

## Practicum Overview

The practicum provides students with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom and work experience within the informatics field. The practicum experience usually aligns with a student's area of interest and is outside of the student's usual and customary work and supervisory responsibilities. Details about the practicum experience follow.

During their final term of the Health Informatics program, students are required to complete a minimum of 120 clock hours at a practice site under the supervision of a preceptor who has extensive knowledge and experience in the field of health informatics. Students are required to deliver a five-minute presentation summarizing what they learned from their practicum experience using the IGNITE format ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ignite\\_\(event\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ignite_(event))) at the end of the term.

Most students will be enrolled concurrently in HIN 740, Emerging Opportunities in Health Informatics, a complement to their practicum experience. Students' enrollment in HIN 740 is intended to explore a topic of interest through a review of the literature and an analysis of the state of the science. Students enrolled in HIN 740 will write a final paper, of publishable quality, to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts. Students may choose a topic related to their practicum experience.

## Credit Hours and Prerequisites

HIN 740 and HIN 745 are three credit courses which run over the entire semester (16 weeks). The courses meet on alternating weeks. Students are required to have completed all the core courses and electives prior to enrolling in either courses. There may be some exceptions, in these cases the student should be able to demonstrate adequate preparation to start the practicum and submit an academic petition to be approved by the Practicum Coordinator.

## Waivers

There are no waivers.

## Registration

All required paperwork for HIN 745 must be completed before registration (see [Planning Your Practicum](#) section). Students who have registered for the class, but have not completed all the forms by the end of the "add" period, will be asked to drop the class.

## Practicum Coordinator

The Practicum Coordinator can be reached at [nsolomons@une.edu](mailto:nsolomons@une.edu) (207) 221-4258.

## **Practicum Policies**

### **Beginning the Practicum before All Coursework is Completed**

Students with more than two classes remaining in their course of study require a compelling reason to begin their practicum before their last term in the program. S/he must submit a petition to the program describing his/her preparedness to begin the practicum. The student should begin discussion with the Practicum Coordinator as soon as possible to assess feasibility. If the petition is accepted by the Practicum Coordinator the student will receive approval to register for the class.

### **Practicum Hours**

Students must complete a minimum of 120 clock hours within the semester (16 weeks) they are enrolled in the course.

### **Place of Employment**

The practicum experience is an ideal time to explore other organizations and roles. Time and resource constraints may require students to fulfill their practicum hours at their workplace. Students may complete their practicum hours at their place of employment under the following conditions: 1) the practicum activities are sufficiently different from their regular work activities; and 2) the practicum activities are conducted in another department and under a different supervisor.

### **Beginning the Practicum before the start of the Semester**

Students may begin logging practicum hours up to one month prior to the first day of class. For example, if a student is enrolled in HIN 745 during the summer and class begins on May 4, s/he may begin the practicum on April 4. Students wishing to start their practicum placement before the start of the semester must submit a petition to the Practicum Coordinator before the mid-point of the preceding semester, describing the reason(s) for beginning the practicum early.

### **Preceptor's Credentials**

At a minimum, the preceptor should have at least a baccalaureate degree and five to 10 years' experience in a health informatics role and supervisory experience. A Master's degree, regardless of area of study, is preferred. Preceptors are required to submit a current resume or curriculum vitae, and dated Preceptor-Site Approval Form.

### **Complying with the Site's Regulation**

Students will communicate with their appointed preceptor prior to the start date regarding immunization and background check requirements for the practicum sites. Students must comply with all established regulations at the practicum site. These requirements shall be communicated to the Practicum Coordinator, in writing, prior to the practicum start date.

## Planning the Practicum: Overview

Students must meet several criteria before beginning the practicum experience. The items in the list below are described in subsequent sections of this document.

- All required coursework has been completed or a petition has been accepted
- The student has identified a site for his/her practicum and it has been approved by the Health Informatics Practicum Coordinator \*
- The practicum site has identified a qualified preceptor
  - Resume or CV submitted to Practicum Coordinator
  - Site-Preceptor form submitted to Practicum Coordinator
- The student, preceptor, and Practicum Coordinator have developed a well-defined project plan/practicum contract
  - Project Plan includes goals, objectives, and tasks
  - The contract has been submitted to the preceptor
- The Affiliation Agreement between University of New England, (“University”) UNE and the practicum site (“Affiliate”) has been signed and executed by both parties\*.
- If the practicum project is research-based, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval must be obtained. Students must also have CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) certification.

\*Student responsibility. Contact the Practicum Coordinator via phone or email for assistance.

