

# **Experiential Learning Guidelines**

## **6 credit hours**

**B.S. Geographic Science and Community Planning**

Department of Geography, Planning & Recreation

*Adopted: spring 2012*

*Updated: Fall 2021*

## **WHY EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING?**

One's education can be considered *experiential* when the student is placed in a situation resembling aspects of real-world challenges and activities. In short, you learn from direct experience, rather than learning about it from someone else. Experiential learning can occur in numerous forms, from cross cultural experiences (study abroad), field experiences, and original research projects, to more formal internships, service learning, or cooperative education.

This requirement encourages your direct application of knowledge and skills to more real-world settings than what you will find in the classroom. Research on learning strategies clearly shows that students learn important academic skills more effectively when they engage with meaningful, realistic projects and challenges. This is an opportunity for you to construct your own learning and improve your academic skills through a facilitated, out-of-classroom experience. Because experiential learning comes in many forms, our requirement is equally flexible to apply best to your own interests and educational goals.

## **YOUR OPTIONS**

You may enroll in one or more of the following options to satisfy a **total of six credit hours (3 credits required)**. The combination you choose should be **approved by your supervising faculty member(s) and the SBS Advising staff**. Keep in mind that if you accumulate more than 6 credit hours of the following, only six credits can be applied for the experiential learning requirement. Additional credits can be applied to satisfy electives or emphasis requirements.

### **GSP 408 PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP (1-12)**

Supervised field experience in an appropriate agency or organization. Department consent required. Pass-fail only. No repeat limit. Course fee required.

### **GSP 485 UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH (1-6)**

Individualized original research under the supervision of a research adviser. Department consent required. Pass-fail only. May be repeated for up to 12 units of credit.

### **GSP 497 INDEPENDENT STUDY (1-6)**

Individualized approach to selected topics by guided reading and critical evaluation. Department consent required. Pass-fail only. No repeat limit.

### STUDY ABROAD TRANSFER CREDITS (3-6)

Up to six credits of accepted and relevant study abroad courses can be used to satisfy the experiential learning requirement.

**NOTE:** Successful course transfer with grades of C or higher is required, in addition to a substantial **reflective essay** pertaining to the study abroad experience.

## WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS

Although you may mix and match different types of experiences (above) to satisfy the six credits of experiential learning, the standard expectations apply for each credit hour, as determined by the Department of Geography, Planning & Recreation:

- 1 credit hour = 50 total clock hours of effort
- 2 credit hours = 100 total clock hours of effort
- 3 credit hours = 150 total clock hours of effort
- 6 credit hours = 300 total clock hours of effort

## STUDENT REQUIREMENTS

### Initial Proposal and Paperwork:

- Discuss your ideas with a GSP faculty member within your area of interest (such as community planning, physical geography, human geography, or GIS).
- Determine the faculty member who will supervise your experiential learning coursework. Submit a **written proposal** to your supervising faculty member that outlines the following information (no longer than one page, single-spaced):
  - **Personal Information:** Name, course (from above), contact information, dates and duration of the experience, supervising faculty member.
  - **What will you do?** Briefly describe the activity and how it relates to one of the course options above.
  - **Purpose and Reasoning:** Write a brief overview of what you intend to accomplish and why, and how it relates to your interests and to your degree plan.

### GSP 408 PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP

- Maintain log of work performed
- Collect examples of work/projects accomplished (submit on CD/Flash drive if possible)
- Regular updates to faculty advisor (minimum of once every two weeks)
- Professional conduct throughout: Being punctual, quality work, well dressed, positive attitude. □ Supervisor Evaluation
- Student Evaluation/Reflection or presentation

### **GSP 485 UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH**

- Journal or Blog (minimum 2 entries per week throughout experience)
- Research paper or thesis
- Poster presentation **OR** oral presentation (both if 4-6 credits)
- Midway and Final Faculty Advisor Evaluations
- Reflective Essay on Student Learning

### **GSP 497 INDEPENDENT STUDY**

- Journal or Blog (minimum 2 entries per week throughout experience)
- Research paper or thesis (or equivalent)
- Poster presentation **OR** oral presentation (both if 4-6 credits)
- Midway and Final Faculty Advisor Evaluations
- Reflective Essay on Student Learning

### **STUDY ABROAD TRANSFER CREDITS**

- Grade of C or higher in approved Study Abroad coursework
- Reflective Essay on Study Abroad experience

## **GSP 408 Professional Internship**

GSP408 Professional Experience/Internship is an opportunity for students to experience the workings of an agency while still a student, to use and expand on their current knowledge base primarily in the fields of Urban Planning or GIS.

The professional internship is an integral and critical part of your education. Internships introduce you to professionals in the field as well as real world projects and agency systems. Internships can aid you in networking and provide contacts for professional letters of recommendation.

