

Student Guide to the MPH Internship Program



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY State University of New York



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Table 1: Learning Objectives for MPH Internships

Table 2: Guidelines and Minimum Criteria by Internship Area of Concentration

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MPH Degree Requirements

The internship component of the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree is viewed as the culminating experience of your graduate academic program. It is designed to provide a meaningful opportunity for you to integrate knowledge gained during academic coursework in a professional public health setting. As such, the degree requirements are extensive and total 12-credits or 960 hours of experience.

In order to be eligible to register for an internship, you must complete at least four core courses PRIOR to beginning an internship, including the core course in the internship's area of concentration. The MPH Core Courses are as follows:

EPI501	Principles and Methods of Epidemiology I
STA552	Principles of Statistical Inference I
HPM500	Organization, Financing and Delivery of Health Care
HPM525	Social and Behavioral Aspects of Public Health
EPI503	Principles of Public Health
BMS505	Biological Basis of Public Health
EHT590	Introduction to Environmental Health
EPI 514*	Computer Programming for Data Management and Analysis in Public Health (*may fulfill Core requirement for this purpose)

Typically, a 6-credit internship is completed during the summer after the first academic year for 40 hours/week for 12 weeks. The remaining 6-credits can be completed throughout the second academic year at 20 hours/week for 12 weeks during the fall and spring semesters.

The 12-credit requirement can be filled by various combinations of 3-credit (240 hours) internships; however, you are required to complete a minimum of 3 credits outside your area of concentration meaning 6 to 9-credits will be completed within your area of concentration (health policy and management, social behavior and community health, epidemiology, biostatistics, biomedical science, and environmental health science).

Qualifying Internships

MPH internships are designed to provide you with the opportunity to develop competence relevant to the MPH learning objectives as outlined in **Table 1**. In light of these objectives, a set of internship guidelines and minimum criteria by area of concentration is provided in **Table 2**. MPH Learning objectives adapted for the internship experience are grouped into five skill areas: analytic skills, communication skills, basic public health sciences skills, social and cultural skills, and policy development/program planning skills. There are multiple specific learning objectives relevant to each skill area as specified in **Table 1**.

MPH internships should incorporate a variety of learning objectives across the skill areas. Positions will differ based on concentration but should involve several skills within each area. In reviewing positions or considering various projects in light of your area of concentration, you should refer to these tables. **You MUST get approval from your faculty advisor that the placement, as presented in the position description, is adequate and appropriate to meeting the goals and requirements of the program of study PRIOR to accepting or beginning an internship.**

In general, a relevant public health experience must include at least one of the following components:

1. Assessing, monitoring, or conducting surveillance of health problems/services in a population;
2. Establishing health objectives and priorities;
3. Conducting research on population-based health problems including biological, environmental, and behavioral issues;
4. Developing and/or implementing policies and intervention strategies to meet public health needs; or
5. Studying the natural history of disease or health-related effects in a population.

Acceptable experience may include only a portion of a full project that is ongoing or continued after the student's participation. Ideally, it will involve a project in which you can make significant progress during the timeframe of the position. A literature review is often required as part of any placement project but is alone, not sufficient to constitute an internship experience. The internship experience should be sufficient to warrant a formal presentation in an oral or poster format. All activities should have a clear and definable Public Health impact.

While most jobs entail some level of clerical work, mentors are notified that these activities do not satisfy the graduate internship requirements of the MPH degree. Thus, photocopying, scheduling, mail preparation, etc. should not consume a significant portion of your experience. If you have concerns regarding this, please discuss them with your faculty advisor and/or the Director of Internships & Career Services.

Host Organizations: Host organizations may include county, state or federal government entities, not-for-profit organizations, private sector companies, and other organizations directly involved in the field of public health. Students are expected to act as professionals at all times and contribute in a positive and significant way to the organization. Mentors within the organization are expected to remain mindful of the fact that the internship is an academic-related opportunity for students to learn from and observe a real-world public health work environment. The arrangement should be a mutually beneficial relationship for both you and the organization.

