



School of Public Health

MHA INTERNSHIP MANUAL

Department of Health Management and Policy

Master of Health Administration Internship Program

HMAP 5394: Master of Health Administration Internship

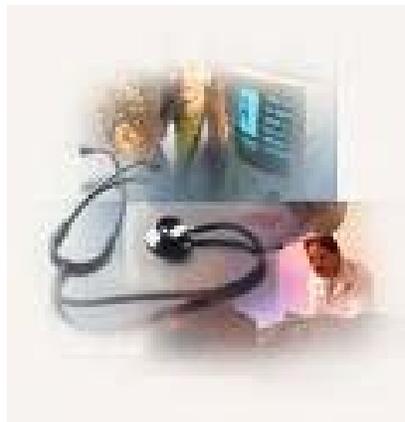


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PREFACE

All students pursuing a Master of Health Administration (MHA) degree at the University of North Texas School of Public Health are required to complete a professional internship prior to graduation. The MHA internship program is managed under the direction of the MHA Program Director in cooperation with program faculty, students and preceptors in the field. The purpose of this *MHA Internship Manual* is to provide students, preceptors, and program faculty with a common set of guidelines for the design and completion of each student's internship requirement within the overall Master of Health Administration curriculum. Accordingly, it contains four main sections:

- I. An overview of the purpose and content of the internship experience;
- II. An overview of the internship year and placement process;
- III. A delineation of the expectations and responsibilities of the student, preceptor, and HMAP program faculty participating in the internship program; and,
- IV. An explanation of the internship program's other policies and procedures.

I. GENERAL OVERVIEW

Internship Purpose and Objectives

Each student in the UNTHSC School of Public Health's Master of Health Administration Program is required to complete a 500 contact hour, 12-13-week, full-time internship in an approved health services organization under the guidance of a qualified preceptor. The purpose of this internship is to provide the student with a "real world" experience against which to compare the concepts and models learned in the classroom; enable an appreciation of the complexity of organizations and the individuals that comprise them; and to provide insights for further development of skills and knowledge during the student's remaining time in the program.

The MHA internship experience is intended to provide students with "hands on" training in health services management. The final decision regarding which type of internship is most appropriate for individual students is made by the MHA Program faculty.

All internships should be designed to enable students to accomplish the following objectives:

- ❖ Observe and understand the leadership and managerial style of the preceptor;
- ❖ Understand the overall design and interrelationships of the individual parts of the organization's structure;
- ❖ Contribute to the "real output" of the organization by participating in relevant projects and one in specific project that can be led by student and significantly contribute to the organization's operations;
- ❖ Practice serving as a "real healthcare manager" within the organization; and
- ❖ Understand the internal and external environment in which the organization functions.

Integrated in the Fall of 2012, the *MHA Portfolio* is a course that is designed to support different professional development activities aimed at improving academic, technical, professional and communication skills that prepare the student for the internship process, activities and responsibilities. All students scheduled to enroll in the MHA internship in the summer, must have successfully completed the portfolio activities outlined and required for the two previous semesters (Fall and Spring).

MHA Curriculum Core Competencies

The Department of Health Management and Policy has identified competencies essential for successful healthcare management and leadership. The Master of Health Administration Program adopted the National Center for Healthcare Leadership competencies model. Three competency domains, Transformation, Execution and People and eighteen competencies (listed below) within those domains guide the MHA Program curriculum.

- Accountability
- Achievement Orientation
- Communication Skills
- Financial Skills
- Impact & Influence
- Information Technology Management
- Performance Measurement
- Process Management & Organizational Design
- Project Management
- Human Resource Management
- Change Leadership
- Strategic Orientation
- Organizational Awareness
- Analytical thinking
- Information Seeking
- Initiative
- Professionalism
- Self Confidence

The MHA internship is intended to develop and strengthen the competencies. Preceptors will be asked to evaluate the student's progress in the competencies at the end of the internship. Students are asked to self assess their mastery of these competencies as they progress through the program.

Content of Internship

While each internship will have unique characteristics, all MHA internships should allow the student to accomplish several things that in turn advance the program's objectives and curriculum's core competencies. These include:

- (1) The opportunity for the student to work under the direction of a health services executive who serves as his/her MHA Internship Preceptor;
- (2) An orientation to the mission, vision, goals and objectives of the organization, including a period of time devoted to an organizational rotation;
- (3) The assignment of projects that meet both the student's training needs and the needs of the organization;
- (4) The opportunity for the student to practice serving as a health services leader within the organization by planning and directing at least one meeting and giving at least one oral presentation for the management team; and,
- (5) Ample exposure to the internal and external environment of the organization.

