A Guide to Successful Field Placement and Mentoring Relationships

University of Maryland
College of Information Studies
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**Introduction**

The Master of Library Science (MLS) program in the College of Information Studies (College) at the University of Maryland College Park is built upon a comprehensive foundation that combines knowledge from scholarship and research in library and information science with those gained from professional practice. By imbuing the curriculum with 21st century perspectives, the MLS program prepares students for leadership in the dynamic and evolving global information society. Students in the MLS program leave with the knowledge, skills, ethics, values, and commitment to service required of the information professions, the MLS program prepares students for professional careers in libraries, information centers, archives, and other information-centered agencies.

The MLS program uses a multidisciplinary approach in order to prepare students to work in professional environments in which different types of information professionals work collaboratively to complement each other’s strengths. The core values of the University and the iSchool are incorporated into the MLS program.

The goals of the MLS program are to:

1. Prepare students to be contributors, leaders, and change agents in libraries, archives, cultural heritage institutions, and other information agencies.
2. Promote a user-centered approach to information programs and systems, imparting values, ethics, and principles consistent with that approach to serve the needs of a diverse global and technological society.
3. Educate students in the theories and practices of information creation, communication, identification, selection, acquisition, organization, storage and retrieval, preservation, analysis, interpretation, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination, and management so they can apply them to specific functional or institutional settings.
4. Educate students in the role and value of research, teaching, and service conducted in and outside the library and information studies field to the advancement of the field’s knowledge base and to other fields.

The MLS program is fully accredited by the American Library Association (ALA), and has been offered at the College Park campus since 1965, at the Universities at Shady Grove since 2008, and online since 2010.

A key component of the MLS degree program is the Field Study course (LBSC 707 for MLS students or LBSC 703 for MLS students in the archives specialization)

1. The field study, taken upon the completion of at least 24 credits, is designed so that students may apply and expand their skills as they prepare to join their desired community of practice (e.g., public library, academic library, archive, etc).

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1 School Library students take LBSC 744 (Internship in School Library) as part of their certification requirements. This manual does not address this Internship class, as it has requirements specific to the school library environment.
More specifically, the field study:

- Prepares students for successful entry into the information professions.
- Allows students to apply the theory and knowledge they have learned in the classroom through "hands on" experience in an information organization, under the supervision and guidance of an experienced information professional.
- Provides a unique opportunity for students to learn about themselves, the clients, the organizations, and the environments of information organizations.
- Builds a student’s professional network, laying a foundation for entry into a community of practice.
- Offers placement agencies the opportunity to develop the next generation of information professionals.
- Offers placement supervisors the opportunity to serve as role models and provide guidance and direction so that students can carry out assigned tasks as well as observe and participate in the work of an organization.

A successful field study, however, requires coordination and preparation between students, the placement agency, supervisors, and the College. This guide defines the responsibilities of students, placement agencies, and supervisors and offers suggestions to facilitate the creation and maintenance of a successful field placement. The guide also includes references to resources, and the context of the field study course within the College’s MLS program's learning outcomes assessment process.

Field Study Resources, Contracts, and Evaluation Forms

The College has developed a comprehensive field study web resource (http://ischoolfieldstudy.umd.edu/) designed to provide 1) an up-to-date database of field placements; 2) a means through which field placement agencies can be added to the field study database; and 3) links to relevant documentation (e.g., field study contract, evaluation forms). Within the MLS program, administration and management of the field study has two primary components:

1. A contract (see Appendix A). This provides details regarding the administration, objectives, and specifics (e.g., work hours/days that ensure completion of the required 120 hours during the term, specific tasking) of the field placement.
2. Evaluation forms (see Appendix B). The field study is linked to the overall MLS program learning outcomes assessment, and as such, students, supervisors, and instructors complete a learning outcomes rubric to ensure that a) the goals and objectives of the field study course are being met, and b) the overall MLS program is meeting its learning outcomes.