Internship Mentors: Mentors should have advanced degrees, ideally within the field of public health and should hold decision-making positions within the host organization. In cases where an individual has been practicing public health for numerous years and can offer a wealth of experiences to a graduate public health student, an advanced degree is not required. A daily supervisor with significant experience as a public health practitioner may also be assigned to a student in addition to the mentor. Mentors are asked to provide the following:

- ◆ Orientation to the organization and the relevant public health program(s)
- ◆ Explanation of work rules and procedures, including time and attendance policies to which the student will be held accountable
- ◆ Access to resources such as a computer workstation, relevant data systems, and/or reimbursement for necessary travel
- ◆ Tangible project assignments and a timeframe for completing assignments
- ◆ Opportunities for involvement in a diverse range of organizational activities including attendance at internal and external meetings, interactions with colleagues and organizational leaders, etc.
- ◆ Regular opportunities for communication to discuss progress and ensure expectations of all parties are being met
- ◆ Guidance, feedback and assessment regarding project deliverables and School internship paperwork requirements

Faculty Advisement

Your faculty advisor plays a critical role throughout the internship process. You should be proactive in seeking advice and assistance from your faculty advisor in designing your internship plan, selecting placements, and completing course requirements. Your advisor will be available to guide you in identifying ways in which a placement will address a set of MPH learning objectives and meet the academic requirements of your degree program. Most internships should require at least a basic application of some skills in several competency areas. **IMPORTANT: You are required to obtain approval of a position from your faculty advisor PRIOR to accepting and beginning an internship. Faculty advisors have sole authority to approve an internship for academic credit.**

Student Responsibilities

As a graduate student in a professional degree program, the School's expectations of you are high. While various sources of support are available through the Dean's Office, Department staff, faculty advisors, and internship mentors; acquiring an internship, remaining up-to-date with paperwork requirements and completing all course deliverables

according to established due dates ARE YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES. You should therefore be proactive in acquiring internships and in completing all degree requirements. If you are unable to meet these obligations for any reason, you are expected notify both your faculty advisor and the Director of Internships & Career Services. Internship course guidelines will be provided during HSPH 680. Any significant updates to the guidelines, policies & procedures will be posted in ERes under HSPH 680. **It is your responsibility to remain up-to-date on all policies and procedures related to the internship program. As noted in the section below on Internship Course Grades, receiving an “Unsatisfactory” (U) automatically triggers dismissal from degree candidacy.**

Professional Conduct: Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for a mentor to call indicating that a student is repeatedly late, making personal phone calls during work time, dressing unprofessionally, or playing games on the computer. Poor professional conduct is a negative reflection on you, your faculty advisor, your department, the Dean’s Office, and the School as a whole. Tremendous effort goes into maintaining relationships with mentors and host organizations. You should remain conscious of this while representing this School to your host organization. So, for the vast majority, this goes without saying, however, you should consider it said: **All students are expected to behave in a professional manner at all times during the internship experience.**

Dress should be professional based on organizational policies, as should all communication with mentors, faculty advisors and Dean’s Office staff. Time and attendance policies of the host organization must be followed. If your mentor does not provide you with details regarding these policies, please ask so you know to what you are being held accountable. Your mentor is responsible for verifying that you complete the appropriate number of project hours, 240 hours for each 3 credits of internship. Should your mentor or advisor express concern regarding your time and attendance, you will be required to submit weekly time sheets, with both your faculty and advisors signatures to the Dean’s Office. This should never happen!

Student Compensation: While the vast majority of MPH internships are funded, this is not guaranteed. Specific information regarding student compensation will be posted on ERes.

Acquiring an Internship: Positions will be posted through the UAlbany Library’s ERes system by the Director of Internships & Career Services. All data pertaining to MPH Internships is maintained in the Dean’s Office. This coordinated approach is critical to managing the School’s funding programs and to providing accurate information for CEPH reporting requirements. If you are working to establish a placement outside of those listed through the School, you are responsible for keeping your faculty advisor and the Director of Internships & Career Services informed of the situation. Competition for acquiring internships may be high. You are therefore encouraged to research a variety of

opportunities independently, particularly if you are seeking a summer placement outside of the Albany area. Please note that students interested in gaining international experience should meet with Carol Whittaker.

