

**SOUTHERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM



***THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS
ABOUT THE
UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC HEALTH
INTERNSHIP PROGRAM***

SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM**

**MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
About the
UNDERGRADUATE PUBLIC HEALTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM**

Section I – The Nature of the Public Health Internship

1. What is the Public Health Internship (a.k.a. field placement/practicum)?

The public health internship is field work experience conducted at a Department approved agency, organization or program, under the supervision of a qualified agency preceptor, and complemented by a weekly seminar.

2. Do all public health programs have an internship requirement?

Yes.

3. Aside from the learning opportunities that participating in an internship afford, are there other advantages?

Other than knowing someone who is in a position to hire you, the successful completion of an internship affords you the best opportunity for obtaining a permanent, paid position in public health. Assuming your performance was highly rated, and assuming the agency in which you completed your internship has a vacancy within your area of training and expertise, your prospects for being offered that vacancy are actually quite good. In fact, one of the questions you might want to ask, at the initial internship interview, is whether a vacancy is anticipated and in what area, especially if you are interested in employment.

4. What is the internship requirement for the B.S. Program?

You must complete a 270-hour internship. The hours must be completed on site ("contact hours") at the agency, under the supervision of a qualified Preceptor (See No. 15) who will assign you a discrete project. Internship-related work performed at home does not count as "contact hours." In addition to the fieldwork, you are required to attend a weekly seminar held at the University.

5. **Who is eligible for a waiver of the internship requirement?**

To obtain a partial (3-credit) or total waiver (6-credit) waiver of the internship requirement you must produce documented evidence of public health experience equivalent to the requirement and *in your area of specialization*. Waivers are granted by the Coordinator of Public Health Internships. In all cases, waivers are granted without academic credit, requiring you to complete elective course credit in public health equivalent to the credits waived. Forms for requests for a waiver are available in the Office of the Coordinator of Public Health Internships.

6. **Does my internship have to be my area of specialization?**

Yes. It is up to you to justify your choice of internship to your faculty supervisor who is the instructor for PCH 497 - Public Health Internship.

Section II – Acquiring an Internship or Field Placement

7. **How is a part-time, student who is employed full-time, expected to complete the internship requirement?**

There are many ways in which students have met this requirement. Some of the ways include:

- a. accumulating vacation, sick days and other work allowances for a period equivalent to the internship requirement.
- b. arranging an internship at an agency that has evening or weekend hours.
- c. arranging to work a 3- or 4-day work week at your current employment to free-up time for your internship.
- d. arranging an internship at the agency in which you are employed, but in a division or department in which you do not currently work.
- e. completing a summer internship.
- f. taking a leave-of-absence from your current employment.

As with the student who must postpone meeting Program requirements because of a lack of financial resources or illness, in rare instances, it may be necessary to postpone your internship until you can create the opportunity or time to complete it. Your academic advisor or Coordinator of Public Health Internships is available to assist you.

8. **Can I use my place of employment as my field placement?**

Maybe, if you can document that (1) the internship assignment is distinct from your employment responsibilities and is completed in a department or division distinct from your regular position, (2) the hours devoted to the internship are

distinct from your hours of employment, (3) there is a qualified Preceptor available for supervision as distinct from your employment supervisor, and (4) criteria 1-3 were reviewed by your employer and he/she is willing to submit a written statement that the criteria are acceptable and that each will be met. To date, the reviews of using one's place of employment as an internship site are mixed. Two of the major disadvantages reported are role confusion and employment-related interruptions. The major advantage consistently reported is convenience.

