



Public Health

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Master of Public Health Program

**Applied Practical
Experience (APE) and
Integrative Learning
Experience (ILE)**

STUDENT HANDBOOK

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A. Overview of Applied Practical Experience (APE) and Integrative Learning Experience (ILE)

1. OVERVIEW

All Master of Public Health (MPH) students at Middle Tennessee State University complete an Applied Practical Experience (APE) and an Integrative Learning Experience (ILE). All students will enroll a six-credit APE in a community-based public health setting. During this experience, students apply skills and knowledge from didactic courses to attain competencies aligned with students' educational and professional goals. At the end of their APE, students will write and submit their ILE Final Paper.

The MPH Program intentionally partners with the public health practice community to improve the quality and depth of our Program's impact in the community. Within the MPH Program, community partnerships are an integral part of achieving academic goals and community engagement outcomes.

All students are strongly encouraged to complete their APE in a community setting such as local public health agency, community non-profit, public or private school, and governmental agencies. If a student chooses to work with a university-affiliated center or institute, the university-affiliated setting must be primarily focused on community engagement with external partners. University health promotion or wellness centers may also be appropriate. Agency needs are considered as the placements and activities are mutually developed to benefit both the student and the site.

Completion of the ILE includes a practice-based written product centered on the APE, linking theory and competencies from the program to their experience. Note: APE = Internship.

2. STUDENT PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

Students are responsible for the arrangement of activities of their APE and must be sure that curriculum objectives of the degree program in which they are enrolled are met. The MPH Program Director, Faculty Advisors, other faculty, and APE Coordinator are available to assist students in defining their APE objectives and to suggest host site contacts. Students may initiate contacts, or they may be made on the student's behalf by a faculty member or APE Coordinator.

The APE may not duplicate current or previous work experiences, but rather, build on the student's background and expertise. By creating the challenge of learning new perspectives and the employment of new practices, the student may be better prepared for a career in public health and health services. Regardless of the type of APE, students are responsible for determining and confirming the location and activities. Once a selection has been made, the student's Faculty Advisor and APE Coordinator must approve the APE.

Although students are responsible for this aspect of their curriculum, they must work with the APE Coordinator, to assure approvals are received for academic credit. Students

Students will not be permitted to register for APE credit without a final work plan, with all required signatures.

The work plan must be submitted prior to the start of the APE experience.

must take special care to be clear about the role and expectations of the APE Coordinator as APE arrangements are being finalized. A complete APE work plan signed by the student, Preceptor, and MPH APE Coordinator is required for all students.

All APE arrangements and activities are ultimately the responsibility of the student, but are subject to approval by the APE Coordinator and MPH Program Director.

3. IMPORTANT PEOPLE

a. MPH APE Coordinator

The MPH APE Coordinator, Kahler Stone, assists students in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the APE and the ILE.

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b. Preceptor

The preceptor serves the critical role of facilitating a successful learning experience through the APE. The preceptor oversees the student's APE work on-site, provides guidance and feedback on a consistent basis to the student regarding their performance during their experience, and completes an evaluation of the student's performance at the end of the experience.

c. Public Health Faculty Advisors

Upon admission to the MPH Program, each student is assigned a faculty advisor. The faculty advisor oversees and guides the MPH student's educational experience. Participating in the APE and ILE is an important aspect of the educational process. The faculty advisor provides insight into potential opportunities, reviews APE products, and helps to formulate and evaluate the ILE.

4. IMPORTANT COMPONENTS

a. HLTH 6910: Special Problems – For Thesis Students

HLTH 6910: Special Problems is a pre or co-requisite to HLTH 6640: Thesis Research and is meant to provide students with time and structure to work on their thesis proposal.

b. HLTH 6880: Internship (APE)

All MPH students at Middle Tennessee State University complete a 180 hour, six-credit APE in a community-based public health setting. During this experience, students apply skills and knowledge from didactic courses to attain competencies aligned with students' educational and professional goals.

c. Integrative Learning Experience (ILE)

Non-Thesis Students: each student who is not conducting a thesis project are required to complete their ILE through a final written product, at the end end of their APE.