Direction by MHA Internship Preceptor

To ensure a successful internship experience for both the MHA student and the sponsoring organization, the assigned preceptor should understand and be committed to the internship relationship. Recognizing that MHA residents are actually "managers-in-training" and not merely temporary employees of the organization is key. By including the internship as a curriculum requirement, the MHA program recognizes that students greatly benefit in their professional growth from the guidance, instruction, support, constructive criticism and encouragement of a senior health services executive in the "real world" outside of their classroom experiences.

The complementarity between students' academic and "hands on" internship training strategically positions them for success as future health services managers. While leadership and managerial styles vary widely across individuals, each preceptor is expected to assume the role of a professional mentor, by actively supervising his/her intern and sharing how his/her own approach to health services management has developed over time and why.

In addition to the assigned preceptor, it is quite natural (and logical) in many organizations that the student will end up working more closely on a day-to-day basis with other members of the management team. Thus, the responsibility of mentoring the student is not necessarily that of the preceptor alone. Other organizational leaders and staff members will invariably serve as role models for the student over the course of the internship and contribute to his/her training. Yet, it is up to the MHA Internship Preceptor to direct the experiences the student undertakes during his/her time with the organization.

Orientation and Organizational Rotation

At the beginning of the internship, the student should receive a thorough orientation and introduction to the organization; be briefed on the organization's history, mission, vision, goals, and objectives; meet the key members of the staff; become acquainted with the environment in which the organization functions; have an opportunity to observe the chief executive officer; and be assigned one or more projects.

Where feasible, this orientation should include a brief organizational rotation. The depth of the rotation through various departments will depend on the student's previous experience, needs and interests, as well as time. When projects will bring the student back to a particular department, less time can be allocated to that department during the initial rotation. It is not necessary that the student spend a set amount of time in every department. Rather, adequate time in unique areas that provide good learning experiences should be selected. In organizations which are not departmentalized, the student should be allowed a wide range of exposure and experience in various aspects of the organization's operation.

Assignment of Projects

The main assignment of all MHA interns, especially at the start of their placements, should be to observe and learn from the experiences of practitioners in the field. Ideally, all internships should

offer students the opportunity to directly observe the chief executive or director of the organization in action.

As with any learning experience, each assigned "observation" should be done with a purpose and with adequate advance explanation. The student should be briefed prior to the observation period as to the issues and the actors involved. The student in turn should observe these "organizational actors" to ascertain their managerial styles and the effectiveness of those styles in varying situations. A most valuable learning technique for the student is the "instant replay" or immediate situation review by the preceptor.

Specific assignments for the student should be selected for their educational value. Assignments will vary according to each student's experience. Students with an extensive health or managerial background will be able to handle more complex assignments early in the internship, while students with more limited experience may need time to become acquainted with the setting before being given a project. There is no set number of tasks that a student is expected to accomplish. An intern's responsibilities may include one major project, a series of projects, or several tasks simultaneously. These can also include team efforts where the student is not exclusively responsible for the final product.

It is desirable, however, that the preceptor identifies appropriate projects for the student as early as is practical. Whenever possible, this should occur prior to the start of the internship, or at least by no later than the end of the student's second week on site. There should be enough flexibility in a student's internship plan, of course, so that new and/or more suitable projects that come up can be undertaken. Ideally, students should be able to work on at least one or two projects that can be completed before the end of the internship period. That way, preceptors should have ample time to offer the student constructive feedback on his/her performance.

Leading the Management Team

The core of the MHA Program's mission includes its dedication to training not simply able managers for health care organizations today, but individuals with the vision, initiative and ability to lead their organizations into the future. While competent leadership demands numerous talents and skills, two essential activities all leaders must perform frequently and well include directing meetings and giving oral presentations for other members of the organization's management team. Every internship should offer the student the opportunity to develop and practice these important leadership skills in the "real world outside the protected environment of the classroom."

Thus, all preceptors are asked to ensure that their interns be given the responsibility of planning and directing at least one meeting while they are in the field. This includes identifying the need for the meeting, deciding who should attend, and scheduling its time and location. The student should also be responsible for planning the agenda, explaining the purpose, setting out the objectives, reporting the outcome, and ensuring that any needed follow-up occurs as a result of the meeting for all parties involved.

