

Clinical Practice Sites/ Professional Practice Experience (PPE) Guide

February 24, 2009

American Health Information Management
Association (AHIMA) House of Delegates Team–
Health Information Management (HIM)
Higher Education and Workforce

Letter from AHIMA Past-President Bryon Pickard

Thanks for reviewing the Clinical Practice Sites/Professional Experience Practice Guide. Student placement in the field (referred to as Professional Practice Experience (PPE)) is an important part of student education and overall career development. In fact, approximately 45 percent of HIM/HIT students actually obtain job offers directly from their PPE experiences. Recent Annual Program Assessment Report (APAR) data obtained from educational programs indicate 85 percent of graduates from two-year programs are employed or pursuing additional education. Employment figures are even more favorable for four-year HIM degree graduates at 90 percent. These are very strong numbers.

From a practitioner perspective, I find the best PPE experiences are at the busiest times (that is, during Joint Commission visits, system conversions, department moves, and so forth). Students find these first-hand experiences invaluable. Please consider extending an invitation to HIM students in your geographic area during peak as well as off-peak times—having an extra pair of hands to help out with special requests can be a tremendous benefit for both you and the student.

Each school program builds a link within the community through the development of a HIM Advisory Committee. Groups of HIM leaders are invited to have an active role in shaping the HIM program content and policies. Putting on my advisory committee hat, successful PPE experiences begin with building relationships and support from local practitioners. If you are not presently involved with a school (local or online) please contact the AHIMA Education Department (patt.peterson@ahima.org or (312) 233-1132) to express your interest in helping as a program advisor.

In this guide, you will find best practices for the actual PPE itself, along with some winning PPE placement strategies. You will also find sections on:

- Program/practitioner networking
- CSA and regional association involvement in PPE
- Examples of Advisory Committee charges
- Professional duty to mentor per Code of Ethics

If we each do our part, we can ensure that HIM students receive a thorough orientation to their new profession, and that our HIM workforce grows smarter, more informed, and better prepared to deal with the emerging issues of HIM practice in the 21st century.

Kindest regards,



Bryon Pickard, MBA, RHIA
AHIMA Past President (2007)

The Clinical Practice Sites/Professional Practice Experience (PPE) Guide was developed by the HIM Higher Education and Workforce House of Delegates Team and specifically refers to the internship or affiliation students undertake throughout their HIM academic program. The guide is divided into specific areas to provide information and best practices to students, academic faculty or programs and HIM practitioners on the expectations for the clinical practice sites/PPEs. The underlying goal is for clinical practice sites, educational institutions, and students to partner together to create a meaningful experience for all involved.

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Introduction

This Guide uses the term Professional Practice Experience (PPE) to refer to the internship or affiliation, or clinical practicum the student participates in throughout their HIM educational program. Each Commission on Accreditation for Health Informatics and Information Management Education (CAHIIM) accredited HIM program must have at least one PPE that helps students assimilate theory with practical application in order to work toward achievement of AHIMA entry-level competencies in a real-world environment.

In the 2004 Workforce Study commissioned by AHIMA, 80 percent of associate and baccalaureate HIM students agreed or strongly agreed that their PPE was helpful in deciding about future employment. In a survey of faculty in 2008, 30 percent (728 respondents) found it difficult or very difficult to find PPE placements. This Guide is intended to provide information and best practices to everyone associated with the PPE. The underlying goal is for clinical practice sites, educational institutions, and students to partner together to create a meaningful experience for all those involved. Each HIM professional can contribute in a meaningful way to help support the academic efforts of currently enrolled students. The importance of member participation is stressed in the AHIMA Code of Ethics, which states:

“Recruit and mentor students, peers and colleagues to develop and strengthen the professional workforce.”

Participating in PPEs is a way to strengthen the academic experience for students regardless of your practice setting. If the organization values your skills and expertise, they would do well to consider how to increase the HIM presence in their organization. So how can the HIM professional contribute? In the traditional HIM department the member could become a site supervisor or provide hands-on training to a student in your area of specialty. In the nontraditional HIM site, the member could contact a HIM school program and offer to take students for a unique PPE (become a site manager). The member could also campaign internally to start a HIM internship—contact human resources and your immediate supervisor to discuss the advantages of having HIM student involvement in special projects where a fresh perspective would be appreciated.

