

2017

# MPH Epidemiology Practicum Guidelines



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO  
DALLA LANA SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The overall goal of the MPH program is to provide students with a base of knowledge and skills in epidemiological methods and public health that will enable them to pursue professional careers or doctoral studies. Professional careers would include jobs in applied public health settings, such as research associate positions in epidemiological research units, epidemiologist positions in public health departments or program monitoring and evaluation roles in non-governmental organizations.

Practica are important parts of the MPH curriculum. Practicum placements allow for students to gain supervised experience in an approved community practice and/or epidemiological research setting while:

1. applying the knowledge and skills learned in courses;
2. developing practical skills in public health and epidemiology;
3. achieving competencies best learned in work experiences;
4. exploring the kinds of jobs/additional studies that they may take up upon completion of the MPH program;
5. preparing further for doctoral studies.

Two types of practicum placements are available:

- The objective of the **research-based practicum** is to provide students with supervised research experience in academic and research institutions, to integrate course work and further develop research skills. They also offer the students a chance to explore the options for employment potentially available upon completion of the degree, and to inform students of options for further academic training (e.g., the PhD).
- The objective of the **practice-based practicum** is to provide students with supervised field experience in community health agencies, to integrate course work and further develop practical skills. They also offer the students a chance to explore the options for employment potentially available upon completion of the degree.

Minimum requirements of the degree:

A minimum of one practicum placement will be completed by all students that must include, as a main component, the epidemiological and statistical analysis of primary or secondary data. A significant component of interpretation of epidemiological data is also required. Students then have the option to take additional practicum offerings to reach or go beyond the total number of course credits required for the program. **The maximum number of practicum credits a student can take during the degree is 3.5 credits.** Students may take practice-based placements and research-based practica in various combinations (e.g., two independent practice-based or research practica, or one of each).

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## **Practicum and Capstone Overview**

### **Practica (Required and elective)**

Students usually complete their required 12 – 16 week practicum in their first summer, between May 1 and August 31. The exact dates are negotiated with the practicum supervisor. An optional second practicum is most often completed as a 12 week practicum in the winter term of year 2, from January 1 to March 30th.

### **Capstone Project (optional)**

Students who wish a more intensive and longer-term research- or practice-based experience may register for multiple practicum placements with the same supervisor/agency and treat the sequence of practicum placements as a Master's Capstone Project. Capstone supervisors must have research training and be able to provide the student with opportunities to be engaged in research themselves. Within the MPH degree, the Capstone Project offers the opportunity to students to complete a thesis-equivalent project. A capstone plan (similar to a thesis proposal) must be submitted within the first practicum. A minimum of 3.0 practicum credits are required when designing the Capstone plan (maximum 3.5).

## General Requirements and Timeline for Practica (and Capstone)

All practica must be supervised by an epidemiologist with at least a master's qualification in community health, epidemiology, or equivalent training and experience.

The learning plan, deliverables and evaluations of the student and placement all must be documented and reviewed (see Table 1). Before students begin a practicum placement, a learning contract must be drafted and submitted no later than 2 weeks after their start date. The contract should be developed in consultation with the supervisor. **The template is available on the Practicum Blackboard site.** The contract will describe the:

*A FULL-TIME 12-WEEK PRACTICUM (APPROXIMATELY 420HRS) OBTAINS 1.5 CREDITS WHEREAS A FULL-TIME 16-WEEK PRACTICUM (APPROXIMATELY 560HRS) GAINS 2.0 CREDITS.*

- specific educational objectives for the student while on placement
- core competencies to be enhanced during the placement
- final deliverable products
- title of the primary supervisor and complete contact information
- setting and work space (e.g. provision of computer workstation, telephone, access to internet and data files)
- financial arrangements for the practicum.

Evidence that the supervisor concurs with the details of this contract must also be submitted, preferably by a signature on the contract itself.

