Applied Practice Experience (APEx) Handbook

Academic Year 2025-2026

Arkansas Colleges of Health Education
1000 Fianna Way
Fort Smith, Arkansas 72916

(479) 308-2243
Achehealth.edu

individual and ACHE.

Table of Contents

Forward

The Applied Practice Experience (APEx) represents a cornerstone of graduate education in public health. As a 120-hour professional engagement, the APEx offers public health students the unique opportunity to apply academic knowledge in real-world settings, gaining essential competencies while contributing to meaningful public health initiatives. This experience is not only a degree requirement, it is a transformative bridge between theory and practice.

At its core, the APEx is a collaborative endeavor. It relies on the shared commitment of academic faculty, public health organizations, and, most importantly, preceptors who generously invest their time and expertise to guide emerging professionals. Through this partnership, students gain exposure to the complexities of public health work, develop professional skills, and engage in projects that strengthen both their understanding and the communities they serve.

This handbook is designed to guide and support those with the APEx process—students, preceptors, and program administrators alike. It outlines the structure, expectations, and benefits of the APEx while reinforcing the value of experiential learning as an integral component of public health education.

We extend our sincere appreciation to the preceptors and field organizations who make this work possible. Your dedication not only shapes the future of our students but also contributes to the advancement of public health practice. Without you, this critical educational experience would not exist.

We hope the pages that follow serve as both a practical resource and an inspiring reminder of the impact of applied learning.

Sincerely,

Public Health Faculty

Key Aspects of APEx

Collaboration: It involves a planned joint effort between the academic program and the practice setting, ensuring a high-quality learning experience and professional growth opportunity for the student while enabling them to contribute to the organization's mission and vision.

Practical Application: APEx acts as a laboratory where students can coordinate and expand their academic knowledge, skills, and professional experiences meaningfully and functionally.

Culminating Experience: As a significant final graduate experience, APEx allows students to demonstrate their communication skills, apply their knowledge independently, and interact with other professionals within the organization.

Competency Development: The experience is designed to enhance foundational and concentration-specific Public Health competencies, align with the students' interests, and support their professional and career goals.

Registration for APEx

Course Enrollment: Students will register for the 1-credit hour APEx course during the last semester of their program.

Pre-registration Meeting: Before registering, students should discuss their APEx plans with the APEx course director to ensure alignment and proper guidance.

Scheduling: The exact dates and duration of the APEx are determined collaboratively by the student, APEx course director, and the preceptor, considering both the student's schedule and the needs of the practice site.

Meetings: Students are responsible for initiating meetings with the APEx course director both before registration and throughout the APEx period to ensure ongoing support and feedback.

Submission Requirements: Students should refer to the syllabus for specific submission requirements related to the APEx course.

Completion Requirement: Successful completion of the APEx is mandatory for degree conferral.

Structure of APEx

Completion Timeline
- APEx hours can be completed either on a full-time basis within one semester or spread over two semesters, depending on the agreement between the student and the field organization.
- The start date must be approved by the APEx course director.

Modalities
- The APEx can be conducted in various formats: in-person, hybrid, or remotely.
- In-person and hybrid experiences are highly recommended.
- Remote experiences are permissible if agreeable to the field organization.
- Students must maintain the same level of professionalism in a remote setting as they would in an in-person or hybrid setting.

Proposal Submission
- Students are required to submit the APEx proposal form before starting their APEx hours.
- The proposal form needs to be pre-approved and signed by the APEx course director.

Field Organizations for APEx

Placement Responsibility: While the APEx course director works with the student, students are ultimately responsible for securing their own placement. Students are encouraged to choose a field organization and experience that aligns with their concentration and career goals.

Variety of Settings: APEx can take place in diverse settings including non-profits, hospitals, health departments, government agencies, clinics, and more. The chosen field organization should be relevant to the students' concentration.

Approval Process: Field organizations retain the right of final approval for each student placement. Organizations may require an application or formal interview as part of their selection process.

Current Employment: Students who already work in the field of public health may request to complete their APEx with their current employer under certain conditions:

- The APEx project must differ substantially from the student's current job duties and responsibilities.
- The preceptor for the APEx must be qualified and different from the student's current supervisor.

