MPH Professional Experiences

Field Experience Instructions & Policy Guide
This FE Instruction and Guideline Manual provides information regarding the overall steps and products of the MPH Field Experience. Specific deadlines and steps vary based on degree type and concentration. Students are to consult the FE Portal on Canvas for deadlines and other information relevant to their degree type and/or concentration.

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1. Overview

- The Field Experience (FE) is an opportunity for students to gain experience in the practice of public health. MPH students in the combined degree MD/MPH program are required to participate in the FE during the summer after the first year in the Program. Students can complete their FE at a Chicago or International partner agency.

- Students must have completed all of the core course requirements, or be concurrently enrolled in them, before beginning the Field Experience project. Core courses include:
  - PH 301 Behavior, Society and Health
  - PH 302 Intro to Biostatistics
  - PH 303 Environmental Health Science
  - PH 304 Intro to Epidemiology
  - PH 420 Intro to Health Management

2. Field Experience Goals

- The goals of the FE are to...
  - Introduce the students to ongoing work related to public health
  - Provide a hands-on opportunity to participate in this work

3. Criteria for approving the Field Experience Proposal

- Program appropriateness for learning during a short period, e.g., summer experience
- Topic appropriateness for student’s level of knowledge
- Topic relevance to understanding the links between medicine and public health;
- Emphasis on a public health field experience rather than a research project, although data collection and analysis can be part of the experience.

4. Field Experience Completion Requirements

- The project must be a public health relevant project that involves no less than 200 contact hours. MD/MPH Students must complete their FE in one block.
- A poster presentation of the Field Experience. Students either present during the Fall FE Poster Session (annually every September) or during the Spring PEC Presentations (CE’s and FE’s). Students should reference the timeline for their degree type on the FE Portal on Canvas.
- A 5-Page analytic paper, submitted at the time of the FE Poster Presentation.
5. FE / Concentration Directors & PEC Coordination

- Throughout the duration of the FE, students are primarily supported by their FE/Concentration Director:
  - Community Health Research Concentration: Darius Tandon, PhD <dtandon@northwestern.edu>
  - Epidemiology Concentration: Laura Rasmussen-Torvik, PhD, MPH <ljrtorvik@northwestern.edu>
  - MPH Generalist (including MD/MPH students): Virginia Bishop, MD, MPH <vbishop@northwestern.edu>

- Logistics of the FE including management of the FE Canvas Portal, Poster Session/Event Scheduling and other logistics are managed by the Professional Experiences Coordinator. The PEC Coordinator is available for day-to-day support of any FE related logistics, including support if your FE/Concentration director is not available
  - Professional Experiences Coordinator: Sheila Pojani. MEd <sheila.pojani@northwestern.edu>

- The Field Experience Process is overseen by the MPH Professional Experience Committee (PEC)
  - Professional Experience Committee Chair and Culminating Experience Director: Rishi Agrawal (RAgrawal@luriechildrens.org)

6. Partner Agencies/Chicago FE

- An updated list of our partner agencies can be found on our website. Please note, some agencies are only available to be matched with certain degree types and/or concentrations. All students MUST first meet with their FE/Concentration Director before contacting ANY of our partner agencies.
- International students should be completing their FE in Chicago because they already have international experience.
7. International Field Experiences

- Students interested in an international FE should visit the International FE Page on the Field Experience Canvas Portal for step-by-step instructions and the most up-to-date resources and information. International FE’s are coordinated by Dr. Virginia Bishop and Daniel Young (IPHAM Center for Global Health). Students in the Accelerated 1-Year MPH program must complete their FE at a Chicago partner agency in order to complete their degree on-time.

- Please note that even though a majority of the International FE are coordinated by the IPHAM Center for Global Health, students are still required to fulfill all Field Experience requirements.

8. CITI/IRB Training:

- Northwestern University requires all students to complete training on the protection of human subjects before any research involving human subjects. If the FE’s involve human subjects, students are required to complete the web-based Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) before they can start their professional experiences. The course consists of about 14 modules that can be done over a period of days or weeks. Most modules take only 10-20 minutes to complete.

