

Department of Community Health Sciences Masters of Public Health (MPH)

Field Placement Step-by-Step Guide for Students

Definitions

Faculty Advisor (MPH Advisor) ... A faculty member of the Department of Community Health Sciences who will be assigned to you at time of admission to provide advice on course content, selection and guidance in field placement coordination.

MPH Program Committee ... A standing committee consisting of the Director of the CHS Graduate Program (Dr. Tate), Director of the Community Medicine Residency Program (Dr. Elliott) and one faculty member who is actively involved with the MPH program as a Faculty Advisor (Dr. O'Neil). The MPH Program Committee approves all programs of study for MPH students, and makes final decisions on field placements.

Agency Supervisor ... is the local supervisor for the MPH student at the site of the field placement. This may be the same person as the Faculty Advisor in some circumstances.

Introduction

The addition of a field experience to the MPH program highlights the relationship between learning and application of public health principles and practice through the integration of coursework with supervised fieldwork undertaken in local, provincial, or national health care settings. Field placement opportunities are identified through discussions involving applied public health decision-makers, students and faculty supervisors in order to find the most appropriate arrangement for each student. The field placement is a required part of the MPH program and must be arranged for a period equivalent to three months.

Thinking About Your Field Placement

Field placements may require a student to be located within a public health organization or agency, or to be situated within a public health program or service. The field placement may be regional, provincial or national in scope, and must have a substantial amount of time spent on field activities.

Although you cannot start your field placement until all course work is completed, you should begin to think about possible field placements as soon as you start your MPH program. Field placements need to be negotiated and may take several months to organize. Discuss your field placement with your MPH Advisor well in advance of the desired start date. Talk to your fellow MPH students to get a better understanding of the field placement experience. Students may wish

to develop a field placement that is related to their primary area of interest or may prefer to develop skills and contacts in another area.

Be proactive in helping to develop your field placement – at all stages of the process. You are responsible for making your field placement happen – the MPH Program Committee may assist you but you are to take the lead. Decision-makers are located at various levels in an organization. Top-level decision-makers are often unavailable for student interaction. The summer period may not be optimum for a field placement since staff may be on holidays and regular meetings may be discontinued. Consider extending the field placement period into the spring or fall to provide more opportunities for interaction with decision-makers.

Working Through the Field Placement Process

Each field placement is organized in a different way, but the following provides the basic framework that you will need to follow in setting up your placement:

Obtain the following package of documents from the MPH Program Committee:

- Field Placement - Agreement
- Field Placement - Supervisor Information
- Field Placement - Performance Appraisal
- Field Placement - Student Final Report

Well in advance, make an appointment with the MPH Program Committee to discuss your field placement. If you would like assistance, the MPH Program Committee will provide suggestions for relevant agencies to determine their field placement potential. This is a negotiation process that involves matching your skills and interests with the needs of the agency and may take some time to put into place. If you have contacts in a relevant agency, you may initiate the negotiations for your own field placement. Your Faculty Advisor may have some contacts that could provide a field placement opportunity.

When a potential field placement opportunity is identified, the Field Supervisor Information and other field placement documents should be shared with the agency in order to provide a clear understanding of the objectives and expectations of a field placement. To finalize the field placement arrangements, you will need to organize a meeting/conference call with yourself, the agency supervisor, and the MPH Program Committee to work out details of the Field Placement Agreement. It is up to you to take the lead and organize all meetings/conference calls – if you need assistance just ask the Faculty Advisor.

In conjunction with the agency supervisor, complete a draft Field Placement Agreement to be reviewed by the MPH Program Committee. Your field placement is finalized when the Agreement is signed by you, the Agency Supervisor and the MPH Program Committee. All parties involved will keep copies of the signed Agreement.

Field Placement Products

You should ensure that your field placement provides you with the following skills and experiences:

- an understanding of the structure/policies/function of the field placement organization, agency or program;
- an understanding of the social, political, and economic context in which the organization, agency or program exists and functions;
- an understanding of issues of confidentiality, privacy, access, and reporting of results;
- engagement in a project or projects that involve conceptualizing, planning, and determining/ negotiating for the resources necessary to complete the projects;
- preparing reports and presenting/discussing the findings as required; and providing input related to on-going work in the project areas at the host site;
- participating as a effective team member; and,
- Interacting with decision-makers through mentoring opportunities such as “shadowing”

Starting the Field Placement

You should ask the Agency Supervisor to introduce you to the organization or program personnel, both in person and through an introductory email. This introduction should clarify your role, with whom you will be working, and the specific project(s) with which you are involved. The MPH Program Committee will contact you and the Agency Supervisor a couple weeks into the placement to make sure everything is going according to plan.

You will need to arrange a meeting with the MPH Program Committee and your Agency Supervisor at the half-way point in the field placement (you probably should book this well in advance as schedules can fill up quickly).

Completing the Field Placement Requirement

At the end of the field placement, the Agency Supervisor is to complete a Performance Appraisal. Prior to leaving the field placement it is a good idea for you to ask the agency supervisor to provide constructive feedback to you, either on your own or with the supervisory team. After the agency supervisor has completed the Appraisal you will have an opportunity to include your comments on the form. A copy will be provided to your faculty supervisor.

You will need to complete the Student Final Report within a month of finishing your field placement. As necessary, you will need to obtain permission from the agency supervisor for release of specific summary information from the report or for presentations. Your Student Final Report is confidential to MPH Program Committee. You will be required to give a presentation on your field placement both content and experience to Community Health Sciences faculty and other graduate students.