

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION STUDIES

GUIDELINES FOR LSC 595: PROFESSIONAL FIELD EXPERIENCE (PFE)
(11/29/2000)

LSC 595 Professional Field Experience (1-6) Directed field experience applying theory to practice in libraries, information centers, and related organizations. Jointly supervised by a member of the faculty and a professional in the cooperating institution. (Practicum) Pre: 18 hours of library science with a B average, 45 hours per credit. 593 and 595 may be repeated for a combined total of 6 credits.

Purpose: The Professional Field Experience (PFE) is intended to provide students who have never worked in a library with an opportunity to gain some practical library experience prior to completion of the MLIS program. It also provides an opportunity for students with some library experience to broaden their experience by working in an area of librarianship other than that in which they are or have been employed. The Professional Field Experience is designed to support the GSLIS Educational Outcomes (<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/lsc/web/Academics/Educ-Outcomes-new.html>). Students will identify the outcomes they wish to emphasize and negotiate their PFE objectives individually with faculty and field supervisors. Achievement of objectives will be documented in the PFE portfolio.

The PFE is pursued for academic credit, and is distinct from paid internship programs. However, students who participate in paid internship programs may register for LSC 595 and receive up to three hours of academic credit if prior arrangements are made with the student's advisor, faculty supervisor, and field supervisor, and all requirements of the PFE are met by the internship experience.

Student Eligibility: Prerequisite for LSC 595 is the completion of at least 18 hours of GSLIS course work with a B average. Courses taken prior to the PFE should include LSC 502 (Library Administration), LSC 503 (Collection Development), LSC 504 (Reference and Information Services), LSC 505 (Organization of Information), LSC 508 (Introduction to Information Science and Technology), and at least one additional course, preferably devoted to the type of library or information service to be practiced in the PFE.

Students who wish to undertake a PFE before completing the required courses must obtain the approval of the faculty. If the student's adviser feels that there is justification for making an exception, he or she may request the approval of the faculty at a regular or special faculty meeting, or via the LSCFAC list.

Procedures: A student who wishes to undertake a Professional Field Experience should discuss the proposed experience with his or her adviser, who will identify the regular (i.e., full-time) member(s) of the GSLIS faculty best qualified to supervise an experience in the student's area of interest. The student will confer with the suggested faculty supervisor to confirm the student's purposes for the PFE and identify an appropriate cooperating institution and field supervisor for the placement.

- **Selecting a Site:** Appropriate placement sites may be identified by the faculty supervisor or the student. Announced PFE opportunities are filed in the School's "Professional Field Experience Notebook," but placements are not limited to these sites; other institutions may be found to meet special interests or geographic requirements. The field supervisor must hold an ALA-accredited master's degree or comparable qualifications, and must be willing and able

to mentor a student. Students will not ordinarily be permitted to pursue a PFE in the library or institution in which they are employed.

- **The Professional Field Experience Form** sets forth the student's purpose for the PFE, the specific activities through which that purpose is to be realized, and the arrangements for supervising, documenting, and evaluating the student's performance. The general purpose and specific activities of the PFE should support the GSLIS Educational Outcomes (<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/lsc/web/Academics/Educ-Outcomes-new.html>), and will be negotiated by the student, the faculty supervisor, and the field supervisor to meet the needs of the student and the cooperating institution.

The PFE form will serve as a contract, and will be the first item in the PFE portfolio (see below). After it has been approved by the faculty supervisor, it will be signed by the student, the field supervisor, and the faculty supervisor, each of whom will retain a copy. A fourth copy will be placed in the student's file in the GSLIS office. This form should be approved and signed before the beginning of the PFE. Credit will not be given for the PFE if the form is not approved and signed before the end of the add period in the semester during which the student is enrolled in LSC 595. The faculty supervisor's copy will be placed in the student's file at the completion of the PFE.

- **Student responsibilities:** The student will exhibit ethical, professional behavior. The student will report to the faculty supervisor at agreed intervals during the course of the PFE; it is also the student's responsibility to communicate with the faculty supervisor promptly if the work experience does not seem to be meeting the goals and objectives of the PFE. The frequency and form of the student's scheduled reports will be governed by the nature of the PFE; a final report on the activities carried out during the PFE and how well they met the student's objective(s) will be due at the end of the semester. These reports will comprise the bulk of the PFE portfolio.
- **Faculty responsibilities:** The faculty supervisor will help the student formulate PFE objective(s), identify an appropriate site, and arrange a placement. The faculty supervisor will serve as a resource to answer questions and concerns of the field supervisor and the student throughout the PFE. The faculty supervisor will arrange to discuss the student's progress with the field supervisor during the semester, by telephone, e-mail, or in person. The faculty supervisor will assign a grade for the PFE, based on a portfolio which will include the original contract, the student's periodic and final reports, and the field supervisor's evaluation of the student's performance. The relative weights of these factors in determining the final grade should be clearly stated in the PFE form. At the end of the PFE, the portfolio will be returned to the student; copies of the contract, the student's final report, and the field supervisor's evaluation will be kept in the student's file in the GSLIS office.
- **Field supervisor responsibilities:** The field supervisor will provide an opportunity for the student to gain practical, professional experience, whether in the routine daily activities of a library (like answering questions at a reference desk) or in special projects (like cataloging a gift collection or developing a database). The work should be of value both to the cooperating institution and to the student, and the field supervisor will communicate promptly with the faculty supervisor if the PFE does not seem to be meeting the needs of the cooperating institution. The field supervisor will serve as a professional mentor to the student, and may involve the student in occasional activities outside the host institution (like professional association meetings) if appropriate. At the end of the PFE, the field supervisor will submit to the faculty supervisor an evaluation in writing of the student's performance, which will be kept on file at the School for a period of five years.

PFE Portfolio: Portfolio assessment emphasizes the documentation of progress toward goals formulated by students. Professional portfolios can be used by job seekers to demonstrate professional knowledge, skills, and philosophy. The PFE portfolio is designed to give students control over the terms of their evaluation. Essential elements of the portfolio are:

- The PFE form, or contract, negotiated by the student, the faculty supervisor, and the field supervisor
- The student's final report, in whatever form the student and supervisors have determined is most relevant and appropriate to the purposes of the PFE
- The field supervisor's written evaluation of the student's performance in the activities agreed upon

Additional elements of the portfolio will vary depending on individual students' purposes and the circumstances of the cooperating institutions. For a PFE designed primarily to give the student experience in the day-to-day operations of a library or information service, documentation might include a log, or brief interim reports reflecting on questions the student poses at the beginning of the PFE. For a more project-driven PFE, documentation might include sample products (such as pathfinders, the URL of a new library site developed by the student, or participant evaluations of the student's story hours). Recommendations for the portfolio:

- Keep it simple. Doing the Professional Field Experience is more important than documenting it; documentation beyond the minimum should arise naturally from meaningful activities.
- Make sure that the items selected for the portfolio document progress toward the agreed-upon objectives of the PFE.
- Negotiate a reasonable weight for each item as a percentage of the course grade.

Resources for the PFE: Students, faculty, and field supervisors should all have copies of the PFE guidelines and the form for the Professional Field Experience Contract, which will be made available online at <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/lsc/>. Prospective field supervisors have submitted information on PFE opportunities around New England; this information is kept for three years in the PFE notebook organized by Dr. Donna Gilton, and will be available online at <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/lsc/>. Examples of well-done PFE contracts and portfolios will also be made available online.