- FE/Concentration directors will provide guidance to students to whether or not their project involves human subject research. Students with questions regarding IRB/CITI should reach out to their FE/Concentration director or to Maureen Moran, MPH, at m-moran@northwestern.edu

- If the FE will involve human subjects in a research project, approval must be received by the NU Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB application and review process can be time-consuming, and should be initiated as early as possible.

- Please visit the CITI/IRB Resource page on the FE Canvas Portal to complete training and access the most up-to-date CITI/IRB related resources.
9. Partner Agencies Matching Process and FE Application:

- The initiation of the Field Experience varies by program type and concentration. Checklists and timelines by program type are provided on the FE Canvas Portal. Regardless of program, the initiation of the FE follows the general steps below:

  - **FE Profile:** Students complete the FE Profile form to indicate their general interests, past public health experience and skills that would be useful during the FE.

  - **Kickoff Meeting(s):** Students meet as a group and/or individually with their FE/Concentration Director and other relevant faculty/staff to learn an overview of the FE process, review expectations, and begin the matching process. This may be one meeting or it may include follow-up meetings.

  - **Initial Matching:** Based on interests, experience, skills and area of study, students meet with their FE/Concentration Directors and identify one or more potential partner agencies that may be a good fit.

  - **Interviews:** Students arrange an in-person or phone interview with partner agency contact(s) provided by the FE/Concentration Director to discuss the site and their potential fit. Please note that this interview it’s to be scheduled AFTER meeting with your FE/Concentration Director.

  - **Partner Agency Preferences:** Partner agencies indicate their preferences to the FE/Concentration Director.

  - **Final Matching:** FE/Concentration Directors communicate placement with students and partner agencies.

  - **Application & Proposal:** Students meet with their preceptor to learn more about the agency, discuss their specific role/project, and review the FE Application and Proposal. The student drafts and edits the Application/Proposal as needed with the preceptor. The FE/Concentration Director may ask to review the proposal before submitting to the preceptor for final review. The final, approved version must be formally submitted to the FE Canvas Portal for approval by the Professional Experience Committee (PEC). Students should consult their program-specific timeline/checklist on the FE Canvas Portal for specific instructions regarding the submission of their application & proposal.
10. **Policy regarding use of non-approved pre-existing sites**

   - Students are strongly suggested to use an approved partner agency for their Field Experience. The required approval process to add a new partner agency can take as long as six-months and students cannot begin work at their FE site until the university-required approval process is complete.

   - Students interested in working with an organization outside of our existing partnerships should discuss this with their FE/Concentration Director. New agencies must be approved by both the FE/Concentration Director and the Professional Experience Committee.

   - **Places of Employment:** Students cannot earn Field Experience credit for projects at their place of employment related to their paid-work or job-description/area of responsibility, regardless of the public health relevance. Students should discuss any potential conflicts-of-interest regarding location of employment with their FE/Concentration Director.

11. **Completing the FE & Troubleshooting Problems:**

   - Students are required, at a minimum, to have 200 hours of experience at the FE partner agency.

   - As part of the application/proposal, students and preceptors indicate the general anticipated days/times that the student will be at the site (including the start-date and the end-date). In addition, students and preceptors need to commit to 1 on 1 meetings (1 hour/40 hours of student completed practical experience). The purpose of these meetings is to discuss the public health relevance and/or implications of the public health experience. Scheduling can change at the discretion of both the preceptor and the agency. If a student fails to follow-through with the mutually agreed upon schedule, the preceptor will communicate with the FE/Concentration Director and completion of the FE degree requirement may be in jeopardy as well as the working relationship between the MPH Program and the partner agency.

   - Students are expected to conduct themselves professionally at the site and with their preceptor. This includes, but is not limited to, effective communication, timeliness, organization/time management, appropriate attire, and cultural considerations with the population(s) served by the site. If students need support in any of these areas, it
is suggested that they (or their preceptor) reach out to the FE/Concentration Director.

