

MPH Practicum Handbook  
PH 598

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# Table of Contents

Purpose of the MPH Practicum.....	3
General Information.....	3
Practicum Required Pre-Requisites .....	3
Required Practicum Products.....	4
Practicum Director .....	4
Practicum Site .....	4
Practicum Preceptor and/or Field Supervisor .....	4
Faculty Academic Adviser.....	4
Practicum & Professional Paper .....	4
Practicum Options.....	5
Practicum Option 1 .....	5
Practicum Option 2 .....	5
Setting up the Practicum Experience .....	5
Student Self-Assessment.....	5
Finding a Practicum Site .....	5
Identifying a Preceptor/Field Supervisor .....	6
Beginning the Practicum Experience .....	6
Practicum Learning Contract .....	7
Completing the Practicum Experience.....	7
Student Responsibilities during Placement.....	7
Weekly Practicum Journal .....	7
Exit Interview with Preceptor and/or Field Supervisor and Practicum Evaluation .....	8
Final Practicum Paper Guidelines.....	8
Practicum Presentation.....	9
APPENDIX A: Student Self-Assessment Survey.....	10
APPENDIX B: Suggested practicum sites/resources .....	12
APPENDIX C: Practicum Learning Contract.....	13
APPENDIX D: Preceptor Evaluation of Student.....	15
Student Evaluation of Practicum .....	17
Field Supervisor Evaluation of Student .....	20
APPENDIX E: Student Journal Example .....	22

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## **Purpose of the MPH Practicum**

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The public health practicum, PH 598, will provide the Master of Public Health (MPH) graduate student with the opportunity to refine the competencies while testing the concepts and skills acquired through the academic program. Students will have direct, hands-on work experience comparable to that in a career position suitable for a MPH graduate. Students work in a team setting to identify, select, and engage in the practicum experience. Students should select a practicum experience that is relevant to his/her professional goals.

Training of public health professionals is not possible without the existence of cooperating community agencies, institutions, and the participation of skilled practitioners. These skilled professionals promote learning opportunities for our students by becoming preceptors and field supervisors. The practicum director and the faculty academic advisers are available to assist the student in identifying meaningful practicum sites and preceptors.

The practicum director is the Instructor of Record (IOR) for each practicum and responsible for assuring a rewarding practicum course for each student. The director is the liaison with the; site, community group, and/or institution; preceptor/field supervisor; student; and MPH Program. The practicum director will work with the student to select an appropriate practicum, oversee and approve the practicum proposal and learning contract, respond to the weekly journals, organize the logistics of the practicum presentation, assess the final practicum paper, and enter the course grade.

The practicum experience is designed to assist the graduate student enhance, supplement, and develop a variety of competencies including but not limited to:

1. Utilize problem-solving skills;
2. Propose and co-implement interventions to address problems which are culturally, ethically, geographically and economically appropriate;
3. Gain experience in public health settings;
4. Engage in interdisciplinary team work to address public health issues;
5. Practice applying at least one of three core functions of public health (assessment, assurance/intervention, or policy);
6. Reflect on how the core functions overlap;
7. Gain self-reflection and observation skills about public health organization/site activities/effectiveness;
8. Observe the various roles and responsibilities of public health practitioners;
9. Experience and reflect on one's own role as a public health professional;
10. Apply acquired skills, knowledge, and aptitude in a real public health work setting;
11. Acquire new skills, knowledge, and aptitude from their preceptor and/or field supervisor;
12. Strengthen public health practice competencies in areas identified through self-assessment; and
13. Expand personal public health networks.

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## **General Information**

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### **Practicum Required Pre-Requisites**

- Completed PH Theory & Practice Seminar PH 508
- Complete a minimum of 20 MPH course credits prior to selecting a practicum
- Select a practicum site and preceptor

- Practicum Director Approved Practicum Proposal

### **Credit Hours**

2 credit hours are required for graduation regardless of whether you sign up for option 1 or 2 of the practicum experience. The grade will appear as a Credit (C) or No Credit (NC).

