The Internship

PURPOSE OF THE INTERNSHIP

The purpose of the internship is to provide opportunities for students to:

- Apply concepts from core and concentration courses.
- Work with agency professionals to gain practical experience in public health.
- Interact with a wide range of health professionals in a designated setting.

The internship should provide MPH students with work experience in their concentration area, important job skills, and the opportunity to explore public health organizational environments. Internship experiences should be valuable to both the student and the host agency.

Well-structured internships help students build the competencies necessary for public health practice. Competencies are a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes that transcend the boundaries of specific public health disciplines and help unify the profession. There are 12 core competencies identified in the MPH program, as well as 4 to 6 concentration-specific competencies. As students develop their Internship Agreements, they are required to link their learning objectives to the MPH Program and concentration competencies.

ELIGIBILITY AND TIMING

The Public Health Internship is a 3 credit course (PBHL-P602) that integrates public health theory and practice. Students are required to work for 240 hours in public health organizations/agencies under the supervision of a preceptor to complete the course (about 15-20 hours per week, if completed within one semester), and work on a set of objectives developed with their advisor and preceptor. These objectives are outlined in the Internship Agreement.

In order to be eligible for the internship, students must have completed their five core MPH courses, earning a B or better in each. Alternatively, students must have completed four of their five core MPH courses, earning a B or better in each, while enrolling in the fifth core class the same semester as their internship. Optimally, students will have also completed at least some of their concentration courses before embarking on the internship.

Students can be authorized to register for the internship course after their Internship Agreement is drafted, approved and signed by their faculty advisor and preceptor.

FINDING AN INTERNSHIP

The internship is flexible. Students may intern in Indiana, out of state, or in an international setting. They can work full-time for several consecutive weeks or part-time for a longer period to complete the 240 hours requirement. The internship does require 160 hours be completed on-site to be sure students gain the benefits of networking with professionals and experiencing the organization as it typically functions. If students work full-time while enrolled in the MPH Program, they should begin investigating how to accommodate the time needed for their internship as soon as they are admitted to the MPH Program. Students working full time might need to use vacation time, design a flexible work schedule, or make other arrangements with their employers.

It is ultimately the student's responsibility to find and secure an internship. Students can meet with someone from FSPH Career Services to discuss internship search strategies, improve application materials (such as résumés), and prepare for interviews. To schedule an appointment with a career development professional, go to the Careers section of the Fairbanks School of Public Health website.

Students should start planning for the internship at least three months before it begins. If students are interested in out-of-state or international placements, advance planning time should be six to 12 months. To assist students in identifying internships, the MPH program publishes a list of previously conducted internships, known as the MPH Internship Database, accessible via the school’s website. Also, internship opportunities submitted to the school from public health organizations are posted to the Fairbanks School of Public Health job board, Career Link.

INTERNATIONAL INTERNSHIPS

MPH students may opt to do their internships in a country other than the United States. Several students have traveled to the AMPATH project in Kenya through the IU School of Medicine and to Central America with the IU School of Dentistry. These experiences require considerable advance planning, since they are often competitive and require funding. Students interested in an international experience for their internship should begin planning a year in advance.
Special stipulations for international placements are required by the Fairbanks School of Public Health and Indiana University:

- Individuals cannot go to areas that have a travel warning issued by the U.S. Department of State.
- Individuals must provide proof to the school that they have purchased travel insurance before they start their internship. The travel insurance must provide temporary health care to the individual while at the international site and provide transportation back to the United States in case of illness or an accident.

Students will not receive credit for their experiences if they do not comply with these stipulations.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN AN INTERNSHIP

When looking for an internship, students should consider their interests, past experience, the requirements of their MPH concentration, and what they want to glean from the experience. Specific activities or tasks that may be part of the internship learning experience include:

- Participating in the day-to-day work of the host agency.
- Attending organizational or community meetings with the preceptor.
- Researching policy implications of programs.
- Assisting in program development or evaluation.
- Participating in the ongoing research activities for studies with the preceptor.
- Working on a community health assessment.
- Working with a team responsible for several existing projects.
- Assisting with data analysis.

The internship is designed to provide the student with exposure to new experiences, topics and methods. Students are encouraged to look for an internship in an organization unfamiliar to them. If students choose to intern where they are currently employed, their activities must be completely separate from their regular paid employment duties and conducted on their own time. They must work under the guidance of a preceptor who is not their supervisor and not within the chain of command of their department or division. This arrangement is more readily achieved in a large organization, such as the Indiana State Department of Health or the Marion County Public Health Department. Students working in small public health organizations are encouraged to look for internships in organizations other than where they are employed.

Students should look for a preceptor who is excited about working with them on their internship. Because the preceptor’s role is to help the student develop the internship and supervise its implementation, the preceptor needs to be committed to devoting time to the student. The preceptor should also be professionally and academically qualified. If a student identifies a preceptor who has never hosted an MPH intern, the student should contact the MPH Internship Coordinator who will verify the preceptor’s qualifications.

Students should use the Internship Agreement as a guideline for internship planning. Students should talk with their preceptor about the activities to be conducted on the internship, his or her learning objectives, the time commitment, expected work hours, and deadlines for completing the required internship work.

