2.4 Practical Skills. All graduate professional public health degree students must develop skills in basic public health concepts and demonstrate the application of these concepts through a practice experience that is relevant to students’ areas of specialization.

a. Description of the school’s policies and procedures regarding practice experiences, including the following:
– selection of sites
– methods for approving preceptors
– opportunities for orientation and support for preceptors
– approaches for faculty supervision of students
– means of evaluating student performance
– means of evaluating practice placement sites and preceptor qualifications
– criteria for waiving, altering or reducing the experience, if applicable

The MPH is the only graduate professional degree classified as public health. All MPH students are required to complete an approved field experience. The primary goal of the field experience is to provide the student with practical experience, and in turn, an opportunity to develop a realistic understanding of public health, from which a personal and professional philosophy of the discipline may evolve and mature.

The field experience is a 5.0 credit hour requirement with at least 300 clock hours working with the field placement site. Students are required to work no less than 20 hours per week at the agency in order to complete the field experience within a 15-week semester. Per Indiana University policy, interns who do not complete their field experience during the initial field experience semester must register for additional credit hours during each subsequent semester until the intern has completed all course requirements. Additionally, in order for the intern to show attainment of the concentration competencies achieved during the field experience, the intern should be fully engaged and integrated into the day-to-day operations of the agency. Working at the agency at no less than 20 hours per week affords the intern the opportunity to develop a realistic understanding of public health, from which the intern can then begin to develop a personal and professional philosophy of the field and specific discipline.

Students complete their field experience during the last semester of the program. The field experience is strategically place at the end for the following reasons: 1). by this time in the students’ MPH program, they have completed all coursework that is relevant to the field experience and expected by the preceptors. The field experience should be an opportunity where the student will apply the knowledge and skills from all of the MPH courses and other experiences gained during the first year and a half of the program. Completing the field experience during the summer in between the first and second year limits the students’ opportunities and scope of work during the field experience. For example, if a student has not completed a course in program evaluation and the agency has an internship in program evaluation, the student isn't qualified, 2). the field experience is competency based. Students must choose two competences from their concentration specific competences to work on during the field experience. The students are exposed to the concentration specific competencies in their courses and have a better understanding of relating the competencies to their field experience once exposed to them in their core and required courses, and 3). by completing the field experience during the last semester, this allows the students the opportunity to accept a job offer and not have to return to campus to take more courses.
The field experience takes place in an agency, institution, or community-based organization at local, state, national or international levels and is supervised by a preceptor (persons who supervise and mentor interns at the field placement sites) under the guidance of the concentration specific Faculty Field Experience Coordinator (FFEC). Students identify and select their field experience site through the school’s websites, referrals from faculty, and word-of-mouth based on previous students’ experiences.

The student and preceptor develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which outlines the objectives for the student during the field experience period. In addition to the objectives on the MOU, the student and preceptor identify two concentration specific competencies the student will work on during the field experience and a major independent project (MIP) that will be completed by the conclusion of the field experience. The project must be a product of the student’s field experience which contributes to the mission of the agency. The MIP must also show evidence of the student’s achievement of the two concentration specific competencies. The policies and procedures regarding the field experience requirements are included in the MPH Field Experience Handbook located in Electronic Resource 2.4.a.

Identifying, Selecting and Approving the Field Experience Site

Students must choose a field experience site that provides them with opportunities to participate in the daily functions of a public health agency, including the administrative and non-educational activities of the agency. The entity chosen must provide public health programs in a public, private or community setting, and must be under the direct supervision of an experienced, professionally trained, public health professional. The field placement site and site supervisor must provide opportunities for students to be engaged in activities that protect and improve the health of communities through educational programs; the promotion of healthy lifestyles and wellness; and provide opportunities for research towards understanding health behavior, along with the causes, prevention and treatment of diseases and disabilities. Each concentration specific FFEC has a number of approved sites for field experience selection. A comprehensive list is routinely updated and available to students via the Career and Internship website.

Students have completed field experiences in a wide range of sites from local placements in Bloomington and Indianapolis, to national sites like the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and international sites such as the World Health Organization. Every spring, the faculty field experience coordinators convene a meeting of all first year MPH students to discuss the field experience program. During this meeting, students are introduced to the wide variety of field experience sites and opportunities. On an ongoing basis, the field experience coordinator meets regularly with students individually as they begin to prepare for the field experience.

