THE MSIS PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE: AN OVERVIEW AND INSTRUCTIONS

Course Description & Rationale

IS 599: Practicum (3 hrs.) Opportunity to translate theory into practice under guidance of qualified information professionals. Prerequisite: completion of required and pertinent advanced courses relevant to student's practicum design. Minimum 3.0 GPA. Written permission of advisor and approval of practicum coordinator. May be repeated with written permission. Maximum 6 hours. S/NC only. Fall, Spring, Summer.

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

- 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 portfolio through validation of skills and knowledge;
- Provides oversight, context, and feedback from skilled and established practitioners;
- Can be done in any location, including virtual;
- 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 if a specific type of organizational climate.

Credit and Work Hour Options

A practicum experience is 3 hours of academic credit (150 clock hours), which translates to an average of 10 hours per week of practicum 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 practicum is flexible. As needed and agreed to by the site supervisor, a practicum 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 practicum may also start during the break between spring and summer terms or the break between fall and spring terms.

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

1. One additional 3-credit-hour practicum experience (i.e., a total of two separate three-hour practicums in two separate semesters), or
2. Two 3-hour practicums (six credit-hours) in different areas/sites during a single semester, or

3. One 6-hour practicum in one semester–in special circumstances.

Location

Practica 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 practicums at international locations. You can also speak with your faculty advisor for ideas. You may also reach out to the practicum coordinator if you are interested in an opportunity that is not listed on the practicum website.

Setup Procedures

1. Interested students discuss their interests with their Faculty Advisor and identify a practicum location and Practicum Supervisor during the semester prior to the term in which they wish to do a practicum. Practicum objectives are developed by working with the Faculty Advisor. Consult the Practicum Coordinator only if needed. Other opportunities are posted on Handshake as they become available.
2. Students then discuss their practicum objectives with the Practicum Supervisor, and negotiate the terms of the practicum, including the actual duties expected, and a mutually-approved work schedule.
3. The online SIS Student Practicum Application Form is then submitted by the student, which is automatically sent by email to the Practicum Coordinator, the Faculty Advisor, and the Practicum Supervisor, for review. The Supervisor and Advisor will each indicate to the Coordinator their acceptance of, modifications to, or rejection of the practicum objectives. If the Advisor and/or Supervisor indicate a change is necessary, or that the objectives as presented in the application are unacceptable, the Coordinator will contact the student to ensure that the specified changes are made, or if rejected, that the student contacts the Advisor. The student would then resubmit the application with the revised objectives.
4. After the Practicum Coordinator has received approvals from the Advisor and Supervisor, the Student Services Coordinator will email the student of the practicum's approval and activation. At this time, the student will be able to register for 3 or 6 units of INSC 599.

Roles and Responsibilities

There are four roles related to a SIS Practicum:
Student:

- Primarily responsible for initiating the practicum process as described in steps 1-4 below.
    1. Students discuss their interests with their Faculty Advisor and then work with them to develop Practicum objectives for their specific practicum experience.

    2. Students identify possible practicum locations during the semester prior to the term in which the student wishes to do practicum. Faculty Advisors and the Practicum Coordinator may be able to help. Students then discuss their practicum objectives with the Site Supervisor, and negotiate the terms of the practicum, including the actual duties expected, and a mutually-agreed-upon work schedule.
    3. The student will submit the online SIS Student Practicum Approval Form which

is automatically sent by email to the Practicum Coordinator, the Faculty Advisor, and the Site Supervisor, for review. The Supervisor and Advisor will each indicate to the Coordinator their acceptance of, modifications to, or rejection of the practicum 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 Practicum Coordinator has received approvals from the Advisor and Supervisor, the Student Services Coordinator will email the student of the practicum's approval and activation. At this time, the student will be able to register for 3 or 6 units of INSC 599.

- 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 practicum experience.

Faculty Advisor

- Assists student in developing a list of learning objectives for the practicum.
- Reviews and approves the proposed practicum as being relevant to the student's program and career interests.

Practicum Coordinator

- Approves practicum sites
- As needed, assists student with identifying the practicum site and placement.
- Approves the practicum form once the faculty advisor and site supervisor have approved it.
- Coordinates INSC 599 and monitors and evaluates course deliverables
- Coordinates communications between the site supervisor, faculty advisor, and student if needed.

Practicum Supervisor

- Supervises and mentors the student during the practicum.
- Assists the student in developing the list of learning objectives.
- Reviews and approves the student's practicum application.

- Completes the Supervisor Evaluation of Student Practicum at the end of the practicum.

The following guidelines apply:

- All required courses relevant to the practicum 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 practicum.

- Because students cannot do practicum work identical to that for which they are paid, a student does not normally do a practicum in an information organization where they are employed. With consent of the practicum coordinator, however, a student may undertake a practicum 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 practicum for more than three credit hours of IS 599 if employed more than 20 hours per week.
- While every reasonable effort will be made to facilitate provision of a practicum experience for a student meeting all qualifications and following all necessary procedures, availability of a practicum cannot be guaranteed.

Resources that can be found on the SIS Graduate Toolkit Canvas Course:

- Practicum Application & Forms
- Tips and Templates

FAQ

Who do I contact with my questions about all things Practicum?

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

How do I know if I need to do a Practicum?

A decision to apply for a practicum 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 practicum 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 Practicum as equivalent to work experience?

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

The Practicum focuses on learning rather than work performance. A practicum may prove to be in an area or environment different from that where a student ultimately applies. If your practicum 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 practicum in the Knoxville area?

A practicum **can take place anywhere** if it meets the other requirements noted in the 599 guidelines. Practica, for example, have been done in Nashville, Chattanooga, Denver, Boston, Phoenix, Albuquerque, Charlottesville, Washington D. C., and elsewhere.

Can I do a Practicum where I work?

It is possible to do a practicum at one's workplace if it is completely different from the student's current work. If, for example, the student does cataloging work and wants to do a reference practicum, that is possible. Of course, one's supervisors must agree to it, and it must not violate federal or state wage and hour guidelines.

How is a Practicum evaluated?

The Practicum is ungraded and for S/NC credit only. The student's supervisor provides a written evaluation at the practicum'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 Practicum be both started and finished in the semester for which I registered for the practicum?

No, practicum experiences and calendars are different for each student, and there is some flexibility about beginning and ending a practicum. A practicum might be initiated during a break before the term in which the student expects to receive credit. Under normal circumstances, the practicum 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 practicum after the semester ends.

Do Practicum requirements change in the shorter summer term?

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

Who sets my work hours for the Practicum?

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 practicum 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 practicum?

Yes, if the practicum involves any technical understanding. Supervisors are not able – nor are they asked – to train a student from the ground up. For example, a cataloging practicum should be preceded by either one or more cataloging courses or some preliminary experience in cataloging. A Web-development practicum 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.

Even though this is coursework, can I get paid for it?

The standard is that this is coursework, and is not paid work; however, in rare cases, students who have applied for externally paid internships have been granted permission to use that work to earn course credit for practicum. Consult the practicum coordinator if you wish to have this option considered.

If I am approved for a 6 hour practicum 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 practicum?

Share your concerns in the INSC 599 Mid-semester check-in; or

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