OBTAINING INTERNSHIP APPROVAL

Students should consult with their faculty advisor as soon as they have identified an internship site and have a general idea of what the internship will entail. If the advisor agrees that the proposed experience meets the requirements of the student’s concentration, the student and preceptor can proceed with defining the student’s responsibilities, tasks, and schedule. Based on this discussion, the student will draft the Internship Agreement and share it with the advisor and preceptor. Each may have modifications they want the student to make. When the advisor and preceptor are satisfied with the agreement, all the parties will electronically sign and the student will submit the agreement to the MPH Internship Coordinator. The Coordinator will give the student authorization to enroll in the internship course (PBHL-P602). It is up to the student to formally enroll in the course. From there, they can begin logging internship hours.

MPH students must submit their 200 Hours Completed Form (online) before they will be given authorization to enroll in the culminating experience course (Capstone/Applied Epidemiology) or the culminating research project.
The Internship Checklist

SEARCHING FOR AN INTERNSHIP

☐ List your priorities for the internship. Is it most important to you to work with a new agency? Learn a new skill set? Work on a particular kind of project? Work hours other than 8a-5p? Work on a specific topic (maternal and child health, tuberculosis, child abuse, etc.)? Are there other considerations that are more important? Once you have defined your priorities, discuss them with your faculty advisor and begin searching for appropriate internship opportunities.

☐ Update your résumé. Preceptors frequently request it, along with a cover letter, before granting an interview. Contact sites to talk with potential preceptors. If you would like assistance in developing your résumé or cover letter, schedule an appointment with FSPH Career Services.

☐ Prepare for interviews with potential sites. Interviews should be conducted in the organization/agency’s office or a similar professional space. FSPH Career Services can help you prepare for interviews. Be sure to discuss the preceptor qualifications and responsibilities during any interviews.

☐ If you have questions about the internship process, schedule an appointment with the MPH Internship Coordinator.

OBTAINING APPROVAL

☐ Once you have identified a potential internship, review your plan with your advisor. Send a brief e-mail to them for informal approval to proceed.

☐ Complete the Internship Agreement (electronic PDF form) with your preceptor. Obtain electronic signatures from your faculty advisor and your preceptor; then e-sign the form yourself.

☐ Email the completed and signed Internship Agreement to the MPH Internship Coordinator. This step MUST be completed before you can begin logging hours for your internship.

☐ The MPH Internship Coordinator will review your form and grant you permission to enroll in the MPH internship course. It is your responsibility to register for the internship course (PHBL-P602).

DOCUMENTING YOUR INTERNSHIP

☐ Maintain your weekly log (PDF fillable form). Be sure to document each week’s date range, hours completed, and a summary of projects and work done during that week. Be sure you keep up with this log throughout your internship.

☐ Halfway through your internship (120 hours), remind your preceptor to complete the Online Mid-Term Evaluation. They will be sent a link for this evaluation at the start of your internship. If they need to have the link re-sent to them, please have them contact the MPH Internship Coordinator.

☐ When you reach 200 hours, you must submit the 200 Hours Completed Form. You must submit this form if you wish to enroll in a culminating experience course (Capstone/Applied Epidemiology) or the culminating research project. 200 Hours Completed Form: https://iu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1St3HWqYdrVs2bz

☐ Complete 240 hours of work in your internship placement. Complete the tasks and projects outlined in your Internship Agreement.

COMPLETING YOUR INTERNSHIP

☐ Submit your internship log to your preceptor for their review and electronic signature verifying the hours and work completed. Once they have signed the log, it can be submitted via email to the MPH Internship Coordinator. Be sure the total cumulative hour count is stated on the log.

☐ Complete the online Internship Course Evaluation: https://iu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eboAsBUNyejqrNr

☐ Remind your preceptor to complete their final evaluation of your work. This is an online evaluation. They will be sent a link after you submit your evaluation and log. If they need to have the link resent, have them email the MPH Internship Coordinator.

☐ Write and submit the internship final paper following the prompt below. Submit the final paper via email to the MPH Internship Coordinator. This must be completed within two weeks of finishing your internship hours.
FINAL PAPER GUIDELINES
The final paper should be five to seven pages in length. The final paper is due to the MPH Internship Coordinator two weeks after the end of your internship. Feel free to include samples of your work in an appendix. Your final paper MUST include the following sections:

1. ORGANIZATION/AGENCY:
   Provide a brief overview of the organization/agency where you completed your internship.

2. CHANGE:
   Describe changes in your perception of the organization/agency during your experience. What original assumptions did you have and how did those assumptions change throughout your experience?

3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
   Describe challenges and successes in your efforts to accomplish the specific objectives you laid out in your internship agreement. Be specific. What feedback did you receive? Identify the outcomes of each objective and any changes that needed to be made to those objectives as the internship evolved.

4. ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS:
   How has what you have learned in the classroom influenced the role you played during your internship?

5. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:
   What skills did you acquire or further develop during this experience? What specific contributions did you make in this role? Did this role and environment seem a good fit for your interests, skills, and career aspirations? What are your current professional strengths and weaknesses following this internship experience?

6. FUTURE:
   Where are you going from here? What are your career goals after this professional experience?

Questions?
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