Table 1. For each practicum, the following files must be submitted to the Practicum Placement Officer by the due date:

Form	Completed by	Due*
Practicum Confirmation Form Learning contract	Student Student and Supervisor	Once you have found a practicum 1 week from start of practicum
Interim evaluation by student	The student	Halfway through your placement (either after 6 or 8 weeks)
Interim evaluation by supervisor	The supervisor	Halfway through your placement (either after 6 or 8 weeks)
Final evaluation by the student	The student	Date TBD, before end of practicum
Final evaluation by the supervisor	The supervisor	Date TBD, before end of practicum
Final practicum report	The student	Date TBD, before end of practicum
Deliverable(s)	The student	Date TBD, before end of practicum
Poster (.ppt file) [ONLY practicum 1]	The student	Date TBD, before end of practicum

\*There are deadlines in each semester for getting grades submitted to SGS. If you start a placement after the 1<sup>st</sup> week in a semester, please communicate with the Placement Officer to ensure you have your files in on time.

Approximately halfway through the practicum placement, the student and the supervisor must complete separate interim evaluations. The student should ensure the supervisor has a copy of the interim evaluation template. The supervisor evaluation must be signed by the supervisor and student; the student evaluation must only be signed by the student. Both should be submitted to the practicum placement officer after 6-8 weeks in the placement.

In the final week of the placement, the student should complete an evaluation of the practicum which can be shared with the practicum supervisor if the student wishes. The supervisor must also complete an evaluation and discuss this with the student. A 3 page final practicum report (see box on next page) should be submitted to the Practicum Placement Officer on the last day of the placement, accompanied by the final deliverable(s) originally listed on the learning contract. Students are required to submit poster practicum work within one week of completing their practicum. The poster can be an academic poster outlining the results of any research conducted on practicum, it can be a reflection on your practicum experience, or it can touch on small pieces of your various practicum responsibilities or projects. There are resources on Blackboard for designing a poster as well as examples of posters. Students are encouraged to submit their poster for Research & Practice day in the fall, to share their work and experience with faculty, staff, incoming students and the wider DLSPH community.

### **Deliverables MUST be submitted for evaluation.**

Students can continue with the same practicum supervisor throughout their practicum experiences or choose a different practicum supervisor as fits their academic plan. If the student wishes a more detailed study in one area, working with one supervisor is encouraged and consideration of a Capstone project should be explored. For students who wish to have a variety of experiences, working with different supervisors and in different settings is encouraged.

Students who are also Community Medicine residents must ensure that arrangements for practica are consistent with the requirements of their Royal College Program.

#### **YOUR FINAL PRACTICUM REPORT MUST INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:**

- 1) A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATION YOU WORKED FOR;
- 2) HOW THE WORK YOU DID HELPED YOU MEET YOUR LEARNING OBJECTIVES;
- 3) HOW YOU ACHIEVED THE CORE COMPETENCIES OUTLINED ON YOUR LEARNING CONTRACT;
- 4) ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU THINK WOULD BE USEFUL TO INCLUDE FOR YOUR APPRAISERS. YOU CAN ALSO INCLUDE ANY EXPLANATION AS TO HOW YOUR PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE MAY HAVE DIFFERED FROM WHAT YOU ORIGINALLY PLANNED OR HAD IN MIND AND WHAT YOU DID TO ADDRESS THESE CHANGES.
- 5) AN "ABSTRACT" THAT PROVIDES A HIGH LEVEL OVERVIEW OF YOUR PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE. THIS SHOULD BE NO LONGER THAN A PARAGRAPH AND COULD BE USED WHEN SUBMITTING YOUR POSTER FOR RESEARCH & PRACTICE DAY (IF APPLICABLE). WHERE APPROPRIATE, PORTIONS OF THE ABSTRACT WILL BE USED TO PROMOTE THE PRACTICUM PROGRAM, THROUGH ADVERTISEMENT ON THE DLSPH WEBSITE OR IN OTHER PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS. PLEASE INDICATE AT THE END OF THE ABSTRACT WHETHER YOU PROVIDE CONSENT TO USE THE ABSTRACT FOR THIS PURPOSE OR YOU DO NOT.

