

Practicum FAQ for Students

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1. What is a practicum?

A practicum is a unique opportunity for graduate students to integrate and apply practical knowledge and skills learned through coursework and prior experiences in a professional public health work environment. The Rollins School of Public Health (RSPH) requires all students to participate in a practicum experience, as required by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH). Public health work environments include not-for-profit organizations, hospitals, local health departments, and for-profit firms. A typical practicum experience requires students to work 200-400 hours under the direct supervision of a Field Supervisor and the guidance of the student's department.

2. When should I begin my search for a practicum opportunity?

You may not begin your practicum until after you complete your first semester (if part-time, after completion of at least 9 credit hours), but during your first semester, you should keep an open mind and start thinking about what you would like to do. Networking with professors, alumni and community partners should begin early on in your Rollins career. Again, you may begin your practicum at the beginning of the second semester, although, many students complete their practicum over the summer between their second and third semester.

[Please Note: EMPH students have a different timeline. For those who are taking three courses a semester, you may begin your practicum in the summer 2017 semester; those taking 2 courses per semester, may start in the fall 2017 semester.]

3. How do I start preparing for the practicum?

Begin by thinking about your professional goals, your strengths and weakness. What competencies do you have and what competencies would you like to gain or enhance before you graduate? List your goals for the practicum. Then explore opportunities with individuals or agencies that can provide you with the type of experience you want. Before starting your practicum, each student should ensure that his/her resume has been evaluated, reviewed, and revised by Career Development. Career Development offers seminars and events every semester on resumes, cover letters, and interviewing techniques, which all serve as key elements in obtaining the ideal practicum.

4. How do I find a practicum?

The idea for a practicum experience can come from many places. Some students know of an organization with which they want to work. Other students know there is a specific content area they want to explore and they seek out agencies in those content areas. Students may also seek potential opportunities by contacting organizations of interest, networking, and applying to openings posted on ROL Handshake or through Career Development.

During the school year, students may also find work study or part time positions that may develop into a practicum experience, such as those through the Rollins Earn and Learn (REAL) program. Additionally, opportunities are continually being developed through departments for students to enrich their learning through structured professional experiences. You might also want to explore a page on the RSPH website called "Where to Find a Practicum" (<https://www.sph.emory.edu/rollins-life/community-engaged-learning/practicum/find-a-practicum/index.html>).

5. Do I register for the practicum?

Yes. Students must register for the practicum. This is through OPUS, just like registering for other classes. Please see your ADAP for more information.

6. Is permission required before starting a practicum?

In order to start your practicum, you and your Field Supervisor need to agree upon the goal and objectives that structure the practicum experience. These objectives should align with the school's core instructional competencies and the specific program competencies of your degree. These need to be entered into the practicum database. Departments will ask you to complete a Practicum Agreement Form (this is a sample), which includes critical information you will need to confirm before starting a practicum. **Please check with your department ADAP to see if this type of form or any other forms are required.**

In addition, all international students should authorize their Curricular Practicum Training (CPT) from International Student and Scholar Programs (ISSP), for all non-campus employment, before starting their practicum. Authorization for CPT will be granted for one semester or summer term per request. If a student wishes to extend the period of authorization, a new request with new supporting documentation must be submitted.

7. Is there a minimum amount of time that must be spent on the practicum?

A typical practicum experience requires students to work a range of 200-400 hours under the supervision of an experienced Field Supervisor and the guidance of the student's department.

8. Are the practicum requirements the same for all MPH/MSPH students?

Yes, all MPH/MSPH students are required to complete an approved practicum or structured field experience for at least 200 hours. A practicum is a required element for professional public health degree students at the master's and doctoral levels to **apply the knowledge and skills being acquired through their courses** of study. Practical knowledge and skills are essential to successful practice.

9. Can the practicum be waived?

No. Exemptions are not granted for the practicum experience. The practicum is a supervised experience based upon the application of graduate level competencies gained during your professional education program. Your work experience prior to coming to graduate school, while important to a professional place of work, was not by definition guided by the learning that occurred during your educational experiences. Therefore, prior work experience does not substitute for a practicum.

10. Can I complete a practicum at my current (or past) place of employment?

Yes, but it must fit into the practicum requirements. The practicum must be completed while a student is enrolled in their MPH program and the practicum must include a specific project that is beyond your previous or past position. The practicum must be tied to the school's core instructional competencies, the student's degree competencies and fit into objectives approved by the Field Supervisor. It cannot simply be a continuation of a previous role.

11. Does my practicum have to focus on my department or area of study in my department?

The purpose of the practicum is to ensure that professional students have a supervised experience in their chosen field or career aspirations. In general, yes, a student's practicum should match their area of study in their department, but there may be some exceptions. This should be discussed with your department ADAP or Practicum Faculty Advisor.

12. What if I have no clue of what I want to do for a practicum?

Review your professional goals; the practicum should be closely related to these. If you are still having problems, schedule a meeting with your Practicum Faculty Advisor, ADAP or Career Development.

13. What constitutes a legitimate practicum?

A typical practicum experience requires students to work a minimum of 200-400 hours under the supervision of an experienced field supervisor and under the guidance of the student's department (ADAP and Practicum Faculty Advisor). A suitable practicum is a planned, supervised and evaluated practice experience, related to a student's academic goals and professional interests, to apply knowledge and skills acquired through coursework in a community-based environment. Each practicum should:

- Be based on well-defined competencies/learning objectives
- Include a process to track and evaluate student performance, competency achievement and practical experiences
- Be supervised, primarily, by a qualified Field Supervisor (a public health practitioner qualified to evaluate the professional competence of the student)
- Take place in a variety of agencies and organizations including local and state public health agencies to the extent possible and appropriate

14. Are there restrictions on where my practicum can be located?

No. Students can seek practicum experience in a range of field sites. The intent is for students to have a variety of experiences both at RSPH and in other agencies while in graduate school. Students have completed practica in the Atlanta metropolitan area, in other locations throughout the state, across the country and around the world.

