

## **Environmental Health Field Experience Handbook – Summer 2004**

Thank you for participating in Concordia's Environmental Health program. This document provides a set of guidelines for students, workplace managers, and supervising health inspectors for the 12-week summer field experience. This experience is one 12-credit course (ENVH 571) towards the completion of the Bachelor of Environmental Health (After Degree) credential BEH(AD), and a most important step in the preparation for the national CIPHI examinations.

Before being considered for a field placement, students will have successfully completed all of their academic preparation. All students possess a previous baccalaureate degree with appropriate scientific background. The after-degree academic program is designed to systematically prepare its graduates with the knowledge, skills and attributes required to become successful entry-level practitioners in the field of public health inspection.

The next step is to provide the students with sufficient and varied experiences in the public health field. This can only be accomplished through our partnerships with the sponsoring organizations. It is recognized that the decision to employ a student through this process includes a commitment to providing those experiences needed for successful completion of their examinations and integration into the public health field. As a guide to this process, everyone is provided here with information covering:

- What skills can I expect the student to have upon arrival at the workplace?
- What are the expectations of participants in the field experience?
- To what practical experiences do students need to be exposed?
- By what process are the students selected and placed?
- How is student progress evaluated?

As well, the appendices contain complete course descriptions and CIPHI Learning Objectives. Forms required for evaluation purposes are available from <http://www.ciphi.ca> or the Coordinator.

During the experience, the coordinator of the program will make every effort to maintain contact with the students and supervising inspectors as well as plan for one on-site visit to observe the situation and provide an opportunity for discussion. However, if there are any questions or concerns about the progress of the field experience program at any point during the process, please do contact:

Dr. Karen McDonald  
Director and Assistant Professor  
Environmental Health  
Faculty of Professional Education  
Concordia University College of Alberta  
Ph: (780) 413-7812 Fx: (780) 466-9394  
E-mail: [kmcdonald@concordia.ab.ca](mailto:kmcdonald@concordia.ab.ca)

Thank you once again for your support of this professional program. The students are ready to experience the best learning opportunity of their public health career and the sponsoring organizations will benefit from the injection of enthusiasm and new skills of these recruits.

Enjoy the experience!

## What skills can I expect the students to have upon arrival at the workplace?

The students arriving at the field placement have successfully completed their academic requirements for the after-degree program at Concordia University College. As well, they each have a unique background in a variety of scientific backgrounds through their undergraduate education and previous work experiences. These skills would probably have been considered as part of the hiring process, but the supervisor should feel at liberty to take advantage of these additional skills as well as the formal environmental health training.

The following table provides a synopsis of the courses that will have been successfully completed by the arriving student. Descriptions of individual courses are provided for your convenience in Appendix I. The Instructional Objectives from the Canadian Institute of Public Health Inspectors (CIPHI), given in Appendix II, form the basis for academic instruction throughout the courses that are taken by students during the fall and winter semesters. The supervisor should feel comfortable that the student has been exposed to classroom instruction based on the CIPHI Instructional Objectives.

<b>Course #</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Instructor 2002/3</b>
ENVH 501	Environmental Management I	Mak / Probert / Epp
ENVH 502	Environmental Management II	Fok
ENVH 511	Health Risk Assessment I	Fok
ENVH 512	Health Risk Assessment II	Hohn / Fok
ENVH 513	Environmental and Public Health Law	O'Neill
ENVH 521	Applied Environmental Health I	Mak
ENVH 521	Laboratory	Mak
ENVH 522	Applied Environmental Health II	Mak
ENVH 522	Laboratory	Mak
ENVH 523	Ethical Issues in Environmental Health	Sinclair
ENVH 533	Health Promotion & Environmental Health Education	McLeod / Laarhuis
ENVH 543	Public Health Administration & Management	Heffner
ENVH 551	Communicable Disease Control	Predy
ENVH 552	Epidemiology	Bodo
ENVH 553	Environmental Microbiology	Hemmerling
ENVH 556	Environmental Chemistry	McDonald
ENVH 557	Environmental Toxicology	Coppock
ENVH 558	Applied Research Methods and Information Systems	Naidoo / Phan

The student practitioner brings a solid base of academic learning to the field experience. They have been exposed to the linkages between the classroom and the occupation through their mentors, professors, and site visits. However, the student practitioner does not have, nor should be expected to possess, the full-range of practical skills acquired by a public health inspector over the length of their career. This very field experience is a starting point for accumulating this experiential base. With that in mind, the supervising inspector is encouraged to be cautious about any preconceived expectations regarding the knowledge base of students, albeit that Concordia students are, for the most part, mature individuals capable of connecting and applying the theory to the practice.