SPH Career Services, in collaboration with all academic programs in the school, maintains a database via the Internship Portal. The Internship Portal contains information from past field experiences of SPH students that includes the name of the agency, website, objectives, and students’ evaluation of the experience. The database allows faculty, staff, and students the opportunity to review potential sites for future consideration as a field experience site.

Methods for Approving Preceptor and Preceptor Orientation

Preceptors are routinely identified by the faculty field experience coordinators based on their professional experiences, recommendations from other public health faculty and students, the public health advisory board, and ongoing collaborative partnerships. New preceptors and agencies are encouraged and invited to submit a description of field experience responsibilities, projects and opportunities for students. New preceptors and sites are reviewed by the faculty
In order to be considered as a preceptor, the faculty field experience coordinators review the
preceptors’ credentials and approve the preceptor based on the preceptor meeting at least one
of the following criteria:

- A doctoral degree in public health or in a closely related field and one-year of experience
  in public health,
- A master of public health degree or a master’s degree in a closely related field and at
  least two-years of experience in public health,
- A bachelor’s degree in public health or closely related field and at least three-years of
  work experience in public health, or
- Eight-years of work experience in public health

The MPH program makes available an orientation for all new and returning preceptors. A copy
of the materials for the orientation is included with this self-study as (Electronic Resource 2.4.b.)
Additionally, all preceptors are provided with the MPH Field Experience Handbook which is sent
to them in hardcopy or as a web link (Electronic Resource 2.4.a). The handbook describes the
policies and procedures that the preceptors, students and faculty field experience coordinator
must follow in order for the field experience to be a mutually beneficial experience for all. The
handbook also provides information regarding support for preceptors, which is primarily
provided by the faculty field experience coordinators.

Faculty Supervision and Evaluation of the Field Experience
The student, preceptor, and faculty field experience coordinator work together to evaluate the
field experience. The student is evaluated based on the objectives in the MOU that was
approved prior to the initiation of the field experience. During the planning phase, the faculty
field experience coordinator discusses the course requirements with the student and the
responsibilities of the coordinator, student and preceptor. Each role is explicitly define and
explained in the MPH Field Experience Handbook (Electronic Resource 2.4.a).

Students are graded either Satisfactory or Fail for their performance during the field experience.
The field experience rubric which delineates a passing grade is provided in the course syllabus.
During the field experience, the student submits weekly journal reports (Electronic Resource
2.4.c) to the faculty field experience coordinator which provides information related to the hours
the student worked, the areas in which the student completed the work (e.g. research,
observeration, presentations, evaluation, etc.), and the associated activities, along with a narrative
that provides detailed information about the activities, reactions, and reflections. Submission of
the weekly journal entry reports allows the faculty field experience coordinator the opportunity to
evaluate the student’s progress on objectives on an on-going basis while providing continuous
feedback related to the student’s experiences.

The student completes a mid-term status report (Electronic Resource 2.4.d) which is submitted
at the completion of half of the field experience hours. This report provides an evaluation of the
progress towards meeting the objectives and is shared with the preceptor and faculty field
experience coordinator. Specifically, the student provides a detailed report on his/her
accomplished activities as well as activities still in progress and is required to write about any
new insights and perceptions related to the internship activities. The student also evaluates
his/her own performance as an intern and describes his/her strengths and areas for
improvement. Finally, the student is given the opportunity to discuss any changes in the objectives, and any additional or new activities to be completed during the last half of the internship.

The preceptor completes a mid-term evaluation (Electronic Resource 2.4.e) in which the student receives a progress report towards the fulfillment of the objectives, progress on the MIP, and attainment of competencies. The preceptor provides feedback related to the student’s personal career attributes and professional skills, interpersonal relations, personal attributes, and professional progress. Additionally, the preceptor provides comments related to the student’s strengths, areas of improvement, and documents any changes to the objectives or MIP that were established on the MOU. This report is sent to the faculty field experience coordinator and is shared with the student prior to submission.