### **Required Practicum Products**

- Pre-proposal meeting with practicum director
- Proposal
- Learning Contract
- Weekly Journal
- Final Practicum Paper
- Evaluation forms
- Practicum presentation

### **Practicum Director**

The PH Practicum is a required MPH course. The practicum director is the Instructor of Record (IOR) for each practicum and responsible for assuring a rewarding practicum course for each student. The director is the liaison with the; site, community group, and/or institution; preceptor/field supervisor; student; and MPH Program. The practicum director will work with the student to select an appropriate practicum, oversee and approve the practicum proposal and learning contract, respond to the weekly journals, organize the logistics of the practicum presentation, assess the final practicum paper, and enter the course grade.

### **Practicum Site**

Selection of the practicum site is based, in great part, by the interest of the student. The student should seek a practicum site that is different from their usual professional experiences but that the student holds interest in learning. The practicum director will assist the student to find a suitable practicum placement. See Appendix A for Suggested Practicum Sites

### **Practicum Preceptor and/or Field Supervisor**

A practicum preceptor is required and must be selected to provide guidance, supervision, and evaluation of the student at the practicum site location. A field supervisor is also located at the practicum site, but is not required. The field supervisor may be extremely helpful to the student by providing additional day to day guidance at the location site. Each student must meet with the practicum director about preceptor qualifications.

### **Faculty Academic Adviser**

The student's faculty adviser may be consulted about potential practicum projects and sites.

### **Practicum & Professional Paper**

The practicum focuses on the day-to-day process of how public health related issues are identified. The student experiences the organizational contexts in which the issues are approached and the roles that public health professionals play in real world settings. The practicum experience may also be useful when developing the professional paper. The professional paper can evolve from the practicum experience, if permission is granted from the participating practicum site.

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## **Practicum Options**

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The practicum experience is designed to assist students gain public health experience. There are two

### **Practicum Option 1**

Option 1 is for students who have little public health experience (less than five years) and the students will benefit from taking the 160 hours of time. This option will offer students direct, hands-on work experience comparable to that in a career position suitable for a MPH graduate.

### **Practicum Option 2**

Option 2 is for those students who have five or more years of full-time public health experience. This option will offer students who have a good foundation of public health a higher-level experience and the opportunity to receive credit for their previous experience. Students should discuss option 2 with practicum director. Under this option, a student can waive 80 hours of the 160 practicum hours. Prerequisites to waive 80 of the 160 hours include:

- Five or more years of full-time public health experience (CV or resume required);
  - The student will draft a short memo to the practicum director **and** director of graduate programs, detailing the full-time public health work experience that qualifies them for this option.
- A sufficient understanding of their work experience in the context of the core functions of assessment, assurance, and policy development; and
- Approval from the practicum director and director of graduate programs.

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## **Setting up the Practicum Experience**

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Students are typically introduced to the practicum experience during the PH Theory and Practice course from the practicum director. Various tools are available help the student determine the type of practicum experience the student might seek.

### **Student Self-Assessment**

During the PH Theory and Practice course, or prior to developing the practicum proposal and learning contract, the practicum director meets with the students and they complete the self-assessment survey (Appendix A). The survey is used to assist the student and practicum director to identify the students' interests and areas of strength.

### **Finding a Practicum Site**

Once the student identifies areas of interest and strength, he/she should identify which programs or agencies might best match his/her learning needs. A practicum experience is intended to be a broadening experience for the student. The practicum site and project identified should assist the student in gaining further experience in the areas they want to enhance as identified by the self-assessment and their interests. The student will work with the practicum director to select an appropriate site; if the student does not have a site in mind, the practicum director keeps a listing of suggested practicum sites (Appendix B). Potential sites contact the practicum director routinely to ask for the assistance of MPH students in completing projects, assessments, interventions, or research. The practicum director notifies students of approved practicum opportunities through the MPH student listserv. Students may also find national or international practicum opportunities in the form of graduate public health student internships and

assistantships. The student should work with the practicum director to ensure that these opportunities are approved.

### **Identifying a Preceptor/Field Supervisor**

Once the practicum site has been selected, the student must identify an appropriate preceptor and meet with them by phone or in person to determine if he/she can support the learning needs of the student and if he/she has the time. The preceptor plays a key role in what the student learns. The preceptor identifies for the student a field supervisor to provide on-site supervision. In some instances, the preceptor can serve both roles. The practicum director approves the selection of the preceptor and field supervisor through a signed learning contract.