## Specific Requirements for the Mandatory Practicum Placement (Practicum 1-summer)

Practicum I is mandatory for all students. For full-time students it takes place in the summer after the first two semesters of course work. The Practicum Placement Officer will circulate a list of available summer practica in mid-January, which students can use to contact potential supervisors. Students are also encouraged to search for their own practica, according to their interests and experience, with the guidance of the Practicum Placement Officer.

The following required courses **must** be completed before practicum I can begin:

Introduction to Public Health

Epidemiology 1

Biostatistics 1

Public Health Policy

Population Perspectives for Epidemiology

Epidemiologic Methods 2

Biostatistics 2

Scientific Overviews in Epidemiology

Health Trends and Surveillance

Practicum I may be 12 or 16 weeks in duration, earning 1.5 or 2.0 credits, respectively. For students who are registered full-time, Practicum I must be done on a full-time basis. No course work is taken during Practicum I except in consultation with the Practicum Placement Officer and with the permission of the practicum supervisor and program lead.

For part-time students, the total time spent in the practicum placement must equal 12 or 16 weeks of full-time work, but it can occur at any point in the program, **provided the required courses have been completed.**

The first practicum is designed to build on the first two semesters of required academic work, which emphasize basic knowledge and skills in epidemiology and public health practice.

The specific objectives of Practicum I are to:

- Identify the information and sources of information necessary for the characterization and epidemiological study of a public health problem.
- Acquire in-depth knowledge on specific health issues encountered during the practicum, as well as general knowledge of current health problems in Canada and strategies for their prevention and control.
- Apply the basic principles and skills learned in the required courses to the problem. Opportunities to critically appraise epidemiological studies or other opportunities to apply epidemiological principles are also expected.

**Your first practicum must include, as a main component, the epidemiological and statistical analysis of primary or secondary data.**

**A significant component of interpretation of epidemiological data is also required.**

Practicum projects could involve work on a community health status report, a specific health needs assessment, a research project, or an outbreak investigation.

- Gain experience using commonly available statistical/database computer packages such as STATA, SAS, SPSS and r.
- Communicate health information to lay and/or professional audiences in written formats. The writing and layout of a report or a part thereof, and/or the preparation of other documents pertaining to work conducted during the practicum normally will fulfill this objective.
- Each student is expected to make an oral presentation to an appropriate audience in the practicum setting.
- Understand the structure, roles, and functioning of the agency/organization in which the practicum occurs. This should include the roles of various professionals and staff, and, in particular, the role of an epidemiologist working within such an agency.

**Practicum I must be done in Canada.** Rare exceptions may be made with the permission of the Program lead (contact the Practicum Placement Officer for more information). Applied settings suitable for Practicum I include public health departments, district health planning agencies, regional health authorities, provincial and federal government settings and applied research units. Suitable research settings include hospital-affiliated research units, applied research institutes, university-based research units, and provincial agency-based research units.

## Optional Second Practicum Placement (Practicum 2 - winter)

A winter practicum placement is optional. Normally, it is 12 weeks in duration (January - March) and, if taken on a full-time basis, earns 1.5 credits. A 16-week practicum can be done but this will preclude the student from graduating in June since the deadline for submitting the list of graduating students occurs in early April and no extensions to this deadline can be given.

With the permission of the practicum supervisor one half-credit course may be taken concurrently; however, the Practicum Placement Officer should be consulted beforehand and permission of the practicum supervisor and program lead is required.

**The educational objectives for the second practicum must be substantively different from those set out for the first practicum because credit cannot be given twice for demonstrating and practicing the same skills.**

Sample objectives for the second practicum include the following. Although all may not be achievable in any particular practicum, at least two of these objectives should be realized.

- To gain experience with different types of evaluation research design and to understand the process for implementing an evaluation plan.
- To gain experience in survey development and management.
- To develop an epidemiological research proposal.
- To identify, measure, value and compare the costs and consequences of alternative health promotion and disease prevention programs.
- To participate in the process of public policy formulation within public health agencies settings, including the analysis of policy situations from a political perspective.
- To understand the analytical process of issue identification, analysis, alternative options and option evaluation.
- To gain skills and experience in the area of qualitative research.
- To gain skills and experience in advanced data analysis techniques.

