
Virginia Tech Geography

Field Experience Guide



**Please read all of the attached information completely
before beginning your search for a field experience.**

Download the complete field experience packet -([Link](#))

Purpose of the Geography Field Experience.

The purpose of the field experience is to obtain valuable experience, apply skills and knowledge you've learned in classes, and to gain exposure to various learning opportunities. A field experience is a structured experiential learning opportunity on location with a company, organization group, or academic department. Examples would be an internship, study abroad, undergraduate research, or service learning.

Why field experiences are important?

Attending college, getting a high GPA, and taking appropriate coursework are all important to employers and graduate schools. In today's society, this isn't enough. More is expected from students than just a college degree. They expect to see evidence that students can apply what they've learned in the classroom in a real-world setting off campus. The field experience increases your marketability to potential employers and graduate schools and allows you to make contacts that may lead to a fulltime position upon graduation.

Requirements:

- Complete a minimum of 15 hours in geography.
- Complete the field experience registration form. This form must be completed by the student and signed by the geography department head and field experience coordinator in 115 Major Williams.
- Return the form to Karen Bland, Field Experience Coordinator in 115 Major Williams Hall. Final approval of the geography department head is required before you can be enrolled in the field experience.
- The student, field experience sponsor, and advisor must have an understanding of the goals, duties, and responsibilities that are required before beginning the chosen field experience.

Four Types of Field Experiences you can choose to gain credit:

- Study Abroad 3954
- Internship 2964 or 4964
- Undergraduate Research 2994 or 4994
- VT Service Learning

Study Abroad

Students who have the opportunity to study abroad attain personal growth, broaden their intellectual experiences, and further develop their global world view. It's exciting to gain first-hand knowledge and understanding of another culture and broaden your understanding of your own culture. In addition, study abroad is an excellent resume builder and gives you a competitive edge in the job market. Please contact Virginia Tech Study Abroad (Education Abroad) to view listed study abroad resources on this webpage.

Internship

One of the most important aspects of doing an internship is that it gives students an idea of what to expect when working in a chosen field and helps students decide if that area is a fit for them. An internship may or may not be paid, but gaining the chance to meet people within the organization who can give you advice on how to be successful in the field and who can possibly help you find a future job in your field of interest often outweighs any monetary benefit. Students who obtain internships also gain career related experience that distinguishes them from other applicants. The internship position must be para-professional meaning that you must work at the side of a professional.

Undergraduate Research

Students can receive field experience credit for doing research on an approved topic under the guidance of a Virginia Tech faculty member.

Virginia Tech Service Learning

VT Service Learning enables students to perform important community service projects related to their major course work and develop community partnerships and address community needs. In addition, students develop important leadership skills. For more information contact Virginia Tech Service Learning.

Strategies for an effective field experience search

Please note that if you plan to do a study abroad, service learning, or undergraduate research as a field experience that contacting companies, preparing cover letters, and resumes isn't required as mentioned below.

Begin searching early: Begin your field experience search at least six months or two terms prior to your estimated field experience start date. Many organizations hire their summer interns in the late fall or early spring.

Conduct a Self- Assessment first: Knowing what skills and abilities you have along with those you need develop will help you identify the best type of field experience for you. Identify the skills you have that field experience sponsors would be most interested in and document how you've developed and used these skills.

Conduct Research: Identify your preference in work type, industry, environment, and geographical location. Obtain and review company profiles and contact information.

Prepare a resume and cover letter/letter of interest: Update and tailor your resume and letter of interest for internships/field experiences you are applying to. Always include a cover letter with your resume or application materials. Attend VT Career Services workshops.

Networking is key: Networking is making new contacts and gathering information from these contacts regarding possible intern/field experience opportunities. Let your friends and family know that you're actively pursuing a field experience. Attend career and internship fairs hosted by Virginia Tech.

Be active in your search: Many field experiences/internships are in the hidden job market meaning they are not advertised in want ads or other traditional avenues. This is why networking is so important. Generate potential opportunities for internships. Search for employers contact information. Just because an organization has no positions posted does not mean that it doesn't have opportunities available.

Need help finding a field experience?

To assist you in finding a field experience, you need to make contact with possible sponsors or organizations. Below is list of possible avenues to research in finding a field experience sponsor:

Check the geography internship board in Major Williams Hall

Read your email from the department as many notices are forwarded

VT Geography alumni employment list

Field Experience Resources & Job listing site

VT Service Learning Center

Study Abroad

Ask fellow students about their internship experiences and how they went about locating a sponsor.

VT Career Placement Services

Other departments here on campus may have their own internship programs; browsing through their materials may produce some leads.

Newman Library - Researching Company Information

Chamber of Commerce Directories

Contacting A Sponsor

After researching the type of field experience you choose, you should have a list of possible sponsors and their contact information. The prospective field experience you seek should relate to geography, your interests, and your career goals. When contacting a sponsor, be prepared to describe your background, skills, and interest in the type of work their organization offers. Briefly mention your course work and speak of your writing, data-gathering, statistical, geospatial and research abilities, along with your career goals.

*If applying for an internship, begin by sending your cover letter and resume to sponsors/organizations that interest you. When seeking an internship, most organizations will want to see your cover letter and resume. The cover letter should be tailored for each intern position you seek. (draft of cover letter & resume)

Setting up the field experience

When you set up the field experience make sure that all of the arrangements between you and your sponsor are clear including the length of the field experience, hours per week, pay (if applicable), supervision, and the specific duties you will be performing. Menial tasks and answering the phone are not appropriate field experiences. Make sure that you will be doing work which will give you practical experience in the field of geography.

Registering for the field experience

*Internships or field experiences already completed **cannot be retro-actively registered.** You must have completed a minimum of 15 hours in geography and be in good academic standing. All students will be registered for three credit hours for the specified term. Students will be registered for field experience credit the semester before they plan to begin the field experience (***with the exception of summer session field experiences which may be registered for the upcoming fall semester.**)

Steps to register

- First, see your advisor and discuss the type of field experience you're interested in pursuing.
- Finalize your decision and coordinate your field experience with the appropriate sponsoring individual.
- Download the Field Experience Registration form

- Have the Field Experience Registration Form signed by the department head.

*The deadline for turning in the registration form for **fall semester is August 1**, and the deadline for turning in the registration form for **spring semester is December 15**. The deadline for turning in the registration for a **summer field experience is April 15**.

***Students who complete a field experience during the summer session may *
be registered for the upcoming fall semester.**

- Bring the form to, Karen Bland, Internship Coordinator in 115 Major Williams, and Karen will enroll you in the field experience.

****Please note the section below Assignments & Receiving Credit *only applies to students who choose an internship or undergraduate research. Study Abroad and Service Learning assignments are determined by the professor or program coordinator***

Assignments & Receiving Credit

Two items must be turned into your faculty advisor three weeks before the end of the semester in order for the advisor to submit a grade for your field experience:

- 1) Field Experience Supervisor's evaluation form
- 2) Student's two page essay

At the beginning of your field experience assignment, you need to provide the field experience supervisor's evaluation form to your field experience supervisor. Three weeks before the end of the field experience, turn in this supervisor's evaluation form to your faculty advisor.

Three weeks before the end of the semester, you will submit a two page essay to your faculty advisor describing your duties, experiences, personal observations, and how this experience contributed to your geography education.

***Please note**: For all summer field experiences, the two required assignments will be due within the first two weeks of the fall semester.

Contacts

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Forms are found on the website at <http://geography.vt.edu/>