

**A Guide to a Successful Field Study
For the
Master of Library and Information Science Program**



**COLLEGE OF
INFORMATION
STUDIES**

MLIS | MASTER OF LIBRARY &
INFORMATION SCIENCE

**University of Maryland
College of Information Studies
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Introduction

The Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) 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 and from professional practice. By imbuing the curriculum with innovative perspectives, the MLIS program prepares students for leadership in the dynamic and evolving global information society.

Students in the MLIS program leave with the knowledge, skills, ethics, values, and commitment to service required of the information professions.

The MLIS 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 MLIS program.

The goals of the MLIS program are to:

1. Prepare students to be contributors, leaders, and agents of change in libraries, archives, government agencies, cultural heritage institutions, and other information organizations.
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 MLIS program is fully accredited by the American Library Association (ALA), and has been offered at the College Park campus since 1965 and online since 2010.

A key component of the MLIS degree program is the Field Study course¹. The field study, taken after the completion of at least 18 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).

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 and certification process.

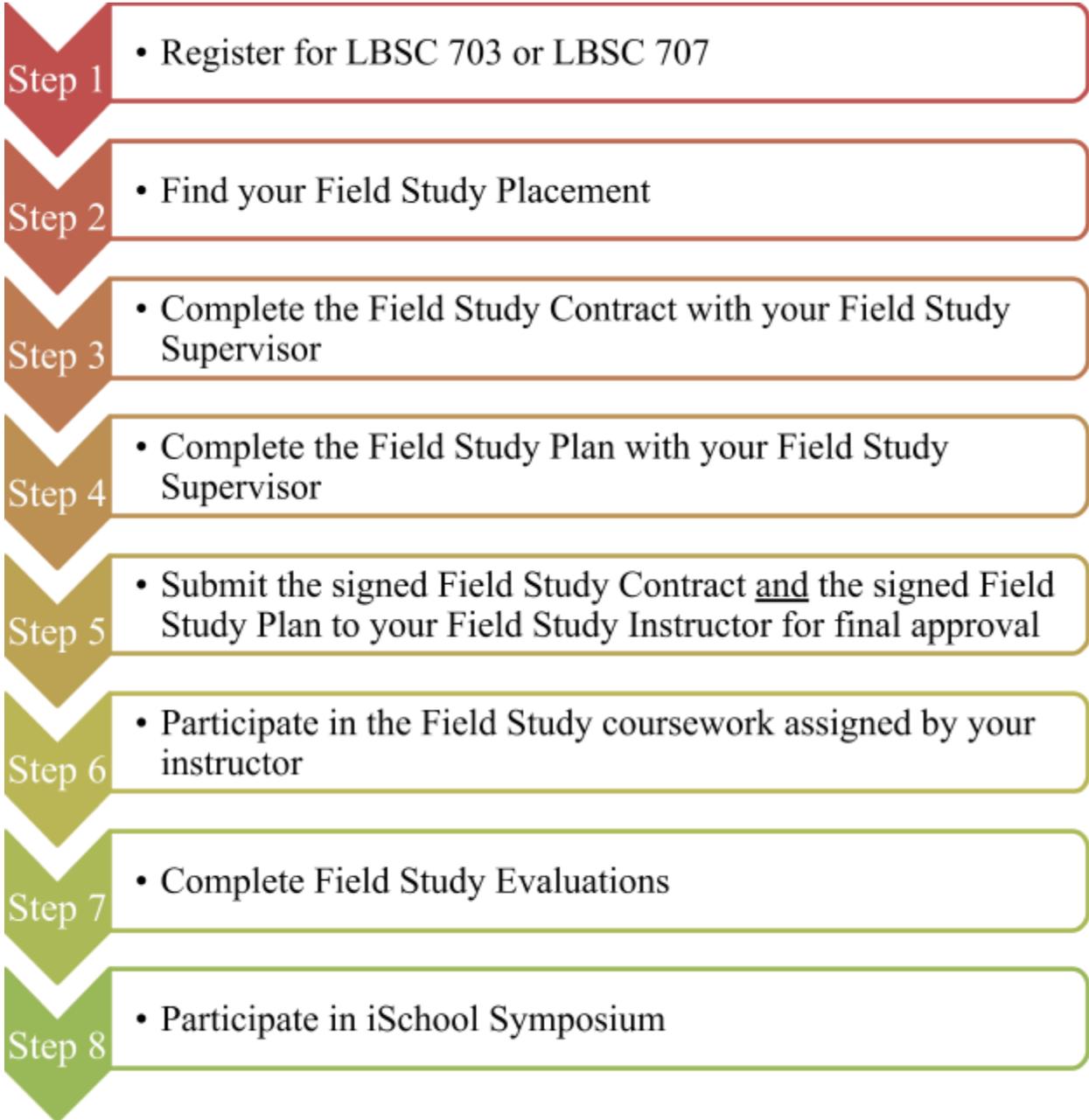
More specifically, the field study:

- 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, 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 MLIS program's learning outcomes assessment process.

Field Study Checklist

Students are required to review the “A Guide to a Successful Field Study” to ensure full compliance with policies and requirements for each step on this checklist.



Step 1: Register for LBSC 703 or LBSC 707

Register for either LBSC 703: Field Study in Archives and Digital Curation or LBSC 707: Field Study in Information Service to complete your field study requirement.

In order to register for either class, you must have already completed LBSC 602, LBSC 631, LBSC 671, plus 9 other credits towards your MLIS degree.

LBSC 703 is offered in-person and LBSC 707 is offered online every semester. Anyone can register for either of these courses. If you are an Archives & Digital Curation student and wish to take your field study online, you would register for LBSC707. Likewise, if you are a Diversity & Inclusion student and wanted to take the field study in-person, you would register for LBSC703. Both courses fulfill the field study requirement for any student, despite the different titles. The only exception is if you are a School Library student.² The iSchool professor teaching your field study course is your Field Study Instructor. Your point of contact at your host institution (Field Study Site) is your Field Study Supervisor.

Step 2: Find a Field Study Placement Site

You are responsible for securing your own field study opportunity. A field study must be completed in an information organization under the supervision of an information professional. The Field Study Supervisor must be professionally qualified and not someone that the student currently works for.

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 site. If you are unclear as to whether or not your proposed location will be allowed, contact your Field Study Instructor.

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.

The College has developed the comprehensive iSchool Field Study Database (<http://ischoolfieldstudy.umd.edu>), designed to provide an up-to-date repository of organizations that have reached out to the iSchool with specific opportunities or an interest in working with our students. This website also includes links to relevant documentation (e.g. the field study contract, evaluation forms, etc.)

² 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 and certification process.

Feel free to explore other opportunities if you do not find a placement of interest through the Field Study Database. You are not required to find your field study placement through the database, it is just here to help you with your search.

If you are unsure about how to reach out to a potential field study placement site, feel free to use our template letter below, of course adapting it to be personalized to you:

Dear _____,

I am a student in the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland, pursuing a Master in Library and Information Science. *[I expect to graduate in...]* As part of the requirements for graduation, I must complete an internship or “field study” and I am writing to ask if *[Enter Organization here]* would consider hosting me. Below is some information about the field study requirements, as well as why I am interested in working with your organization.

A field study can involve everyday operational tasks, a special project, or a combination of the two. Each student must work a minimum of 120 hours over the course of one semester in an information organization that furthers his or her particular interests. Each field study placement organization must provide a direct supervisor who is willing to offer training, oversight and feedback. The student and field study supervisor prepare, agree to, and submit a Field Study Contract prior to the student starting work. At the end of the field study, the supervisor completes a UMD-provided, online evaluation.

As I said before, I am writing you to see if your organization would be willing to host me for my field study. *[Enter here information on why you are interested in that organization, bringing in relevant coursework and professional experiences]*.

Thank you for your time and your consideration. I am happy to answer questions, concerns, or comments you might have!

Best,

[Name]

MLIS Candidate at University of Maryland

Specializations: *[List relevant specializations if applicable]*

Step 3: Complete the Field Study Contract and Plan with your Field Study Supervisor

The Field Study Contract and Plan is a required document to be prepared and agreed upon by the student and the Field Study Supervisor. The contract and plan can be found at Appendix A of this document or at ischoolfieldstudy.umd.edu.

