



MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM

HESC 5805 (9805): Practicum and Report FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This document provides responses to common questions related to *HESC 5805 (9805): Practicum and Report*, and includes important details regarding the practicum placement planning process. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with this information so that they are prepared to plan for this course at the appropriate time and are aware of the requirements and expectations. Although links to each question have been provided below for ease of reference, **students are encouraged to read this document in its entirety.**

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Additional questions?

Please contact the [Administrative Coordinator](#):
Placements.hesc@lakeheadu.ca
(807) 343-8010 x8945

Or refer to: [Department Regulations](#)

1. What is the practicum?

The practicum is an integral and required course of the Master of Public Health (MPH) degree which provides the opportunity to integrate classroom learning and practice in a public health work setting. The student contributes to an organization's resources while addressing a public health issue, and also develops personal confidence and skills as a public health professional.

2. Who has to complete the practicum?

All Standard full-time and Flexible full-time students in the MPH programs, including specializations, must complete *HESC 5805: Practicum and Report*. The course is worth 1.5 FCEs.

3. Do I have to register for the practicum?

Yes. If you are completing your practicum, you have to register in the practicum placeholder course (*HESC 9805 - Completing Practicum and Report*) which will be identified in the current timetable. You must be registered in the practicum placeholder for each of the terms during which you are in your placement.

4. At what point in my program will I complete the practicum?

The practicum placement will normally take place after successful completion of all required courses **and** all elective courses, and after all course grades appear on the transcript.

Thesis students will normally be sufficiently far along in their thesis work before starting the placement; i.e., the thesis proposal defense and submission to ethics must both be complete.

- A student will normally complete a maximum of three half-credit courses (1.5 FCEs) per term; refer to [Department Regulations](#).
- University Regulations and additional ones of the Department of Health Sciences must be met. The student must maintain at least a 70% average in order to proceed with the practicum placement. If a student has to repeat a course, the course must be repeated before the student will be eligible to proceed with the practicum placement.
- It is the **student's responsibility** to ensure they meet current academic deadlines as outlined in the University's [Academic Schedule of Dates](#).
- **Standard Full-time students** must complete the practicum placement and submit the final report within one term, allowing marking and submission of the final mark.
- **Flexible Full-time students** may complete the practicum placement over 2 - 3 terms provided they have sufficient time to do so before all of their program requirements must be fulfilled. This includes time to submit the final report, and to allow marking and submission of the final mark.

The student will complete the practicum under the supervision of an academic advisor (normally a full-time faculty member of the Department of Health Sciences who is assigned to the student before the placement starts) and a field supervisor at the host agency.

5. Where can the practicum be completed?

The practicum placement, which must have a **public health focus**, may be completed in a suitable setting anywhere provincially, nationally, internationally. However, international placements will not be approved in areas for which there are [government travel prohibitions in place](#). In addition to meeting the requirements of the MPH program, international placements require approval of the Director of Risk Management, Lakehead University, and the signing of a waiver. Students are responsible for relocation and living expenses; etc., if they choose to relocate for a placement.

The placement will provide a practice environment that will allow the application of the student's public health knowledge and skills. Settings include those that:

- Have a population health focus
- Have a focus on health promotion and illness prevention
- Offer education and other health services and/or opportunities for health research

When we undertake the practicum planning (at the beginning of the final term of coursework), students have the opportunity to identify their areas of interest and preferred locations for a particular placement. Using this as a starting point, we then reach out and explore the available opportunities until a placement is secured. Although we are never able to guarantee a specific location or project, we will do our best to arrange something that aligns with the student's interests, preferences, and area of specialization. Ultimately, the placement and the practicum project will depend on the capacity and needs of the organization who agrees to accept the student into a position.

6. How long is the practicum?

The practicum is normally **400 hours** in length. Generally, the 400 hours will be completed based on the host organization's work week; e.g., 35 or 40 hours per week. There is some flexibility to arrange an alternate schedule, subject to the mutual agreement of the host agency and the student.

Following completion of the placement, students will submit the final report to their Academic Advisor (via the Administrative Coordinator). Final reports are typically due one week after the placement has concluded.

See Question #9 for information on applying for a waiver of practicum hours if you are currently employed in public health.

7. If I am working full-time, how do I complete 400 hours?

It is the **student's responsibility** to ensure they meet current academic deadlines as outlined in the University's [Academic Schedule of Dates](#).

Flexible full-time students may complete the practicum placement over 2 or 3 terms provided they have sufficient time left in their program to do so. This includes time to submit the final report, and to allow for marking and submission of the final mark.

