

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE AT MARTIN**  
**Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources**  
Practicum in Agribusiness Field Guide

**Purpose**

Supervised field experience is an important aspect of the educational preparation of professionals for agricultural and natural resource management industries. Such experiences reinforce classroom instruction, provide an opportunity for students to observe and engage in the application of recently acquired knowledge, and enable students to gain valuable insights into the organization and operation of businesses and agencies in various sectors of the industry. Field experience, which is appropriately supervised and approached with an attitude of enthusiasm and inquiry, can be the most meaningful learning exercise in a student's curriculum.

The Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources in the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences at the University of Tennessee at Martin has developed and revised this guide for students, representatives of cooperating businesses or agencies participating in the supervised field experience program, and faculty who serve as field-work supervisors for the University. This outline is intended only as a guide; changes may be made as circumstances warrant to improve the quality of students' work/learning experiences.

To provide the maximal benefits for a student, supervised field experience should include the following: 1) involvement in a broad spectrum of activities representative of the major types of activities engaged in by the business or agency, ranging from relatively simple assignments to situations involving more complex management; and 2) routine administrative responsibilities. Initially, students should assist and observe to become familiar with staff and their major responsibilities, general policies and procedures, company or agency rules and regulations, facilities and equipment, major services/products provided by the business or agency, clientele served, and any other components crucial to the proper operation of the business. As a student becomes acquainted with operational procedures (and with the on-the-job Supervisor's consent), he/she should assume increasing responsibilities and perhaps even primary responsibility for a designated area of operation. Individuals differ as will each student's supervised field experience. Each student should be steered as far as is feasible – and as early as possible – into increasing levels of responsibility as the work period progresses.

Field work is an important (and potentially very beneficial) phase of a student's preparation for entry into a professionally-oriented career after completion of his/her degree. It can do much to illustrate the application of learning and expertise for the solution of practical problems. Also, appropriate field experience can contribute to a continuing flow of qualified and competent personnel into agricultural and resource management industries. In addition, a positive internship experience can lead to positive employment outcomes and networking opportunities and long-term relationships for students, businesses and agencies, and the University.

## Student Objectives

For students in any of the curricula leading to a degree in Agribusiness, the supervised field experience should be pursued with the following major objectives:

- to increase the student's preparation for assuming an effective role in a chosen career area after completion of his/her degree;
- to fully take advantage of a unique opportunity to learn by doing;
- to increase the student's understanding of the scope of agricultural and resource management industries;
- to become more familiar with the varied roles and responsibilities of professional workers in agriculture and natural resource management;
- to improve the student's understanding of the functions, administrative organization, and managerial practices of the business or agency with which he/she works;
- to increase the student's knowledge and appreciation of human behavior in a work environment, in turn improving leadership abilities and the student's capacity to work harmoniously with others in a professional environment; and
- to identify the student's strengths and weaknesses so that he/she may overcome potential handicaps to effective performance.

More specifically, each student should endeavor to increase his/her level of knowledge by gaining experience in the following areas:

- Technical Knowledge - The success of any business or agency is directly dependent upon the ability of its "front line" technical and support personnel to effectively execute their responsibilities.
- Management - Observe in action, study, and participate in the maintenance and operating procedures of the company with which he/she works.
- Administration - Study, observe in action, and participate (as much as is feasible) in the development of administrative policies and procedures of the company or agency with which he/she works.
- Miscellaneous Expertise - Endeavor to participate (to the extent feasible) in activities and programs such as research projects, professional meetings, conferences or workshops, public relations, community service projects, etc.

## Criteria of Eligibility and Performance

1. Prior Approval: Prior approval of arrangements among cooperating employer, academic supervisor(s), and course instructor is necessary. The location of the field experience will be decided jointly by the student, his/her field experience Supervisor, and an authorized representative of the sponsoring company or agency (company or agency with which the student will work). Approval of all supervised field experience assignments will be contingent upon the anticipated quality of the experience, the benefits to be derived from the experience in relation to the student's career aspirations, and the benefits to a

potential cooperating company or agency All these points will be assessed prior to final approval by the student's field experience Supervisor. Any field experience must be approved by the student's main Advisor and the course Instructor prior to the beginning of the term to ensure that the field experience meets the criteria of the department.