The practicum preceptor must have an MPH or other advanced degree in the public health field or five years demonstrated experience in public health practice, research, planning or administration. The field supervisor should have knowledge about the site functions and responsibility for one of the core functions of public health in his/her organization/site. Both the preceptor and field supervisor should possess the following:

- Professional competence, positive professional identity and ethics;
- Desire and time to work with a student;
- Experience in the workplace and familiarity with issues of professional practice;
- Knowledge and skills of public health practice in their respective area; and
- Knowledge of and access to networks of public health professionals working throughout the state and region.

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### **Beginning the Practicum Experience**

Once the practicum site and preceptor/field supervisor have been selected, a practicum proposal and the learning contract must be completed and approved prior to beginning the practicum hours. The student submits the completed practicum proposal to the practicum director for approval. Once the proposal is approved, the student then completes the practicum learning contract and then is able to register for the course.

### **Practicum Proposal Guidelines**

The student must have an approved practicum proposal before beginning the practicum hours. The guidelines and format are as follows:

- Define the public health issue(s) you are interested in and provide a one to two-page literature review of the issue.
- Define the nature and scope of proposed practicum activities to be performed.
- Describe the site where the practicum will be conducted.
- Define the agencies' mission and role and responsibility in addressing the public health issue that you are interested in.
- Develop a set of SMART learning objectives for the practicum.
  - S – Specific; M – Measureable; A – Attainable; R – Relevant; T – Timely
  - What does the student wish to learn during the 160 hour practicum placement?
  - List 4-6 competencies from student's self-assessment that this practicum will address?
- Identify the preceptor/field supervisor and their public health credentials.
  - What is the Preceptor's role in the organization/site?

- Describe the field supervisor role.
- How will practicum supervision will be carried out by the preceptor/field supervisor?
- Discuss the products/activities to be completed by the end of the practicum.
- Define the work schedule and actual locations of your practicum experience.
- Format
  - No more than 10 pages in length, double spaced, with numbered pages
  - 12 font with one-inch margins.

### **Practicum Learning Contract**

The practicum learning contract is a signed agreement among the practicum director, preceptor/field supervisor, faculty academic adviser and student. The agreement identifies terms and conditions under which the practicum is conducted. **This contract must be filled out completely and signed by all parties, and returned to the practicum director prior to beginning the practicum hours.** See Appendix C for Learning Contract.

### **Practicum Course Registration**

Students are eligible to register for the practicum course during the semester that they begin their practicum hours, registering for this course requires the practicum director's permission.

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## **Completing the Practicum Experience**

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### **Student Responsibilities during Placement**

1. Students must meet all the terms of the learning contract within the accepted practicum site standards of quality.
2. Students will arrange meetings with the field supervisor/preceptor to discuss progress of the learning activities or project.
3. Students are responsible for advising the practicum director of any difficulties with the practicum placement.
4. Students are required to keep track of their personal and professional learning experiences during their practicum by submitting an electronic journal weekly to the practicum director.
5. Students must prepare and submit a final practicum paper on the field experience to the practicum director prior to the final exam week for the last semester in which they are registered for practicum credit.

### **Weekly Practicum Journal**

The weekly journal allows students to document their experiences with the practicum site, as well as their observations of the organization, its leadership and the strengths and challenges of public health practice. The journal is a series of personal reflections that communicate the impact of the experience from the student view. Entries should be made at least once a week and include specific accounts of experiences, interactions, observations and time completed. Journals can be used to create the final practicum paper. Please see Appending E for journal example:

- What did the student learn; what was difficult?
- How did the social/personal interactions work out?

- What did the student learn from the MPH courses that helped with the practicum this week?

### **Exit Interview with Preceptor and/or Field Supervisor and Practicum Evaluation**

At the completion of the practicum, the student should schedule an appointment to meet with their preceptor/field supervisor to provide feedback of their experience at the site and their performance and results of the practicum. At this time, the student and preceptor/field supervisor should fill out the practicum evaluation forms. This experience will enhance the student's abilities to consult with others on program evaluation and provide the student with practice in providing technical assistance.

Students are responsible for distributing, completing and submitting practicum evaluation forms after their practicum experience is completed. Please see Appendix D for the following forms:

1. Student Evaluation of the Practicum
2. Preceptor Evaluation of Student
3. Field Supervisor Evaluation of Student (if appropriate)

If the student's preceptor is serving as field supervisor, then only the preceptor form should be filled out. These forms must be turned in with the final practicum paper. The practicum director will not assign a grade for the practicum until all of the forms and the final practicum paper have been turned in prior to the deadline for submitting grades for the semester in which the student is registered for the practicum.