## Suggested Planning Timeline

<b>6-9 months ahead</b>	<b>3-6 months ahead</b>	<b>1 month ahead</b>
<p><b><u>Find a Site and a Preceptor</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Engage with your Practicum Coordinator</li> <li>➤ Update your resume, cover letter, and social media presence</li> <li>➤ Conduct informational interviews to learn about informatics projects in your area of interest</li> <li>➤ Identify 3-5 possible practicum sites to pursue a practicum engagement</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Paperwork</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Select practicum site</li> <li>➤ Begin Affiliation Agreement</li> <li>➤ Identify preceptor</li> <li>➤ Submit preceptor CV</li> <li>➤ Develop practicum project with preceptor</li> <li>➤ Obtain health and security screenings if needed</li> <li>➤ Begin CITI and IRB paperwork if research project</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>Final activities</u></b></p> <p>Submit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Signed Affiliation Agreement</li> <li>➤ Signed Preceptor-Site information form</li> <li>➤ Goals, Objectives, Task form</li> <li>➤ Approved practicum contract</li> <li>➤ Register for class at U-Online</li> </ul>

## Planning Steps

### Step 1: Identify a Potential Practicum Project

In the first term of the second year, students should have some idea about where and what they would like to do for their practicum. Note that the practicum is meant to be a meaningful experience with authentic student participation within a professional organization. The practicum can be an opportunity for students and potential employers to evaluate each other for future employment.

Potential practicum sites include, but are not limited to, clinical settings such as a hospital or a clinic, technology and consulting companies, government agencies, and research organizations. The practicum project must be distinct from the student's usual work activities. If the practicum site is the student's place, then the practicum hours must be conducted under a different department and supervisor.

Generally, a Practicum Experience entails of or more of the following roles <sup>1</sup>

- Implementation projects for new systems
- Enhancement or process improvement projects (outside of technology)
- Enhancement projects for current healthcare technology systems
- New performance measures that need to be incorporated (often within the Quality Department)
- Workflow mapping or specification gathering

The Practicum Coordinator is available to assist the student in identifying potential practicum sites and projects.

The following questions may be helpful for identifying a practicum site and/or project:

- What skills would I like to develop/enhance?
  - For example, quantitative skills, communication and facilitation skills, research skills
- What strengths and expertise would I bring to the organization?
  - Look at your resume or consider using an assessment tool such as the Gallup Strengths Finder<sup>2</sup>
- Which type of setting would I like to explore?
  - Profit or non-profit; clinical or business; established or startup
- How much flexibility would I need to complete a project?
  - Consider the compatibility between your schedule and availability with those of the target organization

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<sup>1</sup> (taken from KU document <http://www.kumc.edu/Documents/healthinformatics/Guidelines%20-%20Informatics%20Practicum.pdf>):

<sup>2</sup> <http://strengths.gallup.com/110440/About-StrengthsFinder-20.aspx>

## Step 2: Secure a Practicum Site

It can take six months or more to secure a site for your practicum experience. Students are advised to contact potential practicum sites in their areas and start the application process *at the end of their first year in the program or early in the second year.*

Before approaching any organization of interest for a practicum, students should update their resume and provide a cover letter describing their interest, skill sets, a brief description of practicum requirements (a minimum of 120 hours over 15 weeks, a defined project with a preceptor, etc.), and their availability. Students are encouraged to update and remove any unprofessional content from their social media accounts (LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter...) since individuals from a potential practicum site may likely look at students' social media presence as part of their due diligence and acceptance process.

*Tips for securing a practicum site:*

- Ask a colleague or a career service professional to look over your resume/cover letter for clarity, spelling, and formatting.
- Check local job postings to identify potential sites and to discover current and future projects and desired skills.
- Look for internship/volunteer opportunities on companies' websites.
- Seek out opportunities to meet with potential colleagues and preceptors in person. Attend or volunteer at outreach events and seminars to become known to the organization.
- Maintain a spreadsheet to track organization, the date of initial contact, and follow up activities.
- Request informational interviews to learn about an organization and opportunities for practicum projects.
  - During the interview, discuss interests and career goals while being open and flexible to learning more about the organization and available projects.
  - Follow up; remember to always be courteous and professional.

## Step 3: Complete Paperwork

At least three months before the practicum begins, students should begin the necessary paperwork. These forms are required and should be returned via email or fax to the Practicum Coordinator. Details about each form follow.

NOTE: It is students' responsibility to ensure appropriate forms are completed and submitted within the time required.

- An Affiliation Agreement<sup>3</sup> between UNE and the practicum site (the approval process may take more than three months if changes to the agreement must be made)
- Practicum site and preceptor information form<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Obtain from the Practicum Coordinator

<sup>4</sup> Available on the Health Informatics Practicum webpage

- Practicum goals, objectives, and tasks form<sup>5</sup>
- For research based practicums, an IRB review of human subjects research and CITI certification may be required (speak to the Practicum Coordinator for more information)

#### **Affiliation Agreement—Must be finalized before students begin practicum work**

This is a legal document between UNE (“University”) and the practicum site (“Affiliate”).