Thesis Students: During the thesis proposal phase, students, alongside their committee members, select three competencies to address in their thesis. The final written thesis serves as the ILE.

B. Special Problems – Thesis Students

HLTH 6910

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course is designed to provide a graduate student with the opportunity to study in depth with a graduate faculty member on a subject of their interest and prepare them for their thesis, a time to work on their proposal.

C. Applied Practical Experience (APE) – All Students

HLTH 6880

1. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Through the APE, students will be able to:

- Provide an opportunity to apply training and concepts learned in coursework.
- Integrate public health theory, knowledge, and skills in a community or public health practice setting;
- Engage with a community public health practice organization to fully understand organizational structure, local and organizational politics, program administration, community relationships, and program coordination;
- Demonstrate mastery of at least five public health competencies;
- Contribute to the MPH Practice ePortfolio with at least two products for each competency identified;
- Gain/expand/develop skills and knowledge in an area of interest not covered in depth elsewhere in the educational plan.
- Afford the opportunity to provide valuable service(s) to the host site organization by participating in and/or completing projects or other work assignments.
- Increase appreciation of cultural differences in populations served by public health and health services professionals.
- Increase self-confidence as a professional in the public health and health services arena.
- Develop opportunities for references, job placement, and professional contacts.

It is not our expectation or intention that every APE will serve or accomplish all of the above objectives; however, it is expected that the APE will include many, if not most of these objectives.

2. APE COMPETENCIES

The MPH program's curriculum is based on twenty-two foundational competencies (FC) and five MTSU Community Health concentration specific competencies (CSC) that students will master during their MPH education.

In the APE, students will address five competencies. Students will select five total competencies from the full list of 22 FC and the five listed CSC. These are chosen in conjunction with the internship coordinator and preceptor according to the projects the student will work on during the experience. Students must choose:

Choose three (3) of the following Foundational Competencies (FCs):

1. *Apply epidemiological methods to settings and situations in public health practice*
2. *Select quantitative and qualitative data collection methods appropriate for a given public health context*
3. *Analyze quantitative and qualitative data using biostatistics, informatics, computer-based programming, and software, as appropriate*
4. *Interpret results of data analysis for public health research, policy, or practice*
5. *Compare the organization, structure, and function of health care, public health, and regulatory systems across national and international settings*
6. *Discuss the means by which structural bias, social inequities, and racism undermine health and create challenges to achieving health equity at organizational, community and systemic levels*
7. *Assess population needs, assets, and capacities that affect communities' health*
8. *Apply awareness of cultural values and practices to the design, implementation, or critique of public health policies or programs*
9. *Design a population-based policy, program, project, or intervention*
10. *Explain basic principles and tools of budget and resource management*
11. *Select methods to evaluate public health programs*
12. *Discuss the policy-making process, including the roles of ethics and evidence*
13. *Propose strategies to identify stakeholders and build coalitions and partnerships for influencing public health outcomes*
14. *Advocate for political, social, or economic policies and programs that will improve health in diverse*

Choose two (2) of the following Concentration Specific Competencies (CSC):

1. Engage community partners to develop culturally competent community interventions.
2. Synthesize the social determinants of health behaviors from a multileveled approach.
3. Relate the implication of policy on health behaviors and outcomes in the past to a current public health issue and either the critique of an existing policy or development of a new policy to address that issue.
4. Evaluate components of public health initiatives for cultural competence, ethical principles, and/or appropriateness of theoretical framework.
5. Design culturally competent and appropriate instruments for community data collection.