Competencies for APEx

Foundational Competencies: Deliverables produced during the APEx must demonstrate attainment of at least three distinct foundational competencies. Listed in Appendix A.

Concentration Competencies: In addition to foundational competencies, deliverables must also demonstrate attainment of at least two distinct concentration-specific competencies. Listed in the course syllabi.

Total Competencies: Overall, students must demonstrate attainment of a total of five competencies through their APEx deliverables.

Alignment with CEPH Standards: These competencies are determined by the Council on Education for Public Health (CEPH) to ensure alignment with program standards necessary for future accreditation. A list of CEPH foundational competencies are listed in Appendix A on the CEPH website
https://media.ceph.org/documents/D2_guidance.pdf

Deliverables

Students are required to produce at least two deliverables during the APEx that demonstrates five CEPH competencies. This includes three foundational competencies and two concentration competencies.

- Deliverables should emphasize graduate-level work, and the student should not solely function as an "assistant."
- Students must discuss with their preceptor whether deliverables are considered proprietary (i.e., unable to be shared outside of the organization); if so, alternative deliverables must be proposed.
- Deliverables should benefit the field organization and be appropriate for the student's concentration.
- Deliverables are unique to the student's field experience.
- If a student collaborates with other students or individuals on any deliverable, they must include supporting documents that validate their individual performance. This can include peer evaluations. If peer evaluations are not available, students should submit supporting documentation that identifies their specific contributions to the APEx project. This documentation should include:
  o A list of sections or pages the student drafted for each deliverable.
  o Other tasks for which the student was directly responsible. This ensures clarity in individual contributions and helps validate the student's role in the collaborative project.

Learning Agreement

Completion Timeline: Once a student has identified a field organization and preceptor, they should complete the APEx Learning Agreement with their preceptor. The learning agreement should be completed at least one month

before the desired APEx start date.

Signatures Required: The Learning Agreement must be signed by the student, the preceptor, and the APEx course director.

Revisions and Approval: The APEx course director reserves the right to request revisions to the Learning Agreement. Students are not permitted to begin their APEx contact hours until the Learning Agreement is signed and approved.

Final Approval: Final approval of the Learning Agreement is at the discretion of the APEx course director. They reserve the right to request the student to secure a different APEx if the field organization or preceptor is deemed inappropriate.

Exit Interview

Students must complete an exit interview as part of the APEx requirements and students are responsible for scheduling their exit interview with the program director or designee. The exit interview must be completed at least one week prior to the end of the APEx course semester.

Agreements for APEx

Requirements: Some field organizations may require a formal affiliation agreement or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) before a student can be placed in their APEx.

Notification: If an affiliation agreement or MOU is required, the student must notify the program director as soon as possible. These agreements can take additional time to be approved, so early notification is essential.

Liability Insurance

Some field organizations may require students to have liability insurance coverage for their APEx placement. If a student wishes to work with an organization that has such requirements, they must comply with these conditions at their own personal expense. More information on liability insurance can be obtained through the Office of Student Affairs.

Background Check and Immunization for APEx

Some field organizations may require a background check or proof of immunization as a condition for the APEx. If a student wishes to work with an organization that has such requirements, they must comply with these conditions at their own personal expense. If the student prefers not to meet these requirements, they may choose to select another field organization that does not have these conditions.

Termination of Applied Practice Experience

The APEx course director will communicate and work closely with students and preceptors to ensure that the APEx is appropriate and meets the needs of both the student and field organization.

The public health program may remove a student from a field organization at the request of the organization or the student under limited circumstances which may include the following: violation of organization or university policies, threatening or abusive behavior, failure to meet expectations with an impact to an

organization's operations, student responsibilities and activities do not meet or align with APEx requirements, or preceptor cannot adequately fulfill supervision duties and an alternative preceptor cannot be identified. *This list is not exhaustive.*

If an organization is no longer able to host a student, the APEx course director will work closely with the student to identify alternative options for the APEx.