The general process for applying for positions is as follows:

- ◆ A date by which resumes should be submitted electronically to the Director of Internships & Career Services will be provided. A comprehensive resume workshop will take place during or after Friday seminar to provide guidance in relation to developing a resume well in advance of this due date.
- ◆ A notice will be sent on the Career Listserv when available positions are posted on ERES for the upcoming semester. All information will be posted in ERes under HSPH 680. You will then email the list of positions to which you would like to apply to the Dean's Office by an established deadline.
- ◆ The Dean's Office will then forward resumes from interested students to prospective mentors for review. **Students should not contact mentors directly for positions posted through the Dean's Office at this point in the process unless specifically instructed to do so.**
- ◆ Mentors will contact you directly should they elect to offer you an interview for the position.
- ◆ After interviewing candidates of interest, mentors will notify the Director of Internships & Career Services of their selection after which they will either make an offer to you or inform you that you have not been selected for the position.

Internship Course Grades

The Registration Form, One-Month Review, Mentor Evaluation, Final Internship Report, and Student Evaluation, all described in detail below, are all major components to internship grades. Internships are graded on a "Satisfactory" or "Unsatisfactory" basis.

An incomplete or an "I" will no longer be distributed for an internship unless documentation of extenuating circumstances is submitted to the Dean's Office for consideration. Should an extension be granted by the Dean's Office, the student, academic department, and mentor will be notified accordingly.

Per the University at Albany Graduate Student Handbook, failing an internship (receiving an "Unsatisfactory" or "U") results in automatic dismissal from degree candidacy:

The candidacy of graduate students who receive a grade of *U* in a required seminar or research course, in a practicum, student teaching course, internship, field course or similar application course, on a thesis, or in a dissertation course, is terminated unless an exception is recommended for compelling reasons by their department or school, and they may not register for further study unless they are later reinstated. Under certain conditions, and with the recommendations of the student's major department, such a student may apply to the Dean of Graduate Studies for reinstatement, but ordinarily at least one session must intervene before a reinstatement. (<http://www.albany.edu/grad/>)

In light of this policy, it is in your best interest to notify and involve the Director of Internships & Career Services and your faculty advisor at the first signs of difficulties. Your best option is ALWAYS to address any problems in a timely manner.

Internship Paperwork Requirements

In order to receive academic credit, you must successfully complete all course requirements by the due dates established by the Dean's Office. Reminders will be sent to MPH students regarding paperwork requirements and due dates; however, **it is YOUR responsible to comply with these due dates as expected for any other graduate course.** This includes ensuring that all paperwork is placed in the Internship Paperwork Inbox located on the front desk in the Dean's Office. In addition, you should supply copies of all paperwork to the Assistant to the Chair of your Department. The Dean's Office is unable to provide you with photocopying services so be prepared with copies prior to handing in your paperwork to the Internship Paperwork Inbox. Copies of all of the forms can be found on the ERes page.

Internship paperwork requirements include the following:

Registration Form (Form I): The student, mentor and faculty advisor should sign, prior to the start of the position, the Registration Form which will serve as the learning contract for the position. This provides a basis for the mentor's evaluation of the student, your evaluation of the internship experience, and the faculty advisor's monitoring of student progress. Substantial changes to the initial learning contract should be amended with a revised project description if warranted. Project descriptions should include an outline of the following:

- Project Background and Goals;
- Student's Role in Project;
- Expected Student Outcomes and Deliverables;
- Project Duration and Scheduling Considerations; and,
- Plan for achieving a basic application of the MPH Learning Objectives appropriate to the position. (Several skills in most competency areas should be addressed.)

