



The Pennsylvania State University

# Preceptor Manual



**Department of Health Policy and Administration**

Summer Internship Program

**HPA 395**

# Memorandum

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**To:** Preceptors for Penn State Department of Health Policy and Administration Interns  
**From:** Richard Shurgalla, Director of Professional Development  
**Re:** Being a Preceptor: Roles, Responsibilities and Rewards  
**Date:** Fall 2007

This guide is designed to help preceptors simplify the formal and informal steps involved in successfully supervising a Penn State Health Policy and Administration Intern. In this manual you will find a description of your role, the necessary forms needed to formalize, monitor and complete the internship, and some pearls of wisdom from other preceptors.

Our internship program is recognized by students and alumni alike as one of the most valuable experiences of their academic career. It provides a unique opportunity to integrate classroom learning and real-world experience. Professionals like you have mentored our students for over thirty years. Hospitals, long term care facilities, group practices, clinics and non-provider organizations such as insurers, trade organizations, business coalitions and government agencies have been involved in this exchange.

Serving as a preceptor for an intern not only permits you to participate in student growth, but also in the potential development of your organization's future workforce. Interns bring new skills and knowledge with them that contribute to the organization. They can add a fresh dimension to the environment and contribute real effort to the work at hand.

We hope you will commit to share your important knowledge and experience in health care with an HPA student. We also hope that the experience will be productive and rewarding for you and your organization.

If you have any questions or have a particular need for an intern, please feel free to call me at (814) 863-2670.

## Table of Contents

Background and Purpose.....	Page 4
The Internship Experience.....	Page 5
Intern Requirements.....	Page 6
Preceptor Requirements.....	Page 7
Frequently Asked Questions.....	Page 9
Internship Workplan.....	Page 11
Preceptor Qualifications Form.....	Page 14
Internship Evaluation.....	Page 15
Checklist for Preceptors.....	Page 18
Preceptor Pearls.....	Page 19

## **BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE**

The Department of Health Policy and Administration is located within the College of Health and Human Development. The mission of the department is to provide professional education, service, and research that will help improve access to quality health care at reasonable cost. The mission is pursued through the training and development of competent professionals in preparation for entry into a wide range of health service organizations, such as health maintenance organizations, health insurance companies, hospitals, long term care facilities, home health agencies, as well as health care financing and regulatory agencies in government.

The department offers degree programs leading to BS, MHA, MS, and PhD degrees. The full-time faculty in the department have expertise in a broad range of health-related disciplines including those listed above. Undergraduate students have the opportunity to actively participate in a variety of student professional organizations including American College of Healthcare Executives (ACHE) and the Health Policy and Administration (HPA) Club, and are members of the Association of University Programs in Health Administration (AUPHA).

## **THE BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM**

The BS program is a 120-credit, four-year program. Students in the HPA program complete a series of general education classes completed by all Penn State students in writing and speaking skills, quantitative skills, science, humanities, and social science. Required courses in the department include Introduction to Health Services Organizations, Health Services Policy Issues, Health Care and Medical Needs, and Health Systems Management. Electives include Long Term Care Management, Health Care Financing, Epidemiology, Managed Care, Human Resources, Politics and Policy as well as many courses offered by the School of Nursing, Family Studies, the College of Business, and other Penn State colleges. The internship is a required course for all students and is an integral part of the Professional Development Series. Except for rare circumstances in which prior approval is required, students must complete their internships during the summer semester.

One of the unique strengths of our program is its emphasis on professional development. This work is centered around two courses:

1. Preparation for Internship (HPA 390): 3 credits. Students are required to take this course at least one semester prior to the internship. During this course, students will be required to:
  - a. Prepare a cover letter and resume for use in future internship and job search activities.
  - b. Effectively use computers and software designed to enhance writing abilities and minimize errors.
  - c. Learn and practice interviewing skills.
  - d. Apply self-knowledge in planning for future coursework to support the HPA major.
  - e. Identify resources within the University which will support internship seeking and future job search needs.
  - f. Manage time effectively to meet a variety of deadlines.
  - g. Discussion of ethics and HIPAA
2. Internship (HPA 395): 3 credits. During this course, students gain administrative training and experience for a minimum of 10 weeks full-time (400 hours) with a health services organization. In addition, students are required to complete a weekly log of activities and experiences, participate in an online class and write an internship paper.