The contract and plan must be negotiated with and signed by placement agencies/supervisors and submitted to the Field Study Instructor between 2 and 3 weeks prior to the first day of class for final review and approval.

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 site. If you are unclear as to whether or not your proposed location will be allowed, contact your Field Study Instructor.

The Field Study Supervisor must be professionally qualified and not someone that the student currently works for.

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.

Step 4: Complete the Field Study Plan with your Field Study Supervisor

The Field Study Plan is a required document to be prepared and agreed upon by the student and the Field Study Supervisor. The plan can be found at Appendix A in this document.

The finished plan must provide details regarding the administration, objectives, responsibilities and schedule (e.g., work hours/days that ensure completion of the required 120 hours during the term, specific tasking) of the field study placement.

Step 5: Submit the signed Field Study Contract and the signed Field Study Plan to your Field Study Instructor for final approval

Field Study Contracts and Plans must be signed and submitted between 2 and 3 weeks before the first day of class.

Field Study Contracts, Field Study Plans, and any questions should be sent to the instructor for the section of the Field Study you signed up for.

Please do not send this information to the instructors more than 1 month before the first day of class.

Step 6: Participate in the Field Study coursework assigned by your instructor

The course component of the Field Study will have certain requirements that you must fulfill in addition to the 120 hours of work at your field study institution. Please be aware that these course components are just as important as the fieldwork, and are graded as part of the required field study course for the MLIS Program.

Step 7: Complete Field Study Student Evaluations

The field study is linked to the overall MLIS program learning outcomes assessment, and as such, students, supervisors, and instructors all complete an evaluation upon completion of the field study to ensure that:

- a) the goals and objectives of the field study course are being met, and
- b) the overall MLIS program is meeting its learning outcomes.

These evaluations are separate from the general course evaluations that are sent out towards the end of every semester by the University of Maryland. The evaluations will be sent automatically through Qualtrics at the end of the semester.

Step 8: Participate in the iSchool Symposium

At the end of the semester, students who are on campus are encouraged to participate in an iSchool poster session called the iSchool Symposium. Online students are not required, but are encouraged to participate.

Information for Field Study Supervisors

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:

- a) The creation of organizational e-mail accounts
- b) Network logins
- c) Badges, ID cards, keys
- d) Work space preparation (e.g., desk, work area, equipment)
- e) Explanation of placement site etiquette and codes (e.g., dress code, policies, procedures)
- f) Background-check completion, if necessary
- g) Request a certificate of insurance from student, if required³

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.

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

³ **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:

1. Visit: <http://des.umd.edu/>
2. Look under the "Forms" tab
3. Click on "Forms, Permits, Requests"
4. Click on "Certificate for Insurance Request"

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

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.

Appendix A: Field Study Contract and Plan

LBSC 703: Field Study in Archives and Digital Curation
LBSC 707: Field Study in Information Service
University of Maryland, College of Information Studies

FIELD STUDY CONTRACT

Student's Name

Instructor

_ Academic Term (i.e. Fall 2019)

Name of Field Study Institution

Location (city, state)

_Supervisor's Name

E-mail

Telephone

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 a minimum of 120 hours. This work should span the entire 14-week semester in spring and fall, or the entire 12-week semester in the summer. It should be carried out as 8-10 hours a week, but other scheduling is possible if student and supervisor agree **and** the instructor approves.

The field study should provide challenging, important, and interesting work. 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 the 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.

Evaluation. At the end of the course, both the student and the Field Study Supervisor will be given an evaluation form to complete. These evaluations are required, as they help the MLIS Program collect data for learning outcomes assessment.

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 at least half 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.

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Expectations of field study students. After agreeing to goals, assignments, and a schedule, the student will arrive faithfully on time and stay on task to complete the work as efficiently and effectively as possible. The student will observe the expectations for conduct as defined by the profession and workplace. The 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, the supervisor will provide orientation, training, oversight, and feedback.

Please sign below:

Agreed to on (date) _____, by
_____ (student)

and
_____ (supervisor).

Approved by (Instructor)

_ Date

FIELD STUDY PLAN

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 feel free to use an additional sheet of paper if you need more space.

Please sign below:

Agreed to on (date) _____, by
_____ (student)

and

_____ (supervisor).

Approved by (Instructor)

_ Date