populations

15. *Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity*
16. *Apply leadership and/or management principles to address a relevant issue*
17. *Apply negotiation and mediation skills to address organizational or community challenges*
18. *Select communication strategies for different audiences and sectors*
19. *Communicate audience-appropriate (i.e., non-academic, non-peer audience) public health content, both in writing and through oral presentation*
20. *Describe the importance of cultural competence in communicating public health content*
21. *Integrate perspectives from other sectors and/or professions to promote and advance population health*
22. *Apply a systems thinking tool to visually represent a public health issue in a format other than standard narrative*

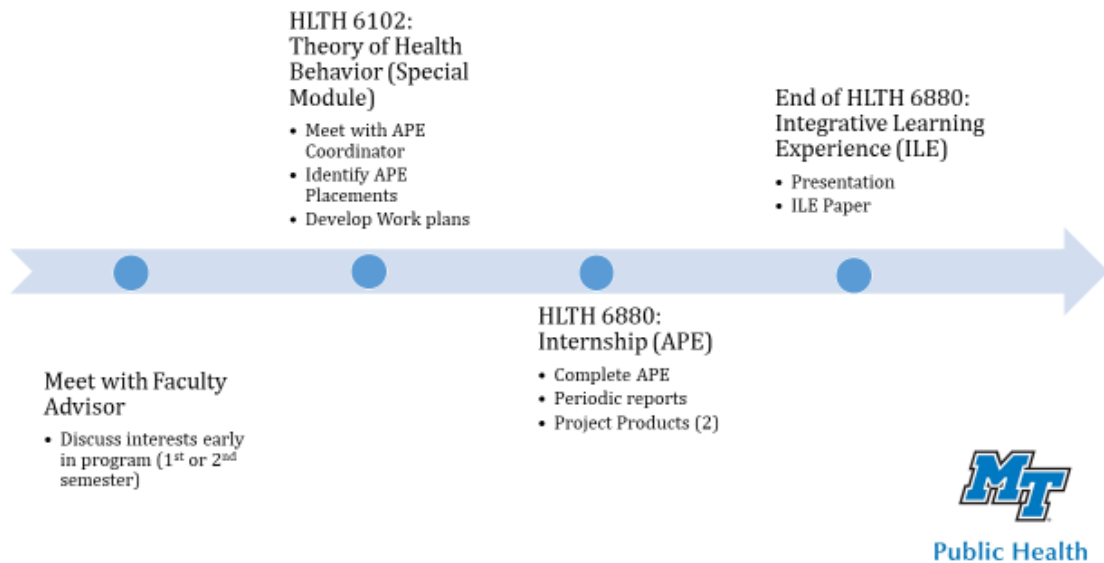
2. PREREQUISITES

Students must be in *good academic standing (GPA of 3.0 or above)* and have *completed seven of the 10 required courses*. The APE Coordinator must approve any other exceptions to this policy in writing on a case-by- case basis.