## **THE INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE**

The administrative internship is a ten to twelve week full-time work experience. It provides students with an opportunity to apply their developing knowledge and skills in health services management. The internship experience uniquely prepares students by exposing them to other professionals in the field and to the work environment in a way which cannot be duplicated in the classroom. Students gain a better appreciation for the pressures which affect decision-making in today's healthcare environment, and are able to identify additional skills they will need to acquire to better prepare them for a rewarding career in healthcare administration.

Whether the student serves in a paid position or as a volunteer, the internship is unique in that its primary purpose is educational. Many student interns are capable of providing valuable service to the organization in which they train, and many organizations are able to have important projects completed by the student. Given that the primary goals are educational, however, the organizations and the preceptors must value the opportunity to contribute to the training and development of an emerging professional.

Students are required to participate in an administrative internship experience in a health services organization where there are professionals acting as preceptors (mentors) who can:

1. Help the emerging healthcare professional gain practical experience in administration/management, research, or policy.
2. Offer the student the opportunity to interact with other health professionals and provide guidance in the establishment of the intern's professional identity.
3. Offer the student opportunities to apply the knowledge and skills learned in a classroom setting.
4. Provide situations in which the student can experience the issues and problems which confront the organization.
5. Provide opportunities for the student to develop awareness of special career interests, abilities, and shortcomings in order to select appropriate relevant coursework and training during the final year of academic study.

In addition, the organizations which train interns have the opportunity to observe and evaluate potential recruits, to expand their particular programs and services, to provide better or additional services to their clientele, or to complete special projects or educational programs. They also provide input to the Department of Health Policy and Administration on issues from curriculum relevancy to professional needs and concerns.

There are three participants central to the internship experience: the student intern, the Preceptor and the Director of Professional Development. The roles and responsibilities of each are described in the following section.

**1. in•tern** (ĩn'tũrn'), *n.* a student or recent graduate undergoing supervised practical training.

For the internship to be successful, each student must be an active participant in the process. During the preparation for the internship and throughout the experience itself, students become involved in a self-assessment process in which they define and redefine goals and objectives, make informed choices, and evaluate their own personal and professional growth and development.

The internship is intended to provide the student with an opportunity to develop his/her own professional role through observation of others and by experiencing role-related tasks. Theories, concepts, and skills learned in the classroom are applied in appropriate settings under the guidance of an experienced preceptor.

Students receive assistance from the department in identifying potential internship sites, but ultimately the responsibility for securing the internship is the responsibility of the student. This involves career preparation activities such as submitting applications, refining their resumes, interviewing, etc. Further assistance is provided to students and is usually tailored to their career focus area.

During the internship, the student is expected to meet all the requirements and responsibilities established by the preceptor, and to work to the best of his/her abilities. Interns are expected to be timely, dress appropriately, and act professionally and dependably. In addition, interns are required to:

- ⇒ Ensure the Internship Workplan (described below) is fully completed and submitted to the Director of Professional Development. Internships will not be approved if the workplan is not submitted prior to the start date.
- ⇒ Complete a log of the internship experience.
- ⇒ Write a brief project description/internship paper.
- ⇒ Participate in an online class throughout the summer. As a result of the discussion topics, students will have to research various aspects of the organization and interview key individuals.
- ⇒ Make sure their preceptor is aware of the evaluation form which must be completed and make an appointment to review the evaluation prior to the last day of their internship.

