

Field Work



Living in the field. The IHS survey team cooking a meal while on the field for the APHSR survey.

Purpose of Field Work

The field placement provides students an opportunity for actual hands-on public health practice. Therefore, the field placement should enable the student to:

- Gain insights from the field;
- Interact with people and appreciate their health care needs;
- Work with health care professionals and understand various health care roles;
- Contribute to service delivery and activities at the field placement site.

Choice of Field Placement Site

The IHS Field Placement Officer assists the student in identifying professional and career objectives and identifying appropriate field placement sites. The choice of such field placement sites is determined by the following criteria.

- The agency must be a reputed organization with a proven track record of excellence and commitment to the cause of development of society;
- The agency may be public, voluntary or private;
- The site location can be within or outside Hyderabad;
- The selected agency or site must offer the student the practical application of principles of public health in the area of concentration chosen by the student;
- The time of assignment will not be less than three months.

The Institute of Health Systems is a preferred site for field placement of students. At any given time the Institute will be handling public health projects in many of the concentration areas offered by the programme. IHS will offer an field placement position to a student, subject to the student's interests and choice of concentration, availability of a suitable position at the Institute, and the concurrence of the Faculty Advisor.

Course Work

The APH curriculum includes two periods of Field placement. Each field placement is of three months duration. Students must be enrolled in course PHC 212 or PHC 302 to receive field placement credit. Field placement requirements include the following:

- A set of learning objectives developed prior to the start of the field placement.
- A work plan that would help the student to achieve the learning objectives.
- Regular communication with the faculty and concerned field placement officials of the IHS.
- A written analytic evaluation of the field placement experience.
- A presentation of relevant aspects of the experience to the student and faculty colloquium.
- Completion of evaluation forms and terms specified in the field placement agreement.

Communication and Reporting Requirements:

The students will regularly communicate with their Faculty Advisor and other assigned IHS officials during the course of the field placement. During these contacts, the students will report to the Faculty Advisor / assigned official, their progress and difficulties encountered, clarify doubts, and seek advice and direction for future activities. The following reporting requirements have to be met for successful completion of the field placement.

Weekly Field Diary

The Weekly Field Diary is a chronological record of activities at the placement site. Students will note, very generally, about what was done during the week, and send the diary by e-mail to the Faculty Advisor, at the end of every week.

Fortnightly Teleconference.

There will be a fortnightly teleconference during the field placement period. The teleconferences are experience sharing sessions in which, the group of students in field placement, their Local Mentors and Faculty Advisors, and other IHS Faculty, will participate. The teleconference will be initiated from the institute, at a predetermined time.

Faculty Visit

Faculty members may visit the placement site during the course of the field placement. Such visits provide an opportunity for on site review of the student's field placement experience. In particular, Faculty will review the Brief Field Notes and Expanded Field Notes by the student. Brief Field Notes are short hand record of observations, interviews etc., by the student. Expanded Field Notes are elaboration of the Brief Field Notes, done on a day to day basis, usually in the evening or rest hours, after the day's field work.

Other modes of communication

Students may use other modes of communication like post, fax, etc., as required, to seek advise and to meet reporting requirements.

Final Field Placement Report

Students are expected to submit a written analytic evaluation of the field placement experience at the end of the field placement. The report will be in form of a publishable paper, developed under the guidance of the Faculty Advisor and the Local Mentor. The paper will be based on activities during the field placement and their relationship to broader public health issues.

Poster Presentation

A Poster Presentation Event will be conducted on a convenient date at the IHS, after completion of the field placement, during which, students will make a presentation on their field placement experience. Each student will be allocated a display space in the presentation hall. Students can utilize the allotted space to present their field placement experience, using presentation techniques of their choice, such as posters, slides, multimedia, interactive presentation etc.

Completion of Evaluation Forms

There are two evaluation forms, one for the Local Mentor and one for student.

a. Evaluation of Student Field Placement Performance by Local Mentor

The Local Mentor will evaluate the student's level of achieving the learning objectives and the different aspects of the student's field placement performance. The evaluation will include, an assessment of the student's ability to:

- Accept responsibility, assess situations, recommend decisions based on the assessment, and evaluate the effectiveness of his/her work;
- Adapt well to work in difficult situations, manage time effectively and use the agency resources, procedures and structure effectively;
- Communicate effectively both orally and in writing;
- Present ideas, negotiate and resolve conflicts in a professional manner;
- Work effectively in diversified task-oriented groups as well as with clients, and;
- Adhere to commitments made to the agency, colleagues, and clients, with professional integrity and impartiality.

b. Student Evaluation of the Field Placement

At the end of the field placement, the student will evaluate different aspects of the experience and give recommendations regarding future use of the site, agency or programme, in the prescribed evaluation form. The Institute uses this feedback to improve quality of the field placement experience.

