

## Assessing Practicum in Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University

The practicum (HSCI 880) is a compulsory 11-week module in the summer term with hands-on work experience for postgraduate students pursuing Masters of Public Health (MPH) at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in Canada. Students in the practicum learn how to apply public health concepts, methods and theory in designated workplace. They are mentored and supported by qualified public health supervisors and faculty. The practicum is offered in various settings of public health practices, including policy, education, communities or health services. There are four concentrations in MPH (Environmental and Occupational Health, Global Health, Population Health Science, and Social Inequities and Health).

Students in the Global Health concentration must do international practicum, with previous students being placed in countries like Malawi, Zambia, Sierra Leone, South Africa, India, Mongolia, Mexico, Iran, Australia and the United States. MPH students in other concentrations can choose to do their practicum in Canada or abroad.

### Distinctive Features:

- ✔ Fostering global placements particularly in developing countries of public health practices;
- ✔ Connecting field practices with potential capstone development;
- ✔ Handing students initiatives and responsibilities

### Designed Learning Outcomes (LO):

- I. Apply relevant theories, concepts, and skills learned through academic coursework in a practice setting relevant to their interests in public health.
- II. Develop confidence in applying specific skills and relevant theory pertinent to their areas of interest, expertise, and practice.
- III. Develop an appreciation for public health practice while working in a professional environment, through ongoing personal reflection.
- IV. Improve planning, organizational, and communication skills.
- V. Demonstrate collaborative skills while working with colleagues in a professional practice setting

Source: SFU (2017) Practicum Guide

### Coursework Teaching & Learning Activities:

- ✍ Pre-practicum arrangements: travel preparations, development of an approved Practicum Plan, completion of Practicum Forms, immunizations, visas, and setting up living arrangements, etc.
  - 1<sup>st</sup> meeting with the practicum committee (formed among the student, academic supervisor, and workplace preceptor)
- ✍ Practicum field work (a minimum of 11 weeks of full-time work at a designated workplace)
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting with the practicum committee (midway through the practicum)
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting with the practicum committee (end of the practicum)
- ✍ Post-practicum poster preparation (2 weeks)
- ✍ Practicum Poster Session (all MPH students are expected to attend; early fall)
- ✍ Debrief session: reviewing experiences and future learning needs

## Assessment Approaches

Name	Learning Activities	Weight	Aligned LO	Type	Generic Skills
A1 Practicum Plan	During the preparation stage for practicum, students need to prepare a Practicum Plan as a brief proposal stating their learning goals and how they plan to achieve the goals. This written document should be within 10 pages with professional layout. It can later be revised on site.	n/a	I.II.IV.	Formative	Communication; Critical Thinking; Self-management; Study Skills
A2 Bi-monthly Reports	To help students reflect on their learning experience, they are required to submit a total of 5 bi-monthly reports throughout their	n/a	III.IV.V.	Formative & Summative	Collaboration; Communication; Critical Thinking;

		practicum. The 5 <sup>th</sup> report is a summative report of the full learning experience and what aspect(s) can be taken into the capstone project.				Problem Solving; Self-management
A3	Practicum Poster & Poster Presentation	Students are required to do a poster presentation on the rationale behind the work undertaken during the practicum, their achievement of objectives, deliverables and any insights gained. The format of the poster should follow closely the Practicum Plan.	n/a	I.II.III.IV.	Summative	Communication; Creativity; Critical Thinking; Study Skills
A4	Practicum Student Assessment Forms	Workplace preceptors have to complete a student assessment form for mid-practicum and end-of-practicum evaluation. Students identify their own competencies for evaluation by the preceptors.	n/a	I.II.IV.V.	Summative	Collaboration; Communication; (Critical Thinking); Problem Solving; Study Skills

### Assessment Type

Both formative and summative assessments are employed before, during and after the practicum to capture student learning experience.

### Assessment Focal Areas

**Holistic competencies:** The practicum experience is “designed to assist students in acquiring skills as a team player, problem-solver, and effective communicator” while “organizational and critical thinking skills are sharpened as a result of this experience” (SFU 2017). The supervised field learning is competency-based, and students need to conduct self-assessment of core competencies as an initial step of placing practicum. Self-understanding of holistic competencies is thus enhanced. Students can choose which core competencies they want to focus on during the practicum. Alongside the self-elected core competencies identified by the students themselves, the assessment form (A4) to be completed by the internship preceptor covers four areas of holistic competencies, including interpersonal communication, professional conduct, efficiency at work, and teamwork.