9. **Are there any specific questions that are suggested I ask at the initial internship interview?**

There are obviously many questions that you could ask, but some of the most important would include:

- a. Is there any remuneration? Will there be a stipend, or a food or parking allowance, etc?
- b. Are there any position vacancies expected in the near future?
- c. Will I have access to a qualified Preceptor on a regular basis?
- d. Will I be required to work specific hours on specific days?
- e. Will I have the items required to complete my assignments (e.g., office space, phone, fax, photocopier, computer, etc.)?
- f. Will I be expected to work independently or as part of a team?
- g. What will my required project and related activities consist of?
- h. Will I have networking opportunities?
- i. Will I have opportunities to attend meetings/conferences within and outside of the program or agency?
- j. Who will I be responsible to in the event that my Preceptor is away from the agency?
- k. Will I be working with other interns?
- l. What is the procedure for requesting a change in schedule?
- m. What is the procedure for reporting an absence?
- n. If I complete my assignments can I suggest new projects?
- o. Will I be required to answer to anyone else in addition to my Preceptor?
- p. Can anyone besides my Preceptor assign work to me?
- q. In the event that my Preceptor is unavailable, who else will be authorized to assign activities to me?
- r. Will I be required to complete work at home?
- s. Will I be expected to complete all aspects of my project prior to receiving my performance evaluation?

10. **Where is the best place to look for an internship?**

The Department maintains a link on the Internet for public health internships completed by its undergraduate and graduate students. This is an excellent starting point however, you have the option to search on your own. In addition, make sure

you periodically check the Department's Electronic Message Board. In addition, your faculty advisor and Coordinator of Public Health Internships are available to assist you in obtaining a suitable field placement.

11. **Am I required to complete my internship in Connecticut or the U.S.?**

No. You are encouraged to take advantage of any field placement that you believe will provide you with the most relevant and substantial learning opportunity.

12. **When should I begin to look for an internship?**

The recommended times to begin the search for an internship is presented on page 17 of the Internship Manual. A semester before you intend to enroll is usually sufficient time to obtain an appropriate internship.

13. **Why is it recommended that I look early?**

There is some competition for field placements by other public health interns and students from other health-related disciplines in other departments within SCSU and from other universities. To obtain an internship that is relevant to your training and interests, you may have to conduct more than one agency interview. In addition, the more specific your requirements for a placement, the fewer options may be available. Therefore, looking early is extremely important. In order to take PCH 497 - Public Health Internship, even if you are registered, you must have an approved field placement prior to the first day of class. It is highly recommended that you submit your internship papers to the Coordinator of Internships or faculty supervisor as early as possible. This will provide you with adequate time to obtain a more appropriate field placement, if necessary. In any event, you must have an approved internship prior to the first day of class.

14. **Can I begin my internship before the semester begins?**

The answer is usually yes. Since agencies don't operate on a semester schedule, it is not unusual that an agency requests that you begin at an "off" time. You may also be granted permission to start your internship before the semester begins to reduce the number of weekly contact hours you are required to spend at the agency during the semester. In either case, your start date should be in close proximity to the start of the semester and your completion date should approximate the end-date for the semester. Whether you begin within the dates of the semester or early, all paperwork must be filed and approved before work at the agency can begin. Weekly journals will be required for all pre-semester hours that you want counted toward the total hour requirement.

15. **Can I accept an internship offer on-the-spot?**

No! All internships must be approved by the Department's faculty supervisor prior to your acceptance of an offer. The faculty supervisor is experienced in reviewing internship contracts and can help you assess the relevancy of the opportunity to your training, interests, career goals and internship requirements.

16. **What if I accept an offer at one agency and receive a better offer at another agency?**

This is tricky, although this situation has arisen. Unless the second offer is so qualitatively and quantitatively superior to the first, a contract is a contract and it is expected that you will honor your agreement. In the unusual circumstance described above, you can petition the first agency to release you from the contract based on specific and substantive advantages of the second offer to your training, interests and career goals. This is another reason to look early and to spend the time necessary to obtain a field placement that is suitable to your needs and that meets the requirements of the graduate public health internship program.

17. **Can I “split” my internship between two agencies or programs?**

Maybe. Your request will have to demonstrate that (1) participating in an internship at two agencies or programs would enhance your knowledge, skills and preparation for the future practice of public health and (2) you can clearly delineate the advantages over a single agency internship.

Section III – Obtaining Approval for the Internship or Field Placement

18. **What comprises the internship approval process?**

In order to obtain approval for a prospective internship, you are required to submit a set of signed Preliminary Internship Documents, consisting of an Intern-Agency Contract form and Memorandum of Affiliation. These documents must be approved by the faculty supervisor or Coordinator of Public Health Internships prior to your acceptance of an internship offer.