Preceptors are also asked to have their interns give at least one formal oral presentation before the organization's management team or another appropriate constituency. The presentation can be based on the findings and recommendations of one or more of the student's assigned projects, special assignments, team meetings the student has participated in or led, or other appropriate activities (e.g., a research paper the student has written that is of interest to the organization). The timing, setting, length and nature of the presentation should be based on the needs and interests of the organization, as well as the abilities and interests of the student.

Interns should consult with their preceptors when preparing these two activities. They should also schedule a post-hoc debriefing session after each one with their preceptors to receive constructive feedback regarding how their leadership skills in these key areas can be improved.

Exposure to Internal and External Environment

The internship should also provide opportunities to experience both the internal and external environments of the organization. At the outset, the internship should focus on the internal environment with an introduction to the organization's purpose, technologies, task environments, people and structure. This involves becoming acquainted with the physical aspects of the setting and receiving an introduction to the key people, including board members, department heads, and, as appropriate, physicians and other health professional staff.

The intern should also be exposed to those factors imposed upon the organization by the external environment. These technological, economic, political/legal and social/cultural settings may suggest visits to or with other agencies and institutions to ensure an appreciation of the forces impacting upon the organization (e.g., local councils, service clubs, governmental units, accrediting organizations, unions, etc.).

Prior to their field placements, many students have had only limited contact with physicians and/or other professional health service providers. If possible and appropriate, these students should spend several days with such individuals (e.g., physicians, psychologists, social workers, etc.) to get a better understanding of their roles and functions as they relate to the organization's delivery of services. As a result, students should come to appreciate what is involved in a health service provider's day and his or her attitudes toward the health care delivery system, health legislation, and other factors affecting his or her professional practice.

Much of this exposure should take place during the student's initial orientation to the organization, or at least early in the internship placement. It is expected, however, that a deeper understanding of the nuances of the organization's internal environment and the pressures of its external environment will develop over the full internship period. By the end of the internship, the student should have a grasp of the problems and challenges the organization is facing, why these issues have arisen, how these are being handled and resolved, who is taking the lead in resolving them, and where the organization is headed as a result.

III. EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Student

Students will be provided with a catalog of project descriptions from individual preceptors willing to host a student intern. The contact information of the point of contact at each organization will be included in the catalog of internship opportunities. It is the responsibility of the student to schedule interviews and secure an internship placement before the beginning of the internship period. The student must provide documentation to the MHA Program Director and Internship Instructor of internship placement.

Expectations

Prior to internship, all students planning to enroll in internship are briefed by the MHA Program Director regarding what they can expect from their internship experiences, preceptors, MHA program faculty, as well as their own responsibilities. These include:

- ❖ First-hand knowledge of how the organization really works;
- ❖ Work experience at a professional level;
- ❖ Exposure to the environment within which a health care organization must function;
- ❖ Mentoring by an experienced health service manager, exposure to the organization's chief executive officer, and the opportunity to observe and learn from their managerial styles and those of others in the organization;
- ❖ Better understanding of possible career options in the health services management field

Responsibilities

Students should approach their participation in the MHA Internship Program as a tremendous learning opportunity. They need to appreciate that professional training requires time, earnest effort, flexibility, consistent cooperation, integrity, maturity, and openness to new experiences, patience, a positive attitude and a pro-active commitment to developing one's own career. Each student is responsible for understanding and complying with the requirements of the internship program explained in this manual.

In preparation for their field placements, all students are required to:

- ❖ Attend all scheduled internship meetings; participate in all MHA Portfolio required activities in both the fall and spring semesters;
- ❖ Attend the MHA Internship Debriefings offered by the returning internship class;

- ❖ Arrange to meet with their faculty advisors and MHA Program Director to discuss the various career options in the health services management field and what type of internship setting might best serve their individual career goals, needs and interests; and submit copies of their resume, their completed Internship Information, Goals, Needs and Preferences form, and all other requested information to the MHA Program Director by the stated deadlines.

The goals of the internship should focus on realistic student aspirations and be achievable and measurable. All resumes should summarize each student's educational background; experience (work and relevant volunteer); honors and awards; extracurricular activities; and special skills or training (foreign language, computer, special licenses, etc.). These documents will be shared with each student's faculty advisor, internship preceptor, and the HMAP program faculty as a whole to assist them in the internship matching process.

The student and the preceptor, with guidance from the advisors, share the responsibility for scheduling the student's activities during the internship. The mixture of departmental rotation, project assignments and observation of the chief executive officer should be developed for the individual student based upon past student experience and present needs. All students are expected to adhere to the highest professional standards of conduct, speech, dress, discretion, punctuality, conscientiousness and performance while they are in the field.