Outside the organization, the member could work through the component state association (CSA) to provide assistance with recruiting sites and interested professionals while developing student projects. The member could also share their knowledge by contributing a learning packet to CourseShare that HIM educational programs use to further students’ knowledge. The CourseShare Web address is <https://courseshare.ahima.org>.

The need for collaboration between HIM educational programs and the working membership is great. This Guide is divided into specific areas to provide information and best practices to HIM practitioners, CSAs, academic faculty, and students on the expectations for successful clinical practice sites/PPEs.

Affiliation Site Guide

Affiliation sites are organizations that agree to take HIM students for a non-paid extended period of time in order to aid the student in blending classroom theory with practical application. The student should be supervised, but should also be considered a contributing member of the HIM staff. Depending on the type of PPE, the student will observe and experience day-to-day HIM operations, provide documentation and recommendations in workflow, and complete special projects with supervision.

Organizations That Serve as Affiliation Sites

Traditionally, most PPE sites were either acute care hospitals or non-acute care sites such as ambulatory clinics, larger physician practices, LTACs, skilled nursing and long-term care facilities, and home health or hospice centers. Today, many HIM programs are reaching out to encourage student placement in consulting companies, HIM service providers, software vendors, insurance companies, pharmaceutical firms, outpatient behavioral health centers, and various state agencies, since these are all organizations that employ HIM professionals.

Affiliation Agreements

College programs establish agreements with area employers and agree to the conditions for accepting students in the workplace. These programs have standard agreements or contracts that outline the expectations of both the college and the organization. Topics such as HIPAA training, background checks, immunization and TB status, and health insurance coverage typically make up the bulk of the affiliation agreement. Ensure ample time for the agreement to be examined and signed prior to the start date of your first student's arrival.

Key Responsibilities of an Affiliate Site

1. Responsibilities prior to the PPE:
 - a. Review affiliate agreement with human resources, legal counsel, or required departments
 - b. Review student resume and work experience
 - c. Prepare student schedule of activities
 - d. Identify departmental site manager and mentor(s)
 - e. Prepare written description of any projects (if applicable)
 - f. Arrange for the following: facility identification, parking instructions, employee orientation (if applicable), information systems access, and any additional facility specific requirements
2. Responsibilities at the beginning of the PPE:
 - g. Provide an organizational chart of the department and facility
 - h. Provide departmental policies and procedures
 - i. Provide a facility and departmental tour

- j. Introduce students to all members of the HIM department, including those individuals the student may report to
- k. Review expectations—your expectations of the student and the student’s expectations of you
- l. Provide supervision and guidance for the student—either directly or through a department mentor(s)

Important Points about Being an Affiliate Site

1. The student is taking this experience as an academic course requirement and for a grade. It is vitally important that the experience is engaging and the student feels there is meaningful work to do.
2. Have a department supervisor available in case of illness or off-site requirements that might take you out of the office. The second supervisor should be introduced to the student on day one, and involved in the PPE plan so they may take over with a minimum of downtime.
3. Adhere to the Student Service Work Policy of CAHIIM Standard V.E.4. “All activities required in the program must be educational and students must not be substituted for paid staff.” Policies and procedures by which students may perform service work while enrolled in the program should be made known to all students.
4. Remember to complete the student evaluation on the last day of the visit and return it promptly to the program director. Since the student is receiving a grade for the PPE, it is very important that the site supervisor complete the student’s evaluation, since it makes up the bulk of the student’s grade for the course.
5. Encourage all staff to welcome the student even if they won’t be directly working with the student. A student is forming an opinion about HIM as a career and is learning specifics about what it means to work in an HIM department from this PPE.
6. This is a great opportunity to develop your staff’s supervisory or leadership skills by having a particular staff member serve as the department mentor for the overall PPE. Once the student’s PPE ends, meet with the staff member to determine what worked well and what they would have done differently. Count this as part of their annual performance appraisal as a professional development activity.
7. Consider this to be a prolonged job interview. By accepting HIM students to complete PPEs, you give yourself time to see how they interact with existing staff, and what skills they might bring as a future employee. Approximately 45 percent of students receive their first job in HIM either from the affiliate site directly, or from contacts made on-site during the PPE.

Site Manager Guide

The site manager will coordinate the PPE of the students at the clinical practice site.

