

## Pitt Public Health – 2017-18

### Tips for identifying practicum opportunities

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You know about the practicum requirement, you have some sense of the expectations, but how best to get started?

Here are four sets of activities that should help.

#### 1. Do a *personal* inventory

- Is there a particular place you'd like to be?
  - a state? a country? local?
  - near family or other personal connections?
- Is there an environment you would really like to experience?
  - a state health department? the CDC? a small, community based organization? a national or international research or advocacy organization?
- Are you hoping your practicum will transfer to an essay or thesis, or are you flexible on this?
- Are you hoping for a paid practicum? Most practica are not! Can you plan accordingly?

#### 2. Do a *professional* inventory

- What past experience do you have already?
- What experience(s) do you need to supplement your experience and coursework so far?
- What skills do you have already?
- What skills do you want to develop?
- How are your "people skills" – communicating, working on teams, do you enjoy working with people?
- How are your computer skills, quantitative skills, research skills, writing skills? Which of these do you bring to the table, which do you want to improve, and which do you hope to avoid?
- Are you interested in a particular disease or condition? a particular segment of the population? a particular region of the world? a particular intersection of any of these?

Be HONEST with yourself – a practicum is your opportunity to explore and develop! No one practicum is going to do everything that you hope, but your first challenge is to prioritize what it is you hope for.

#### 3. Network

-everyone says it but it's not so easy – touch base with faculty to see what and whom they know, including other faculty who might have other contacts and ideas, but only AFTER you've done your inventories so you can give them better information, but also:

#### **4. COLD CALL**

- yes, cold call – or cold email. That means you may not have *any* contact at an organization whatsoever.

-First do a thorough web search based on your personal and professional needs. Identify the possibilities! Then reach out and share:

- That you are a graduate student interested in gaining more experience in .....
- That you bring certain skills such as ...
- That you thought of their organization because ...
- Indicate your flexibility, enthusiasm, strengths and – if applicable – your willingness to work without pay

This is where having been honest with yourself you can be honest and clear with them!

Do NOT exaggerate your skills or experience – you risk disappointing them, stressing yourself out, and maybe most importantly, cheating yourself of the opportunity to make the most of a practicum

Do NOT underestimate yourself! You were accepted into and are progressing through a well-established, recognized and respected school! You are offering to assist and share, as well as to learn.

#### **5. Final thoughts based on 20 years of guiding students to - and through - practica**

Be flexible and make the most of your opportunities! Again, no one practicum will do everything for you, but once you have a practicum, you should squeeze every bit of relevance and opportunity out of it. Use this as an opportunity to explore and develop.

(And by the way, if it turns out you really dislike the practicum you take on, now you know you don't want to do that type of work in that type of environment! Even then you are ahead - some people don't figure that out until five years into a job!)