Flexible Full-time students may consider alternate arrangements (such as placements of fewer hours per week completed over a longer period of time, or a combination of part-time and full-time hours). Students may consider a leave of absence from their place of employment, or the use of vacation time. Practicum schedules will be mutually agreeable to the host agency, the student, and the student's employer (if applicable). Arrangements with a student's place of employment to accommodate the time needed for a practicum placement are the responsibility of the student.

Students must be willing and able to make the commitment to, plan for, and complete the required practicum hours.

Important Note:

The Practicum placement is a required course in order to graduate from the Master of Public Health program. There is no requirement or expectation that a host agency pays a stipend. Students must be willing and able to make the commitment to complete the required hours.

8. I currently work in a public health setting. Am I able to complete my practicum within my current organization?

Yes, you may complete your practicum within your current public health organization; however, your practicum responsibilities must be separate from your normal work day responsibilities. The placement must be supervised by a person in a supervisory capacity within the organization who is not your regular employment supervisor.

If a student plans to approach their public health employer to host the practicum, the Administrative Coordinator will work with the employer on the administrative arrangements. Arrangements with a student's place of employment to accommodate the time needed for a practicum placement are the responsibility of the student.

9. I currently work in a public health setting. Am I able to apply for a Prior Learning Assessment (Waiver of Hours) to have some of the practicum hours waived?

Students who **work directly in a public health setting and have a minimum of five (5) years of non-clinical, public health experience** are able to **apply** for a waiver of practicum hours, up to a maximum of 200 hours towards the 400 required hours. Note that only professional experience will be considered and hours completed as part of a previous practicum or placement will not be eligible. You will be required to address the Learning Objectives found in the Course Outline/Information Handbook, and outline how your current job has allowed you to meet any or all of the objectives, providing a brief example for each objective identified and how it was achieved. It is not expected that all objectives will have been met. The Handbook, in addition to a Waiver of Hours Request Form, is posted on the D2L Courselink MPH Practicum site. Your current supervisor or manager must sign off on the document before it is returned, with your CV, to the Administrative Coordinator, for consideration by the Review Committee. The Review Committee will determine the number of hours, if any, that will be waived. The Committee's decision is final, so please provide thorough responses on your request form.

Important Note:

If you will be seeking a waiver of hours, the request must be submitted and approved before potential host agencies are approached on your behalf, or before you begin a placement with your employer. Placement hours will not be applied retroactively.

Allow planning time to develop the “Request for Waiver of Hours – Practicum Learning Objectives” document, (available on the D2L Courselink MPH Practicum site), to receive the approval of your supervisor/manager, and to be considered by the Review Committee.

10. Will I be paid during my practicum?

There is no expectation that a host agency will pay the student during the placement. There is no requirement for a host agency to pay a stipend. The agency may, at its discretion, pay a stipend. Instances of this are rare, and students should not depend on receiving payment.

Students must be willing and able to make the commitment to complete the required Practicum and Report course.

11. How is the practicum arranged?

Placements are arranged through, and with the assistance of, the Department of Health Sciences.

Each term, the **Administrative Coordinator** will send out a communication to all students asking them to self-identify their eligibility to begin planning the practicum. Eligible students will be expected to respond by the given deadline. As students self-identify, the Administrative Coordinator will forward them a *Practicum Planning Form* to complete and return by a specific due date. The planning form must be submitted by the assigned deadline or there may be a delay in starting the practicum.

Although students will be given the opportunity to share their preferences and areas of interest for placement on the Practicum Planning Form, **it is not guaranteed that a placement will be finalized either at a preferred host agency or within one of the identified areas of interest.** The planning form is a starting point in which to begin the outreach in the process of securing a placement. Students are asked to remember that the practicum, like any other course, is an academic requirement that must be fulfilled as part of the program, and is a valuable experiential learning opportunity no matter where it is hosted. We encourage students to approach the practicum with an open mind and willingness to learn regardless of whether the placement aligns with their precise areas of interest and/or desired career goals.

Once the planning begins, the initial contact to an organization is made by the Administrative Coordinator, unless otherwise advised or arranged. Potential host agencies will be approached consecutively, and one-at-a-time, according to the top three options that students identify on their Practicum Planning Form; we will not contact multiple agencies at the same time.

Occasionally, host agencies may contact the Administrative Coordinator to share an upcoming student placement opportunity. When this occurs, the Administrative Coordinator will share

the placement details with prospective students, who are encouraged to consider applying, particularly if their search for a placement is in the advanced stages. Students are once again asked to keep an open mind and recognize that the goal is to ensure that every student has been placed so that they are able to complete their practicum and graduate within the required timelines. At its discretion, an organization may request interviews either in person or by telephone.