Roles and Responsibilities

Role of Organization and Local Mentor

The chosen organization will provide a Local Mentor to oversee the student's field placement. At IHS, the Local Mentor will be the Coordinator of the project to which the student is assigned. The Local Mentor should have expertise in assigned project areas, experience and status within the organization, and an interest and competence in supervising and mentoring. The Local Mentor serve as a resource person and provides applicable experiences for the student, creating a viable learning experience. The responsibilities of the Local Mentor include:

- providing orientation, guidance and supervision to the student
- arranging informational meetings with key personnel in student's area of interest
- reviewing organizational policies and procedures
- making necessary arrangements for the student experience
- ensuring that the student is actively involved at the site
- ensuring that the student has physical space at the site
- monitoring the progress of the student and communicate periodically with the faculty advisor
- signing the field placement agreement
- guiding the student in preparing the final field placement report
- evaluating student performance in the field placement

Role and Responsibility of the Faculty Advisor

The Faculty Advisor has to assure that field placement experiences are valuable learning opportunities for students and that the field placement sites chosen are appropriate. The Faculty advisor can assist the Site Local Mentor in his/her role and provide technical assistance and the Institute's academic resources. The Faculty Advisor will:

- meet with student to discuss the student's interests, career goals, and possible field placement sites
- help develop learning objectives and activities
- ensure all program paperwork has been completed with appropriate signatures and provide the initial signature for the field placement agreement
- communicate regularly with the student during the field placement
- maintain communication with the student and the Site Local mentor through visits, e-mail or phone contacts throughout the experience
- guide the student in preparing the field placement report

Role of the Field Placement Officer

The Field Placement officer is the APH Programme contact for all field placement activities. The Officer serves as liaison for faculty, students and site supervisors. The Field Placement Officer will:

- Maintain an up-to-date list of potential field placement sites at the Programme office
- Assist students in choosing a site.
- Initiate field placement process with chosen sites.
- Provide a field placement manual to the Local Mentor along with a letter of acknowledgment
- Track all ongoing field placements.
- Receives evaluations of students and sites.
- Receives field placement reports and completed field placement agreements.
- Maintains on-going files for historical purposes on students and field placement sites.

Role and Responsibilities of the Student

The field placement provides exposure and access within organizations that may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience during the early years of their public health careers. The student is expected to function as a professional, which is reflected in the projects and activities performed and in relationships with the organization's administrators and other staff. The student is responsible to the Local mentor for agreed upon projects and work duties.

Students are expected to:

- develop and finalize learning objectives and specific activities to accomplish these objectives in collaboration with the Local Mentor and Faculty Advisor prior to the start of the field placement
- complete the field placement agreement. The agreement must be in effect prior to the start of the field placement
- provide professional quality work
- adhere to the rules and regulations of the field placement site
- integrate within the structure of the organization
- take initiative in designing or implementing a project
- prepare and present the field placement report

The Field Placement Agreement

The Field Placement Agreement is developed prior to the start of field placement by agreement among the Local mentor, Faculty Advisor and the student. The Field Placement Agreement describes and defines the working relationship between the student and the organization. It integrates the student's learning objectives and interests with the needs and opportunities of the site and is a tool for communication, monitoring, and evaluation of the practice experience.

Evaluation of Student Performance

The evaluation of the student performance and the assignment of grades will be based on the weekly field diary, participation in fortnightly teleconference, evaluation by local mentor, evaluation by faculty, poster presentation and final field placement report.

After completion of my Masters in Social Work, I was keen on pursuing my interests in the field of community health and action research. Having worked at the IHS, as a Research Associate, I had first hand experience of the stimulating learning environment and the encouraging attitude that exists in the Institute towards multidisciplinary research. Therefore I had no hesitation in joining the APH programme when an opportunity to pursue my interests presented itself in the form of an Institute sponsorship. The easy and frequent contacts that students and teachers have, the quality of teaching and world class facilities make the Institute a fantastic place to study. A unique feature of the programme is the focus on practical training and exposure to real life experiences.

My field work experience at Thittumati Primary Health Centre helped me better understand the structure and

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organisation of a PHC, the roles performed by various staff, implementation of national health programmes, and the role of communities in achieving better health status. Attachments with the staff nurse, pharmacist, and laboratory technician helped to develop my skills in basic health care practices. Working with various staff provided insights into their aspirations, grievances, emotional attachment of each towards their work and the community they serve.