Roles and Responsibilities

Responsibility of Course Director

- Orient all students to the APEx by hosting an annual information session.
- Develop field organization partnerships on campus, in the community, and through referrals for internships in various locations, modalities, and concentration.
- Meet with student advisees to discuss class schedule and timing of the APEx.
- Review and approve completed student request forms.
- Support students to engage in meaningful and appropriate internships by:
    - Providing suggestions on field organizations based on the students' interests.
    - Providing guidance on CEPH competencies and the development of objectives.
    - Providing feedback on and approving the learning agreement.
- Work with the student to identify appropriate field organizations based on a student's schedule, abilities, and interests.
- Attend and provide feedback for APEx deliverables and oral presentations for student advisees.
- Attend, facilitate, and grade all of the APEx oral presentations at the end of the semester, and provide emailed feedback on the presentation to the student.

Responsibility of Student

- Attend the annual APEx information session.
- Complete the student request form to identify desired semester(s) for APEx hours and articulate public health interests, career goals, and potential field organizations.
- Apply and interview with field organization(s) (as applicable), and communicate any organization requirements (i.e., MOU, liability insurance) to the program director at least 1 month prior to the desired start date.
- Complete learning agreement with preceptor
- Students must communicate any agreement changes to the course director as soon as possible
- Complete and turn in assignments for the APEx course throughout the semester and make revisions in a timely manner if requested by the APEx course director.
- Work with the preceptor as needed to resolve any issues or barriers to achieving
  the competencies and objectives for the APEx.
- Send a thank you note or email to the preceptor at the end of the APEx to thank them for their time and effort.
- Complete the exit survey with the program director.

Responsibility of Preceptor

- Work closely with students to develop products and competencies for the APEx and complete the learning agreement.
- Communicate any organizational requirements to the student prior to beginning the APEx hours. This may include a MOU, background check, or training (e.g., onboard training for new employees).
- If the APEx is in-person, secure an appropriate and safe workspace for the student as well as any resources the student may need.
- Provide the student with an orientation to the field site which may include the following:
    - Introduction to staff
    - Overview of organization and population served.
    - Tour of the facility
- Meet regularly with the student to check-in on APEx progress and provide feedback.
- Communicate with the course director regarding any issues that arise during the APEx including student performance or barriers to completing preceptor responsibilities.
- Complete a final evaluation of the student.

APEx Forms

Students will reference the following templates and forms located on the ACHE Connect student website to aid in completion of their APEx.

APEx Activity Log: This template is used by the students to track their APEx activity dates and hours, as well as details about their APEx accomplishments and reflections. The APEx activity log should be updated weekly by the student. Appendix B.

Course Director Assessment Form: This form is to be completed and signed by the student's course director three weeks prior to the end of the APEx. Appendix C.

Preceptor Assessment Form: This form is to be completed by the APEx preceptor. Appendix D.

Student Assessment Form: This form is to be completed and signed by the student three weeks prior to the end of the APEx.

Frequently Asked Questions

Can Public Health Faculty serve as Preceptors?
No. Field preceptors are professionals outside of the public health faculty.

What happens if a student has a problem or issue with an APEx Preceptor?
Students should promptly contact the course director.

Can the APEx requirement be waived or experience prior to program be used toward APEx hours? (i.e., public health nurse with 20 years of experience or a physician)
No. Exemptions are not granted for the APEx. The APEx is a supervised experience based upon the application of graduate level competencies gained while enrolled in the program. In the APEx, students are expected to practice graduate level competencies (i.e., the knowledge and skills) they have acquired through their coursework in a professional public health environment.

What is the difference between APEx and Capstone?
The APEx is a supervised practice experience in the field of public health designed to enhance a student's professional skills and knowledge. Capstone is a higher-level written product that requires the synthesis of knowledge and evidence on a particular public health topic.

Can I be registered in APEx concurrently with my Capstone?
Yes! Students will be enrolled in both the APEx and Capstone courses in the final semester of the program.

Can a student do an APEx at their current place of employment?
Yes. Students can complete the APEx at their current place of employment, but the APEx opportunity must extend beyond their regular work duties. Work supervisors cannot serve as preceptors.

What if I am unable to complete my APEx hours in my last semester?
In this case, students will be given an incomplete grade and registered in the subsequent semester for the course. Degree conferral would be delayed until all program requirements are met

How should a student begin their search for an APEx site?
When choosing an APEx site, students should explore what skillset, experience, and content area would enhance their professional/academic goals.

