

Introduction

The Division of Biostatistics recognizes the need for practical experience involving applications of biostatistical methods to public health studies such as surveys, case-control studies, longitudinal followup studies, and clinical trials for students in the Master of Public Health (MPH) program in biostatistics at the University of Minnesota.

Briefly, the practicum component of the MPH program will require at least 90 hours of on-site work in an organization or business carrying out research related to human health. For each student the program will be overseen by a faculty supervisor (usually the student's academic or Plan B advisor), and a qualified preceptor (supervisor at the worksite). Evaluation of the student's completion of the practicum will be based on (1) a detailed report by the student, (2) a report on the student's performance by the workplace supervisor, and (3) review of the above reports by the faculty supervisor. Two semester credit hours (PubH 7496) can be awarded upon satisfactory completion of the practicum; additional credits can be awarded in appropriate situations upon request by the student and approval by both the workplace supervisor and the faculty supervisor.

Objectives

General objectives of the practicum experience will include the following:

1. Participation in a research or evaluatory setting in a project which involves application of the principles and methods of biostatistical theory and skills which the student has learned in classes;
2. Writing of a detailed report describing the practicum experience, including a description of the nature, scope, and potential usefulness of methods, skills, and principles encountered in the practicum;
3. Oral presentation of the report to an audience of other MPH and MS students and faculty (optional, at the discretion of the faculty supervisor);
4. Written evaluation of the student's progress and performance in the practicum by the worksite preceptor;
5. Written evaluation of the student's progress and performance and of the practicum itself by the faculty supervisor.

In some cases the practicum experience may form the basis for the MPH student's Master's Project.

Implementation

The practicum will be comprised of at least 90 hours of on-site experience in a setting in which health-related research or evaluation is carried out. This may include:

1. An internship or staff position in the State Department of Health, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, or other research-oriented health agencies or organizations dealing with medical outcomes data;
2. An internship or staff position with a company involved in the development and testing of medical devices or medications;
3. Participation in research activities of a medical clinic or large research hospital;
4. Research Assistantship work, supervised by Biostatistics or other University faculty and/or research staff. In this case, the student's RA supervisor is considered the workplace supervisor, and may not also act as the practicum's faculty supervisor.

In all cases it is expected that the student will be exposed to a wide variety of procedures involving for example data collection, data processing, data analysis and presentation, as well as to the principles and mechanics of study design and creation of research protocols. Acquisition of new skills in computing, study design, and communication with medical researchers, and self-evaluation of the experience will be important components of the ideal practicum placement.

The student is responsible for finding a faculty supervisor. The student may (but is not required to) enroll in PubH 7496 for 2 credits (for a 90 hour practicum); additional credits are possible with permission of both the workplace supervisor and the faculty supervisor. The student should register in the section corresponding to the practicum's faculty supervisor.

Selection of Practicum Settings

The responsibility for identifying an appropriate practicum placement will be shared by the faculty supervisor and the student. The Division will maintain a file of likely sites for practicums. Other sources will include the School of Public Health Career Center and the School of Public Health Alumni Society. Local HMOs and hospitals with active research staffs are also likely sites for practicum appointments.

The expectations and responsibilities of the student will be stated clearly and in writing in advance by completing the Contract for Field Experience/Practicum form (available at www.biostat.umn.edu).

The workplace supervisor must be a person with appropriate training, experience and skills related to biostatistics and research in human health. The workplace supervisor must be identified in advance of the practicum and must be approved by the faculty supervisor. The workplace supervisor must be informed of the responsibilities and performance expected of the student, and must agree to provide a written evaluation of the student's progress after completion of the practicum period.

Timing

The timing of the practicum will be flexible. However, to make optimal use of the practicum, the student will be encouraged to complete it during the summer after the first year of basic courses in biostatistics and public health core courses.

Report on the Practicum Experience

Upon completion of the practicum, the student will prepare a report on the experience using the Student Evaluation of Field Experience/Practicum Form (available at www.biostat.umn.edu).

The workplace supervisor will also provide an evaluation of the student's preparation and performance using the Preceptor Evaluation of Field Experience/Practicum Form (available at www.biostat.umn.edu). The practicum is considered complete upon receipt of the faculty supervisor's approval of both reports.

Referential Materials

A historical file of the practicum activities of various students will be systematically maintained in the Division of Biostatistics. This will be useful for the purpose of identifying settings and projects which have provided a practicum of high quality and relevance to the student's training and future work in biostatistics and public health.

Security Checks

It should be noted that certain facilities are required by State law to submit paperwork for a criminal background check for all personnel who may have direct, unsupervised contact with clients. Placement of students in such facilities for a practicum will require that they complete the relevant paperwork and submit to the background check. The Division and School of Public Health, through the SPH Student Services Center, will assist students in this process. In addition, some agencies in which students are placed may require that they sign agreements regarding confidentiality of data or data practices.