

Considerations regarding Credit-Bearing Field Work in the School of Education

The following unofficial document offers some potential considerations and principles regarding credit-bearing field work in the School of Education, UW-Madison.

Over the last decades there has been growing interest in *experiential learning* as an important element of a college education. Experiential learning can include a wide variety of enriching opportunities for students, including service learning, volunteering, student organization leadership and campus involvement, faculty-led research and projects, student employment, and—especially important for this document—field work.

Field work has many names and descriptors across campus. Commonly called an *internship*, field work is also described as clinical work, field education, field experience, practicum, cooperative education, and student teaching. These experiences may be paid or unpaid.

For many professional preparation programs—teaching, nursing, medicine, social work, for instance—field work is a long-standing, mandatory, and often highly-regulated component of the preparation program. In other academic programs—business and engineering, for example—field-based work experiences are a critical link between academic preparation and employment. In all disciplines field work permits students to apply their academic and creative skills to a real-life situation or problem.

As more students have shown interest in pursuing field work, more colleges and universities have promoted these experiences. In turn, an increasing number and variety of employers want to offer these experiences, especially in the form of internships. This has led to a significant national discussion around the concept, purpose, structure, and function of field work. Because the parties involved—students, colleges and universities, and employers—can have differing objectives and interests, it is important to establish a coherent and defensible set of principles and policies that undergird the development and conduct of field work. This is especially critical with for-credit experiences, given the requirements of higher education accreditation bodies and federal law relative to the definition of college course work and credit.

Based on documents like the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) paper on internships (<http://www.nacweb.org/advocacy/position-statements/united-states-internships.aspx>) and long-standing best practices of the School of Education’s professional field experience staff, these principles and policies related to for-credit field work have been identified:

1. **For-credit field experiences must be linked directly to a student’s academic work.** The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) describes such an experience as “an extension of the classroom: a learning experience that provides for applying the knowledge gained in the classroom” (<http://www.nacweb.org/advocacy/position-statements/united-states-internships.aspx>). Important but ultimately secondary goals of field work include giving students the opportunity to gain valuable applied experience; confirming the student’s career path; allowing students to make connections in the professional field; giving employers the opportunity to guide and evaluate talent; and providing feedback about the congruence between the instructional program and the needs of the field.
2. **Whenever possible, field work should be associated with a specific, dedicated course title and number,** not with independent or directed study. This ensures that the field work course has been reviewed and approved within the campus governance system and increases the likelihood that these principles and policies have been consulted.
3. **Field work has specific, well-articulated, and documented learning goals.** These learning goals are determined in advance, used for student performance evaluation, and generally communicated in a published document—the syllabus, an individual “study plan,” or some combination of these.
4. **Field experiences are usually paired with a seminar** that permits students to participate in traditional classroom discourse and reflect critically on their experiences. This seminar may be part of the field work course or an entirely separate class taught concurrently.

5. **Students are expected to reflect regularly and systematically on their experiences and learning in the field.** This might take the form of journaling, blogs, reflection papers, or critiques. Through these reflections students demonstrate their ability to link their learning in the classroom with their field work; to critically examine their own performance relative to standards or models; and to defend their practice choices.
6. **Students should meet minimum requirements to be eligible for field work.** This might include prerequisite course work; a specified level of performance in previous classes; or a minimum grade-point average, class standing (e.g., juniors/seniors), or academic status (in good academic standing).
7. **Field experiences require a specified minimum amount of time.** Given federal requirements and campus standards for time associated with academic credit, the School affirms that *a credit of undergraduate field work should equal approximately three hours per week of work or 45 hours of work over the course of the semester.* This duration should be documented for students in the course syllabus. Students cannot earn more than one credit over a school week; thus, as in summer term, a three-credit course would need to meet at least three weeks.
8. **Field work is primarily a learning experience, not primarily a work experience.** Participating students will stretch beyond their current ability/expertise, try new things, take longer than a fully-prepared professional to complete work, and sometimes fail. Learning takes priority over work values such as productivity and efficiency. In fact, the primary responsibility of students is to their academic supervisor rather than to their host organization. The student's status as a novice and learner will generally entail an additional cost to the organization that accepts the student. If the student is replacing a regular employee and mainly producing rather than learning, this is employment, not a credit-bearing course. Paid work that is also being used to earn credit should be reviewed and monitored carefully for potential conflicts with the learning goals and outcomes required for credit-bearing courses.
9. **The placement site offers resources, equipment, and facilities that support the student's learning objectives and goals.**
10. **Field work is closely supervised by qualified staff at the placement site.** This identified person (*on-site supervisor*) must meet specific minimum qualifications and may or may not be compensated for her/his supervisory work. In some cases on-site supervisors must undergo training before working with our students. The on-site supervisor will monitor the student's attendance and performance, provide regular feedback, and have some responsibility for evaluating the student. In some programs a formal written evaluation of the student's work is required. The supervisor's participation is part of the cost to the organization for the field placement.
11. **Field work is also supervised by faculty/staff, usually (but not always) the course instructor (University supervisor).** University supervision would be expected to include one or more site visits over the course of the semester. The on-site supervisor and University supervisor should be in regular contact regarding the student's performance. The University supervisor is responsible for the formal evaluation of the student via the course grade, which will be informed by feedback from the on-site supervisor. In some programs a formal written evaluation of the student's work by the University supervisor may be required.
12. **Field placements are formally reviewed and approved by the course instructor/supervisor in advance.** In some programs students may identify possible field placements; in others, students may choose from a list of approved agencies/organizations; and in others, students are expressly forbidden from arranging their own field placement. Regardless of how placements are identified and selected, course or program faculty/staff have final authority in determining the appropriateness of a student's field placement.
13. **Field placements may require a formal affiliation agreement before students can be placed.** UW-System has provided standardized affiliation agreement forms for use with those organizations/agencies that require them: <http://www.uwsa.edu/rm/manual/part4/affiliations.htm>. Because affiliation agreements are legally binding, program staff must never sign or verbally agree to abide by an affiliation agreement unless it has been reviewed and approved by UW-Madison Legal Services. Consult with the School's Director of Field Experiences around these issues.
14. **Credit-bearing field work usually has a handbook or other document** governing critical policies such as length of experience, attendance and absences, working conditions, workload, duties and

expectations, conflict of interest, legal liability, and placement changes. See the following as an example: <http://www.education.wisc.edu/docs/WebDispenser/soe-documents/te-field-experience-policies-fall-2014.pdf?sfvrsn=2>.

As the School of Education's director of field experiences, Associate Dean Jeff Hamm is currently responsible for oversight relative to these policies and principles. Please consult with him on issues related to field placements. Dean Hamm directs the School's field experience office, a unit within Education Academic Services that includes field experience program support staff. Dean Hamm has extensive contacts with campus Legal Services and the Risk Management Office.

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