### **Internship Activities**

Internships are individually tailored by students and their preceptors in consultation with the Director of Professional Development. Preceptors are required to submit the Preceptor Qualifications Form (Appendix B) or a copy of their current resume. In order to match the interests of the student and the needs of the field organizations, careful planning and communication are essential on the part of all involved, but especially on the part of the student intern. A typical internship includes both **observational** and **participatory** activities. The following are examples of activities and projects in which Penn State students have participated in recent years.

**Observational Activities**

Attend board meetings  
 Attend department meetings  
 Rotate through admin. and clinical departments  
 Attend management seminars  
 Shadow a physician or resident  
 Observe a surgical procedure  
 Ride a medic unit for a day  
 Sit in on employment interviews  
 Participate in community activities  
 Interact with suppliers, accreditors, etc.  
 Observe Joint Commission debrief

**Participatory Activities**

Help prepare departments for Joint Commission and/or DOH visits  
 Revise a policy manual and generate reports  
 Design a hospital brochure  
 Write a press release and set up photos  
 Assist with budgeting and allocating expenses  
 Update insurance provider manuals  
 Design and conduct patient satisfaction surveys  
 Assist claims adjusters  
 Collect information for a benchmarking project  
 Create a database from organizational records

**2. pre-cep-tor (prī-sĕp'tər), n.** 1. An expert or a specialist, such as a physician, who gives practical experience and training to a student, especially of medicine or nursing. 2. A teacher, an instructor.

Preceptors (or mentors) are health service professionals who have an interest in sharing their administrative knowledge. They make an important commitment to the development of emerging professionals in their field. They provide guidance and coordinate the interns' experiences in a supportive and professionally stimulating environment. The role of the preceptor is similar to that of a supervisor overseeing the work of an entry-level employee, with a particular focus on educational and personal development. Throughout the internship, the preceptor assumes a key role in the student's development. Through regularly scheduled meetings, the preceptor interacts with the student and reviews progress, answers questions, helps resolve problems, and reviews performance in the context of the intern's own goals and objectives.

The preceptor's role extends beyond the time frame of the internship itself. The following suggested guidelines represent activities normally performed by preceptors before, during, and after the internship experience.

**Before the Internship Experience**

- ✓ Meet with the prospective intern and jointly complete the internship Workplan (Appendix A). Students will be given a specific deadline for submission of the Workplan during the spring semester.
- ✓ Complete the Preceptor Qualifications Form (Appendix B) and submit with the Workplan.
- ✓ Discuss the arrival of the student and the student's role during the internship with appropriate personnel.
- ✓ Assure that adequate space and support services are available to the student upon arrival.
- ✓ Ensure all pre-arrival arrangements have been made with other offices and that those arrangements have been communicated to the student, Human Resources, etc.

### Ongoing Internship Activities

- Make sure the student is provided with an orientation to the organization. This usually includes a tour of the facility, information about the organization's mission, history, policies, and organizational structure.
- Finalize an internship schedule with the student.
- Arrange regular meeting times to discuss progress, problems, questions, and provide performance feedback to the student on an ongoing basis.
- Introduce the student intern to other key personnel.
- Arrange for the student intern to attend staff and management-level meetings.
- Provide opportunities for the intern to observe the relationship between the organization and other local, regional, and national health organizations as well as its relation to the community.
- Immediately contact the Director of Professional Development with problems or concerns regarding the student intern.

### Culmination

- At the end of the internship, review the student's weekly log and internship paper for accuracy. Sign off on the Student Internship Evaluation Form indicating that you have reviewed these documents.
- Complete the Student Internship Evaluation Form. The form should be completed like any other employee evaluation tool. Constructive feedback assists the student in his/her professional development. See form in Appendix C. After completion, you should mail or fax the form to:

Director of Professional Development  
 Health Policy & Administration  
 604 Ford Building  
 University Park, PA 16802  
 Fax: (814) 863-2905

### After the Internship

- Maintain contact with the Department of Health Policy and Administration regarding future internship placements and other opportunities of mutual interest and, if possible, attend the annual Internship Awards Ceremony held each spring at the University Park campus.

