

OVERVIEW AND INSTRUCTIONS FOR SETTING UP AN BSIS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

The Professional Experience is a means of gaining relevant, professional work experience. The Professional Experience gives SIS students an opportunity to “try out” a job and type of workplace, gain professional work experience, earn academic credit and valuable professional contacts. The Professional Experience:

- Integrates the classroom with the “real world” under the supervision and instruction of an experienced information professional;
- Puts technique and technologies in context;
- Strengthens one’s accomplishments portfolio and resume through validating skills and knowledge;
- Provides oversight, context, and feedback from skilled and established practitioners;
- Can be done in any location;
- Allows students an extended opportunity to “interview” an employer they are interested in working for;
- Confirms interest in a possible career path and develops familiarity with culture and values of a specific type of organizational climate.

Note: These pages do not describe the school library practica (INSC 595/596) or the MSIS Practicum (INSC 599)

Rationale

The Professional Experience is an elective curriculum option available to any student who wants field experience as a part of his or her specific program of study. It is available to those who:

1. Meet the necessary prerequisites (in course description, below),
2. Identify a career goal or information work area outside the scope of available courses, or
3. Want to gain work experience, expand his/her knowledge base, and/or enhance a portfolio with a work product (e.g., student-created websites, system documentation, training materials, computer programs, etc.).

INSC 499: Professional Experience (3 hrs.). Translate knowledge into practice through a practicum, internship or other supervised work experience at a departmentally approved employer. May take place off or on campus. Prerequisite: completion of required and pertinent advanced courses relevant to student's practicum design. Information Sciences majors. Minimum class level-junior.. Written permission of advisor and approval of practicum coordinator. May be repeated with written permission. Maximum 6 hours. S/NC only. Fall, Spring, Summer.

Special note: This course counts towards credit hours earned, but it does not contribute to your GPA, which is why you might notice a discrepancy between hours earned and GPA hours on your transcript.

Credit and Work Hour Options

Typically, a Professional Experience is 3 hours of academic credit (150 clock hours), which translates to an average of 10 hours per week of Professional Experience activity (e.g., instruction, work, consultation, supervision, review, evaluation) for one 15-week semester during the regular academic year (i.e., fall and spring semesters). This is equivalent to a quarter-time job. The summer term is only 8 weeks long, but the 150 hour requirement still applies.

The time format for the Professional Experience is flexible. As needed and agreed to by the site supervisor, a Professional Experience can begin before the beginning of that term in which the student wishes to receive credit. With the site supervisor's consent and availability, the Professional Experience may also start during the break between spring and summer terms or the break between fall and spring terms.

The flexibility of the Professional Experience affords the student a range of possible options. Under circumstances agreed to by the student's advisor and the Professional Experience coordinator, a student may engage in:

1. One additional 3-credit-hour Professional Experience (i.e., a total of two separate three-hour Professional Experiences in two separate semesters), or
2. Two 3-hour Professional Experiences (six credit-hours) in different areas/sites during a single semester, or
3. One 6-hour Professional Experience in one semester—in special circumstances.

Location

Professional Experiences can be completed at a variety of locations across the state of Tennessee, as well as across the nation. Students are also able to complete Professional Experiences at international locations. Some opportunities are listed in [SIS Professional Experience Opportunities](#). You can also speak with your faculty advisor for ideas. You may also reach out to the Professional Experience coordinator if you are interested in an opportunity that is not listed on the Professional Experience website. There are also some examples on the [Pathways](#).

Roles and Responsibilities

There are four roles related to a SIS Professional Experience:

Student:

- Primarily responsible for initiating the Professional Experience process as described in steps 1-3 below.
 1. Students identify possible Professional Experience locations during the semester prior to the term in which the student wishes to do Professional Experience.
 2. Students then discuss their Professional Experience objectives with the Site Supervisor, and negotiate the terms of the Professional Experience, including the actual duties expected, and a mutually-agreed-upon work schedule.
 3. The student will submit the online SIS Student Professional Experience Approval Form which is automatically sent by email to the Professional Experience Coordinator and the Site Supervisor, for review. The Supervisor will indicate to the Coordinator their acceptance of, modifications to, or rejection of the Professional Experience objectives.
 - **If modifications are needed:** The Advisor and/or Supervisor indicate a change is necessary and the Coordinator will contact the student to ensure that the specified changes are made.
 - **If the form is rejected:** The Coordinator will email the student to ensure they contact their Advisor. The student would then need to resubmit the application with the revised objectives.
 - **If the form is approved:** After the Professional Experience Coordinator has received approvals from the Advisor and Supervisor, the Student Services Coordinator will email the student of the Professional Experience's approval and activation. At this time, the student will be able to register for 3 or 6 units of INSC 499.
- Completes 150 hours of work and keeps a log of their work hours and activities.
- Completes other requirements as specified in the course syllabus.
- Completes evaluation form at the end of their Professional Experience.

