

**Department of Public Health Education**  
**MPH Internship**  
***Student Guidelines***



THE UNIVERSITY *of* NORTH CAROLINA  
**GREENSBORO**

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# The UNCG MPH Internship

## Introduction to the UNCG MPH Internship

In addition to the field-based learning experiences that are part of the courses throughout the program, students are required to integrate and synthesize their acquired skills and knowledge in an applied situation that approximates some aspect of professional practice in community health education. This is done through an internship/practicum in a community health agency (HEA 650: Community Health Internship/Practicum). Prior to the internship/practicum, students plan their work in an applied program planning class (HEA 648: Applied Program Planning). These two courses and the experiences they provide constitute the Capstone Experience of the MPH program.

An internship is a structured, planned, and supervised professional experience for which the student receives academic credit. The well designed internship should engage students in a unique learning relationship involving a three-way partnership between the student, the site preceptor, and the faculty internship coordinator. The internship should provide the student with a critical learning opportunity that links academic knowledge with practical experience while providing a beneficial service to the preceptor organization. By carefully applying the graduate level skills of the MPH program into an experiential process the internship provides a different experience than volunteer or paid work. Although an internship may allow students the opportunity to build professional contacts and/or be paid, that is not its primary purpose. Neither is the purpose of the internship to provide “cheap” labor to often under-staffed or under-resourced agencies. And although an internship is typically practice-based, at its core it is an educational experience and should therefore be designed to contribute to the student’s intellectual and ethical growth.

Students plan their internship in the fall during a program planning course (HEA 648) and implement their internship during the subsequent spring semester. Internships are a minimum of 180 hours.

The following are key characteristics of an MPH internship:

1. It is an educational experience.
2. The work/activities are designed to provide opportunity for both student learning and benefits to the agency.
3. It is guided by the student’s personal learning goals.
4. It is planned. The plan consists of identifying a health and non-health problem; developing internship goals and objectives; activities/strategies for achieving these goals and objectives; and a timeline and budget (monetary and non-monetary).
5. It is situated within an appropriate agency, supervised by qualified agency personnel.
6. It involves ongoing interaction between the student and a faculty internship coordinator.
7. It involves student reflection and evaluation.
8. It involves graduate level work and assessment.

## Internship Definitions

### **Faculty Internship Coordinator**

The faculty member in the Department of Public Health Education who is responsible for coordinating and managing the internship experience. This is typically the course instructor for HEA 648: Applied Program Planning.

### **Intern**

A student from the Department of Public Health Education who has met all prerequisites for HEA 650 and is undergoing supervised professional fieldwork training.

### **Internship**

An internship is a structured, planned, and supervised professional experience for which the student receives academic credit.

### **Internship Site**

The agency, organization, community group, coalition, institution or university setting that is sponsoring the student's internship experience. The agency has been approved by the University as an appropriate site for providing fieldwork experiences to graduate MPH students.

### **Preceptor**

The agency staff person who will supervise the student at the internship placement site. Preceptors should, at a minimum, be academically prepared in community health education, have an MPH or have at least 5 years professional experience in the field as a practitioner and a supervisor.

### **Research and Graduate Assistantships**

Each academic year select students are chosen to fill Research Assistant and Graduate Assistant appointments by the department. These appointments provide opportunities to graduate students to assist with the advancement of the department's mission or to work with community partners on research/project related activities. These assistantships should not be confused with the MPH Internship experience.

## Steps and Timeline for the Internship process

For your internship (HEA 650), you will implement a planned health education project for which you have primary responsibility. Prior to the internship, you will take Applied Program Planning (HEA 648), during which you will plan your internship. Full-time students will take HEA 648 in the Fall Semester of their 2<sup>nd</sup> year in the program; part-time students will take HEA 648 in the Fall Semester of their 3<sup>rd</sup> year in the program. Students will take HEA 650 in their final Spring Semester (2<sup>nd</sup> year for full-time students, 3<sup>rd</sup> year for part-time students). You will spend a minimum of 180 hours on your internship activities. In addition to these 180 hours, you

will participate in various web-based learning activities facilitated by the faculty internship coordinator.