15. Can I be paid for my practicum or receive reimbursements?

Yes, usually a practicum opportunity will be a paid position for a student. However, some students may be willing to work in unpaid opportunities if the project is closely aligned with their career goals and interests. The school manages and funds several programs to facilitate field placements, such as the RSPH [Rollins Earn and Learn Program \(REAL\)](#) and the [Global Field Experience](#). Many students are attracted to Rollins because it promotes an "earn while you learn" approach in an environment offering numerous opportunities for gaining an experience in the practice of public health.

16. What is my Practicum Faculty Advisor's role in the practicum?

Practicum Faculty Advisors may help locate practicum opportunities and possible site preceptors, review learning objectives and certify completion.

17. What are the Field Supervisor's responsibilities for the practicum?

A Field Supervisor (sometimes called a site supervisor or preceptor) will serve as a liaison between the school and work site, providing direct supervision to the student. Occasionally, they will serve in a mentoring role, providing the students with valuable guidance, insights and lessons that can only be gleaned from years of professional experience.

Field Supervisors are responsible for the following:

- Develop mutually agreeable practicum goals and objectives with the practicum student(s) at the beginning of the experience.
- Remain available (on site) to supervise and direct students during the experience.
- Provide feedback to the student and the school by completing an online evaluation form at the end of the experience. Supervisors should schedule time to meet face-to-face and discuss this feedback.
- Complete Field Supervisor Profile (contact info, credentials and work-setting/content experiences) in the online system.

18. Can my Practicum Faculty Advisor be my Field Supervisor?

No. A Field Supervisor is someone who oversees and supervises a student's professional work in the field and evaluates their work. Whereas, a Practicum Faculty Advisor is the one who would help a student locate practicum opportunities and possible Field Supervisors, review learning objectives and certify completion. If needed, the Practicum Faculty Advisor can step in and assist the student should issues come up between the student and Field Supervisor.

19. What is the grading system for the practicum?

The practicum grading system at the Rollins School of Public Health is on a Pass/Fail grading system. Students cannot graduate with a professional degree until they have completed a practicum. To complete the requirements, students must be enrolled in OPUS, complete the actual practicum and complete all the requirements in the Practicum Web Client/Portal.

20. Can I complete more than one practicum?

Yes. While many practicum experiences are in-depth enough to provide the student the required 200-400 hours, many students choose to complete more than one practicum experience in order to gain additional skills and experiences.

21. Can I start working on my practicum the summer prior to enrollment?

No. Students are not allowed to begin their practicum until they have completed their first semester (or if part-time, at least 9 credit hours). In a practicum, students are supposed to practice graduate level competencies (i.e., the knowledge and skills) they have acquired through their coursework in a community of practice. Students haven't acquired any competencies through their coursework until they have

completed at least their first semester.

22. Can my thesis count as my practicum?

No. The practicum and thesis are different experiences. A practicum is an applied and practice- based experiences whereas a thesis is an academic pursuit. It is important to remember that even if the practicum and culminating experiences are related to each other, they must be distinct projects that are independent from one another and can be described as such.

23. Can I still graduate if my practicum isn't completed?

No, the practicum is a graduating requirement for all accredited Schools of Public Health.

24. Once I have documented my practicum in the RSPH Practicum Web Client/Portal, have I completed the practicum requirement?

Once a student has evaluated their practicum experience, an email will be sent to the Field Supervisor asking that individual to complete an evaluation. The student and Field Supervisor evaluations are reviewed by the department ADAP, who certifies that the practicum requirement were met, approves the practicum completion and assigns a grade once all components are finished. The director of enrollment and financial aid services finally certifies that students have completed this requirement for graduation.

25. When will my supervisor get the notification to complete the supervisor evaluation?

Once the student has submitted his or her student practicum evaluation to the Web Client/Portal, the Field Supervisor will be prompted by email from sphdatabase@emory.edu to log in to the Practicum Web Client/Portal to evaluate the student's practicum performance. The specifics of the log in and approval process will be provided in the email prompt.

26. My supervisor hasn't received any email notification, what should I do?

Please ask your practicum Field Supervisor to check their spam/junk folders for email from sphdatabase@emory.edu.

27. My Field Supervisor does not have access to a computer; can my Practicum Faculty Advisor complete my supervisor evaluation instead?

No. If the supervisor does not have access to a computer, please print off the Field Supervisor evaluation form [here](#) and give it, and an envelope, to your Field Supervisor. Ask your Field Supervisor to complete the evaluation form, put it in the envelope, seal the envelope and sign the back of the envelope across the seal. Then, bring the signed/sealed envelope back to your ADAP for entry into the system. [Please note: If you supervisor does not have access to a computer and therefore cannot approve your practicum objectives at the beginning of your experience, please let your ADAP know. Under these special circumstances, your ADAP will be able to approve your objectives for you within the Practicum Portal.]

28. Can I be 'fired' from an internship/practicum?

Unsatisfactory performance or student misconduct can result in dismissal. Agencies are required to communicate any problems directly to the student and the ADAP or Practicum Faculty Advisor in a timely fashion in order to avoid dismissal if possible. It's vital that students learn the agency's policies and procedures, confidentiality requirements, employee conduct expectations and other rules in addition.