## **What are the expectations of participants in the field experience?**

*Sponsoring public health organizations* are essential partners in ensuring a positive and productive field experience for Concordia's environmental health students. Sponsoring organizations help students to achieve success through efforts to:

- create a positive learning climate in the workplace;
- integrate students into the daily life of the agency;
- provide directly relevant, hands-on community experience;
- provide problem-solving opportunities and support responsible risk-taking;
- model techniques and behaviours of effective public health professionals;
- provide a practical understanding of the application of public legislation; and
- demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development.

*Immediate supervisors* for the work experience are expected to be CIPHI-accredited public health inspectors. The supervising public health practitioners at the field experience agency perform an essential role in the professional development of the student practitioner. In addition to assigning and supervising the student's work in the field, the supervisor(s) will:

- orient the student to the field of public health inspection and its application,
- introduce the student to operations in the sponsoring placement agency,
- guide the student practitioner in aspects of professional practice,
- encourage the student to progress in performing the responsibilities of an independent practitioner from observing functions through to conducting functions under direct supervision, and finally to conducting functions independent of, but accessible to, the supervising practitioner,
- provide the student with on-going formative evaluation of performance and complete a formal evaluation at the end of the 12-week experience.

*Student practitioners* are expected to be active participants in this learning opportunity. Full-time attendance each working day of the field experience is a requirement. Any extended absences will require additional field experience time. In becoming part of the work environment, students are expected to:

- comply with the agency's policies and protocols,
- accept direction and constructive criticism with a view to improved performance,
- maintain the normal working hours of the placement agency,
- arrive at work well prepared for conducting the day's assignments,
- adhere to the agency's expectations regarding behaviour and dress.

*Concordia's Environmental Health Coordinator* is available to the students, supervisors and sponsoring organizations throughout the duration of the work placement to:

- maintain on-going contact with all field experience participants,
- regularly conference with the supervisor and student,
- if requested, assist the supervisor in planning experiences for the student practitioner,
- provide advice to the supervisor in objectively evaluating the student's progress,
- assist the student in acquiring and submitting the required documents for the CIPHI certification examinations.

## To what practical experiences do students need to be exposed?

In its “*Candidate Information Package*” (available at <http://www.ciphi.ca>), CIPHI provides the purpose for the student field experience:

“The purpose of a field experience is to provide the student Public Health Inspector with a grasp of the practical application of his/her academic program. Under the supervision of experienced personnel, the student is familiarized with the day to day work of a Public Health Inspector and with those intangibles which form an essential part of inspection procedure.

It is realized that not all agencies will be able to provide experience in all of the fields listed. However, to the extent that each item is available, it is expected that the student will receive adequate supervised practical training over a three (3) month period, in regular daily work.

It is the candidate’s responsibility to demonstrate that, having completed the required field experience, all areas of the required program...have been satisfied.”

The CIPHI Board of Certification has articulated a total of 467 instructional objectives for accredited educational programs. These are listed in full in Appendix II for your reference. These objectives form the basis for the academic program taken by the students prior to their field experience, and the course numbers in which students will have been exposed to the topic are provided in the appendix. The objectives also provide a template for the types of experiences that the sponsoring organizations take efforts to provide to the environmental health student.

The supervisor(s) and the student are asked to read, discuss and plan action steps to take during the work term using the *CIPHI Forms C and F* as guidance for the types and quantities of experiences possible at the work place. Any objectives that are not possible in the sponsoring agency’s experience can be arranged with a partnering organization, or it then becomes the student’s responsibility to gain that skill through other means such as volunteering elsewhere. Taking some initial time to develop a work plan will provide the student with sufficient time to find other opportunities to learn if needed and clarify the agency’s commitment to the student.

Needless to say, students are not well served when (or prepared to be) left alone in field situations during this 12-week learning experience, but should be able to function independently in common situations by the end of their time with the organization. It is recommended that the student’s required two inspection reports be completed before the end of the work term in preparation for the CIPHI submission needed **60 days** before the examination. This means that for the October examination, documents need to be into CIPHI by August and for April by February.

## By what process are the students selected and placed?

Please note that this process is under review and any advice you have about how well this worked or not would be greatly appreciated on behalf of students or employers.