One-Month Review (Form II): You are required to arrange a formal meeting with both your mentor and advisor to review internship progress to date. An in-person meeting is ideal but a teleconference is also acceptable if necessary. During this meeting, your completion of the One-Month Review Form should be reviewed and discussed. At this time, any changes to the original internship plan can be resolved and should be described with an amended project description. The mentor will also have the opportunity to complete a brief questionnaire regarding your progress. This paperwork must be signed by you, your mentor and faculty advisor.

Mentor Evaluation (Form III): This is completed by your mentor and reviewed with you & your advisor for signature and submission to the Dean's Office. Your mentor will provide a final grade based on your performance throughout the internship experience. While the mentor's evaluation is considered to be the main source of input for assigning a passing or failing grade, your faculty advisor and the Dean's Office may also contribute to the decision. The final internship report also contributes to the overall course grade as described below.

Oral Presentation: You should, under the guidance of your mentor, arrange to complete a formal oral presentation on your internship project(s) and/or overall experience to your mentor and any other members of the host organization deemed appropriate by the mentor. Faculty advisors should also be invited to attend or listen via teleconference to the presentation. The date and mentor evaluation of your formal presentation is incorporated into the Mentor Evaluation (Form III).

Final Internship Report: The faculty advisor and internship mentor are responsible for approving the final written report. You should first submit a draft of your final paper to your mentor for review and allow ample time to receive feedback and make necessary revisions. After obtaining mentor approval, submit the paper to your faculty advisor for review and approval. Include a section for approvals on the cover page of the report in the following format:

Signatures of approval for Final MPH Internship Report:

Student: _____ Date: _____

Mentor: _____ Date: _____

Faculty Advisor: _____ Date: _____

The MPH internships are presented to the Council on Education in Public Health as the capstone experience of the MPH degree program. As such, the final internship paper should be held to this high standard. **The final paper is required in addition to any final deliverables involved in the internship position (including papers being submitted for publication).** Papers should, on average, be approximately 8 to 10

pages in length.

The final internship report should discuss the following:

1. The organizational unit where the internship took place, its primary mission, and its relationship to the overall organizational structure (explanation of services provided, program/public health objectives, populations targeted etc.).
2. Specific duties performed within the context of the organization and the field of public health.
3. Assigned projects (outline of the issue, methods used to define and address the problem, results, discussion and recommendations). Copies of relevant materials developed during the field placement, e.g., draft or final reports, surveys, questionnaires, etc. should be attached.
4. Skills applied during the experience in the context of the MPH learning objectives (Table 1). For each identified learning objective, specific examples of how the internship provided an opportunity to attain that objective should be included.
5. Previous coursework and/or professional experience utilized during the experience (also noting additional coursework or skills that would have been helpful).
6. Self-assessment of performance and overall contributions made to the organization.
7. Analysis of ways in which the internship experience helped to clarify or alter career goals.

Student Evaluation (*Form IV*): The evaluation is an opportunity for you to provide an open and honest assessment of your internship experience, internship mentor, and your faculty advisor. Feedback provided in this evaluation will remain confidential. Your feedback may be used to guide development of future internship placements but will remain anonymous. Your comments should reflect thoughtful consideration of your experience and relevant criticisms or shortcomings of the experience should be presented in a constructive, forthcoming manner.

Internship Paperwork Due Dates: Due dates are listed below.

MPH Internship Paperwork Due Dates

	Fall	Spring	Summer
Form I: Registration Form due to Dean's Office	September 15th	February 1st	June 1st
Form II: One-Month Review Due to Dean's Office	October 15th	March 1st	July 1st
Submit Final Internship Paper with Mentor's Signature to Faculty Advisor	Last Day of Classes	Last Day of Classes	September 15th
Form III: Mentor Evaluation Due to Advisor	Last Day of Classes	Last Day of Classes	September 15th
Form IV: Student Evaluation due to Dean's Office	Last Day of Classes	Last Day of Classes	September 15th
Form III & Final Paper with All Signatures Due to Dean's Office	No Later than the Last Day of Finals	No Later than the Last Day of Finals	September 30th

Forms I, II & III must be signed by the student, internship mentor and faculty advisor.