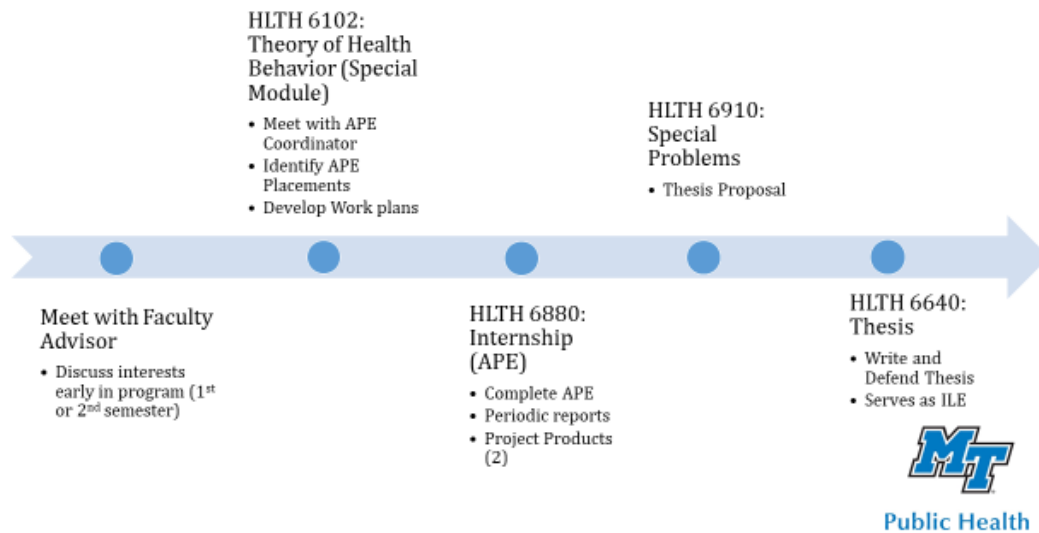
3. PLANNING FOR THE APE

Students should start thinking about an APE placement during the first semester of their program and should have a good idea of the type of placement they desire before the start of their second year.

Non-Thesis Student



Thesis Student



a. Finding a Placement

APE placements are highly individualized for each student and are dependent upon the initiative the student takes to plan a quality experience. The experience may be group-based, but the student must document the experience individually.

Students should use the [APE Checklist](#), which includes a timeline for development, on the MPH website to assist in planning the internship. Students may want to think about the following questions while preparing for the APE:

- How do I hope to use my MPH degree in the future?
- What additional skills and/or knowledge will I need to meet my career goals?
- Where might I be able to learn to apply the skills and/or knowledge that I wish to obtain?
- Who might be best suited to assist me in obtaining the desired set of skills/knowledge that I need?

There are several formal and informal resources the student may wish to utilize when choosing a placement:

- Review the [APE Opportunity Information](#) on the MPH Program's website to find potential sites, projects, and contact information.
- Attend lectures, seminars, and special events on campus to learn about different public health issues, ongoing projects and research at the university.
- Discuss potential plans with Faculty Advisor
- Talk to other public health faculty members and other students.

While MPH Program staff and faculty members are poised to help in the development of the internship, please remember that developing the internship is the student's responsibility.

b. Meet with the MPH APE Coordinator

It is highly recommended that students meet with the APE Coordinator to discuss desired internship placement sometime during the latter half of the first semester of their first year.

c. Placement Site Approval

Upon determining the desired APE placement site, the student will contact the APE Coordinator for approval. A representative at the placement site will be designated as the student's preceptor. In order for a student to proceed, the site and preceptor must be approved by the MPH Program. The following forms must be on file in the HHP Office:

- The Preceptor's Resume' or CV
- The Standard Affiliation Agreement between the site and MTSU

d. HLTH 6102: Theory of Health Behavior as Internship Preparation

HLTH 6102: Theory of Health Behavior is a required three-credit course that includes a module that aids in preparing students for APE. The module includes the following:

- *IRB Training*
- *APE Placement site briefs*
- *Drafted APE Learning Agreements*
- *Professionalism Trainings*

- Career Service Advising

e. APE Learning Agreement (APE-LA)

The student, faculty advisor, and the preceptor develop a Learning Agreement prior to registering for HLTH 6880. The MPH Internship Coordinator approves the agreement. The agreement identifies

- details about the site,
- the assignments the student will complete at the placement,
- five competencies,
- two work samples for each competency, and
- IRB status

The APE-LA must be submitted with signatures from the student, preceptor, APE coordinator, Graduate Program Coordinator before the student can enroll in HLTH 6880. Students will not be able to register for HLTH 6880: Internship (APE) until they submit the APE-LA.