## FINDING YOUR SECOND PRACTICUM

Students are required to find their winter placement on their own using networks developed before and during the degree.

Speaking with colleagues about their summer placements is a good place to start.

The Blackboard site will have any practicum opportunities posted as they become available.

## Master's Capstone Project (optional)

Students interested in completing a Capstone should consider this early in the degree as it will likely mean finding a supervisor on their own and working out the project details prior to beginning the practica in the summer. Students are expected to develop a Capstone proposal with their supervisor early into their first practicum, which will span the pre-planned sequence of practica.

The Capstone proposal should be 5-10 pages in length resembling a thesis proposal and must include a timeline outlining the work tied to practicum credits. A minimum of 3.0 credits (max of 3.5) of practica are required when designing the Capstone plan. Please work with the practicum placement officer to develop your Capstone proposal.

By the end of the last practicum in the sequence, the student will have prepared a final major report(s) or paper(s). The report may take a number of different forms including peer-reviewable research publication(s), health status reports, and/or grant applications.

As part of the final practicum, the report must be presented orally in a public forum, and revised by the student based on feedback received on the written component and oral presentation, as would be the experience with a thesis. Once the Capstone Project is complete, the student could then indicate that a thesis-equivalent had been completed as part of the MPH and a letter attesting this will be kept on file by the Practicum Placement Officer that could be shared as required. It will also be included as a line on the student's transcript.

## Capstone Overview

**The proposal must include appropriate and evaluable objectives associated with each of the practica in the sequence** and should be submitted to the Practicum Placement Officer for approval.

The student is required to complete a learning contract, interim reports, final evaluations and reports for each practicum included within the Capstone sequence and will be graded (P/F) on each practicum.

The Capstone is not a separate course/registration.

The student is responsible for enrolling for each practicum which must be outlined in their Capstone plan.

## General issues

1. Each practicum will be registered separately. **It is unacceptable to fail to meet the educational objectives of the first practicum and simply transfer these objectives to a subsequent practicum. For example, students who fail to complete the pre-specified data analyses in the first practicum cannot transfer the work and related educational objectives to a second practicum.** Each practicum (except the Capstone) must stand on its own as a complete unit of work and, as noted earlier, the first practicum must be completed before a second practicum can begin.
2. It is the responsibility of each student to enrol appropriately for the practicum in ROSI. Students having difficulty enrolling for practicum placements should contact Ellen Sokoloff in the graduate office for assistance.
3. Part-time students may have a very different schedule of practicum placements based on their schedule. The usual formula is to calculate equivalency of work based on the number of hours of a practicum.
4. If you are going abroad for your placement (outside of Canada), you must register with the Safety Abroad Office. See [Safety Abroad Office website](#) for more information.

## Special Circumstances for Part-Time Students

If you must stay in your current employment during your practicum, a secondment must be negotiated. This secondment should be time-limited, with a clear start and end date, and **with a clear product that is substantially different than your regular work**. The goal of the practicum is to gain new experiences, therefore the practicum opportunity must represent a new piece of work for you. **It is generally better to find a practicum in another setting.**

Students must discuss options with the practicum placement officer, and ensure that there is approval from the MPH Epidemiology program lead.

## Global Health/Going abroad

For those students in the global health emphasis, it is recommended that they complete their global health placement as a second practicum in the second winter term, should they be interested in going abroad. Students who wish to avail themselves of this opportunity should, if necessary, submit funding proposals early in the second semester (one year ahead of time). Advanced planning is necessary for placements abroad due to the considerable paperwork required by the University. If external funding and/or ethics review is necessary, the time required to process such applications is also significant and should be kept in mind.

If you are going abroad for your placement (outside of Canada), you must register with the Safety Abroad Office. See [Safety Abroad Office website](#) for more information.

Please ensure all forms are completed and responsibilities fulfilled prior to leaving the country.

## Contacts

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