### Summary of key steps:

Step	Time-line	
	Full-time students	Part-time students
1. Identify your interests as well as personal and professional goals (Statement of Personal Purpose).	Fall-spring semester, 1 <sup>st</sup> yr.	Fall-spring semester 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr.
2. Select an internship site.	Spring-summer, 1 <sup>st</sup> yr.	Spring-summer 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr.
3. Get site approved by internship coordinator.	As soon as possible; must have approval first day of HEA 648 (Fall, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr.)	As soon as possible; must have approval first day of HEA 648 (Fall, 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr.)
4. Prepare MPH Internship Proposal.	First weeks of HEA 648 (Fall, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr.)	First weeks of HEA 648 (Fall, 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr.)
5. Prepare internship program plan detailing planned internship activities.	Fall, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr. during HEA 648	Fall, 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr. during HEA 648
6. In the field carrying out internship activities.	Spring, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr. during HEA 650	Spring, 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr. During HEA 650
7. Prepare internship reports and evaluations.	Spring, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr.	Spring, 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr.
8. Participate in Internship Poster Session	End Spring, 2 <sup>nd</sup> yr.	End Spring, 3 <sup>rd</sup> yr.

### Semester-by-semester overview:

The semester-by-semester timeline below offers additional guidance for fulfilling your internship requirements. Depending on your particular situation, the specific due dates may vary but must be approved by the internship coordinator and internship coordinator/advisor in advance.

#### Fall semester, 1<sup>st</sup> year Full-time students

#### Fall semester, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year Part-time students

- Think about what you want to accomplish through your internship experience. Do you want to:
  - Learn a new skill?
  - Improve a skill you already have?
  - Continue to work in a familiar content area (e.g. family planning, injury prevention)?
  - Explore a new content area?
  - Focus on a specific population?
- Talk/meet with:
  - Previous or second year students about their projects.
  - PHE, or other, faculty who share your interests.
  - the internship coordinator/advisor about interests and personal goals for the internship
  - Current preceptors attending the spring semester Student Internship Poster Session (typically held the first Monday in May).

Spring semester 1<sup>st</sup> year Full-time students  
Spring semester 2<sup>nd</sup> year Part-time students

- Meet with internship coordinator/advisor to discuss potential internship interests and placements.
- Check internship board/Blackboard regularly - Requests are posted as they come in.
- Identify agencies that can help you achieve your personal learning objectives.
- Contact agencies to further discuss details of proposed projects. Negotiate with the agency to define a project that will suit your needs as well as theirs.
- Begin the personal learning plan by identifying learning objectives and a set of activities that could help you achieve them.
- Get initial approval for internship site from faculty internship coordinator.

Fall semester 2<sup>nd</sup> year Full-time students  
Fall semester 3<sup>rd</sup> year Part-time students

- **DEADLINE:** Have your internship site identified and approved by the faculty internship coordinator by the beginning of the Fall semester, 2<sup>nd</sup> year for full-time students and Fall semester 3<sup>rd</sup> year for part-time students.
- Develop an internship program plan based on negotiations with agency and discussions with faculty internship coordinator. *\*\*Remember: you will work a minimum of 180 hours on your internship\*\**
- Finalize the internship program plan.
- **DEADLINE:** Have the internship learning plan and agreement signed your internship preceptor and the internship coordinator/advisor by the exam date for HEA 648.

Spring semester 2<sup>nd</sup> year Full-time students  
Spring semester 3<sup>rd</sup> year Part-time students

- Begin your internship
- Participate in web-based learning activities
- If needed, set up a mid-project conference with internship coordinator/advisor and preceptor for February/March.
- Prepare a final manuscript
- Prepare a professional poster for the Poster Showcase

## Ensuring a Quality Internship

### The “learning edge”

We encourage you to identify an internship experience that is at the “learning edge”, that is, one that takes you outside your comfort zone and helps you learn new skills. It is important to find an opportunity that allows you the opportunity to implement in practice the ideas, concepts and skills you have learned in the classroom. This is why an internship is primarily a learning experience, not a “retread” of skills and experiences you held prior to entering the graduate program. Because it is a learning experience, both preceptors and students need to recognize that you are free to ask questions, ask for help as appropriate, and, generally, feel free to not be an expert. The corollary is that a good preceptor is one who can help teach and guide you as you learn new skills and how navigate the organization and community.

At the same time, you need remember what you learned in the classroom, or in other work experiences, about good health education practice. However, in most work settings what is important to the agency is not so much what you know but what you can do; the usefulness of your knowledge and information depends on what you can do with it. This essentially, is the value, and the challenge, of the internship experience for both you and the agency: learning how to implement good practice.

## Suggested Types of Internship Experiences

As you approach your internship, you should consider the knowledge and skills you have gained through the MPH program. The MPH internship should be approached as an opportunity to apply these new skills to the needs of organizations fulfilling a public health function. As a graduate level internship, its mission is beyond a typical undergraduate internship in which exposure to the professional work environment is its main goal. You should approach this experience as an opportunity to leave an agency better off due to your internship efforts. Your internship could cover many aspect of the profession but should specifically target one or more of the recognized professional Areas of Responsibility/Competency.