During the final two weeks of the internship, the student should set up a time for an exit interview with his/her preceptor. Prior to this meeting, each student must complete a formal evaluation of his/her internship experience. This document should be used as a basis for discussing how effectively the internship fulfilled the student's expectations and career goals with his/her preceptor during the exit interview. This evaluation should be used in the student's joint debriefing with his/her faculty advisor. Finally, the HMAP program faculty actively considers these student evaluations in their periodic review of all active internship sites and preceptors.

Upon returning to the UNTHSC campus, all interns are required to:

- ❖ Submit all other reports, completed forms and materials as explained in the MHA internship program documents and correspondence from the MHA Program Director; and
- ❖ Present a formal "internship public debriefing" of their internship experience for the incoming internship class, the HMAP program faculty and the program's preceptors.

Each student's public debriefing should focus on sharing with the audience the value of his/her internship as a professional and personal learning experience. These debriefings should identify the student's site and preceptor; state his/her prior expectations and goals; explain the projects he/she was assigned; and reflect on the "lessons learned" from the internship experience. A set of guidelines for the public debriefings are distributed by the MHA Program Director.

The Preceptor

Once a senior health services administrator or executive has agreed to serve as a particular student's MHA Internship Preceptor, he/she is appointed by the MHA Program Director to supervise the field experience phase of the internship program. The preceptor and the MHA Program Director share the responsibility for ensuring an educational environment during the internship period. The preceptor should always feel free to consult with the MHA Program Director and student's advisor regarding questions, issues or concerns that may arise during any phase of the internship program.

Preceptors will work closely with the MHA Program Director based upon the internship information, goals, needs and preferences of the students' who will be performing their internships in the coming year and those senior health care executives who have indicated their willingness to participate with the program in this educational endeavor. This commitment includes certain preceptor expectations and assumed responsibilities.

Expectations

Individuals agreeing to serve as preceptors can expect to benefit from the following features of the MHA internship program:

- ❖ The opportunity to mentor "young" health services managers-in-training;
- ❖ Fresh insights into managerial activities through a student's new perspectives;
- ❖ Exposure to the current "thinking" in health services management education;
- ❖ Interaction with the School of Public Health faculty and their teaching, research and service activities;
- ❖ Service to the profession; and
- ❖ The ability to "try out" potential future employees.

Responsibilities

The preceptor is responsible for directing his/her intern's educational experience in the field. This responsibility may require some delegation to other administrators. It should include ample time for preceptor-student dialogue that is thoughtful, candid, guiding and meaningful. The preceptor is expected to take the student to staff meetings, board meetings, negotiating meetings, and expose him or her to various elements of the executive function.

It is also recommended that the student have access to incoming and outgoing mail. Indeed, the student should have as much access to what goes on in the organization as is feasible simply

because he or she is a student and not committed to specific outputs each day. The preceptor, in turn, should be available for teaching and be prepared to produce assignments, give reviews and offer mini-lectures when necessary.

The preceptor shares with the student the responsibility for scheduling the student's activities. The preceptor is a necessary part of this process to better guide the student to an understanding of the organization and its environment. Through this involvement, the preceptor will also gain a better understanding of the student's total internship activities, and a greater awareness of what the student is involved with at any time.

Regular, scheduled contact between the preceptor and student is essential for ensuring a successful internship. While circumstances may vary, in most cases the preceptor should set aside at least one hour per week to meet with the student one-on-one to debrief on the prior week's events and discuss the student's schedule for the week ahead. Past experience has demonstrated that when the preceptor and student meet only infrequently or on a "catch me as you can" basis, neither the preceptor nor the student is able to fully benefit from the potential of the mutually-educational internship mentoring relationship.

The preceptor is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the student's performance of all assigned tasks throughout the placement period. This ongoing evaluation should consider:

- How well has the student defined the problem? How does he or she understand the dimensions of the tasks to be accomplished?
- Has the student considered alternatives that are realistic, creative, and comprehensive?
- Has the student fully utilized the resources available?
- Is the student consistently asking the "right questions?"
- Is the student's final product (if applicable) usable? Is it well written?

Each preceptor is also expected to keep in touch with the MHA Program Director throughout the internship period. In particular, the preceptor should contact the MHA Program Director immediately if a student is not performing at the desired level.

All preceptors are encouraged to conduct an exit interview with their students during the final two weeks of the internship. This interview should be viewed as an opportunity for a mutual exchange of views between the student and the preceptor. Both parties are encouraged to express their views on the quality of the internship, possible improvements in the organization, directions for future study, and career possibilities.