Important Tasks for the Site Manager

Before the student comes to the site, in conjunction with the academic program director the site manager must:

1. Identify the total number of hours the student must complete before he or she begins.
2. Obtain a copy of the evaluation to be completed after the PPE period is over.
3. Identify the topics and projects requiring completion and discuss with the school those topics that cannot be completed at your site.
4. Arrange a schedule for each topic, in coordination with other departments in the organization as necessary.
5. Identify the department and site mentors for the student and pre-meet with these individuals to:
 - a. Coordinate the student's schedule and project.
 - b. Discuss or provide the school's expectations for the student.
 - c. Review key expectations, including specific expectations for the student to accomplish during his or her time with the mentor (for example, hands-on skill building versus completing a project).
6. Identify that one continuing education unit (CEU) will be given for all credentialed mentors in the facility. This will be validated by the academic program director.
7. Compile basic materials as reference documents for the student:
 - a. Department organizational charts and other pertinent organizational entities
 - b. Phone and pager numbers and the e-mail addresses of key resource individuals
 - c. A schedule with the names and locations of individuals with whom the student will spend time.
 - d. Any reference materials related to the student's project
8. Arrange for temporary access to computer systems, parking, or other security issues as appropriate to the organization.
9. Identify and reserve space for the student to work.
10. Team Assimilation—allow the student to become part of the team. The student should attend lunch, breaks, and any meetings with the team.

The Student's First Day:

1. Spend scheduled time with the student for a brief orientation to the department.
2. Provide reference materials.
3. Discuss the schedule for the PPE.
4. Introduce the student to key resource people in the department and other departments.
5. Have student sign confidentiality and security agreements and other required documents.

Throughout the PPE:

1. Meet regularly to review the student's projects and documentation.
2. Meet regularly to verify the PPE is meeting the student's expectations and that they are receiving all the necessary references and knowledge on schedule.
3. Review expectations with the student and discuss how they are meeting them at mid-point or other intervals.
4. Meet with personnel who were scheduled with the student for feedback.

At the End of the PPE:

1. At the completion of the PPE, arrange for a small thank-you celebration with the student and the people who spent time with the student.
2. Schedule the final evaluation and provide copies to the student and the school as directed by the academic program director.
3. Contact the school to see if you are eligible for any free or discounted continuing education unit (CEU) opportunities.

Department Mentor Guide

A department mentor provides the support a student needs to navigate the environment and complete assigned tasks. Though similar to new employee training, the mentor realizes that the student's experience is short term and more intensive. To this end, in a department, a student may have several mentors as tasks are assigned and completed. If the mentor is credentialed, they are entitled to one continuing education unit per calendar year for a mentored hour. Although one CEU per calendar year is modest, if a department has 20 credentialed members and they were each involved in mentoring students, then the department has the benefit of 20 CEUs at no charge.

The department mentor to student relationship is different than the student to site manager or student to director relationship. The mentor is the "go to" person for questions, advice, and assistance, and generally has a somewhat less formal interaction with the student than the site manager.

Expectations

The site manager will assign department mentors based on their knowledge and experience of the institution and the task. Mentors understand that the student is in an experiential learning environment and receives a grade for their activity and task completion. It is helpful and recommended that mentors log their activities with the students and submit this information to the site manager to incorporate into the student's overall activity log.

Serving as a mentor is good experience toward developing supervisory, leadership, and communication skills.

- The mentor understands the student will observe and experience day-to-day operations, giving the student an opportunity to participate, learn, and comment on workflow, operations and special projects. It is the mentor's expertise in each assigned area that is shared with the student in an environment conducive to learning.
- The site manager will assign employees (mentors) who can set aside time in their workday to work with the student on task completion.
- The site manager is responsible for communicating and understanding the expectations with the student and the employee (mentor) on the first day or early in the PPE.
- The site manager is responsible for meeting with each employee (mentor) to determine what worked well and what needs refinement. This information exchange may be part of ongoing performance appraisals.

Role of Component State Associations (CSAs) Guide

CSAs have an important role in supporting academic programs by facilitating a match between students and area HIM employers. A match supports students' desire to find clinical sites so they can complete their required PPE. In addition to traditional academic programs that CSA leadership knows about, there are a number of online programs that potentially have students in the CSA's geographic area. These students (and their remote programs) greatly need the CSAs' help to locate local facilities where students can complete their PPEs. A remotely trained student will ultimately become a newly credentialed professional, ready to practice in their CSAs' geographic area.

