

Guidelines for Choosing a Master of Public Health Research Project or Professional Practice Unit

Master of Public Health (MPH) students may apply to undertake a 25 point Research Project or 25 point Professional Practice Unit as part of their MPH. Both the Research Project and the Professional Practice Unit will give students the opportunity to consolidate their public health training by completing a discrete project related to their chosen specialisation.

Entry to the Research Project requires an average mark of at least 70% over all relevant subjects, for students who began their MPH in 2011 (see the FAQ below if you began your MPH before 2011). Entry to the Professional Practice Unit is competitive and will be determined on the basis of academic merit and the availability of appropriate supervisors and host organisations.

To apply for the Research Project and/or the Professional Practice Unit, please fill out the [Expression of Interest](#) (EOI) form and return it to the Academic Programs Office. The due date for the Expression of Interest is 3rd November, 2011, for entry in Semester 1 or Semester 2, 2012.

If you are applying to undertake a Professional Practice Unit, please make sure you do the following prior to submitting the Expression of Interest form:

1. Please do not assume you will be automatically accepted into the Professional Practice Unit, limitations on student numbers apply at this stage.
2. Identify the discipline area you would like your unit to be in and complete the highly recommended elective subjects in the area as a priority in your course plan.
3. Consider the type of organisation in which you would like to undertake the Professional Practice Unit:
 - If you do not have an existing relationship with a potential host organisation please fill out Section 2a on the Expression of Interest form and we will endeavour to match your interests to a host organisation. **Please do not contact host organisations yourself, we will do this initially.**
 - If you have an existing relationship with a host organisation of interest (for example, your own workplace) please fill out Section 2b on the Expression of Interest form. We will liaise with you about organising the unit. **Please do not begin to organise the unit with the host organisation until we contact you.**

If you are applying to undertake a Research Project, please make sure you do the following prior to submitting the Expression of Interest form:

1. Complete all prerequisite subjects for the Research Project in your specialisation as per the [handbook](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

I already work in a health care or public health related field. Can I do a Professional Practice Unit at my workplace?

The purpose of the Professional Practice Unit is to allow you to practise and develop new skills learnt in the MPH that you have not previously applied in a workplace setting. If there is an opportunity at your current workplace to undertake a project which would extend your existing skill set, and for which there is supervision available, we would be happy to consider this. If this is the case, please explain your circumstances and the proposed host organisation on the Expression of Interest in Section 2b.

I have a host organisation in mind. Can I contact them and organise my own Professional Practice Unit?

Please do not contact potential host organisations (i.e. no cold calling, no unsolicited emails, phone calls or letters) until you are enrolled into the Professional Practice Unit. If you have a host organisation that you already have a relationship with then please fill section 2b of the EOI. If you do not have an existing relationship with a host organisation please fill in section 2a.

Please note that if you plan to organise a Professional Practice Unit in a host organisation that you already have a relationship with, and the plans do not eventuate, we cannot guarantee that another host organisation will be found.

I don't really know what I want my project to be on but I know which host organisations I'd be interested in working for. Can I still apply?

Yes, we imagine this would be the case for many applicants. Please fill in section 2a of the Expression of Interest form and indicate your preferences.

Can I do a Professional Practice Unit overseas?

Yes, it is possible to do a Professional Practice Unit overseas. If you have a contact within an overseas organisation you would like to work for, please fill in Section 2b of the Expression of Interest form. If you do not have a contact within an overseas organisation please fill in section 2a of the EOI. All students doing a Professional Practice Unit overseas will require an approved Risk Assessment form to be completed before the unit can commence, and will be required to have regular contact with their University supervisor. Please note that if you are travelling for

your Professional Practice Unit you will need to meet the costs of travel and day to day costs of the unit.

When do I do the Professional Practice unit and how long does it take?

Students are expected to spend a minimum of 160 hours working for the host organisation. You could work for the host organisation for one month full time, 1 day per week for 20 weeks or a different combination of hours/days to reach the 160 hour minimum. It will be up to you and your host organisation to work out the appropriate timing.

Should I do the semester long or year long Professional Practice Unit?

It depends on your personal circumstances and workload. The unit will require you to undertake a number of assessment tasks and spend a minimum of 160 hours working for your host organisation. If you are confident you can do this in a semester then you can do the semester long unit. If not, you should do the year long unit. If you undertake the semester long unit you can do up to two other coursework subjects in the same semester. If you do the year long unit you can do up to three other coursework subjects in each of the two semesters you are doing your Professional Practice Unit.