### **Final Practicum Paper Guidelines**

To complete the practicum, students must submit a final practicum paper to the practicum director. The final practicum paper consists of an overview of the practicum related activities, description and analysis of the practicum experience and skill building experiences at least one core public health function (assessment, policy or assurance).

The final practicum paper will include the following content:

- Include a brief summary of practicum placement, preceptor, general outline of practicum activities, scope of project and timeline for project.
- Outline the student learning objectives from your practicum proposal.
  - Describe in detail what activities you undertook to meet your learning objectives.
  - Evaluate the extent to which you were able to meet each learning objective.
  - Include analysis of barriers to complete learning objectives and supply recommendations for how the practicum could have been structured differently to meet the objectives, if applicable.
  - Compare your initial vision of what you wanted to accomplish with what actually happened.
- Report practicum accomplishments and/or outcomes of any projects.
  - What specific products are you leaving with the site?
  - What has the site been able to accomplish with your assistance?
- Describe the role of your preceptor and/or field supervisor in the site.

- What skills did they bring to your practicum experience?
- What did you learn from them as public health professionals?
- Describe the site's (or your) theoretical framework for approaching the public health issue that was the subject of your practicum.
  - Describe how the site works with the major stakeholders and constituencies to address the issue.
  - Describe the various professional roles and capabilities needed to address the health problem (process and content knowledge/skill needs); how the site and health problem are affected by the larger public health and political environment.
- Describe your practicum experience in terms of a particular core function of public health.
  - Explore how your chosen core function informs and interacts with the other two core public health functions in both theory and practice.
- Recommendations:
  - What specific recommendations would you provide this site in furthering their organizational capability?
  - What recommendations would you provide the practicum director in structuring the practicum experience?
- Appendix: Any products that you would like to share, such as brochures, reports, or any other relevant material.
- The final practicum paper should be between 10-15 pages in length. Double spaced, 12 font, page numbered, one inch margin and include reference page.

### **Practicum Presentation**

Upon completion of the practicum experience, students are required to give a short presentation to faculty and students.

The practicum presentation is an opportunity to showcase the experiential work completed. The primary audience is the MPH faculty. You are welcome to invite your preceptor and/or field supervisor. The presentation is **7-10** minutes. You will have **5** minutes after the presentation for questions. Presentation slides are limited to **8** slides; pictures and/or examples of products will enhance your presentation. Bring to your presentation any reports, videos, poster presentations, curriculum, and/or policy that you created during your practicum experience.

The format of the presentation should include the following information:

1. Name of the site or organization in which you conducted your practicum and the name of your preceptor(s) and/or field supervisors;
2. Goals and objectives of the practicum;
3. A brief summary of what you did as part of your practicum (this may or may not include your learning objectives);
4. Highlights and challenges of your experience;
5. What you learned, produced, and/or accomplished;
6. Lastly, how you believe you can use the experience in future work; and  
References and acknowledgements (Ex. I would like to thank \_\_\_\_\_, my preceptor, field supervisor, etc.)



5. Please rank your preference for field training professional setting from 1-10.

_____	Public Health Department, (local)	_____ (location)
_____	Government Health Agency (State)	_____ (location)
_____	Government Health Agency (Federal)	_____ (location)
_____	Hospital	
_____	Community Clinic	
_____	Community based organization	
_____	Consulting Firm	
_____	Social Services Agency	
_____	Foundation/Research Institutions	
_____	Union/Labor Organization	
_____	Industry/Insurance	
_____	HMO	
_____	Private Voluntary Organization	
_____	Indian Health Service	
_____	Ethnic Specific Target population	
_____	Urban	
_____	Rural	
_____	Reservation	
_____	Other: _____	

6. Please list other factors to be considered in your practicum.

## APPENDIX B

### Suggested practicum sites/resources

New Mexico Department of Health <https://nmhealth.org>.

Indian Health Service <http://www.ihs.gov>.

HRSA <http://www.hrsa.gov>.

Pan American Health Organization <http://www.paho.org>.

World Health Organization <http://www.who.int/en/>.

CDC <http://www.cdc.gov/train.htm>.

Bright Futures <http://www.brightfutures.org>.