Some strategies CSAs might consider to support clinical practice sites and PPE placement are:

- Determine how many traditional HIM programs exist in the state and notify HIM directors within a 15-mile radius of each school to inquire if they are taking students. Encourage 100 percent participation. Determine if there are alternate employers in the state (HIM vendor companies, large physician practices, consultant groups, and the like) and encourage them to accept students for PPE. Send contact information on these sites to academic program directors so they have new sources to develop into affiliation sites.
- Be open to being contacted by remote programs seeking to find clinical practice sites for a remote student who lives in the CSA. Consider assisting them by making calls or e-mails to sites where the student lives so a PPE can be set up. The ideal CSA leader to provide this "match-up" assistance is either the CSA president or the director of education.
- Develop a partnership between academic program directors and the CSA leadership to work toward successful PPEs for both students and clinical practice sites.
- CSAs without any in-state HIM programs, which thus have hard to fill vacancies, may want to provide aid to students willing to travel to complete a PPE in the CSAs' area. Both remote and traditional students are encouraged to complete their PPE in different geographic locations.
- Encourage CSA members to be open to working with all academic programs with CAHIIM accreditation to ensure a well-qualified and well-prepared workforce.
- Provide a process for members interested in taking students to "raise their hand" or otherwise alert academic programs of their interest. This may be through a committee or volunteer position focused on facilitating and advocating for student PPEs. This committee or volunteer position would advocate for traditional and nontraditional PPEs for students.
- Recognize clinical practice sites that host students. This recognition could occur at CSA meetings or in the CSAs' newsletter, Web site, or CoP (Community of Practice). Consider having CSA awards for strong supporters of PPEs (for example, an "Academic Ambassadors Award").

- Recognize individuals who continually serve as clinical practice site managers or mentors. Again, this recognition could occur at CSA meetings or in the CSAs' newsletter, Web site, or CoP.
- Provide incentive programs for CSA members who host students, such as scholarships or drawings for free or reduced meeting registrations, prizes, and the like.
- Encourage CSA members and students to share their success stories, ideas, and best practices for making the PPE a rewarding and rich experience through the CSA newsletter, Web site, or CoP, and also at CSA meetings.

College and University Guide

The primary responsibility for maintaining and supporting a CAHIIM-accredited HIM program lies with the college or university. The PPE portion of these programs should include the following components:

1. Generic Affiliation Agreement
 - a. One Agreement—Determine if it makes sense to have one generic agreement for all allied health student programs rather than individual affiliation agreements for each program. This allows the college to negotiate once and all departments benefit from the effort.
 - b. Corporate Agreement—It may be advantageous to have an affiliation agreement with the healthcare corporation rather than each individual facility.
 - c. Memorandum of Understanding—This may be used for short-term visits or non-acute care PPEs.
 - d. Automatically Renew—Consider inserting an evergreen clause into the affiliation agreement to allow the agreement to annually renew unless a 30-day prior notice of intent to withdraw is provided by either party.
2. Provide evidence of insurance coverage for students in PPEs.
3. Be aware of requirements for onsite students at various organizations (for example, drug, criminal background, or TB testing). Have a policy in place that addresses funding and testing of students in preparation for on-site visits when required.
4. Support program advisory committee recommendations.
5. Clinical coordinator or program director should have adequate resources to contact, visit, and orient practice site managers and employees at the clinical practice sites.
6. Host free or low-cost continuing education seminars and workshops for PPE site managers and employees at the college or local facility. Consider allowing use of college or university facilities (meeting rooms, equipment) for free or reduced costs.
7. Provide speakers at local or state meetings or host a local or state meeting.

Program Director Guide

The Program Director has the ultimate responsibility for identifying, securing, and managing adequate and appropriate sites in which students can receive quality PPEs. Refer to the CAHIIM Accreditation Standards: III.A.2.b., V.A.- V.E.4. at the following Web address for more information: www.cahiim.org/standards

It is important to appreciate the relationship between enrollment count and the need to find meaningful PPE placement for students once they enter the program. Programs with aggressive growth must consider what additional resources they require to support the subsequent growth of PPE placement. Strategies include hiring a clinical coordinator to expand and manage clinical practice sites and determine the maximum placement count according to the program's affiliation agreements and the organizations' ability to accept students.