Students will request the form from the Practicum Coordinator and send it to the practicum hosting organization for review. The organization may suggest edits/modifications using “track changes” for the UNE legal department to review and sign. If the organization wishes to use its own template, send the document to the Practicum Coordinator for review and submission to UNE. UNE will work with the organization hosting the practicum to develop a fully-executed agreement. A final copy of the agreement will be provided to the organization as well as the student. **The affiliation agreement must be in place before the student starts his/her practicum hours. This process can take between one to six months to complete, depending on the changes needed.**

#### **Institution Review Board (IRB) Review of Human Subjects—Must be approved before students begin practicum work**

Students conducting research involving human subjects are required to follow UNE’s Institution Review Board policies, and must contact the Practicum Coordinator. Policies and procedures are available at: <https://www.une.edu/research/compliance/irb>. Students will be responsible for obtaining CITI training as part of the IRB review process; contact the Practicum Coordinator for more information. Students are responsible for completing the IRB application, which will be reviewed and edited by the Practicum Coordinator before submission. In most cases, the Practicum Coordinator also serves as the Faculty Advisor on the project requiring IRB approval.

Depending upon whether the IRB committee considers the project exempt or in need of a full review, this process can take from two weeks to three months to complete. Students are advised to begin the IRB process in the semester prior to the practicum to have sufficient time for review and revision.

#### **Practicum Site and Preceptor Information Form—Due one month before class begins**

This form is designed to collect more information on the site and the preceptor. The preceptor at the site should complete the form. The Practicum Coordinator reviews the form for approval and returns an approved copy to the site and the student.

#### **Final Practicum Goals, Objectives and Task Form—Due one month before class begins**

This form is designed for the student and preceptor to discuss the project in greater detail and agree on the expectations, tasks, outcomes and timelines. The form should be completed by the student with assistance from the preceptor.

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<sup>5</sup> Available on the Health Informatics Practicum webpage

Tips for filling out the “Goals, Objectives and Competencies Form”:

**The Goal is the overall purpose of the project that the student undertakes.** See this [document](#) for ideas. **A project may have only one goal.** If there is a second goal, then a second project must be added.

For each goal, list one to three objectives. **Objectives should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focused, and (realistically) Time-bound.** For help in designing SMART objectives see this [document](#). Objectives may include specific deliverables (e.g. products) that students will be working on as part of the practicum project. Students should describe tasks needed to complete the objective(s) and include the approximate completion date. *Tasks must support each objective and the objectives must support the goal. See Table 1.*

**Example of a Goals/Objectives/Task Form**

Table 1: Example of a SMART Goal and Objectives

Goal	Objectives	Tasks	Completion Date
Improve interoperability among ED systems	Create an inventory of all HIT systems accessed in department	Interview IT staff	
		Interview clerical staff	
		Create systems inventory	
	Produce an inventory of common fields and values across the systems used in the ED	Obtain data dictionaries for each system	
		Catalog each variable and possible values.	
	Produce a cross walk of which variables and originating systems are used in each report	Obtain list of reports produced and consumed by department	
		Develop crosswalk of field, application providing field, possible values and unit of measure for field within program/application, and report name where field is used	

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Student

The student is expected to function as a professional always and is responsible for completing all activities and deliverables agreed to in the “Goals, Objectives, and Task Form”. The student is also expected to:

- Contact the Practicum Coordinator six to nine months before the practicum start date to begin the planning process
- Commit to identifying potential practicum sites in a timely manner, and follow up as needed
- Behave and dress in a professional manner at the practicum site
- Wear their UNE name tag while on site in their student practicum role<sup>6</sup>
- Provide professional quality work
- Comply with the policies and procedures of the host organization including any immunization and health insurance requirements
- Maintain regular communication with the preceptor and course instructor
- Ensure that all required paperwork is in place before the practicum begins
- Complete the required course assignments on-time

### Preceptor

The preceptor should be familiar with the student’s project, hold a baccalaureate degree, (a Master’s is preferable) and have five to 10 years of experience with health informatics. Over the period of the practicum, the preceptor and student will meet with the Practicum Coordinator three times (beginning, middle, and end). The preceptor reviews and signs the student’s reports and completes the preceptor’s student evaluation form at the end of the course. The student provides the preceptor with the evaluation form; the preceptor returns the completed form directly to the Practicum Coordinator via email or fax.

The role of the preceptor is to:

- Clarify expectations for student’s practicum work
- Ensure that students are adequately introduced to the site, colleagues and project
- Ensure the student assists the organization with appropriately challenging and substantive projects
- Oversee the student’s activities and provide feedback and expertise as needed
- Provide mentoring and exposure to different parts of the preceptor’s organization
- Communicate with UNE Health Informatics Practicum Coordinator as needed
- Review and sign the student’s quarterly reports
- Participate in evaluations of the student’s work

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<sup>6</sup> Name tags will be sent to students before the first day of the practicum