4. PRECEPTORS

a. Role of the Preceptor

The preceptor serves in the critical role of facilitating a successful learning experience. The preceptor oversees the student’s APE work on-site, provides consistent guidance throughout the APE, and completes an evaluation of the student’s performance at the end of the experience. The preceptor will help frame the project in the larger context of improving the health of the community or population. The preceptor may also consult on the ILE.

b. Preceptor Qualifications

Preceptors for MPH students must:

- Have an advanced degree in an appropriate field and/or adequate experience in the fundamental concepts in public health or related areas.
- Feel comfortable in providing constructive feedback to students and be willing to engage in the ongoing learning process with students.
- Be an employee of the agency/organization the student is working with.

5. FACULTY ADVISORS

Faculty advisors will help provide insight into potential APE opportunities. They will meet with students throughout the APE process to ensure students are mastering competencies, aligning their work with their goals, and planning projects to meet the internship requirements.

6. APE REQUIREMENTS

a. Time Commitment

i. Overview of 180-Hour Requirement

All MPH internship students are required to complete 180 hours in the field. The internship should be completed during the course of a single semester. While the internship hours can be divided between different semesters if needed, the internship

must be completed at the same site for the entire 180 hours.

Most students complete the time requirement on-site in a public health or community organization; however, some students are required to do more independent work. The following is a list of activities that *can* count towards APE hours:

- Working on public health projects or other related public health work at the APE site
- Hours spent at the APE site learning about public health or other related topics or projects that enhance the understanding of public health
- Time spent developing IRB proposal
- Time spent completing a literature review or other library research related to the APE
- Time spent analyzing data related to the APE project
- Time spent in meetings, trainings, or workshops either related to APE or that enhance the understanding of public health if they are not accomplished directly at the APE site.

There are also some things that *cannot* be counted towards the APE hours, including:

- Travel time to and from the placement site
- Work/Job time (see below)
- Time spent in required courses, elective courses, and time spent studying for these courses and/or doing the course work

ii. Jobs and Assistantships

Generally, work/job time *cannot* count towards APE hours. However, if the student wishes to develop a project to benefit their organization that is completed above and beyond their regular work hours, they should consult with the MPH APE Coordinator.

There may be special considerations related to preceptorship and APE supervision as it relates to a work situation. Graduate assistants are permitted to intern within MTSU, but must be above and beyond the work hours assigned per contract.

b. APE Assignments

i. Reflections (2)

During the APE, students are required to complete self-reflections, one at the mid-point of the term, and one at the end. Students are asked to reflect upon the work that is done in the APE and how it relates to overall career goals, public health, and the MPH competencies.

ii. Work Sample Artifacts

Students will submit work samples or products from the APE that address competencies listed in the APE-LA. Students must submit two artifacts for each competency listed on the APE-LA.

c. Two Products

Throughout the APE, students should be working towards at least two projects or products. They may be similar but having two distinct products is necessary. Both products need to clearly link to the (5) competencies listed in the APE-LA. Each product does not have to connect to all (5) competencies, but both products together must cover and connect to all (5) competencies cumulatively. Examples below:

- Program evaluation report

- training manual
- policy statement
- legislative testimony with accompanying supporting research
- surveillance report

Another example:

Suppose an intern is working with a school district to develop and evaluate new health promotion programs. One product to use and turn in would be the formal proposal of the program. Another product might be the evaluation plan or report of that program or of an existing program.

d. Grading

The APE is graded on Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory basis. *The final grade will be based on the Preceptor's evaluation of the student, work products uploaded into D2L, reflection assignments, and final project presentation.*

The MPH APE Coordinator is responsible for determining and entering the Student's final grade for the APE in conjunction with the faculty advisor. Preceptor evaluation disputes should be discussed and resolved by the student and Preceptor.

e. Student Evaluation of Preceptor

Students are required to complete an evaluation of the preceptor and the placement site at the end of the placement. While not a part of grading, the student evaluation is the MPH Program's effort to make certain that all placement sites and preceptors provide an educationally sound experience.

The information provided by the student in the evaluation is kept confidential and is not shared with the preceptor. The student evaluation will be sent to the student approximately two weeks prior to the end of the semester or session. The student evaluation and accompanying paperwork should be completed and returned to the Faculty Advisor on the last day of the semester in which the student is enrolled.