2. Class Standing: Students should have reached the class standing of "Junior" in most cases, and sufficient course work in the major field of study (by the beginning date) to benefit adequately from the field experience. Departures from these requirements may be justified by special or extenuating circumstances.
3. Minimum GPA: Students should have a minimum cumulative GPA of at least 2.0 at the end of the semester immediately preceding the supervised field experience.
4. Length of Supervised Field Experience: The duration of the field experience should be a minimum of 12 weeks to fulfill course requirements (the goal is 320 hours of supervised field experience).
5. Course Credit: Students must officially enroll in AGEC 444: Practicum in Agribusiness and satisfactorily complete all course requirements in order to receive academic credit.
6. Financial: Since the financial resources of most students are limited, sponsoring companies or agencies are encouraged to provide some salary or compensation appropriate to the value of services performed by the student. However, the level of remuneration will not be a consideration in approval of field experience assignments.

### **Responsibilities of the University, Company or Agency, and Student**

- A. The Department of Agriculture, Geosciences, and Natural Resources in the College of Agriculture and Applied Sciences at the University of Tennessee at Martin shall:
  1. Approve cooperating companies or agencies for participation in the supervised field experience program based upon the quality of field experience they can provide for students.
  2. Assign a faculty member as field experience supervisor – the course "Instructor" – who shall:
    - a. counsel students in preparation for the field experience, as necessary.
    - b. visit the field experience location (when possible) to confer with the student and his/her company or agency Supervisor to determine the student's level of performance and recommend alterations as appropriate.
    - c. evaluate field experience reports and, if needed, discuss them with the student and his/her company or agency supervisor.
    - d. evaluate the student's performance, assist the student in self-evaluation, and suggest approaches for improvement.

- e. assign the student's final grade for academic credit at the end of the field experience.
  3. Determine the eligibility of students to take the supervised field experience course (AGEC 444: Practicum in Agribusiness).
  4. Approve each field experience placement in cooperation with the student and the company or agency.
  5. Provide cooperating companies or agencies and participating students with a copy of this document: "Practicum for Agribusiness Field Guide."
  6. Endeavor to maintain free and open communication with cooperating companies and agencies in order to improve the supervised field experience program.
- B. The cooperating company or agency – the "Employer" – shall:
1. Assign a qualified staff member to serve as the field experience Supervisor.
  2. Assist each individual student in developing a program of field experience which is suitable for his/her needs and with the least disruption of the regular work program of the company or agency. This may be done in cooperation with the University field experience Supervisor (i.e., the course Instructor).
  3. Introduce and orient each student to his/her new assignment.
  4. Evaluate the performance of each student placed with the company or agency.
  5. Offer suggestions to the University for improvement of the supervised field experience program.
- C. The student shall:
1. Seek approval of arrangements with the cooperating Employer, the student's academic Supervisor, and the course Instructor prior to the intended beginning date of the field experience.
  2. Satisfactorily fulfill all eligibility criteria for the supervised field experience.
  3. Consult with the University field experience supervisor (the course Instructor) to secure placement with an approved cooperating company or agency.
  4. Discharge his or her responsibilities with initiative and in a professional manner.
  5. Conform to company or agency policies and regulations, including codes of dress and conduct.
  6. Participate in training or orientation sessions, attend conferences, and submit reports, etc., as required by the company or agency.
  7. Visit, observe, and participate in phases of the company or agency operation other than those to which he/she is assigned in an effort to learn as much as possible about varied aspects of the organization and its operation.

8. If possible, maintain a field experience portfolio including the following: company or agency policy statements and regulations; organizational charts; personnel forms; informational brochures; examples of procedural worksheets, records, and reports; outlines of job responsibilities or descriptions at various management levels; budget forms; project outlines and reports; any additional notes the student takes concerning the work experience; etc. This should prove useful for the preparation of the final paper and presentation.
9. Prepare and submit the following required reports to the University field experience Supervisor (the course Instructor):
  - a. Initial Field Experience Report – outlines the position, expectations, and other information.
  - b. Weekly Field Experience Reports – weekly progress reports from the student’s perspective.
  - c. Final Report on Field Experience – a final report drawing from prior coursework, the Field Experience Portfolio, Weekly Field Experience Reports, etc., to synthesize and process the broad field experience.
  - d. Final Presentation – a presentation about the field experience to be given for the field experience supervisor (the course Instructor), and potentially for other students, faculty members, and parties interested in learning about the student’s experience.
  - e. Field Experience Portfolio (*optional*) – outlined in #8 directly above.