Identifying Potential PPE Sites

1. Attend local, state, and national HIM meetings to meet and network with HIM directors in the state where the program is located and all surrounding states. PPE sites can include hospitals, vendors, and other nontraditional sites.
2. Work with Advisory Committee
 - a. Emphasize their commitment to serve the program in many ways, including serving as a PPE site.
 - b. Seek references of other professionals who might agree to let their [Organization? Place of business] serve as PPE site.
 - c. Contact the CSA Board of Directors to discuss the issue and identify ways the CSA can support students completing their PPEs.
3. Approach past students who are in management positions and who the program director believes would provide a quality experience.
 - a. Create an active alumni program including an annual appreciation meeting. Use these meetings as a way to sign up alumni to support PPEs.
 - b. Encourage alumni to serve as mentors to rising seniors to help them to transition from student to employee. Recognize their efforts with a letter to their employer from the dean of the college or similar.
4. Upon accepting students into the program, determine if any can visit locations away from the local vicinity of the program by discussing the ability to stay with family or friends.
 - a. The program director is responsible to research hospitals and nontraditional sites located in the identified area.
 - i. Communicate with HIM professionals at the potential sites to determine if the student would receive a good experience.

- ii. If the HIM professionals are interested and the program director is satisfied the student will receive a quality experience. The program director must establish the proper relationship with the site (that is, the affiliation agreement).

Nurturing and Training PPE Site Supervisors

1. Early in the academic year, hold an annual workshop or program for local PPE site managers to review expectations for experiences during the upcoming academic year. Important notes:
 - a. Include the dean in the program
 - b. Keep the program to approximately two hours or less
 - c. Hold the program in conjunction with breakfast or lunch
 - d. Provide and review a PPE Handbook that includes:
 - i. Course outline and objectives
 - ii. Sample activities
 - iii. PPE expectations
 - iv. Supervisor evaluation tool of student
 - v. Student evaluation tool of PPE
 - e. Seek the input of site managers into student assignment alternatives (one student at a time versus multiple students concurrently)

Online Programs and PPE

2. Early in the academic year, for PPE site managers who are not local:
 - a. Provide a PPE Handbook including:
 1. Course outline and objectives
 2. Sample activities
 3. PPE expectations
 4. Supervisor evaluation tool of student
 5. Student evaluation tool of PPE
 - b. Host a virtual meeting (conference call or Webinar) to review the PPE Handbook, specifically the experience expectations. Important notes include:
 1. Include the dean in the virtual meeting.
 2. Seek the input of site managers regarding student assignment alternatives (one student at a time versus multiple students concurrently)

3. As an alternative to the above options, host a virtual meeting (conference call or webinar) early in the academic year to address these topics with local and non-local program directors.

PPE Preparation and Follow-up

1. Well in advance of student assignment, complete the following:
 - a. Contact the site manager where the student is assigned and review the following:
 - i. Confirm willingness to serve and dates
 - ii. Re-review objectives and expectations
 - iii. Finalize required agreements
 - iv. Provide a student profile, including a list of the types of projects in which the student has expressed interest and the student's e-mail address to facilitate communication prior to the PPE.
2. Communicate with site supervisor periodically during the student's PPE.
 - a. As permitted by location and funds, visit the site during the student's PPE.
 - b. If unable to visit in person, make contact with student and site manager via e-mail or phone.
3. Invite the site manager to attend any student presentation activities held after the PPE.
4. Using academic program stationery, the program director should summarize the total number of hours contributed by the organization to the PPE along with a letter of appreciation for support of the academic development of future HIM practitioners. Send the letter to the organization's CEO with a copy to their Public Relations Department. Many organizations keep track of community involvement hours or have internal reward and recognition programs.
5. Provide CEUs within the Commission on Certification's specified limits, to credentialed practitioners at the site who worked with the student.
6. Encourage students completing their PPE to send personal thank-you notes to those individuals who contributed to their PPE. Encourage students to send handwritten notes versus e-mail messaging.

Use of Nontraditional Sites

PPEs do not have to be completed in traditional acute care HIM departments. As the HIM field is expanding to nontraditional sites, so should the PPE opportunities. It is important that the student is matched with a PPE site based on the student's background, experience and interests. As well, consider incorporating one-day, nontraditional PPEs for students.