When can I start the Professional Practice Unit?

If you start in Semester 1, you can start the Professional Practice Unit from early March, and from early August if you start in Semester 2. Your Professional Practice Unit cannot begin until you have had an initial discussion with your University supervisor and host organisation supervisor regarding the nature of the project and the timing of the placement.

Enrollment for next year will open shortly, what subjects should I enroll in?

Enroll in all of your subjects other than the Research Project or Professional Practice unit. When you know which option you can enter (we will get back to you in early December) you can then go back into your student portal and enroll in it.

I started my MPH in 2010 or earlier, should I fill in the EOI?

If you started your MPH in 2010 or earlier, the requirement of an average mark of at least 70% over all relevant subjects for entry into the research project does not apply to you. You may enrol in the research project on-line as usual and you do not need to fill in the Expression of Interest form or be concerned about the 70% average in relevant subjects. If you wish to apply for the Professional Practice Unit, complete the Expression of Interest form and you will enter the competitive process with the other students who are applying to undertake the Professional Practice Unit.

What is the difference between the Professional Practice Unit and the Research Project?

If you undertake the Professional Practice Unit, you will be immersed in a workplace environment and will complete a project with input and feedback predominately from your host organisation. You will have the opportunity to develop professional contacts throughout this process and will also take part in the day-to-day activities of the workplace. If you do a research project, you will complete a substantive piece of research with support from your university supervisor. Completing a research project is a prerequisite for PhD entry, if you have not previously completed a research project (i.e. Honours).

Will I be paid for my time spent in the workplace if I undertake the Professional Practice Unit?

Generally, no payment will be offered from workplaces. The only exception to this is if you are completing the Professional Practice Unit at your own workplace within your own work time and with your workplace supervisor's approval.

What will the assessment be?

The subject descriptions, objectives and assessment for the Research Projects and the Professional Practice Unit can be obtained in the university handbook.

What are some examples of tasks undertaken in the Professional Practice Unit?

The main piece of assessment is the project report, which will be the main piece of work you are undertaking for the organisation. The nature of the project will depend on the organisation you work for. Some examples of possible projects include:

- A health promotion media campaign (assessable component could be a DVD)
- Data analysis of past 10 year history of salmonella infection in Victoria
- A literature review of different methods of reducing obesity in school age children
- Operational and analytic support of a hospital audit
- Development of a research proposal and/or subsequent ethics application
- Development (and piloting) of an evaluation framework for a community-based education program on stroke prevention
- Development of a questionnaire for a large research project
- Innovative dissemination of relevant research findings

More broadly, literature reviews, data analyses, manuscript development, contributing to program or policy development, small scale program or policy evaluation, small scale program development, report writing, or conducting focus groups or interviews and analysing the results of these may be appropriate. Your project will be developed in conjunction with your University supervisor/subject coordinator and workplace supervisor.

What are my responsibilities as a student in the Professional Practice Unit?

Your responsibilities as a student are to:

- attend the workplace during the period determined in conjunction with your workplace supervisor and University supervisor;
- complete all assessment pieces on time, including the main project report;
- ensure you have regular contact with your University supervisor and/or workplace supervisor as necessary, to ensure successful and timely completion of your project;
- inform your University supervisor and the Professional Practice coordinator as soon as possible if unexpected difficulties disrupt the unit, either through unforeseen workplace issues or your own difficulties; and
- in the workplace, you should bear in mind that you are representing both the Melbourne School of Population Health and the University of Melbourne, and ensure that you act with professionalism and integrity at all times.

What is the process once I have submitted the EOI?

If you began your MPH in 2011 and are interested in undertaking the research project we will contact you once second semester marks are released. We will let you know whether you may enroll in the research project or discuss with you possible alternatives.

If you apply to undertake the Professional Practice Unit we will spend the next month looking to finalise our host organisations, based on the preferences you indicate in your EOI. We will then contact you once second semester marks are released and let you know whether you can enroll, who your host organisation may be or discuss alternatives with you. We may contact you over November to further clarify your interests so please monitor your email account over this time. Once you are enrolled into the Professional Practice Unit you will be able to contact your host organisation and organise the timing and specific project for the Unit.

Best wishes

For further queries please contact:

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