## Graduate-level competencies

A quality internship is one that provides you the opportunity to learn/practice advanced/graduate-level health education competencies not entry-level competencies. You must include advance/graduate-level competencies as part of your learning objectives

## National Health Educator Competencies \*

*Responsibility Areas with Competencies: (\*indicates higher than entry-level competency)*

### **I. Assess Individual and Community Needs for Health Education**

- Competency A: Access existing health-related data
- Competency B: Collect health related data
- Competency C: Distinguish between behaviors that foster or hinder well-being
- Competency D\*: Determine factors that influence learning
- Competency E: Identify factors that foster or hinder process of health education
- Competency F: Infer needs for health education from obtained data

### **II. Plan Health Education Strategies, Interventions, and Programs**

- Competency A: Involve people and organizations in program planning
- Competency B: Incorporate data analysis and principles of community organization
- Competency C: Formulate appropriate and measurable program objectives
- Competency D: Develop a logical scope and sequence plan for health education practice
- Competency E\*: Design strategies, interventions, and programs consistent with specified objectives
- Competency F: Select appropriate strategies to objectives
- Competency G: Assess factors that affect implementation

### **III. Implement Health Education Strategies, Interventions, and Programs**

- Competency A: Initiate a plan of action
- Competency B: Demonstrate a variety of skills in delivering strategies, interventions, and programs
- Competency C: Use a variety of methods to implement strategies, interventions, and programs
- Competency D\*: Conduct training programs

### **IV. Conduct Evaluation and Research Related to Health Education**

- Competency A: Develop plans for evaluation and research
- Competency B: Review research and evaluation procedures
- Competency C: Design data collection instruments
- Competency D: Carry out evaluation and research plans
- Competency E: Interpret results from evaluation and research
- Competency F\*: Infer implications from findings for future health-related activities

### **V. Administer Health Education Strategies, Interventions, and Programs**

- Competency A: Exercise organizational leadership
- Competency B\*: Secure fiscal resources
- Competency C: Manage human resources
- Competency D\*: Obtain acceptance and support for programs

### **VI. Serve as a Health Education Resource Person**

- Competency A: Use health-related information resources
- Competency B: Respond to requests for health information
- Competency C: Select resource materials for dissemination
- Competency D: Establish consultative relationships

### **VII. Communicate and Advocate for Health and Health Education**

- Competency A: Analyze and respond to current and future needs in health education
- Competency B: Apply a variety of communication methods and techniques
- Competency C: Promote the health education profession individually and collectively
- Competency D: Influence health policy to promote health

\* From the National Commission for Health Education Credentialing, Inc.

## Determine your personal learning objective

A prerequisite to locating a good site is to determine what you want to gain and learn from the internship. For this reason, we ask that students consider and complete the personal learning plan before identifying an internship site. This learning plan (Attachment A) includes a

discussion of your: learning objectives; strategies and task for achieving these objectives: and a discussion of how you will know you have achieved these objectives. Ideally, you will use this learning plan to guide your search for the internship sites, tailoring your search to those agencies/sites that can help you achieve your objectives. This learning plan must include advanced-graduate level competencies.

### Identifying a quality site

The process of finding an appropriate location for an internship begins when you enter the program, becoming refined as you identify your learning objectives. You may want to review posted project proposals as well as talk with faculty and other personal contacts to begin identifying possible opportunities. Agencies may go through a ‘hiring’ process whereby they request student resumes, interview interested students and select the most appropriate candidate. In some cases, a project may be extensive enough that two interested students can work on the same project. If a project can provide sufficient independent experience for each student, then two students may work on the project. Students must get approval to do so from the internship coordinator/advisor.

Once you have identified a potential agency, you should initiate contact with the internship coordinator/advisor to discuss it. With some exceptions, you will then contact the agency directly. If you are interested in a working on a project that relates to a faculty’s research activities, that faculty member will also need to agree to serve as an additional internship advisor.

The following are things to consider in locating a good quality site:

- Is there a qualified preceptor (see below for specifics)?
- Does the preceptor have the time to devote to “the job”?
- Are there appropriate resources at the site?
- Can you achieve your learning goals at this site?
- Are the preceptor and/or other key agency personnel open to new ideas or ways of doing things?
- Are the logistics and conditions appropriate given your personal constraints: can you get to the site, can you afford to work there, does it accommodate your schedule?