### Process for Recruiting:

- Sponsoring organizations are invited by Concordia's Environmental Health Coordinator to provide posters advertising available positions.
- **The field placement poster should contain:**
  - The sponsoring organization, contact information, and site of the posting,
  - An anticipated start date and duration of the posting,
  - Any offers of financial or other compensation,
  - A description of the position (optional),
  - Any specific requirements for the posting (eg., driver's license, etc.),
  - A deadline for applications.
- Students apply for positions by submitting resumes to the posting organizations by the date provided on their advertisement. Students are recommended to apply for more than one summer placement.
- For each position available, the sponsoring organization will select students from the resumes for interviews and may relate names to the Coordinator to arrange interview times. Mutually convenient interview times and places will be arranged with those students still on the list of available candidates.
- Following the interviews, sponsoring organizations will offer their position(s) to the successful candidate(s). To assist in effectively filling as many spots as possible, sponsors and students are asked to advise the Coordinator when an agreement has been reached.
- Students do not have to accept the first position offered but, in fairness to employers and other students, once a position is accepted, it is not professional to change it for another offer. Therefore, placed students will be removed from the available candidates list.

### Field Experience Education Agreement

In the past, each participating organization was asked to sign a *Field Experience Education Agreement* with Concordia University College of Alberta prior to the commencement of the field experience. This Agreement outlined the commitment that was being made by the student, the sponsor, and the university much of which is covered in this document.

In some cases, this *Agreement* was seen to be an encroachment on the responsibilities of the hiring organization particularly in those situations where the student was being paid a salary and was considered a fully functioning part of the work team. However, such a document could include specific details of worker's compensation insurance (available through Concordia if required) and form a basis for mutual progress to successful graduation and CIPHI accreditation. If your organization would like to pursue such an agreement, please contact the coordinator.

At present, the onus is placed on the student practitioner to submit the necessary materials to CIPHI and to Concordia. This is not the responsibility of the sponsor or employer.

## How is student progress evaluated?

Evaluation is a fundamental part of any learning process. Here, evaluation is a collaborative process achieved in the context of open, supportive and candid communication. It emphasizes the importance of professional development as an on-going process, and identifies areas of strength as well as targeting areas that require the student's further attention.

Supervising public health inspectors are involved in three aspects of evaluation as they work with student practitioners and the university coordinator. Those aspects are:

- (1) **Diagnostic** – Regular, ongoing feedback offering suggestions for consideration, discussion of alternative approaches, and goal setting for upcoming assignments.
- (2) **Formative** – Observation of the student practitioner's performance and provision of direction and encouragement. The supervising public health inspector will commend the student for progress achieved; reinforce strengths and successes; identify areas for improvement and provide suggestions for enhancing performance; and discuss the student's concerns during this critical time of professional formation.
- (3) **Summative** – Completion of the formal, official evaluative record. This evaluation is used by Concordia for purposes of completing the course requirements for graduation from the after-degree program. Experience is critical but credentialing is important to the student's future. If desired, the evaluation may be discussed with Concordia's coordinator prior to presenting the evaluation to the student.

During the final week of the 12-week field experience, the supervising public health inspector will complete the student's final evaluation. As an efficiency for the participants, Concordia employs CIPHI's Forms C and F as its evaluation report. The student is to be provided with an opportunity to comment on the evaluation report before completion. Both the student and the supervising practitioner will sign the documents and then the student will submit them to the university coordinator as the final component of the academic program for graduation. These same evaluation reports are a required part of the student's package for application to the CIPHI national examinations. ***Failure on the part of the student to submit completed Forms C and F plus copies of the two field reports to Concordia could result in an inability to graduate and have marks released to CIPHI in preparation for the national examination.*** Concordia provides only a Pass/Fail grade on the practical experience based on the employer's evaluation of completeness and not on ability to pass the CIPHI examination.

The complete Candidates Information Package and required Forms from CIPHI are found on <http://www.ciphi.ca> for your reference. Please note that any updated materials from the national website would supersede discussion of that issue contained in this document.

If there are any difficulties with the field experience, in general, or the evaluation process, specifically, any participant is encouraged to contact the Environmental Health Coordinator at Concordia for advice, facilitation or other service as required. It is the intention of the coordinator to visit the sponsoring health authorities or other agencies during the work term and every effort will be made to do so at the employer's convenience.