Internships are to be taken with a professional agency engaged in your professional pursuits. The agency may be public, non-profit private or a for profit private agency selected with approval of your advisor. The experience in an internship is invaluable as professional experience and can open the door for future work opportunities. Internships may be paid or unpaid. The majority are the latter. Plan your program of study accordingly with your advisor. Internship credits are available throughout the year, fall, spring and summer.

#### **Steps:**

1. Talk to your advisor about internships and when they best fit into your program of study.
2. Before the semester or summer in which you are to intern begins, start looking for internships. Several months in advance is suggested. The faculty probably have ideas and contacts.
3. You will need a current resume. Make sure it is professional. The resume will be sent to possible internship supervisors at the agencies you are applying to. Note: If you are using a contact of the

professor's, there likely is a protocol to follow. Make sure you follow it! (Ex: Professor makes initial contact and instructs you when to send a resume in.)

4. For any internship interview, dress professionally. Know something about the agency and possible projects. Be able to discuss how your education and skills can help the agency, and how knowledge from the agency will help you.
5. When you have secured an internship, fill out the **internship form**, attach a description of the internship and secure the required signatures (advisor, supervisor, department chair). You may then register for the internship.

### **Expectations:**

1. You will work approximately 50 hours per hour of credit earned.
2. You will keep a log of the work you perform and examples of projects or reports/research you work on. These are to be turned in to your advisor at the end of your internship. They may be placed on disk or flash drive. This can be used as part of a professional portfolio.
3. You will update your advisor every two weeks on your status.
4. You will conduct yourself in a professional manner. This includes being on time, producing quality work, a professional attitude and appropriate dress. Your internship reflects not only on yourself, but this program and will have an impact on the opportunities of students coming after you.
5. As a part of your internship experience, your advisor may require you to talk to a class or club regarding your internship, or communicate to others via poster.
6. Expect your advisor to contact your supervisor for your status and ability as an intern. This is likely to be done as a site visit, phone conversation, email or letter.

## **GSP 485 or 497**

### **During the Experience: *Reflecting!***

- **Updates for your Supervisor:** At a minimum of **once every two weeks**, provide an updated summary of your accomplishments and learning to your faculty supervisor. This may consist of a short reflection paper/email based on what you have learned, or a more specific requirement assigned by your supervisor, depending upon the experience and level of supervision required.
- **Journal Assignment:** Maintain a **written journal** of your activities and learning, with a minimum of **one entry per week (see more information below)**.
  - Your periodic summary (above) can make use of material from your journal if desired. Your journal can be typed or written in a field/notebook, depending upon your type of experience.
  - You can also create a **blog** (we recommend *Wordpress*) or add to an existing blog. This can either be privately accessible only to your supervisor, or more publicly accessible.
  - This journal will be evaluated by your faculty supervisor upon your return and/or completion of the experience. (*Please see more detailed information about the journal assignment at the end of this document.*)

## After the Experience: *Reporting!*

- Set up a meeting with your faculty supervisor to share your experiences and to discuss the final requirements for your evaluation.
- For each 1-3 credit hours, complete one of the following products, as determined through discussion with your supervisor:
  - A 15-20 minute **oral presentation** to share your experiences with others in the department, either at the ***GPR Senior Seminar Research Conference*** in fall or spring, or another accepted venue.
  - A **poster presentation**, to be presented in the department building or at another acceptable venue.
- Complete a final **research paper** or thesis (or related written product of equivalent rigor).

**NOTE:** The oral presentation or poster can be presented or displayed during *Geography Awareness Week* (November) or during the *Department Undergraduate Conference* (fall or spring). If you are located at NAU or nearby during the semester of your experience, you can complete your presentation during that semester in either November or April. Otherwise, set up a time to complete this work during the following semester.

## **Your Journal**

**Why keep a journal?** Research has shown that journal writing tends to encourage the following outcomes:

- Improvement of a student's thinking and writing skills. Writing IS thinking. Writing is not simply the final product of one's own thoughts and knowledge, but is an active way to encourage thinking PRIOR TO the final draft. Enhancement of a student's learning and ability to reflect on one's own learning.
- Encouragement for students to examine and consider their own beliefs, assumptions, and values, including preconceptions and misconceptions.

**What to expect from your journal?** Journals are designed to promote personal observations, reflections, and critiques of one's own experiences and learning.

- Journals are confidential, only read and evaluated by your professor, unless you decide otherwise (such as with a blog format).
- Some typical topics and purposes for handwritten or typed journal.
  - Field notes, sketches, diagrams.
  - On-site or spontaneous observations. ○ Reflections during and after experiences. ○ Personal connections or thoughts that relate to experiences and learning.
  - Personal evaluations of yourself with respect to what learning is or is not taking place. ○ Whatever other topics or thoughts are important to you at the moment.