### Identifying a qualified preceptor

The qualities of the preceptor in many respects are more important than those of the agency. The preceptor is ideally a person who knows health education and understands the complex work of health educators, is willing and able to put in the necessary time, and is willing to work in partnership with the university as a teacher. The following are qualities of a good preceptor:

- Has a graduate degree in health education (MPH, MEd). Although we could approve people without this educational background as preceptors, we will do so on a case-by-

- case basis. Those who do not have a graduate degree in health education will need to indicate that the combination of their educational and employment background ensures they are qualified to supervise a graduate-level health education internship.
- Is willing, and has time to be, a mentor.
  - Is willing to evaluate the student's work.
  - Agrees to: meet with the student to help develop/approve the work plan; provide the resources called for in the program plan; oversee the duties/work and be available for counsel and advise; meet with the student at least once a week; meet with the internship director for a mid-course conference; and evaluate the student's performance.
  - Gives the student opportunities to attend meetings as appropriate (staff, committee, community, policy, legislative).
  - Explains how decisions are made.
  - Speaks directly to the student if there are problems. If the preceptor is unsure how to proceed or deal with an issue, we recommend contacting the internship coordinator/advisor directly.
  - Gives the student credit and recognition for his/her own work.
  - Gives the student opportunities to attend professional seminars, workshops or other learning opportunities available to the agency staff.
  - Gives the student the opportunity to observe other areas of the agency or other important work the agency is engage in.
  - Gives the student the opportunity to meet the administration or other key members of the management or directing team.
  - Provides the student the opportunity to meet those within or outside the agency who could be helpful contacts for future employment.
  - Gives constructive, descriptive evaluation
  - Helps the student understand his/her job in relationship to other jobs/programs in the agency.

### An internship at work

We discourage you from pursuing an internship at your current worksite. If you wish to have your employing agency also serve as the site for your internship you will need to get approval from the internship coordinator/advisor early on in the process. At a minimum, to qualify as an appropriate internship site, your worksite must meet the following criteria:

- Agree that the internship is primarily an educational experience.
- Agree that evaluation of the student's on-the job performance will remain independent of the internship preceptor's evaluation of the student's performance of during the internship.
- Provide the opportunity for the student to learn advanced/graduate-level skills and competencies.
- Provide a qualified preceptor who is not the student's supervisor at work; a quality preceptor is one who has the qualities discussed earlier.

- Provide for/allow an internship activity that is separate and apart from the student's normal work.
- Agree that the student must have the opportunity to "fail" or "learn in a safe environment" without jeopardizing their employment.
- Agree for the preceptor to meet with the internship coordinator/advisor prior to UNCG making a final determination about the appropriateness of the site for the internship.

## International Internships

It is possible to set up an international internship experience for those who are interested. If you are interested, please contact the department's internship coordinator as soon as possible.

## Departmental/University Policies

### Sexual Harassment

UNCG has a sexual harassment policy; you may access this policy at [http://www.uncg.edu/cha/UNIVERSITY\\_COUNSEL/FAQ](http://www.uncg.edu/cha/UNIVERSITY_COUNSEL/FAQ). Although this policy applies to you as a student here at UNCG, the policy does not apply to internship sites. Thus, if you are experiencing sexual harassment at your internship site this policy does not protect you. If you believe you are experiencing sexual harassment at your internship site we encourage you to contact the internship coordinator/advisor to discuss your options.

### Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Students must confer with their internship coordinator/advisor to check whether their internship activities will require IRB approval. Resolving this issue early in the project planning process is the student's (with faculty support) responsibility. For questions or more information about the IRB at UNCG go to: <http://www.uncg.edu/rsh/orc/humanres.html>

### Personal Liability Insurance

We recommend you obtain personal liability insurance if you do not already have it. It is possible that the agency where you do your internship will have a blanket liability policy that will include you as an intern. If not, you can purchase your own through the department of Public Health Education.

### Withdrawal from an internship

The department can withdraw a student from an internship if the situation warrants such action. No one has to feel trapped into an undesirable situation. The agency also has the right to terminate an internship for just and reasonable cause.

### Departmental Resources

Unless your preceptor is a faculty member in the department, the department does not pay for or provide resources/supplies you may need for your internship. The department does not

provide office supplies and students will not be reimbursed by the department for supplies/resources they purchase with their own money. Students should try to have their agency provide any necessary supplies. Students are also not allowed to use departmental resources for their internship; this includes the copier, fax, telephone, computer, paper, and other office supplies. If you find that you need some assistance please contact the internship coordinator/advisor.