Some nontraditional sites to explore include the following:

- Pharmaceutical firms
- Quality Improvement Organizations (QIOs)
- Physician group practices
- Large clinics and hospital-system owned practices
- Related associations—American Hospital Association and American Medical Association (national and local chapters)
- Consulting vendors and companies
- Insurance companies
- Veterinary practices
- Public health departments
- Cancer registry
- Healthcare research organizations

Another option includes making use of the various departments within an organization. For example, the Information Systems, Human Resources, Finance, Compliance, Internal Audit, and other departments all have roles for or information to share with HIM students. Consider using departments within a traditional setting (acute care hospital) to provide a nontraditional PPE.

Student Guide

The PPE is designed to provide students with practical work experience in the HIM competencies and domains. Students are expected to observe and perform HIM functions as outlined by their HIM program.

Attendance

Absenteeism and tardiness are considered unprofessional and undesirable traits. While there may be times when a student may be absent due to illness or other valid reasons, it is the student's responsibility to make up the time, per their school policy.

- If a student is unable to work on a specified day, it is their responsibility to notify and make arrangements to make up the missed time with both their PPE site manager and their academic program director.
- If a student is running late, it is important to contact the PPE site manager and give him/her an estimated arrival time.
- Do not ask to leave early – you are expected to complete a certain number of hours in the field to complete your PPE experience. If you must depart early, be sure the arrangement is agreed to by your PPE site manager and that a later visit is arranged to make up missed hours.
- Excessive absenteeism and tardiness will adversely affect the student's grade for the PPE course.

Appearance

Students should practice professionalism by presenting a professional appearance.

- Adhere to the facility's dress code—dress in suitable business casual or office attire.
 - For example, women should wear blouses and skirts, dresses, or dress slacks with hose or socks. Men should wear dress shirts, ties, and dress slacks with socks. Jeans, shorts, sneakers, or t-shirts should not be worn—avoid extremes in jewelry, hairstyles, body piercing and tattoos, perfume, and make-up.
- Students should wear their identification badge at all times.
- If there are questions regarding proper attire and appearance, discuss them with the academic program director or site manager.

Conduct

Students should demonstrate professional conduct throughout the course of the PPE.

- Demonstrate initiative by completing activities as assigned.

- If you complete your assignments early, ask for additional work rather than waiting for someone to notice.
 - There may be times when clinical personnel are unavailable to work with you. During those times use initiative to interview staff, maintain PPE log of activity, review policy manuals, and so on.
- Do not use your cell phone during working hours, this includes texting. Make personal calls and texts only at break and lunch times.
- Demonstrate a professional attitude during any unexpected situations that might occur.
 - Assist, if you can. Otherwise, be a silent observer or remove yourself from the situation.
 - Remember, much can be learned by observing how other professionals handle difficult situations.
- Utilize professional communication.
 - Students should contact their PPE site manager prior to their PPE to make introductions, obtain driving and parking information, and ask questions related to appropriate attire.
 - Maintain professional relationships by avoiding personal discussions.
 - As a professional you are expected to handle minor difficulties that arise on your own. However, if attempts to solve the situation have been unsuccessful, these matters should be brought to the attention of the PPE site manager and the academic program director.
 - Avoid gossiping or complaining about your PPE with site staff or other students. If you have issues, you should be discussing them with your PPE academic program director.
 - Students should maintain a daily log of activities that they accomplish during their PPE. This log should be shared with their site manager periodically to see what has been accomplished, what needs to be completed in the time remaining, and perhaps to delete or add some new activities.
 - Students are encouraged to send personal, handwritten thank-you notes to their PPE sites and those specific individuals who contributed to their experience.

Ethics and Confidentiality

Students are expected to:

- Adhere to the ethical guidelines set forth by the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA)
- Abide by the school's Code of Student Conduct

- Abide by applicable facility policies and procedures
- Abide by HIPAA rules

Appendix

The appendix provides sample documents and frequently asked questions that may be useful in your efforts to support clinical practice sites and PPEs. Keep in mind the nature of these sample documents. All documents should be reviewed and modified by appropriate parties to ensure they meet the applicable requirements of your state and setting.