**3. di-rec-tor (dī-rĕk'tər), *n.*** 1. One that supervises, controls or manages. 2. The conductor of an orchestra or chorus.

The Director of Professional Development is responsible for maintaining relationships among the department, student interns, and preceptors. Specific responsibilities include:

1. Develop and maintain relationships with health service organizations and agencies in which students may secure appropriate internships.
2. Provide the students with consultation and information helpful in securing and planning internships.
3. Approve each student's internship workplan to ensure that the internship experience is providing an

- acceptable balance of general administrative exposure and focused application of skills.
4. Be accessible to both students and preceptors by phone throughout the internship period.
  5. Review the student internship log, monitor participation in web-based discussions, and grade the internship portfolio.
  6. On the basis of the preceptor reports, the student's self-evaluation, and the director's own observations, evaluate and grade each student's performance.
  7. Encourage students and preceptors to give constructive feedback regarding the academic and professional preparation provided by the Department of Health Policy and Administration (HPA).
  8. Invite preceptors to Annual Awards Ceremony held in April.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **1. How long does the internship/field experience last?**

The minimum internship length is 10 weeks of full-time work (40 hours per week) in the organization.

### **2. What should a preceptor do if there are questions about the internship or if problems arise during the internship?**

The preceptor should contact the Director of Professional Development (Richard Shurgalla) regarding any questions or problems at (814) 863-2900 or 863-2670. When performance problems occur during the internship, it may be appropriate to give the student a mid-semester evaluation, using the Internship Evaluation Form (Appendix C). This can enhance clarity of expectations and help the intern focus on areas of expected improvement. It really means dealing with the intern as you would perhaps a new employee.

### **3. What about compensation for interns?**

Although interns are seeking training opportunities, they also provide a valuable service to the organization. They frequently are able to complete projects which would have taken the commitment of a large amount of staff time, and they bring skills and knowledge which add real value. As many as 75% of HPA students normally work while completing their degree, but the internship makes additional work prohibitive. HPA students may incur several thousand dollars in expenses during their internship. They must pay tuition, transportation and room and board. Any compensation they can receive helps tremendously.

All agreements about compensation are ultimately up to the preceptor, the organization, and the intern. Preceptors are encouraged to offer compensation to the students, if possible. If students cannot be salaried, compensation can be provided in a number of other creative ways. Interns can be put on wage payroll like other temporary employees. Stipends for travel or other expenses, meal passes, lodging, attendance at conferences, and tuition reimbursement are all valuable forms of compensation.

**4. Are students insured?**

Because students are not performing clinical duties, they generally do not need professional liability insurance. For most employers, student administrative interns can be used without affecting their insurance. *If, however, the placement requires students to obtain coverage, the student is responsible for obtaining it, and the preceptor must notify the student of that responsibility.* There are a number of companies which carry student liability coverage.

Students will be advised they must have their own health insurance. It is assumed that they would be treated as any other employee or volunteer with respect to Workers' Compensation issues. Please inform the intern about the handling of work-related injuries (should any occur) during the internship.

**5. What is the difference between the undergraduate Administrative Internship and the master's degree Summer Residency Program?**

Occasionally, an organization or a preceptor will be approached by students from each of these two distinct degree programs of the Department. Both degrees have a field experience requirement, with approximately the same kinds of goals. Differences in age, maturity, preparation and outlook mean that graduate students generally perform more sophisticated project work and function with less direct supervision during their summer residency than would be expected in undergraduate internships. A different Guide is available for the master's level residency.