19. **What is the procedure for accepting an internship?**

- a. Present the internship brochure to the prospective agency/preceptor.
- b. Provide a copy of the Preceptor’s Guide to the prospective agency/preceptor for review after summary its contents.
- c. Inform the prospective agency/preceptor that faculty supervisor approval is required prior to acceptance of the internship offer.

- d. Have the prospective agency/preceptor complete the Intern-Agency Contract and Approval Form, including his/her signature.
- e. Submit the above documents to the faculty supervisor for review and approval.
- f. The Student Educational Affiliation Agreement and Certified Resolution are required for any agency for which such an agreement does not currently exist (Check with your faculty supervisor).

Section IV – Submission of Required Documents

20. **What is the Intern-Agency Contract (a.k.a. "Contract") and why is it so important?**

The contract is a written agreement between you, the intern, your Preceptor and the Faculty Supervisor which identifies the specific activities that you are expected to perform. Once signed the contract is binding on all parties and can be changed only with the agreement of all signatories. The contract protects all parties in that it can be referenced in the event that one party disputes whether the contracted activities are being fulfilled.

21. **What are the Student Educational and Affiliation Agreement and Certified Resolution?**

The Student Educational and Affiliation Agreement and Certified Resolution are formal agreements between the University and sponsoring agency that provides the field experience. They are legal documents that must be approved and signed by the agency's CEO or director, the University's Provost and the Assistant Attorney General for Connecticut.

22. **Certificate of Commitment**

The certificate of commitment outlines the requirements of the public health internship.

Section V – The Personnel of the Internship

23. **Who is the Faculty Supervisor and what is his or her role?**

The faculty supervisor (a.k.a., course instructor), is a faculty member in the Department of Public Health who serves as the instructor for PCH 497 - Public Health Internship. There may actually be two instructors who will address various

aspects of PCH 497. One of the major roles of the faculty supervisor is as your advocate or support person for your field placement.

24. What is a Preceptor and what are the qualifications to serve as one?

A Preceptor is an appropriately credentialed and experienced public health practitioner, who is employed full-time by a public health agency and who serves as your on-site internship supervisor and mentor. Since your internship must be in your area of specialization, the Preceptor must be qualified to serve in this capacity. Ideally, the Preceptor should possess a Master of Public Health degree with specialized training and experience in your area of specialization. Individuals, not in possession of the MPH or its equivalent, but who possess extensive experience in public health may be approved as a Preceptor, by the course instructor or Coordinator of Public Health Internships.

Section VI – The Internship Seminar

25. What is the public health internship seminar?

The seminar, conducted by a member of the faculty (a.k.a., faculty supervisor), is the didactic phase of the internship that meets for 2 1/2 hours each week for the semester. In the seminar you will be presented with the opportunity to meet with the other interns, exchange ideas and experiences, provide support for colleagues and explore internship and work-related issues. Attendance is mandatory.

26. What is the weekly journal?

The journal is one of the activities that comprise the weekly seminar. The journal, submitted each week at the seminar, is a confidential and detailed account of your activities. It is the means by which the instructor tracks your progress. Journals are reviewed by the instructor and returned with comments, suggestions and questions, as appropriate.

Section VII – The Approved Internship Field Placement

27. What if I decide that I don't like my internship after the first few weeks?

Unless there is a contractual violation that cannot be resolved or a situation which poses a threat to your well-being, it is expected that you will fulfill the terms of your contract in its entirety. Sometimes things are not what they initially appear to be. In this instance, it is suggested that you “act as if” you do enjoy your internship and use your talents and abilities to create learning opportunities for yourself. Adequately investigating the agency prior to your acceptance of an internship should greatly decrease the likelihood of unpleasant surprises.