At the conclusion of the field experience, the student submits a “binder” of his/her activities along with accompanying documents. The binder contains a detailed explanation of the MIP and attainment of competencies, documentation of written materials, program planning, attendance at conferences/workshops, certifications, and a final paper that provides information about the agency, additional activities outside of the MIP and a self-analysis related to the student’s perceptions about positive experiences, challenges, personal and professional growth, and suggested changes. The student completes three additional evaluations regarding the field experience process, his/her experiences with the preceptor and the faculty field experience coordinator (which is completed anonymously). These evaluations assist in the future placement of students at field experience sites and shapes the overall administrative activities of the MPH field experience program (Electronic Resource 2.4.f includes Site and Preceptor evaluations completed by the student). (Electronic Resource 2.4.g) includes Faculty Field Experience Coordinator evaluations completed by the student).

The preceptor completes a final evaluation which assesses the student’s attainment of the competencies and objectives. The open-ended questions allow for preceptor to provide detailed information about the student and his/her experiences. Specifically, the preceptor is asked to evaluate the student’s strengths and skills that need improvement, and areas where the student has shown the most improvement. The preceptor also evaluates the student’s attainment of competencies. Two additional questions are included on the final evaluation to assist in the evaluation of the internship program and the graduate professional preparation program in public health. The final evaluation is shared with the student prior to submission to the faculty field experience coordinator and the student develops his/her response to the final evaluation in an “exit interview paper” which is included with the final field experience documentation (Electronic Resource 2.4.h). A summary of comments provided by preceptors as a component of this evaluation for the 2013-2014 academic year is included as Electronic Resource 2.4.i.

Criteria for Waiving or Altering the Field Experience
The field experience is a required course in the MPH Program; therefore we do not waive, reduce or alter the field experience requirements.

b. Identification of agencies and preceptors used for practice experiences for students, by program area, for the last two academic years.

Table 2.4.1 includes a list of agencies and preceptors used for the MPH field experience, by concentration, for the two most recent academic years.
c. Data on the number of students receiving a waiver of the practice experience for each of the last three years.

No graduate professional public health degree students have received a waiver of the practice experience during any of the last three years.

d. Data on the number of preventive medicine, occupational medicine, aerospace medicine and general preventive medicine and public health residents completing the academic program for each of the last three years, along with information on their practicum rotations.

Not applicable.

e. Assessment of the extent to which this criterion is met and an analysis of the school’s strengths, weaknesses and plans relating to this criterion.

This criterion is met.

Strengths
The field experience follows a well-planned and consistent structure across all concentrations of the MPH degree, and an established MPH Field Experience Handbook is available for students, faculty, and preceptors in each of the program’s eight concentrations. The school also makes available an orientation program for all new and returning preceptors.

To ensure consistency in the coordination of the field experience across the concentrations, a designated field experience coordinator within each concentration works closely with students and preceptors throughout the process of planning and conducting the field experience. The program maintains comprehensive mechanisms for evaluating the field experience, which includes the submission and review of weekly journals by each student during the field experience, mid-term evaluation activities completed by both the student and preceptor, and final evaluation activities that include the student, preceptor, and faculty field experience coordinator. These evaluation activities are mutually beneficial as they not only help faculty to assess the appropriateness of the field experience for each student and the nature of each student’s and preceptors performance, but also provide valuable information to faculty about necessary enhancements and other revisions to the field experience program.

Weaknesses
The basic structure of the MPH field experience was developed over many years during the time that the MPH program was accredited by CEPH in the “program” category and only had a single concentration, that being the social and behavioral science concentration. When the additional seven concentrations were added to the MPH program, faculty agreed to adopt the existing structure and requirements of the field experience program. As the school continues to evolve, it will be important to evaluate the field experience program to ensure that this established and proven structure, which worked so well for the initial nature of the MPH program, will effectively serve the needs of the newer concentrations and those planned for the future.

Future Plans
At the end of 2013-2014 academic year, the school will have graduated its first full two-year cohort of students in four of the newest MPH concentrations (epidemiology, biostatistics, environmental health, and public health administration) and will graduate its first full two-year
cohorts in the other two newest concentrations (family health and professional health education) at the end of the 2014-2015 academic year. During the next year, the Public Health Leadership Committee will devote significant attention to reviewing the nature of the field experience and the evaluation data collected from the first cohorts in these new concentrations, to ensure that consistency in the structure of the field experience remains the best approach to management.