### **Final Report Requirements**

Each student who participates in AGEC 444 will complete a final report on the company or agency for which he/she works. Preparation of this report should enhance the student's comprehension of the organization, management, and operation of the company or agency. This knowledge should contribute to the student's competence in his/her chosen career area. The report may contain, but is not limited to, the following:

- I. Company or Agency
  - A. Legal status of the company or agency
    1. Brief history of the company or agency
    2. Legal basis of the company or agency
      - a. Public agency, private or public corporation, individually-owned business, etc.
      - b. Legislation (if any) establishing, or enabling the establishment of, the company or agency
      - c. Major federal and state laws governing the organization (if applicable)
      - d. Local ordinances that regulate or influence operational patterns

- e. Other legal constraints
- f. *Students may choose to include copies of establishing legislation, enabling legislation, constitution and by-laws, corporate charter, legislation or ordinances which regulate operation, etc.*

## B. General Administration

### 1. Governance

- a. Individually owned business or partnership
- b. Board of Directors or Board of Governors
  - i. number
  - ii. background and interests
  - iii. attainment of position—election, appointment, invitation, etc.
  - iv. officers
  - v. procedures for exercising governance
- c. *Students may choose to include copies of policy statements, publications, charts showing relationship of governing body to the total organization, etc.*

### 2. Internal Organization

- a. Relationship of different components (departments or divisions, such as personnel, accounting or fiscal, marketing and sales, research and development, etc.) to the total organization.
- b. Personnel policies—method of selection, job classifications, qualification criteria, evaluation procedures, salary levels, vacation policies, fringe benefits, etc.
- c. Office procedures—filing systems, record-keeping systems, etc.
- d. *Students may choose to include organization charts showing channels of reporting and supervision; copies of job analysis or job description; copies of position announcements; outline of recruiting and hiring procedures; samples of records and reports; etc.*

### 3. Fiscal Affairs

- a. Budget—type of budget, major budget categories (e.g., wages and salaries, capital expenditures, etc.), procedures for developing the budget.
- b. Sources of income—for example,
  - i. if a public or non-profit agency, tax appropriations, gifts and donations, etc.
  - ii. if an individually owned business or corporation for profit, sale of goods or merchandise (major categories), contract of services, etc.

- c. Major expenditure—categories of goods and/or services which account for most of expenditures of funds.
  - d. Policies and procedures for handling funds—requisitioning procedures, issuance of purchase orders, authorization of expenditures, bidding procedures, etc.
  - e. Special financial problems—summary of important or unusual problems caused by legislative or regulatory constraints, trends in the national or local economy, etc.
  - f. *Students may choose to include copies of sample forms for budgets, requisitions, purchase orders, accounting sheets, etc.*
4. Public relations and/or advertising programs
- a. Objectives of the public relations programs of the company or agency.
  - b. Development of a public relations campaign
    - i. continuous or sporadic?
    - ii. internal (company or agency staff) or contracted?
    - iii. department or officer within the organization having primary responsibility
    - iv. media utilized--mass media, in-house publications, publications developed for broad circulation, etc.
  - c. Major concepts, products, and services emphasized in public relations efforts
  - d. Techniques which have been particularly effective or ineffective
  - e. Procedures used in resolving complaints
  - f. *Students may choose to include copies of news stories (paper, radio, TV), press releases, advertisements, brochures or newsletters, annual reports, etc.*

#### C. Management

- 1. Responsibility for and procedures for initiation of:
  - a. Maintenance of grounds and auxiliary installations
  - b. Maintenance of buildings and equipment
  - c. Job planning and scheduling
  - d. Training and orientation programs for staff
  - e. Compliance with OSHA regulations for safety of workers and visitors
  - f. Protection, security, and law enforcement
  - g. *Students may choose to include copies of job schedules, maintenance contracts, equipment inventories, work orders, etc.*

#### D. Special Programs

1. Research and development
  - a. Organizational unit responsible
  - b. Technical and support personnel involved
  - c. Major emphasis and goals
  - d. Unusual approaches or techniques employed
2. New product or service introduction and marketing
  - a. Procedures used (refer to public relations section above)
  - b. Anticipated trends (e.g., mechanization, financing and capital management, consulting services, etc.)
3. Others

## II. Student Experience

### A. Expectation vs. Reality

1. Discussion of the student's expectation for the supervised field experience
2. Discussion of the student's actual supervised field experience
3. Discussion of similarities and differences between the student's expectations and his/her actual experience working in this particular area and for this particular company or agency

### B. Application

1. Discussion of prior coursework relevant to the supervised field experience
  - a. Any particularly courses that were relevant or useful to this position
  - b. Any particularly useful skills obtained through University studies (perhaps external to coursework) that was relevant or useful to the position
  - c. Any particular skills that would be relevant or useful that were not included in the academic curriculum
2. Discussion of how skills obtained through University study were or could be applied in this company or agency, whether by the student or somewhere else in the business

### C. Preparation and Relevance to Career Goals

1. Discussion of how this supervised field experience was relevant to the student's career goals, how it prepared the student for entry into the workforce, how this experience changed the student's perspective, etc.
2. Discussion of any changes in future goals, objectives, or career paths the student has considered as a result of this field experience