the update boxes as well as keeping your proposal up-to-date as you progress through your Practicum to ensure less confusion at the end.

Remember, this is your time to reflect on your experience as a whole. Take this opportunity to provide considerable feedback on your host organization, supervisor, the Practicum process, and the portal itself.

Congratulations! You have completed your Practicum.
Practicum
Contacts

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For general Practicum inquiries, Portal issues, or to request a Portal account once a Practicum project has been secured

Remember, all Practicum staff are available for assistance. You will not be turned away if you do not fall in one of their functional areas!