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## Enhancing the Future Public Health Workforce Through Competency-Based Student Field Placements

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# Conference Abstract

## Enhancing the future public health workforce through competency-based student field placements

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**Background:** The Public Health Workforce Interest and Needs (PHWINS) 2014 survey from ASTHO (Association of State and Territorial Health Officials) demonstrated a dramatic need for succession planning and retention of the future public health workforce. To address this need, the Region IV Public Health Training Center's (R-IV PHTC) Pathways to Practice Scholars Program places students from accredited schools and programs of public health into practical field placement positions across eight states. Skill- and competency-based student field placements reinforce the value of working with medically underserved areas/populations (MUA/Ps) through public health agencies. Field placements use adult learning theory through experiential learning to build essential skills from the Council on Linkage (COL) core competencies.

**Methods:** Host agencies include state and local health departments, Area Health Education Centers, primary care settings, and community organizations in one of eight southeastern states serving MUA/Ps. Agencies propose practical projects using COL domains. Proposals are converted to job postings. Once an agency selects a student, the team collaboratively develops a detailed work plan using specific COL competencies.

**Results:** A brief overview of evaluation findings will be shared but are not the focus of this workshop. Evaluation instruments included a pre-survey, work plan, mid-term survey, final evaluation, and alumni survey. Students submit a final report, reflection summary, webinar presentation and/or abstract worthy of submission to a professional conference. Findings demonstrated increases in students' perceived ability to perform core competencies and future plans to work in MUA/Ps.

**Conclusions:** This program builds leadership and real-world experience in the future workforce while serving immediate needs of public health agencies. The workshop focuses on interactive discussion about processes and tools to create COL competency-based field placement position descriptions and detailed work plans. Participants can engage in dialogue about developing student positions which enhance their work while training the future workforce.

**Key words:** student field placements, competencies, work plans

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