Is an APEx paid or volunteer opportunity?

The APEx can be a paid or volunteer (unpaid) experience based on the site used for the APEx hours.

What are examples of appropriate products for an APEx? Appropriate products must demonstrate at least five CEPH competencies (3 foundational, 2 concentration). Products may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Grant proposal
- Evaluation or evaluation plan
- Process or quality improvement project
- Literature   review
- Surveys or questionnaires
- Policy brief
- Journal article or manuscript
- Needs assessment
- Data analysis
- Lecture or presentation
- Social media campaign or plan
- Curriculum development or implementation

Do the two products identified for the APEx need to demonstrate all five competencies?

Two products are the minimum requirement. It may take more products for a student to demonstrate five competencies (3 foundational, 2 concentration). For example, one product may demonstrate three competencies while the other demonstrates two. A student may also complete five products with each product demonstrating one competency. This is determined by the student and preceptor and approval of the course director.

How can students learn more about the Applied Practice Experience?

The APEx course director hosts an APEx information session annually. Additionally, students can meet with the course director 1:1 at any time during the year.

What qualifications does an individual need to serve as a preceptor?

It is the 'gold standard' for preceptors to have a public health degree, but this is not required. Qualified preceptors may have graduate degrees in related fields (child and family studies, education, social work, etc.). Years of public health experience, ideally in a supervisory position, can substitute for a public health degree.

Appendix A

List of CEPH foundational competencies.

Evidence-based Approaches to Public Health
1. Apply epidemiological methods 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

Public Health & Health Care Systems
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

Planning & Management to Promote Health
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

Policy in Public Health
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 populations
15. Evaluate policies for their impact on public health and health equity

Leadership
16. Apply leadership and/or management principles to address a relevant issue
17. Apply negotiation and mediation skills to address organizational or community challenges

Communication
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

Interprofessional Practice
21. Integrate perspectives from other sectors and/or professions to promote and advance population health

Systems Thinking
22. Apply a systems thinking tool to visually represent a public health issue in a format other than a standard narrative

There is additional guidance on how each competency can be interpreted on the CEPH website below.
https://media.ceph.org/documents/D2_guidance.pdf

Appendix B

ARKANSAS COLLEGES OF HEALTH EDUCATION

APEx Activity Log/Journal

Student Name

Anna Layne

Student ID

Date

08/05/202

Semester/Year of APEx

Student Email

Instructions: Use this form to track your hours and activities.

On-Site Hours

0.00

Off-Site Hours

0.00

Brief Description of Activities and Reflection

Appendix C

ARKANSAS COLLEGES OF
HEALTH EDUCATION

COURSE DIRECTOR ASSESSMENT

APPLIED PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE (APEX)

Student Name

Date

08/05/2025

Concentration

Agency Name

REQUIRED DELIVERABLE

Do you agree with the student's evaluation of the level of competence, reflected in their **first** deliverable in their concentration area?

○ Yes   ○ No

REQUIRED DELIVERABLE

Do you agree with the student's evaluation of the level of competence, reflected in their **second** deliverable in their concentration area?

○ Yes   ○ No

ADDITIONAL DELIVERABLES

Do you agree with the student's evaluation of the level of competence, reflected in their **additional** deliverable in their concentration area?

○ Yes   ○ No

Additional Comments:

Course Director's Name

Date

Appendix D

ARKANSAS COLLEGES OF HEALTH EDUCATION

APEx
Preceptor Assessment

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Preceptor Name

Origination Date

08/04/2025

Title

Phone

Agency Name

Student Name

APEX End Date

MM/DD/YYYY

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Please rate the student on the following performance and deliverable attributes.

Initiative: Degree to which the student can be relied upon to do the job without close supervision.

Job Knowledge: Appropriate background knowledge of job- related behaviors, techniques, skills, and procedures to perform effectively.

Ethics: Degree to which student acts ethically and fairly in the professional environment.

Cooperation/Teamwork: Willingness to work harmoniously with others in getting the job done. Readiness to observe and conform to the policies of the agency.