Each of these is explained in more detail below, and illustrated in Figure 1.
Contract

The contract resides within a larger field placement process. Students should explore the field study database for placement opportunities, or seek additional opportunities should they wish to conduct their field study in an organization not yet in the database. Contracts should be negotiated with placement agencies/supervisors and submitted to the field study instructor ahead of time (in general, at least one month prior to the initiation of the placement) for review and approval (Note: some placement agencies require a background check that can take several months. Students should learn whether their desired placement agency requires a background check and if so, begin that process well ahead of time to ensure their placement).

From time to time, a field placement does not work out as intended. There are also unforeseen challenges that may intervene (e.g., government shutdown, illness, closures due to weather or other circumstances). Should you run into issues with your placement, inform your instructor immediately so as to determine appropriate courses of action.
Evaluation Forms

A key aspect of the field placement is the set of learning outcomes assessment rubrics developed to assess the placement as well as the application of skills as part of the larger MLS program. The field study collects learning outcomes assessment data from supervisors, students, and instructors. The rubrics (in Appendix B) are available online for completion once students have met the 120 hours placement threshold.

Placement Readiness

The supervisor and student should ensure that the placement agency is ready for the field study to begin to ensure success and that time is not lost due to administrative hurdles or time consuming preparations that take away from the intended project(s) or work items. Administrative items that might require planning ahead include:

- The creation of organizational e-mail accounts.
- Network logins.
- Badges, ID cards, keys.
- Work space preparation (e.g., desk, work area, equipment).
- Explanation of placement site etiquette and codes (e.g., dress code, policies, procedures).
- Background check completion, if necessary.
- Request certificate of insurance from student if required.*

In short, any administrative preparations should be addressed prior to the commencement of the field placement so that the field study work may begin on day one.

*Certificate of Insurance and Other Documentation

Some field study sites require a certificate of insurance from the University of Maryland before a student may begin working at the facility. Students who require this can request a copy by:

2. Look under the "Forms" tab
3. Click on "Forms, Permits, Requests"
4. Click on "Request for Certificate of Insurance Coverage"

Once you have submitted the form you will receive the certificate in 1-2 business days.

Supervisor Characteristics

Supervisors are called upon to serve multiple roles for the field study students -- role models, advisors, and career facilitators. In light of this, there are certain characteristics that are helpful for fostering a positive and productive relationship with field study students. Supervisors should be:
1. *Proactive about helping the student to feel comfortable at the site.* Because field study students are, essentially, visitors at the placement institution, they may be hesitant to express concerns or anxieties; supervisors can be most helpful in sharing background information about the site early in the placement relationship that will educate the student on the history, culture, and services offered at the site.

2. *Professional and approachable.* Supervisors should possess a demeanor that projects knowledge and confidence as well as a willingness to openly share this knowledge with the student.

3. *Willing to answer questions.* Students will likely seek answers to a variety of questions and may also need instruction about how to conduct specific tasks. Supervisors should be capable of patiently fielding these inquiries, answering questions (or finding answers and relaying the information), and determining if additional questions may exist.

4. *Willing to listen.* While supervisors are called upon to be useful resources who answer myriad questions, they should also be able to note when it is appropriate to simply act as a sounding board for the student’s concerns, frustrations, or gaps in knowledge.

5. *Able to provide constructive feedback.* Supervisors must be willing to observe their student’s behaviors and share information that will assist in the individual’s professional growth. A supervisor should have the ability to notice and comment upon positive traits that should be encouraged and negative traits that require improvement.

6. *Role models.* Supervisors should model behaviors that are ethically and professionally sound that students may emulate when they enter into the information professions.

### Suggested Supervisor Responsibilities

The field placement has a threefold aim of (1) supporting professional development, (2) assisting future information professionals in becoming familiar with programs and services within information organizations, and (3) opening the channels of communication between information specialists at different levels. By overseeing a field placement, supervisors are committing to professional service activities that will benefit the students, the organization, the information professions, and themselves.