28. **What if I am asked to perform an activity unspecified on the contract?**

This is a very common situation since it would be virtually impossible to specify or predetermine every activity within the purview of any internship. From time to time you may be asked to perform a function that was not specified on the contract, but that is within the general expected duties of any internship. Certain tasks are common practice for most internship placements including, photocopying, answering telephones, data management, letter-writing, delivery of documents, and, on occasion, stuffing envelopes. However, as important as these activities are to the operation and success of any agency or program, they should not constitute the substance of your internship. If in the event, that more than just a few of your assignments are inconsistent with the activities agreed to on the contract, you should discuss the matter with your Preceptor and in the weekly journal. The matter should be resolved as soon as possible. Your faculty supervisor will be available to intervene, as requested.

29. **What if I am asked to perform an activity that I believe comprises my personal or professional values or beliefs?**

In the unlikely event that this situation was to arise, you would have to use your discretion, at least initially, to determine an appropriate course of action. In an emergency, you should discuss the issue with your Preceptor, or, if he or she is the source of the request, you could call the Department of Public Health and have the secretary locate your faculty supervisor or any available faculty. If you are unsure of what to do, it might be prudent to delay compliance until you can discuss your objection with an appropriate party.

30. **What if the activities stipulated on my contract are completed before I complete my required hours?**

This does happen and may be a function of your efficiency and effectiveness, a simple miscalculation, or the result of unanticipated problems. In any event, you should discuss this with your Preceptor and make a reference to it in your weekly journal. Since, this situation is most likely to occur only after you have completed a substantial portion of your hours, your familiarity with the agency and program should provide you with enough insights to create learning opportunities for yourself. I am sure that there are many worthwhile contributions that you can make to advance the mission of the agency or program and that would be received favorably by your Preceptor. This would be a perfect opportunity to demonstrate your initiative.

31. **Can I work more hours each week and complete my commitment before the end of the semester?**

As discussed earlier, the requirement of the internship is that you complete a 6-credit, 18 hour a week field placement. These hours would be completed over

three or more days. The purpose of this requirement is to provide you with substantial exposure to the agency so that you can “fit in” with other personnel and to maximize your learning opportunities, as in “being where the action is.”

32. **What if the agency I select for my internship requires me to complete hours in excess of those required by the Department?**

In this case, you would have two separate contracts. The one between you, your Preceptor and faculty supervisor would be completed prior to the one between yourself and your Preceptor, who is representing the agency or program that has offered you the extended internship. If you have prior knowledge of a condition of your interning at an agency, and you select to accept the offer, you should be prepared to fulfill all conditions of the contract, including those that supercede the Department’s requirements.

33. **What if my Preceptor or other agency employee treats me in a discriminatory manner?**

As in any job you obtain, you should secure a copy of the agency’s policy on discrimination and harassment. Although, policies may vary, generally, unless your well-being is in imminent danger, you should first verbally inform the individual of his or her unacceptable behavior. If the behavior reoccurs, you should send the individual a written correspondence requesting that he or she refrain from any further objectionable behavior. If the behavior does not cease, then you should discuss the matter with your Preceptor or other appropriate agency person. Your faculty supervisor is available to intervene, as per your request.

34. **What if I disagree with my Preceptor’s evaluation of my performance?**

The Preceptor is strongly encouraged to discuss his or her evaluation with you during which you can point out areas of agreement and disagreement. In the event that you and your Preceptor are unable to agree on a part or parts of the evaluation, you are permitted, as in any evaluation you receive on the job, to write a rebuttal, which is in essence “your viewpoint” regarding the disputed area(s) of your evaluation. This rebuttal then becomes a permanent part of your evaluation and will be considered, by your faculty supervisor, in assigning you a grade for the fieldwork component of the internship.

35. **Can I be terminated from the public health internship program?**

Yes. The successful completion of the internship requires more than just technical competency in the assigned activities. Conducting yourself in a professional manner with the highest standards of personal ethics is equally important and will be used, in part to judge your performance. Violations of professional conduct

and/or generally accepted standards of ethical behavior will be grounds for termination from PCH 497.

36. **How does my agency/preceptor know if I accept the internship offer?**

Upon approval by the faculty supervisor, the Coordinator of Public Health Internships will forward a letter of introduction and copies of the approved documents to the preceptor. After approval, you may contact the agency/preceptor to inform them of your acceptance of the internship offer.