Student Poster Day

Students are required to present one internship in a poster format during Student Poster Day which occurs annually in April, typically on the third or fourth Friday of the month. The faculty advisor is required to attend and complete a written evaluation form (supplied at the event) of the student's poster and presentation of the experience. Project mentors are also strongly encouraged to attend as it provides students with the opportunity to present to public health practitioners in addition to faculty and peers. Posters should demonstrate the achievement of learning objectives and comprehension of the public health relevance of the internship. You are required to submit your abstract to your internship mentor for approval prior to submitting to the Dean's Office for Poster Day. Please verify that your mentor does not have any additional requests in relation to reviewing your poster well in advance of the event.

In order to graduate, you are required to satisfactorily complete one poster presentation. While not formally a component of your internship course grade, degree clearance is contingent on meeting this requirement.

Table 1: Learning Objectives for MPH Internships

I. Analytic Skills

- a. Define the health problem being addressed in the internship.
- b. Describe the use of data, statistical methods, and/or laboratory procedures used in addressing the problem.
- c. Employ quantitative techniques to analyze data pertaining to the problem.
- d. Describe the basic research design used in addressing the problem.
- e. Explain how the data illuminate ethical, political, scientific, economic, and overall public health issues.
- f. Make relevant inferences from the data.

II. Communication Skills

- a. Communicate effectively both in writing and orally.
- b. Present accurately and effectively demographic, statistical, programmatic, and scientific information for professional and lay audiences.
- c. Solicit input from individuals and organizations.
- d. Advocate for public health programs and resources.
- e. Lead and participate in groups to address specific issues.

III. Basic Public Health Sciences Skills

- a. Define, assess, and understand the health status of populations, determinants of health and illness, factors contributing to health promotion and disease prevention, and factors influencing the use of health services as pertains to this internship.
- b. Describe public health science research methods used in this internship.
- c. Identify the basic public health sciences used in this internship, including behavioral and social sciences, biomedical sciences, biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental health, and prevention of chronic and infectious diseases and injuries. (Many internships use more than one of the public health sciences.)
- d. Understand the historical development and structure of state, local, and federal public health agencies.

IV. Social and Cultural Skills

- a. Describe the dynamic forces contributing to cultural diversity.
- b. Interact sensitively, effectively, and professionally with persons from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, educational, and professional backgrounds, and with persons of all ages and lifestyle preferences.
- c. Identify the role of cultural, social, and behavioral factors in determining disease,

disease prevention, health promoting behavior, and medical service organization and delivery.

- d. Develop and adapt approaches to problems that take into account cultural differences.
- e. Identify techniques for involving community groups in devising solutions to their non public health problems.

V. Policy Development/Program Planning/Management Skills

- a. Collect and summarize data relevant to the public health issue addressed in the internship.
- b. State policy options and summarize the fiscal, legal, social, political, administrative and overall public health implications of each option.
- c. Articulate the health, fiscal, administrative, economic, ethical, scientific, legal, social, and political implications of each policy option as they affect decision making in public health policy.
- d. State the feasibility and expected outcomes of each policy option.
- e. Decide on the appropriate course of action.
- f. Write a clear and concise policy statement.
- g. Develop a plan to implement the policy, including goals, outcome and process objectives, and implementation steps.
- h. Translate policy into organization plans, structures, and programs.
- i. Identify public health laws, regulations, and policies related to specific programs.
- j. Develop mechanisms to monitor and evaluate programs for their effectiveness and quality.
- k. Monitor program performance.
- l. Apply basic human relations skills to the management of organizations and the resolution of conflicts.