**APPENDIX A**

**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION**

**INTERNSHIP WORK PLAN**

Student Intern's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Summer Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Preceptor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Health Service Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Department/Division: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization's website address (URL): \_\_\_\_\_

Internship Start Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Internship Completion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Internship Objectives or Key Projects:

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. \_\_\_\_\_

## INTERNSHIP WORKPLAN

*Although it is understood that an internship may evolve over time as the preceptor and intern get to know one another and the intern's skills are assessed, it is important for there to be some agreement about the type of administrative experiences the student will have. Please list observational opportunities (committees, board meetings, clinics) and participatory activities (committees, surveys, projects, assessment and planning activities) below. They should be developed, to the extent possible, with the department's objectives.*

Objective 1: To gain practical experience in health services administration or planning.

Possible focus areas and job tasks:

Objective 2: To develop a professional identity, including communication and time management skills.

Possible focus areas and job tasks:

Objective 3: To apply knowledge learned in the classroom and to analyze organizational activities.

Possible focus areas and job tasks:

Objective 4: To learn the key aspects of a health services delivery system, including allocation of resources.

Possible focus areas and job tasks:

**INTERNSHIP WORKPLAN**

Additional Duties/Limitations:

- The student will work an average of 40 hours per week, generally maintaining the same work schedule as the preceptor. Hours may vary. Occasionally evening and weekend hours may be required.
- As deemed capable, the student may assume additional responsibilities. They will not, however, perform clerical duties, except those related to the completion of their internship responsibilities.
- It is understood that the student will be expected to complete a log of activities, participate in online discussions, and write an internship paper. To ensure confidentiality, no patient or employee names will be used in the reports, unless the student has been given written permission to do so. It is also understood that the student will not copy or use any confidential business information. The student agrees to the preceptor’s right to request and retain copies of any academic work completed during the internship.
- If unusual circumstances or emergencies prevent the completion of any of the commitments stated above, the appropriate parties signing this document must be consulted and give approval prior to any other action.
- If the student defaults on the internship agreement, all credits may be forfeited and the student may receive an unsatisfactory grade thereby requiring him/her to repeat the internship experience.

Student Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Preceptor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized Approval: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail completed form to:

Director of Professional Development  
Department of Health Policy and Administration  
604 Ford Building  
University Park, PA 16802

**APPENDIX B**

**THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION  
PRECEPTOR QUALIFICATIONS FORM**

The Preceptor Qualifications Form should be submitted with the student's Workplan  
(see address on previous page).

A new form should be completed every two years.

**A current resume may be submitted in lieu of the form.**

Name/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization : \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Form completed last year.

**EDUCATION**

List degree(s) obtained and the conferring institution(s).

**EMPLOYMENT HISTORY**

Briefly outline your professional employment history.

**PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES**

List professional organizations to which you belong and your involvement in them.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Date

## APPENDIX C

### THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

#### Internship Evaluation Form

To be completed by final week of internship

***Note to Preceptors:** This form should be completed as though you were evaluating a new employee. Constructive feedback and open discussion of strengths and weaknesses are essential to the student's professional growth. Please remember to sign the form and initial that you have reviewed the student's weekly log and final paper.*

Intern's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Dates of Internship: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Evaluation Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Intern Performance Score: Note if Not Applicable	Poor	Below Average	Average	Good	Excellent
<i>1. Communication Skills</i>					
Oral	1	2	3	4	5
Written	1	2	3	4	5
Presentation Skills	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
<i>2. Applies academic preparation to tasks/projects</i>					
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>3. Ability to Work Independently</i>					
Completes individual assignments on time	1	2	3	4	5
Asks appropriate questions	1	2	3	4	5
Seeks assistance when appropriate	1	2	3	4	5
Organizes and analyzes information effectively	1	2	3	4	5
Identifies and solves problems as they arise	1	2	3	4	5
<i>4. Ability to Work as a Member of a Team</i>					
Can function professionally within groups	1	2	3	4	5
Can communicate and listen to ideas of others	1	2	3	4	5
Completes assigned group tasks	1	2	3	4	5
Values ideas and contributions of others	1	2	3	4	5
<i>5. Initiative</i>					
Willingness to undertake new tasks	1	2	3	4	5
Takes on challenges and opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Desire to learn	1	2	3	4	5
<i>6. Professionalism</i>					
Displayed professional demeanor	1	2	3	4	5
Reported to work on time	1	2	3	4	5
Completed tasks in a timely manner	1	2	3	4	5
Dressed neatly and appropriately	1	2	3	4	5
Accepted direction and feedback	1	2	3	4	5
<i>7. Overall satisfaction with intern</i>					
	1	2	3	4	5