Though each placement site and field study has its culture and approach, suggested supervisor responsibilities include:

- Meeting regularly with their students (either face to face or virtually, depending on the nature of the placement).
- Maintaining records of activities, discussions, or other activities of the placement.
- Assisting the student in creating and articulating concrete objectives and activities related to the placement.
• Assisting the student with understanding policies and procedures related to professional methods of information provision in general and the institution or organization specifically.
• Encouraging the student to reflect on his/her experiences and perception of knowledge gained through the placement activities.
• Keeping channels of communication open.
• Providing constructive feedback to students on topics related to the student’s development as an information professional.
• Exposing students to strategies and opportunities for networking with other information professionals.
• Using feedback from students to evaluate and potentially alter future placements.
Field Study Student Characteristics

Students have a main goal to become information professionals, further their skills through applied learning, and build their professional network. There are several characteristics that students should possess or strive to develop during the course of the field study placement activities in order to maximize the opportunity.

To the extent possible within the parameters of the field study placement, students should be:

1. *Motivated and eager to learn.* Students should exhibit a sincere desire to learn from the supervisor (and others that might assist in the field placement). Students should be proactive and take initiative to foster a working relationship with the supervisor that will lead to achieving professional goals.

2. *Cognizant of time.* Students should be aware and respectful of the time their supervisors are devoting to helping them develop professional competence. The supervisor likely has many demands on his/her time. Thus, it is important that students make extra efforts to arrive at scheduled appointments by or before the agreed upon meeting time. Students should be willing to alter meeting times if the supervisor’s schedule changes unexpectedly.

3. *Able and willing to accept critique.* Field placements often involve the provision of constructive feedback to students by supervisors. Students should be able to receive this feedback without becoming defensive and use the information given to them in order to improve.

4. *Interested in being mentored.* Your supervisor may ask questions about your personal and professional life in an effort to get to know you as a whole person. These exchanges can increase communication and better tailor the field study experience.

5. *Respectful of the supervisor and placement organization.* Supervisors and placement organizations often are willing to “give back” by serving as field study placement sites. In exchange, students often provide support to projects or activities that might not otherwise take place. This resides in a larger context of a relationship between the supervisors, students, and the College of Information Studies. For all this to work, there needs to be mutual respect among all parties.

6. *Comfortable posing questions to supervisors.* Students should treat the field study as an active rather than passive process. Thus, students should be willing to share concerns, questions, or issues with their supervisors. Be proactive rather than reactive.

7. *Patient throughout the field study process.* Time and effort are necessary requisites in a field study. Students should persevere through challenges that may arise during the learning process. A solid supervisor-student relationship takes time and effort by all involved in order to fully develop.

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*Students should, however, raise concerns that they may have with their instructors as well. Though rare, not all placements are a good fit and may need to be reconsidered.*
8. *Willing to take risks.* Students should demonstrate a willingness to move beyond mastered tasks and accept new and more challenging experiences. To do this, students should engage in perpetual self-assessment and seek ways to acquire new skills.

**Student Responsibilities**

Field study students will have opportunities to interact with professionals in various information organizations. In order to obtain the maximum benefit from field placements, students should consider engaging in the following:

- Meeting regularly with their supervisor (either face to face or virtually, depending on the nature of the placement).
- Keeping records of activities or discussion notes for completed meetings with supervisor.
- Reviewing articulated concrete objectives. Engage in periodic reviews of the field placement goals and objectives (as articulated in the field study contract) to ensure that the goals are being met. Placements and responsibilities can evolve, so students should allow some flexibility. However, it is important to ensure that students are achieving their intended goals.
- Communicating with field study instructors. Make sure that you stay in touch with your instructor and let them know that the placement is going as planned.
- Sharing the placement experience. Share with students, instructors, supervisors about the field study experience. As part of the field study course students present a poster at the iSchool Experiential Learning Expo. We welcome student contributions to the blogMLS (mls.umd.edu); twitter, facebook, and other forms of communication are welcome as well. Students respect your thoughts on how to establish a successful field study – please do share.
Resources Used to Create this Guide