Table 2: Guidelines and Minimum Criteria by Internship Area of Concentration

Health Administration or Policy

Internships may be classified as health administration or policy if the student's internship is focused on several of the following:

6. Focusing on research or practice-based activities related to the structure, management, or evaluation of the delivery, financing, or organization of health care services, within the private or public sector.
7. Engaging in activities that involve policy development, implementation and/or evaluation either at the industry, organization, or sub-organization (e.g., department) level.
8. Gaining skills in one or more areas of health management or policy such as health care service delivery, health care strategy, financial management and reimbursement of health services, health care access, organizational change or restructuring, health professions or workforce training.
9. Acquiring skills in more specialized health administration or policy topics in the research or practice areas such as organizational decision making processes, organizational cultural or structural analysis, policy formation, analysis, and evaluation (e.g., economic evaluation, outcomes research), budgeting, statistical analysis of population-based data, business planning, or HR development.
10. Participating in the production of some tangible output related to the health management or policy activities or skills noted above, which may include (but is not limited to) an analytical paper or report, position paper, internal planning, evaluation, or management report, survey instrument, strategic plan, organizational manual, or public or internal presentation.

Behavioral Science/Community Health

Internships may be classified as behavioral science/community health if they focus on two or more of the following:

1. Social, psychological, and/or behavioral factors that influence health (including mental health) and/or health-related behaviors.
2. Psychosocial or behavioral mechanisms through which cultures, communities, policies, and society shape people's health.
3. The development (including community needs assessment activities), implementation or evaluation of health promotion programs or interventions that facilitate healthy behaviors or address the social environment of individuals, groups or communities.
4. A community-based approach to a public health problem.
5. The development of health education materials, health communications, or social marketing campaigns.

Environmental Health Sciences

The individual must be able to demonstrate that their environmental health sciences experience has direct public health relevance. Given this fundamental requirement, the student's experience must involve one or more of the following to be classified as environmental health sciences:

1. A focus on research and problem solving related to specific laboratory-based experimental work.
2. A focus on research and problem solving related to specific field-based experimental work.
3. A focus on research and problem solving related to analysis of existing data.
4. Participation in a larger, on going research based study that has a basic science focus with a relevant long term Public Health impact.

Biomedical Sciences

Internships may be classified as "biomedical sciences" if the majority of the internship experience involves two or more of the following:

1. A focus on research and problem solving related to a specific laboratory based project involving wet lab bench experimental work.
2. Engaging in daily activities during the internship that involve the development of and execution of an experimental project relevant to biomedical science specifically focused on research areas of biology that have an ultimate impact on Public Health.
3. Involve literature study and presentation of an area of biology relevant to biomedical science specifically focused on research areas that have an ultimate impact on Public Health.
4. Extensive work in a laboratory involved in the daily development, implementation, and/or use of Public Health related screening, diagnostic and/or genetic testing technology.
5. Participation in a larger, on going research-based study that has a basic science focus with a relevant long term Public Health impact.

Epidemiology

Internships may be classified as "epidemiology" if they include (1) at least 2 of the four activities from the following list or (2) at least 3 of the 4 activities in number 3:

1. Develop research question/program objectives.
2. Design study/program.
3. Conduct study/program (to include: identify/select relevant people to be in study/program; measure characteristics of them; manage/analyze data; interpret and present results).

4. Plan subsequent action, based on what is learned.

Biostatistics

The majority of the internship experience must meet one or more of the following criteria:

1. Use vital statistics or other public health records in the description of population health characteristics or in public health research or public health evaluation.
2. Apply descriptive techniques commonly used to summarize public health data, including data display (tables, graphs, figures) or measures of distribution shape, central tendency, variability, correlation, or risk assessment.
3. Apply common statistical methods for inference in a health related activity, including estimation, confidence intervals or hypothesis testing.
4. Interpret results of statistical analyses found in public health studies, including assessing the assumptions, quality of data, appropriateness of statistical methods and validity and utility of conclusions.
5. Apply descriptive and inferential methodologies (consisting of sample selection, research and hypothesis development, hypothesis testing, decision errors, power, and sample size determination) to answer a particular health related research question.

For further information related to Tables 1 and 2, the Association of Schools of Public Health's model of the MPH discipline specific and cross-cutting competencies and the Education Committee's full report *Master's Degree in Public Health Core Competency Development Project* can be viewed at: <http://www.asph.org/document.cfm?page=929>.