Public Health Foundation <http://www.phf.org/PHFiobs/index.htm>.

UNM Comprehensive Cancer Center <http://www.cancer.unm.edu>.

Public Health Employment Connection  
<http://cfusion.sph.emory.edu/PHEC/index.cfm?CFID=17996922&CFTOKEN=52717894>.

New Mexico Voices for Children <http://www.nmvoices.org>.

Albuquerque Area Indian Health Board <http://www.aaihb.org>.

Southwest Women's Law Center <http://www.swwomenslaw.org>.

Chronic Disease Prevention Council - New Mexico <http://www.chronicdiseasenm.org>.

UNM Prevention Research Center <http://prc.unm.edu>.

Peanut Butter & Jelly Family Services, Inc. <http://www.pbjfamilyservices.org>.

Planned Parenthood of the Rocky Mountains, Inc. <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-rocky-mountains>.

SouthWest Organizing Project: SWOP <http://www.swop.net>.

Presbyterian Health Services <http://phs.org>.

NM Emerging Infections Program <http://www.nmhealth.org/about/erd/ideb/eip/>.

Region 6 South Central Public Health Training Center <http://r6phtc.sph.tulane.edu/>.

Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health (ASPPH) <http://www.aspph.org>.

American Public Health Association (APHA) <http://www.apha.org>.

## APPENDIX C

Summer	20 _____
Fall	20 _____
Spring	20 _____

### Practicum Learning Contract

Student Name:

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Agency/Organization:

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\* Agency Field Supervisor (required):

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\*\*Public Health Preceptor (if needed)

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Practicum proposed for \_\_\_\_\_ Semester 20\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ Credits

If practicum will not be completed during this semester, indicate additional semester(s) and credits

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#### **Project Description**

Write a brief proposal that includes: 1) the nature and scope of the proposed practicum; 2) the tasks performed during the practicum and resources provided to complete the tasks; 3) the length of the practicum and location in which the tasks will be performed; 4) the final product(s) to be left at the field site upon completion of the training. Attach student practicum proposal to this agreement. (Send proposal to preceptor and field supervisor.)

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#### **Student responsibilities in carrying out the project:**

1. Maintain a work schedule agreed upon with the preceptor.
2. Complete the specified tasks of the project, including journal and final paper.
3. Meet with the Field Supervisor in weekly scheduled supervisory sessions to discuss the progress of the project.
4. Meet with the Public Health Preceptor in monthly meetings.
5. Initiate and schedule initial meeting with Practicum Director and second meeting with Practicum Director and the Field Supervisor/Preceptor.

**Field Supervisor/Preceptor responsibilities in supervising the project:**

1. Orient the student to the agency/organization.
2. Assist the student in gaining access to information and data required for the project.
3. Maintain contact with the MPH faculty as needed, provide a final evaluation on the student's performance, and meet with the Practicum Director and student near the end of the practicum experience.
4. Meet with the student in regularly scheduled supervisory sessions.
5. Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Expected schedule of student time in the agency/organization (e.g., hours per week).

Expected schedule for supervisory meetings between student and field supervisor (minimum once a week).

Specify arrangements for student work space in agency, if applicable. .

Specify arrangements for student access to information, personnel, data, data processing, and other materials necessary for completion of the project. If special permission is required for access to data, records or clients, how will such permission be arranged?

I have participated in development of the practicum proposal and agree to the conditions specified above. If it becomes necessary to change any of the specified conditions, I agree to make the changes know to each of the persons whose signatures appear below.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Preceptor Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Field Supervisor Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
UM Faculty Advisor Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
UNM Practicum Director Signature Date

## APPENDIX D

Summer	20_____
Fall	20_____
Spring	20_____

### Preceptor Evaluation of Student

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Preceptor: \_\_\_\_\_

It is important to remember that the Practicum is an integral component of the student’s professional training in Public Health. This evaluation will help shape the student’s course of study during the rest of their program at UNM as well as provide input for the planning of future practicum experiences and curriculum improvement. If you have questions, please call the Practicum Director at (505) 272-9879.

**General Evaluation:**

Please check the appropriate box. Check the number which best represents your answer. Five (5) represents the highest score, one (1) represents the lowest score or NA if not applicable.