Emory University School of Medicine. Mentoring—Characteristics of a Mentor. Located: http://medicine.emory.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/mentoring/characteristicsofmentor.cfm

Dan Erwin. (June 2010.) 7 Characteristics of a Successful Mentee. Located: http://danerwin.typepad.com/my_weblog/2010/06/7-characteristics-of-a-successful-mentee.html

LSAMP Indiana. (2004.) Mentoring and Diversity: A Handbook for Faculty Mentoring


Appendix A: Field Study Contract

LBSC 703, Field Study in Archives, Records and Information Management
LBSC 707, Field Study in Library Service
University of Maryland, College of Information Studies

FIELD STUDY CONTRACT

Student’s Name__________________________________________________________
Instructor ________________________________ Academic Term (i.e. Spring 2012) ______
Name of Field Study Institution ____________________________________________
Location (city, state) __________________________ Supervisor’s Name __________________________
E-mail ________________________________________ Telephone __________________________

NOTE: The Field Study Plan section must be completed on the back of this form or on a separate sheet and this contract signed and returned to the instructor before the student begins the work.

Description. Field studies are coordinated through either the LBSC 707 or LBSC 703; both of which are three credits. Please do not hesitate to contact your instructor if you have questions.

A field study assignment needs to be 120 hours (or more, if the student and supervisor agree). This is normally carried out as 8-10 hours a week for 14 weeks, but other scheduling is possible if student and supervisor agree and the instructor approves. The field study should provide challenging, important, and interesting work for the student in preparation for his/her first professional job. The nature of the work may be everyday operational tasks, or it may involve a special project (in its entirety or as part of a larger project where the rest of work can be completed by others). The field study may also be a combination of everyday work plus one or more special projects.

A field study experience cannot be completed in the same unit in which a student is currently or has been formerly employed. A field study in a different unit within the same organization, however, may be considered as an appropriate field study placement site. The direct supervisor must be professionally-qualified and not someone that the student works for now or has ever worked for before.

Evaluation. At the beginning of the course the student will give an evaluation form to the site supervisor. At the end of the course the supervisor will complete the form and send it the instructor.

Benefits. A field study experience should be mutually beneficial for the student and the institution. The student gains hands-on practical experience, acquires knowledge and skills appropriate for a professional career, begins to build a network for support and future employment, and clarifies individual professional goals and strategies for development. The institution gains the opportunity to make progress on or accomplish work that might not otherwise get done and to work with highly motivated students who have already completed most of their master’s level coursework and who can,
with minimal supervision and training, work independently. It is also an opportunity for the mentors to return some of the knowledge, guidance, support, and encouragement that they received early in their careers, and develop the next generation of information professionals.

**Expectations of field study students.** After agreeing to goals, assignments, and a schedule, student will arrive faithfully on time and stay on task to complete the work as efficiently and effectively as possible. Student will observe the expectations for conduct as defined by the profession and workplace. Student will ask questions as needed, communicate problems or issues, and follow a regular schedule of reporting on progress.

**Expectations of field study supervisors.** After agreeing on goals, assignments, and a schedule, supervisor will provide orientation, training, oversight, and feedback.

**Field Study Plan.** Describe the following:
- Goals for this field study
- Assignments and responsibilities (all should be beginning professional level, as normally expected and appropriate for this site)
- Schedule (including start date, expected end date, and weekly hours).

Please sign below:

Agreed to on (date) ____________________, by ________________________________ (student) and ________________________________ (supervisor).

Approved by (Instructor) ________________________________ Date ____________________
Appendix B: Supervisor, Faculty, and Student Evaluations

All evaluations can be found on the field study database website here:
http://ischoolfieldstudy.umd.edu/content/evaluation-forms