Student Samples

- Student Thank-you Letter—23

Program Samples

- AHIMA Continuing Education Credit form—Mentor Hours Log—24
- FAQ—Developing More Clinical Practice Sites—25
- FAQ—Placing Students in Their Current Work Settings—27

Web Resources

- Entry-Level Curriculum Competencies for Baccalaureate and Associate Degree programs:
 - AHIMA Associate Degree Entry-Level Competencies available at:
http://library.ahima.org/xpedio/groups/public/documents/internalproject_bok/bok1_036792.pdf
 - AHIMA Baccalaureate Degree Entry-Level Competencies available at:
http://library.ahima.org/xpedio/groups/public/documents/internalproject_bok/bok1_036793.pdf

Sample

Student Thank-you Letter

Dear NAME,

I would like to take a few minutes to explain how much I enjoyed my professional practice experience with you and your staff. I felt very welcome and comfortable with everyone, and couldn't imagine working in a friendlier environment. I feel this experience will benefit me throughout my future job experiences.

Although I found all the areas to be interesting in their own unique way, I am especially drawn to inpatient coding. It was very helpful to see the billing and coding process from start to finish.

Coming into this professional practice experience with limited hands-on experience, I left with a great deal of helpful experience and information for the future. I thought you personally went out of your way to ensure I understood every function of the HIM Department. Could you please share my feelings of gratitude with your staff? Thank you again for the time and effort you spent on my professional practice experience.

Sincerely,

NAME

Sample**AHIMA Continuing Education Credit form—
Mentor Hours Log**

< Insert School Logo >

School	PPE Mentor Name	Dates	Number of Students	CE Units	Notes
State University	Jane Doe, MA, RHIA	2008 Fall Term (November—December)	Three students for a total of 48 hours onsite PPE	1 CEU for 2008	Thanks for all your efforts in training our students. We look forward to working with you again in the 2009 Spring Term.

Program Notes

- The total hours of PPE per semester should be calculated by the HIM program director or by the program’s PPE faculty. Many healthcare facilities need to keep track of their community service hours and this form will support that effort.
- Providing a comprehensive analysis by clinical practice site will assist the academic program in calculating your PPE statistics.
- Programs may wish to track hours by site—over time—to determine trends of increased or decreased PPE activity over time.
- Clinical site mentors qualify for 1 CEU per calendar year (2 CEUs per CE reporting cycle) regardless of the number of actual hours accrued or students hosted.
 - In other words, a mentor who works with one student for six hours will receive 1 CEU per calendar year. While a mentor who works with three students for 24 hours will also receive 1 CEU per calendar year.
- At the end of the college term or calendar year send a completed version of the “Mentor Hours Log” to each clinical practice site used during the term. If more than one credentialed mentor was involved with the student’s PPE, the secondary mentor also qualifies for the CEU credit, but it should be calculated and maintained by the clinical practice site. The school or program only needs to send one form per clinical practice site.

FAQ—Developing More Clinical Practice Sites

Question

Our academic program is located in a very rural area. There are only a few hospitals located in a 50 to 60 mile radius of our school. I have six hospitals within 65 miles of our location who have agreed to accept one student. I plan to pursue physician's offices, cancer registry, long-term care facilities, and surgery center sites, as well. However, I didn't think it would be enough experience for the student, if they spent their entire time at one of these nontraditional settings. What do you think?

What if I had students spend one semester at a traditional hospital site and the other semester at a nontraditional site? Would that be enough time at each to get a "decent" experience in each setting? This issue impacts how many students I can accept into the program.

Answer

The issue of PPE placements rates high in all programs—the goal is that students have a high quality experience without burning out the clinical practice sites.

Suggestions/Tips

- During the student interview process, determine if there are any student applicants who have the option of completing the PPE in a different part of the state/country. Discuss with the student the option of staying with family or friends to make this happen. Consider awarding extra points to students who have this potential.
 - Once the student is enrolled, assign the student the task of developing a list of facilities that could be options for the PPE and compiling other background and contact information. The program director will need work with the facility to arrange the PPE for the student and begin the process of obtaining the affiliation agreement.
- Have an open discussion with the program's Advisory Committee about the challenge. Committee members should be among the first to step up and help. If hospital representatives are not members of your Advisory Committee, make this happen! Use an Advisory Committee meeting to outline the logistics of PPEs and request members commit to accepting at least three students per year.
- Consider initiating a campaign to increase support of PPEs. Partner with the CSA Board of Directors to support this effort. Host a luncheon for your Advisory Committee and potential clinical practice site representatives. Have the Advisory Committee members share about the benefits of hosting students. Invite the Dean to share positive messages.
- Don't forget about virtual communications—post the need for clinical practice sites (like a help wanted ad) to your CSA's Web site or CoP.