Once the internship is completed, the preceptor is asked to submit a written evaluation of the student's internship performance by the requested due date to the MHA Program Director. This evaluation should assess the student's strengths and weaknesses, career potential, and recommend to the faculty for the internship. Grades of A, B, C, F or I (Incomplete) may be assigned.

MHA Program Faculty

The MHA program faculty benefit from participation in the internship program in several ways. As "faculty mentors" for their students, their role in helping their advisees to prepare for, succeed in, and fully internalize their internship experiences is critical.

Expectations

The MHA program faculty can expect that the internship experience for their students will:

- ❖ Expose them to a wide range of administrative and planning activities;
- ❖ Provide them with supervision by a senior-level health service administrator;
- ❖ Cultivate mutually beneficial professional relationships between the MHA program and the community of "real world" health service management practitioners; and
- ❖ Provide channels for feedback on the relationship between the theory of the program's curriculum and current, as well as changing realities of practice world.

Responsibilities

The personal interchanges among the preceptor, student, and faculty are important contributions to the internship experience. Faculty members are expected to:

- maintain an active mentoring relationship with each of their advisees throughout the internship;
- be available to their advisees' preceptors as a resource on the MHA program's activities, policies and procedures throughout the placement period; and
- fully inform the MHA Program Director of any problems that should arise relating to the internship program.

As mentioned earlier, when students return to campus after completing their internships, they need to meet with their faculty advisor for a debriefing meeting. During these meetings, each faculty advisor will review individually with his/her advisees the preceptor's evaluation, the student's self-evaluation, and all faculty progress reports developed during the course of faculty visits and communications. Sharing of this information is intended to provide the student with deepening insights into his/her strengths and weaknesses, both as experienced during the internship and as anticipated in future career planning.

IV. OTHER POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Site Information & Placement

The decision by an individual organization or health services executive to sponsor a MHA resident from the UNTHSC School of Public Health is always voluntary. Therefore, the exact list of sites and preceptors participating in the MHA Internship Program varies from year to year.

The Internship placement process is a mutual responsibility between the MHA program director and the student. MHA program director will communicate with the student regarding potential sites and of any interviews that might be required. Internship placements for all students will be revealed at times as they are confirmed or when all are confirmed. Given the amount of coordination and negotiations between sites and needs, this process might mean confirmation of internship sites taking place as late in April for summer internships.

Students, then, should focus on identifying the type of health services setting they would like to be placed in (e.g., large or small hospital, managed care company, in-town or out-of-town consulting firm, etc.), rather than requesting a specific site and preceptor. All this is explained in detail at the Internship Orientation Meeting by the MHA Program Director.

Students are also encouraged to consult with members of the returning internship class and the School of Public Health faculty, as well as to use Internet and other sources to gather as much information as they can about their sponsoring sites before they begin their internship experiences.

Housing and Transportation

Arrangements for living expenses, tuition, housing and transportation during the field placement phase of the internship program are the full responsibility of each student intern. Many active sites within the Dallas-Fort Worth area are reachable only by car. Students need to understand this and allow ample time to arrange for transportation if they do not have a car of their own.

Stipend

UNTHSC's MHA Internship Program asks participating sites to offer the interns they sponsor a modest stipend in recognition of the services that the students provide. These monies should be regarded as a "training wage" by students and are not expected to reflect salary levels they might earn in a full-time job. The HMAP Department recommends a stipend when it invites prospective internship preceptors and organizations to participate in the internship program (e.g. \$10 per hour in 2013).

This range is based on the calculated average of stipends earned by the outgoing internship class and those offered to students in other MHA programs. Preceptors are free to adjust the amount they offer their interns within or above the recommended stipend range according to their own organizational budget constraints, as well as the prior experience level of their individual student.

It is never appropriate, however, for an individual student to ask his or her preceptor for a stipend greater than the amount recommended by the HMAP Department in any given year.

Grading

A grade of A, B, C, F or I is awarded to students when they complete all their internship requirements. Grades are based on the joint recommendation of each student's preceptor, faculty advisor, and the MHA Program Director.

SUMMARY

The MHA program internship aims to provide students with an experience which will permit their maximum professional growth and development. While the preceptor and student are to tailor the internship to meet the specific needs of the student, the HMAP program faculty is available to guide and counsel each preceptor and student throughout the internship year. The proper internship format will vary considerably, but all students should have the opportunity to develop their management skills and decision-making abilities, acquire some technical knowledge of health services delivery, and build a foundation for their future career development during their field placement experiences.