Site Supervisor

- Supervises and mentors the student during the Professional Experience.
- Assists the student in developing the list of [learning objectives](#).
- Reviews and approves the student's Professional Experience application.

- Completes the [Supervisor Evaluation of Student Professional Experience](#) at the end of the Professional Experience.

The following guidelines apply:

- All required courses relevant to the Professional Experience will have been completed. It is highly recommended that students have completed at least 18 credit hours in SIS.
- The student must not be on Academic Probation during the semester prior to the beginning of the Professional Experience.
- Because students cannot do Professional Experience work identical to that for which they are paid, a student does not normally do a Professional Experience in an information organization where they are employed. With consent of the Professional Experience coordinator, however, a student may undertake a Professional Experience in a department/unit within the organization other than the one in which they normally work. But this should be done only (1) when there is real need—not merely for convenience-- and (2) does not violate federal or state wage and hour guidelines.
- A student may not take a Professional Experience for more than three credit hours of INSC 499 if employed more than 20 hours per week.
- While every reasonable effort will be made to facilitate provision of a Professional Experience for a student meeting all qualifications and following all necessary procedures, availability of a Professional Experience cannot be guaranteed.

FAQ

Who do I contact with my questions about all things Professional Experience?

Email: msispracticum@utk.edu with any questions that you may have.

How do I know if I need to do a Professional Experience?

A decision to apply for a Professional Experience may be made for a variety of reasons:

1. You desire a job upon graduation but lack practical experience in the information sciences.
2. You may have considerable experience in one area of information work; the Professional Experience offers an opportunity to test the waters and the culture in a different aspect of the field.
3. You need a low-risk opportunity to test initial interest and aptitude in an area of career interest.

Do prospective employers consider the Professional Experience as equivalent to work experience?

Employers are primarily interested in skills and work habits over time. A Professional Experience is a different type of experience as to intensity and duration (150 hours equivalent to only 18+ days) as well as intensity.

The Professional Experience focuses on learning rather than work performance. A Professional Experience may prove to be in an area or environment different from that where a student ultimately applies. If your Professional Experience is successful in the supervisor's eyes, you may get a positive recommendation from that supervisor once you seek full-time, professional-level work.

Do I have to take a Professional Experience in the Knoxville area?

A Professional Experience **can take place anywhere** if it meets the other requirements noted in the 499 guidelines.

How is a Professional Experience evaluated?

The Professional Experience is ungraded and for S/NC credit only. The student's supervisor provides a written evaluation at the Professional Experience's completion. The student turns in a report of the experience as to its activities, its quality, its ability to meet the original objectives, and the level of student satisfaction.

Must a Professional Experience be both started and finished in the semester for which I registered for the Professional Experience?

No, Professional Experience experiences and calendars are different for each student, and there is some flexibility about beginning and ending a Professional Experience. A Professional Experience might be initiated during a break before the term in which the student expects to receive credit. Under normal circumstances, the Professional Experience should end before the end of the term in which credit is expected. However, with advanced approval, the student can take an incomplete and finish the Professional Experience after the semester ends.

Do Professional Experience requirements change in the shorter summer term?

No, a three-credit-hour Professional Experience in the summer term still requires 150 clock hours. However, a student with the supervisor's agreement, for example, could begin a Professional Experience in May during the break between spring and summer semesters, for example. This would make completing the Professional Experience on time less taxing.

Who sets my work hours for the Professional Experience?

Setting the hours during which the student will be working on site is the responsibility of the student and the supervisor. Factors which should be considered include the meeting times of the student's other courses, if any, and availability of the supervisor to oversee the student.

Does the Professional Experience have to be face-to-face, or are there virtual opportunities?

It's your choice! As you look for potential sites, be sure to ask the organizations which modality (on-site or virtual) they are willing to accommodate.

Do I need to bring knowledge or skills to the Professional Experience?

Yes, if the Professional Experience involves any technical understanding. Supervisors are not able – nor are they asked – to train a student from the ground up. For example, a cataloging Professional Experience should be preceded by either one or more cataloging courses or some preliminary experience in cataloging. A Web-development Professional Experience should be preceded by IS 581 or previous experience in HTML/XML coding and related experience. The supervisor makes the ultimate decision as to a student's ability to handle the relevant work.

If I am approved for a 6 hour Professional Experience in one semester will I have to work 20 hours per week?

You would need to complete 300 hours over the course of the term. How those hours are distributed across each week is up to you and your site supervisor.

What do I do if I have issues at my Professional Experience?

Share your concerns in the INSC 499 Mid-semester check-in; or

Email: msispracticum@utk.edu with your concerns. Our team will be happy to help.