		High 5	4	3	2	Low 1	NA
Drive and Initiative							
Priority setting: problem solving decision making							
Interpersonal skills: groups and individual							
Ideas and change							
Planning organization/project/program – development, management, evaluation							
Computer techniques-financial, management information systems, etc.							
Problem Analysis and Solution							
Basic research design of methodology, data collection and analysis, literature search							
Communications-conveying ideas persuasively, convincingly and concisely so that others can understand	Verbal						
	Written						
Policy research, drafting legislation, negotiation, implementation							
Assessment skills							









Summer	20	_____
Fall	20	_____
Spring	20	_____

**Field Supervisor Evaluation of Student**

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Field Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

It is important to remember that the Practicum is an integral component of the student's professional training in Public Health. This evaluation will help shape the student's course of study during the rest of their program at UN M as well as provide input for the planning of future practicum experiences and curriculum improvement. If you have questions, please call the Practicum Director at (505) 272-9879.

**General Evaluation:**

Please check the appropriate box. Check the number which best represents your answer. Five (5) represents the highest score, one (1) represents the lowest score or NA if not applicable.

		High 5	4	3	2	Low 1	NA
Drive and Initiative							
Priority setting: problem solving decision making							
Interpersonal skills: groups and individual							
Ideas and change							
Planning organization/project/program – development, management, evaluation							
Computer techniques-financial, management information systems, etc.							
Problem Analysis and Solution							
Basic research design of methodology, data collection and analysis, literature search							
Communications-conveying ideas persuasively, convincingly and concisely so that others can understand	Verbal						
	Written						
Policy research, drafting legislation, negotiation, implementation							
Assessment skills							

**Overall Evaluation:**

1. Did the student meet the objectives stipulated in the student's Learning Contract for the Practicum Placement?
2. To what extent did the student's work contribute to the mission and direction of your organization?
3. On the whole, how would you rate the student's performance?
4. Do you or your program or agency wish to continue to provide supervised field practice placements in the future?
5. Additional comments (you may comment about the student and or feedback on any aspect of the UNM MPH Practicum placement process including the role of the Practicum program and staff at the UNM MPH Program):

Summer	20_____
Fall	20_____
Spring	20_____

### Student Journal Example

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Practicum Journal: Semester \_\_\_\_\_ Practicum start date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** (of journal entry):

**Description of Activity(ies) for each week:**

**Total hours completed:**

**Remaining hours:**

**Final Notes & Observations** [*Reflection piece. Ex 1) What you learned; 2) What you would have done differently; 3) Your interactions with your preceptor/field supervisor; 4) How your MPH coursework aided your week of experiences*]

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Example of Rachel Mnuk's Journal (Permission granted September 18, 2016)

**Journal Entry Dates: August 22<sup>nd</sup> – August 28<sup>th</sup>**

*Activity Description:* Continued interviews with both providers and patients, and research team meeting wherein we reviewed transcripts and began coding the data.

*Total Hours Complete:* 94      *Remaining Hours:* 66

*Final Notes and Observations:* With continued interviews, I have seen a lot of variability in recruitment day-to-day, with both providers and patients. This week, I was able to obtain an interview hourly some days, while being declined by each of the patients I saw the next day. It can be a little discouraging, but overall, it's been a good lesson in the difficulties of participant recruitment. We also started reviewing transcripts and coding our findings by establishing patters in how questions were answered. This was also a learning experiences for me; I have never had to interpret my own data before, so it was interesting to see how you must comb through transcripts to find repeated words and phrases. Determining patters in qualitative research is much more time-consuming than I would expect, particularly because our research group must agree upon what themes are present. The biggest thing I would have done differently is familiarize myself more with Dedoose prior to using the program. Again, it is difficult when I have never tried coding before, so I feel as though reading more through the tutorials would have been helpful. Although it is difficult to gain practical skills without actually using the program and entering data, which we have just now began. This week I also checked in with Dr. Pereda twice; once at the clinic while doing interviews, wherein she just touched base on how the interviews were going, and once while we met as a research team to review transcripts and begin coding our data. Finally, my public health coursework came into play in interpreting our data. Epidemiology has regularly made me concerned about bias in our study, but this week it took on a new concern. I remember from reviewing articles that researchers could bias their data due to preconceived notions about what the study would find. While reviewing the interviews, I had to remind myself that even though I had assumptions about what we would find, I could not let that affect our final results. Again, it was helpful to experience something in the field that we had discussed previously in classes.