- If questions or problems arise, or, if a student needs additional support beyond what the agency can provide, students and preceptors are to contact the FE/Concentration Director.

12. Post- FE: Course Registration, Evaluation, Poster Presentation and Paper

- Evaluation:
  - Student Evaluation: At the end of the FE project, students are required to complete the Professional Experience Evaluation Form (student) to evaluate their individual experiences. Information and comments provided by the student will be kept confidential from the preceptor or other FE site staff, if the student requests. Failure to complete this evaluation will result in an automatic “incomplete” grade. The incomplete will be changed to a grade once the student completes and submits this evaluation. This evaluation is available and submitted on the FE Canvas Portal.

  - Mentor/Site Evaluation: The FE preceptors/site supervisors will also be asked to evaluate the FE experience by completing the Professional Experience Evaluation Form (mentor). Information and comments will be kept confidential from the student, if the preceptor requests. This form is provided directly to the preceptor by the FE/Concentration Director. This form is also available for reference by the student on the FE Canvas Portal.

- Course Registration: Students are to register for the 0-Credit FE Course the term that they will present their FE Poster (not the term(s) that they are working at the site). Students should consult their program timeline available on the FE Canvas Portal for specific registration dates.

- Poster Presentation: A poster presentation is a typical method of sharing data at a scientific meeting. Although the Field Experience poster session does not present scientific data, it provides an opportunity to practice visual and oral presentation. A poster should get the main points across effectively, and attract people to read it so that the presenter can engage them in discussion.

  - Posters are presented either at the Fall FE Poster Session (September) or during the Spring Presentation Days (CE Presentation and FE Posters).
Students should consult their program timeline available on the FE Canvas Portal for specific information regarding their presentation time.

- Posters are digitally submitted to the FE Canvas Portal to be printed by the MPH Program. The poster may be used for other presentations by the student at conferences, seminars, etc.

- Specific guidelines and deadlines are provided on the FE Canvas Portal. Please note, some concentration areas may require specific poster content.

- Students are suggested to communicate with their preceptor and other site staff about their respective presentation day/time so that they can attend. Accommodations for preceptors/site staff to attend can be provided by the MPH Program office, including parking vouchers. Please contact pec@northwestern.edu to request parking passes or other accommodations so that preceptors and/or other site staff can attend the poster presentation session.

- FE Paper: The FE Paper is an opportunity for the student to analyze and critique the field experience and organization or setting in which it was conducted. It is not a scientific manuscript and it is not a simple description of the FE setting. It is not a description of what was accomplished, unless that is accompanied by an analysis of successes and barriers or lessons learned. (A manuscript based on data collected during the field experience may also be produced, but doesn't satisfy the FE paper requirement.) It should be a reflection upon how the FE helped develop core public health competencies.

  - The paper is typically due the same day as the FE Poster Presentation. Students are to consult their program timeline on the FE Canvas Portal for further information.

  - Specific requirements, style guidelines, and resources are available on the FE Canvas Portal.
13. Grading and Assessment:

- The Field Experience is a 0-Credit MPH Degree Requirement. Students will receive a pass/fail grade on their transcript. The Pass/Fail grade is assessed under the direction of the FE/Concentration Director, the site preceptor, and the MPH Professional Experience Committee. Criteria Include:
  - time spent (based on information from the student and preceptor)
  - problems that arose and how these were handled;
  - engagement in the precepting relationship (based on information from the student and preceptor);
  - contribution to the site’s work (based on information from the student and preceptor);
  - 5-page analytic paper (specific guidelines available on the FE Canvas Portal)
  - Poster Presentation (specific guidelines available on the FE Canvas Portal)

- Failure to complete the final paper, poster presentation and/or the evaluation will result in an “incomplete” grade. A grade of “incomplete” automatically becomes a permanent record if the student does not complete the project and requirements within one calendar year from when the incomplete grade was given. The student is solely responsible for making sure the requirements are met before the one-year is reached. A grade of Y entered for a course reduces the total credit toward residency for that quarter by one-third, regardless of the number of courses in the registration for the quarter.