D. Integrative Learning Experience (ILE)

The ILE demonstrates the synthesis of at least three MPH Program Competencies through the course of the MPH degree. The ILE is completed at or near the end of the program of study (e.g., in the final year or term) and represents the culmination of MPH educational endeavors. The ILE consists of three components:

1. Completing an APE
2. A written product integrating the APE work and theory (Thesis student uses thesis)
3. A formal review evaluation of the student's written product (Thesis student uses thesis)

2. FACULTY ADVISORS

The student's faculty advisor and APE coordinator will guide students through the ILE and assess the written product.

3. ILE COMPONENTS

a. Presentation Session

All students will be required to give a presentation about their APE. The presentation will be held during the end of the semester and coordinated with other APE students, sites, and faculty. Each presentation will be an overview of the entire work of the APE covering the 5 competencies selected in the APE-LA. The following items are expected to be discussed in the presentation:

- Overview of the APE placement and project(s) the student completed
- How the five competencies were addressed with the projects
- Reflection on time spend during APE and MPH Program altogether

b. Written Product: ILE Paper (Example Below, check D2L for latest version)

i. Assignment Instructions

Objective: Integrate a public health theory or system to an applied experience

Synthesis Paper:

Each paper must have a title, appropriate literature citations, and the following sections:

I. Introduction and description of the applied experience chosen (>400 words)

II. Description of how the applied experience fits into a public health theory or public health system or policy. (>500 words)

III. Address how the applied experience in the context of the health theory, system, or policy is, or is not addressing the following. Be sure to also provide at least two suggestions for improvement as well. (>1000 words)

1. Cultural competence in communication of this public health issue or initiative. (FC 20)
2. How do current policies on the issue of your applied experience impact health equity? (FC 15)
3. What are the social determinants of health behavior at multiple levels in this context? (CSC2)

Format:

1. Your paper should be at least 2000 words not including the references and titles, and should be in essay—not, bulleted format.
2. Use whatever format style you would like, but I recommend a common one (APA, AMA, MLA, etc.)
3. You will be graded primarily on the connection of your applied experience to the three elements of cultural competence, health equity, and social determinants of health.

Example:

My applied experience

During my APE, I created a health promotion campaign for type 2 diabetes that including social and print media, presentations and trainings, and online awareness video adds.

The social-ecological model and diabetes

I would describe how the social-ecological model works and how my experience of developing the promotion campaign connects and falls into this theory at the different levels of influence. I would point out where there were gaps and where there were successes.

Addressing cultural competence, health equity, and social determinants

I would then briefly describe cultural competence and the importance of it in the context of diabetes and the social-ecological model. I would then connect the promotion campaign I was part of to this issue and point out where it incorporated cultural competence and where it had room for improvement.

I would address specific policies that connect to diabetes impact healthy equity and then tie my experience in the promotion campaign to health equity improvement, whether the policies that exist influenced the promotion campaign or vice-versa. I would then address how the campaign addressed health equity or did not and where it could be improved.

I would then synthesize the social determinants of diabetes within the social-ecological framework and how my promotion campaign targeted or did not target these social determinants and where it could be improved.

ii. Assessment

The student's faculty advisor and APE coordinator will assess the written product using the written product rubric and may be supplemented with assessments from other qualified individuals (e.g., preceptors, community-based experts).

In order to be deemed satisfactory, the written product must meet or exceed all expectations for criteria set forth in the rubric (uploaded and shared in D2L). In the event that the team identifies one or more areas in which the criteria is deemed unacceptable, the student must complete appropriate edits. The faculty will provide specific detail on which elements are unacceptable and the appropriate remedial steps to bring the final written product to the satisfactory level. Students who have any issues noted in the "unacceptable" column of the rubric will not meet graduation requirements until the written product is revised.