**Knowledge application:** The practicum is an opportunity for students to apply and use their knowledge acquired through coursework, to deepen

knowledge in a particular area of expertise, and/or expand their breadth of knowledge. It is also a collaborative learning process encouraging knowledge translation and exchange. The self-assessment of core competencies for public health professionals covers areas of knowledge in health sciences. In the Practicum Plan (A1) and the Bi-monthly Reports (A2), students identify the set of competences they want to prioritize and focus on in the practicum. This determines the content of the assessment form (A4) to be provided to the workplace preceptor to evaluate student performance.

**Reflection:** The learning outcome of ongoing personal reflection is highlighted in this course. The Bi-monthly Reports (A2) should be reflective in nature, “to facilitate a progressive reflection on the practicum that supports the learning experience” (SFU 2017). The poster (A3) should contain a section on reflection of lessons learned or key insights gained from the practicum.

### Assessment Standards/ Sample Rubrics

As a MPH program requirement, this credit-bearing practicum is graded as CO for complete, S for satisfactory, or U for unsatisfactory. The credit points or marks are not relevant as long as the students complete the field requirements satisfactorily. Therefore, rubrics are not provided for most of the assessment activities, although assessment form (A4) and template for Practicum Plan (A1) are available. Questions on the assessment form are listed as follows:

Q.1 For each competency, please indicate to what extent the student has met the competency for entry level or TIER 1 public health practice, to the extent that you feel was possible during this practicum. Entry level or Tier 1 public health professionals are typically individuals who carry out the day-to-day tasks of public health organizations and are not in management positions.

Competency:				
	Fully met beyond my expectations	Fully met	Partially met	Not met
(8 repeated competency rows)				

Q.1b) In the box provided below, please describe aspects of the Core Competencies identified above that could benefit from additional attention by the student during the remainder of the MPH program.

Q.2 Please note the degree to which the student met your expectations in the following areas:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Interpersonal Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional Conduct	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hours of Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Efficiency at Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Team work (where appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q.3 Practicum activities were defined in the Practicum Plan and reviewed at the start of the practicum. Please indicate the progress of the student towards completing these practicum activities.

Completed activities beyond my expectation	Completed activities	Experienced difficulties	Very challenged by the activities

Please elaborate, with examples.


Q.4 Please provide any further recommendations to enhance this student's life-long learning in the areas highlighted by this practicum.


Q.5 Do you think the student could have been better prepared by our program for this practicum?  
Yes      No

If yes, please elaborate.

## Teacher's Stories

While the practicum is coordinated and administered by managerial staff in the MPH program, the practicum design and arrangements are very much a group effort of the entire faculty of health sciences.

 Prof. John O'Neil is the Dean of Faculty of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University. He comments that *"Probably the most important part of their (MPH) training is the practicum, and all of our students do a 12-week practicum in a public health or population health setting. ... Our students receive a broad interdisciplinary training and they take with them into the field and into their careers, I think one of the strongest backgrounds in public health and global health than any groups of students in the world."* (Online video, Sept 2010)

 Dr. Craig Janes, emeritus Associate Dean of Health Sciences at Simon Fraser University, says that: *"Mongolia is a very interesting place for students to come to study. It represents in many ways a microcosm of globalization. It's a very rapidly developing society, with many of the problems that developing societies have. At the same time it also has a merging epidemics of non-communicable diseases which are very similar to what developed countries have. So it's a very good place for students to come to study. Our students are able to take advantages of very unique placements. They learnt a great deal about global health."* (Online video, Sept 2010)


## Professional Engagements


Before joining SFU, Dr. John O'Neil was Director of the Manitoba First Nations Centre for Aboriginal Health

Research. He has been appointed as a Senior Investigator of Canadian Institutes of Health Research and as the founding Chair of the Advisory Board for the Institute for Aboriginal People's Health at the Canadian Institutes for Health Research from 2000 to 2006. He also served as the research advisor to the health policy team for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1995/96 and he is currently appointed to the Advisory Board of the National Collaborating Centre on Aboriginal Health at the Public Health Agency of Canada.