- Stagger the students PPEs—it may not be possible for every student to complete their PPE at the same time. Some students can use spring break, while another student can do the PPE every Thursday for 12 weeks or similar options.
- Require that students share about their PPEs. Not every student can be placed in the “main” hospital, so it’s important that students share their experiences with each other. Consider hosting required meetings at various times (mid-term, final week, and the like) for students to share and discuss their PPEs.
- Consider a tour PPE—all the students would tour the hospitals before they are placed. This allows students to visualize the layout of the departments, size, workflow, and so forth. It is beneficial for many reasons—it puts the students at ease, allows exposure, facilitates better class discussion, and more.
- Orientation tours—in many hospitals, a public relations person can arrange tours. Often students will come into the program having never seen the inside of a hospital, so touring the pharmacy, lab, blood bank, an ICU unit, and so on. can energize students for their classes and PPEs.
 - This type of PPE would typically occur during the first term. Students would tour the major clinical practice sites—since it is just a walk-through, the HIM Departments typically do not object, since it’s just a stop along the tour. This type of tour is usually provided by a public relations person.
- Consider dividing up the PPE hours into several “smaller” experiences, instead of just one or two big PPEs. Clinical practice sites may be more likely to participate due to the reduced time commitment.
 - The PPE could be:
 - In a nontraditional clinical practice site
 - At the larger acute care PPE
 - Aligned with the student’s preference. For example, students who have an interest in coding can be placed with coders, students with an interest in a registry are placed in that department, and so on. In many programs, this is referred to as an “exploration PPE.”
 - Bottom line—there is no “magic number” of PPEs or time students should spend in each clinical practice site. **The important considerations are:**
 - Did the PPE advance the student’s skills and understanding?
 - Does the PPE help the students imagine and plan future career paths?
 - Did it provide students a positive exposure to area employers?

FAQ—Placing Students in their Current Work Settings

Question

It is my understanding that PPEs must be unpaid. The policy of our health information technology (HIT) program is that all PPE rotations must be unpaid and students cannot complete their rotation at their place of employment (for students currently working in the HIM Department). Our program has two PPE requirements (40 hours and 80 hours). Recently, one of our students transferred to a different HIM program that was providing credit for 45 of the 120 PPE hours for working in the HIM Department.

Is this within the CAHIIM's Standards? Has my program been inappropriately denying students this option? What is the CAHIIM requirement for PPEs? Can students be provided PPE credit when currently employed in an HIM Department? If so, what documentation should be maintained?

Answer

CAHIIM sets minimal standards for accredited HIM programs. Your current PPE policy reflects a more robust interpretation of the minimum standards. Your current requirements ensure students are challenged during their PPEs. You might consider modifying your policy to allow for PPE opportunities within the same hospital where the student is employed, with the student's time being spent in different focus areas.

A current HIM employee (student) who completes HIM activities as a PPE student in the same HIM Department where they work is not learning anything new. It may not be a violation of the standard, but it is a disservice to the student.

A compromise is to allow the student to complete one of the PPEs in his or her place of employment requiring that it be in a department and with a mentor separate from the director of the HIM Department or the student's current supervisor. Examples include: cancer registry, quality and risk management, admissions, patient financial services, compliance or privacy office, and so forth. This allows convenience for the student while they learn new skills that satisfy the intent of your current policy.

CAHIIM Standard V.E.4.

All activities required in the program must be educational and students must not be substituted for paid staff. Policies and procedures by which students may perform service work while enrolled in the program should be made known to all students.

Interpretation V.E.4.

It is expected that programs include a service work statement in the PPE materials available to both students and clinical supervisors, stating that HIM students must not be substituted for paid staff. This does not prohibit a paid internship or PPE but is designed to ensure students gain experience to reinforce the competencies and skill sets, and are not used simply for backlog work in the absence of appropriate paid staff.