



COLLEGE of
PUBLIC HEALTH
EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Preceptor Guidelines

***MPH Applied Practice Experience
College of Public Health
East Tennessee State University***

To our preceptors

A guiding principle of the College of Public Health at East Tennessee State University is to establish and nurture learning opportunities with respected regional, national and international public health and health service organizations and professionals. We are proud that you and your organization have become an affiliate of the College of Public Health at East Tennessee State University. We are confident your mentoring, professional guidance and project assignments will offer our students unique and challenging exposure to practical applications of the essential competencies of their public health curriculum. Our students consistently report that their practice experience has been one of the most rewarding experiences of their academic career and we are grateful for your invaluable contribution and commitment to our program and our students. Thank you!

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Preceptor Role in Planning the Applied Practice Experience:

The primary goal of our full semester (approximately fifteen weeks) Applied Practice Experience (APE) course is to provide students with practice-based reinforcement of foundational and concentration competencies presented throughout their prior coursework. This is a unique opportunity for students and practicing health professionals to assess possible post-graduate public health or health services options including immediate employment or further educational pursuits. An essential expectation during this time is that students complete two or more work assignments that add value to your organization. This also gives the student “work experience” that is invaluable to them.

To facilitate a smooth and effective launch of the practice experience it is important the site preceptor begin planning a semester long agenda before the student arrives. However, students are expected to arrive with a draft set of Foundational/Concentration competencies which serves as the starting point for planning the overall practice experience. The overall responsibility for designing, facilitating and coordinating the practice experience lies with the affiliate organization and the ETSU College of Public Health course instructor, referred to as the student’s **Departmental Professional Advisor (DPA)**.

It will not likely be effective to ask the student, “what would you like to do while you are here?” because, as you may expect at this stage, students often do not yet have a good frame of reference and do not know what options are available to them at your organization. Your guidance is critical at this point to assure their practice experience begins with a well-defined road map; alterations can be made along the way, of course.

It is recommended that you and our student discuss possible observational and applied learning opportunities the practice experience could include and, equally important, what you will expect of the student. Face-to-face contact (e.g. an interview) prior to the student’s arrival is time well spent and goes a long way for a mutually rewarding experience.

Methods for Approving Preceptors:

Students identify a qualified preceptor at their APE organization in consultation with and approval of their DPA, who will also serve as the course instructor. For graduate students, the preceptor is typically the director of the facility, the head of the department or organizational unit that will be hosting the student, or their designee. As such, the preceptor is a working professional with sufficient professional experience to train students in public health practice and to evaluate their ability to apply the competencies of their respective degree program. It is expected that preceptors have two or more years of public health related experience and are recognized by their organization to provide the required level of training for public health students.

Within the practice experience organization, preceptors are approved based on the following recommendations:

- 1) Ability to facilitate interaction and communication with others in the organization
- 2) Professional qualifications to fulfill the learning needs of the student as described above
- 3) Belief in the professional obligation of preceptors and interest in teaching
- 4) Capacity to assign duties and provide necessary resources to the student
- 5) Willingness to devote time to field activities including planning and supervision
- 6) Commitment to evaluating the student's performance relative to the program competencies
- 7) Interest in working with the college faculty

Applied Practice Experience Background:

The MPH degree has historically provided professional preparation for those who will practice in a public health setting. As such, the APE has always played an important role in applying classroom instruction with real-life experience in most public health educational programs. The APE provides up to 6 graduate hours of credit and on-the-job training. In a minimum of **300 contact hours** it provides an opportunity to assess how public health theory is being used in the practice setting and what skills and competencies are required to prepare for a career in the field.

Preceptor Role During the Applied Practice Experience:

1. If possible, orient the student to the organization prior to arrival. This may include literature, internet material, interviews or a more formal orientation program.
2. Work with the student and the DPA to develop a set of learning objectives related to the MPH competencies selected by the student in consultation with his/her DPA.
3. Communication is critical so it is important to set aside routinely scheduled time to interact with the student.
4. Provide a diverse variety of exposure to broaden the student's awareness and perspective of public health and/or health services. This is a time many students begin to form their professional vision.

5. Assist the student in transitioning from an “observer” to a “productive participant” in your organization as quickly as is feasible. The semester will pass by faster than you may expect.
6. You can assume the student has the potential to be productive so please provide multiple opportunities for the student to “show you what they can do”. Your intern will be eager to make a contribution that “makes you proud”.
7. Assign projects that might translate to “experience” on the student’s resume when they are seeking subsequent employment.
8. Help the student relate their practice experiences to their previous academic courses.
9. Complete and submit candid mid-term and final evaluations using a survey link in REDCap. Your professional assessment and guidance toward molding a future health professional is most valuable.
10. Candidly discuss your performance evaluations with the student and offer professional advice and recommendations. Our students want and value your feedback and guidance.
11. Review and approve a mid-term and a final timesheet for the intern.

Applied Practice Experience Content and Competencies:

A variety of both observational and practical assignments across departments and functions within your organization provides the greatest value to the student. Several weeks in a few operational areas (perhaps three or four) is often of greater value than dedicating the entire semester to one department or activity.

When designing and organizing the student’s internship activities and projects please include exposure to, or application of, the competencies discussed with the student and the DPA, and approved at the beginning of the semester.

Designing Practice Experience Objectives and Supporting Action Plans:

This is the playbook for a successful practice experience.

1. There should be one or more objectives that correlate with each of the student’s selected list of foundational and concentration competencies.
2. Each objective should be supported by an agenda of “actions” that will assure the objective is achieved. “What will the student actually do during the practice experience to achieve each objective?”
3. The competencies selected by the student (and approved by the DPA) will help identify the competencies we are striving to validate.

4. It is often good to schedule two or three weeks in which students have 1-2 day shadowing opportunities in multiple parts of the organization. This helps the student and their preceptor determine areas/functions the student would like to experience and “work” in for the remainder of the semester; ideally, then spending four or five weeks in two or three different areas. This way students will gain a more rounded perspective of their professional options and hopefully also allows sufficient time for the student to make a meaningful contribution in each area.
5. Students will benefit greatly if they are expected to work (and complete) multiple tasks and projects simultaneously. This of course is the nature of virtually every professional work environment.
6. Likewise, participating effectively as a member of a work or project team is an essential skill.
7. Students regularly report that one of the most beneficial learning experiences is being included in meetings (both internal and external). They feel honored and rewarded when they are asked to interact when appropriate. The term we use is, *“Contribute your public health voice”*.
8. Shadowing their preceptor is also an eye-opening and effective learning tactic. Students often have no idea of the volume and variety of work activities a health professional will deal with on a daily basis.
9. Finally, we want our students to grow in their ability to be self-sufficient workers, to creatively solve problems or meet challenges, to take innovative initiative, to refine the basic skills of professional behavior and to gain and reinforce their self-confidence in a professional setting.

Field Coordinator Contact Information:

Please remember, as the Field Internship Coordinator, I am your partner during this internship experience. Should you experience a problem or desire assistance during the semester, do not hesitate to contact me and I will be there to assist in any way I can.

It is our intention that serving as an ETSU College of Public Health preceptor will not become an administrative burden. During the course of the semester we only ask that you candidly complete two evaluations of the student's performance, a mid-term and a final timesheet, and also offer your insights into opportunities for us to enhance our curriculum and overall program.

Again, thank you very much for your support of our students and our program.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer R Hunt, MPH, CMRP". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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