Dr. Craig Janes, when he was the faculty member at SFU, received National Medal of Honour from Government of Mongolia for his work to develop the country's health sector.


## Partnership

 Oyun Lkhagvasuren, Director of Health Promotion Division in the Department of Health in Mongolia, is one of the global partners and workplace preceptors of the practicum. She states that: *"We like our collaboration with Simon Fraser, because it's beneficial for both sides, for the Canadians and Mongolians, and we are putting together our efforts to address the issues that we have in Mongolian terms of public health"* (Online video, Sept 2010).

 Tsogtbaatar Byambaa, Ministry of Health & Global Fund in Mongolia, *"Global Fund support is the largest of its kind in Mongolia. The money was there, efforts were there but our capacities weren't good enough, and SFU practicum students came and helped us to strengthen our capacities, and benefits were mutual"* (Online video, Sept 2010).

## Students' Side of Stories

 *"I chose the Global Health stream of the MPH program at SFU because I have a strong interest in global Indigenous health. I pursued my practicum at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute in Adelaide, looking at heart health disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations in South Australia, and developing cultural determinants of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."* (MPH student)

 *"I felt the need to gain knowledge that would help me work on a much larger scale to reduce health inequalities and improve access to better healthcare services in developing countries like mine and the world at large. ... While in the MPH program, I have learned so much from the wide range of courses that I have been exposed to, and I have been able to narrow my interests to the area of Maternal and child health. The highlight of the program has been the practicum experience where I had the*

*opportunity to work in my area of interest.”*  
(MPH student from Nigeria)

- ✔ *“Today I am here in this secondary school to help evaluate a HIV aids trainer program and peer education program. This summer I am going to be working with the Department of Health, to help evaluate this program that has been funded by the Global Fund. But I decided to come to Mongolia based on the previous experiences as former student here and the relationship that they form as well as the experience of Mongolian culture.”* (MPH student doing practicum in Mongolia, Online video, sept 2010)
- ✔ *“At first I have had the experience of what is successful public health intervention can look like, and so we have a lot of learning about challenges and struggles, and some projects that haven’t worked out and so to have the real experiences of what the changes can mean for vulnerable populations ... was really motivating, it was really inspiring to know that public health projects can work and can have a real impact.”* (MPH graduate, online video, Sept 2010)
- ✔ *“Through all the courses we have taken in this program and through our experiences abroad in our internships, we are taught to take into account and to give importance to the social context, or political context, economic context, and how those relate into health outcomes and health data of populations.”* (MPH graduate, online video, Sept 2010)
- ✔ *“There are professors in the program that were in India and in other similar socio-economic and political context, who prepare me by telling me what to expect and how to deal with those issues, and I felt very prepared when I went there.”* (MPH graduate, online video, Sept 2010)
- ✔ *“When I was a student in the master program at SFU, I did my practicum placement at the Department of Health (of Mongolia), and I really learnt through that experience about the complexity and importance of working with various stakeholders in the public and private and NGO sectors, and these are skills that I think I would take with me as I continue my career.”* (MPH graduate, online video, Sept 2010)

## Featured Photos & Videos

Videos posted online about SPU MPH Practicum:

- ▶ Practicum with the Department of Health in Mongolia on HIV aids <https://youtu.be/ISBtNHAbvBE>

Snapshots of posters done by the previous practicum students are available:

- ▶ [https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster\\_Oumar.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster_Oumar.pdf)
- ▶ [https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster\\_Kiani.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster_Kiani.pdf)
- ▶ [https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster\\_Krusi.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster_Krusi.pdf)
- ▶ [https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster\\_Paxton.pdf](https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/current-students/graduate/documents/Poster_Paxton.pdf)

## References

- Simon Fraser University (2017) Practicum Guide. Retrieved <https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/fhs/future-students/graduate/documents/2017-2018%20Practicum%20Guide.pdf> (accessed 12 Mar 2018)
- Simon Fraser University (2018) Student Life. Retrieved from <http://www.sfu.ca/fhs/future-students/graduate/studentlife.html> (accessed 12 Mar 2018)