8. Did intern fully complete the 400-hour full-time requirement?  Yes  No: Please Explain

9. How likely are you to recommend this student for an entry level position upon graduation? *Circle one:*

Very Likely      Likely      Neutral      Unlikely      Very Unlikely

**ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK:**

What tasks or responsibilities was this intern capable of completing exceptionally well? What skills were very strong?

What skills does this intern need to acquire? What additional courses or experience would you recommend for this intern's continued development?

Intern's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Preceptor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have reviewed the Internship Paper and Weekly Log \_\_\_\_\_.  
(Initial)

I am interested in taking on another intern next summer:      Yes                  No    (If no, please explain)

**Final comments:**

**Handwritten evaluations can be mailed to:**

**Richard Shurgalla**  
Director of Professional Development  
Department of Health Policy and Administration  
604 Ford Building  
University Park, PA 16802

Or faxed to (814) 863-2905

**Electronic evaluations can be emailed to:**

**rns12@psu.edu**

**Thank you for your contribution to the professional development of students at Penn State!**

### CHECKLIST FOR PRECEPTORS

- Meet with intern. Complete and sign Internship Workplan.
- Submit updated resume if one has not been provided in two years.
- Meet with intern to provide end-of-term performance review and exit interview.
- Complete, sign and mail the Internship Performance Evaluation.
- Plan for next year's Penn State Intern!

## Preceptor “Pearls”

*Words of wisdom from some of our MVPs (Most Valuable Preceptors)...*

I always find a concrete project for them to get started on right away and assign someone in the office to show them the ropes.

I like to involve them in meetings right away. It gives them ideas and gives me an opportunity to assess their willingness to take on a new project.

I generally have a game plan that includes clearly-defined projects as well as sending them to spend time with other managers in different departments to gather information and observe what goes on there.

Set aside some time in the first week to clarify goals and tasks. Play to their strengths, which may be quantitative, verbal, or social. Expect a lot. They have had many classroom hours to prepare for this experience and now they need hands-on challenges to apply their knowledge in meaningful ways.

It may take a few weeks to find the right project or department. Don't hesitate to adjust the original work plan.

Let them have access to some high level meetings. This way they see firsthand how professionals behave, how effective meetings are run, and how adults communicate in the workplace to get things done.

Set firm goals and always encourage involvement. Many students are hesitant to participate in meetings or interact with staff. Your encouragement goes a long way toward them becoming mindful, engaged employees.

The most important preceptor skill is providing effective, ongoing feedback. The sooner you debrief the intern's performance on a project, meeting or interaction, the more quickly they will develop proper workplace skills. Even the most motivated students need help from their preceptor to succeed.

Providing enough work to keep the intern focused and productive is essential – especially in the beginning because you want to set the right tone. Prepare for their arrival by identifying at least two weeks of assignments so that they make the proper transition.

Firm but friendly parameters are needed to avoid inappropriate behavior or interactions. Set limits and stick to them.

Your intern will need access to you on a daily basis at first, and then it drops off a bit. Be clear about the open channels to your time and attention they have access to so that they don't have to worry about interrupting you or feeling like a burden.

Have fun! Working with college students can be energizing and very rewarding. You'll learn new words and improve your text messaging skills!

This publication is available in alternative media on request.

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Direct all inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policy to the  
Affirmative Action Director  
The Pennsylvania State University  
201 Willard Building  
University Park, PA 16802-2801  
(814) 865-4700/V, (814) 863-1150/TTY.  
U.Ed. HHD 03-55