If a student plans to approach their public health employer to host the practicum, it is suggested that they identify the appropriate contact person and the Administrative Coordinator will work with the employer on the administrative arrangements.

Proposed project outlines must have the approval of the Department before a student begins a placement. Hours will not be applied retroactively to a placement which has not received the required approval, or for which administrative details are not finalized.

12. Do I have to accept the practicum if a placement is offered?

When an appropriate placement is offered, the student is committed to accept the placement. As detailed in Question #11, while the Administrative Coordinator will begin by contacting suggested organizations, there is no guarantee that a student will be placed at an organization that they have suggested, nor within their preferred areas of interest.

Failure to report to a practicum placement that has been finalized, or the abandonment of a placement, may jeopardize a student's standing in the Master of Public Health program.

Important Note:

Once a placement is arranged, the student is committed to it. The Department of Health Sciences Administrative Coordinator will arrange one practicum placement for each student. If the student's actions jeopardize the placement that has been arranged, the student will be required to either secure his/her own appropriate practicum placement, subject to the approval of the Department, or withdraw from the program.

[Department Regulations](#) – scroll down to “Practicum” under the Public Health Graduate Program Regulations.

13. How long does it take to arrange a placement?

Each placement is unique, but arrangements have taken anywhere from 6 weeks to 6 months to finalize. Students will be asked to self-identify their eligibility to the Administrative Coordinator 4 - 6 months in advance of their placement start date to begin planning. Time for administrative arrangements, any requests for waiver of hours, and project identification and development must all be factored in.

Important Note:

Students are expected to contribute to the placement process, including the planning, in a professional and timely manner, so that arrangements can move ahead efficiently. The practicum is part of the academic requirements of this program, and students are asked to adhere to all deadlines while working with the Administrative Coordinator to plan a placement. Failure to observe the assigned deadlines may result in a delay to starting the practicum.

Note that the Administrative Coordinator will communicate with the student via their Lakehead University e-mail account and will not respond to non-Lakehead University email accounts (e.g., Gmail, Yahoo, Sympatico, etc.). Please be sure to check your Lakehead University email account frequently for any updates throughout the planning process.

14. How is the Practicum and Report course graded?

The Practicum Field Supervisor at the host agency is requested to complete both an interim and a final evaluation form, assessing how the student is progressing through the placement and achieving their set learning objectives and deliverables. These completed evaluations are submitted to the Academic Advisor (via the Administrative Coordinator) for review. Templates of these forms can be found on the D2L Courselink MPH Practicum Site.

The student's written report, typically completed within one week of the placement end date, is submitted to the Academic Advisor (via the Administrative Coordinator). The course is marked "Pass/Fail".

It is the student's responsibility to ensure they meet current academic deadlines as outlined in the University's [Academic Schedule of Dates](#).

15. Are there resource documents that I can read?

Yes, resource documents and forms are available to students through the D2L Courselink MPH Practicum Site. If you cannot access the D2L MPH Practicum site, please advise the Administrative Coordinator. This is a **required course**, and students are strongly encouraged to read through and familiarize themselves with the available resources, including the Practicum Course Outline/Information Handbook and this complete FAQ document.

16. What is the role of MPH staff and faculty throughout the practicum (HESC 5805)?

The **Administrative Coordinator** coordinates the administrative details of the placement and supports the student through the practicum planning process. Once a student has self-identified and their eligibility is confirmed, the Administrative Coordinator will contact potential host agencies and finalize the administrative aspects of the placement (including the coordination of an affiliation agreement, if applicable). The Administrative Coordinator also liaises with the student, as the placement begins and progresses, with regards to the practicum requirements. They will connect with the student, the Field Supervisor, and the Academic Advisor at the start

of the practicum to communicate specific timelines for the return of all required documents (i.e. – the Learning Contract/Learning Objectives and Deliverables, the Evaluation Forms; etc.). They will help facilitate the collection, processing and filing of these documents throughout the placement.

The **Academic Advisor** will serve as the contact for the student and Field Supervisor as needed throughout the practicum. They will discuss and address any concerns that may arise during the course of the placement. The Academic Advisor reviews all documents submitted during the placement, as well as the final report, and assigns a pass/fail grade to the student based on their successful completion of the course requirements.

The **Graduate Coordinator** works with the Administrative Coordinator to approve proposed practicum projects.