

The Graduate Certificate in Gerontology Experiential Learning Guide

To complete the Graduate Certificate in Gerontology, students are required to gain practical experience through an internship at an aging services organization or an independent research project. This experiential learning requirement is considered a culminating experience and is expected to be the last requirement fulfilled. Students are required to spend a total of 80 hours in this experience and to complete a final paper.

Option 1: Internship

The internship (AGE 504) carries 1 - 3 academic credits (Ex: Master of Social Work (MSW) students register for 1 credit in addition to their gerontology-related MSW field experience). Approval depends, in part, on the relevance of the internship to gerontology.

The internship (sometimes called field experience) can be one of two general types:

- Career exploration, where experience is gained to deepen the student's understanding of a particular specialization (e.g., housing, transportation, mental health, advocacy) within the field of gerontology; or
- Advanced internship, in which one or more projects are conducted, enabling the student to apply, test, and further develop skills learned in the Certificate program.

Site Selection

Internship sites may include a variety of types of agencies or organizations. Consider what skills and knowledge you would like to gain and/or what type of agency/organization would best meet your career objectives, including where you would like to work and the type of work in which you would like to be engaged. Examples include advocacy organizations, senior centers, hospice programs, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, meal programs, social service agencies, housing agencies, health care clinics, transportation agencies, or trust departments at banks. Some organizations program alumni worked with include: Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare, Metropolitan Family Services, Multnomah County Public Guardians Office, Villages NW and more. This represents past activities and students must work with an adviser to select an appropriate site.

Tasks and Projects

Various kinds of activities and/or projects can be engaged in, depending on what best fits the student's needs and interests. Examples include job shadowing and assisting the supervisor or other staff, organizing and/or creating resident activities, arranging special events, interviewing program participants, developing new program components, creating program materials.

Option 2: Independent Research Project

An independent research project (AGE 501) might be an option for students enrolled in a PSU graduate program (Masters or Doctoral) that requires a thesis or dissertation for the degree. Independent research credits must be separate and distinct from any other coursework for which the student may also be earning academic credit.

To be approved, the student's thesis or dissertation should have a primary focus on gerontology. Students will complete an AGE 501/601 By Arrangement form for 1 credit. The student will then be required to complete a reflective paper. This paper should describe how gerontology courses informed their research question, methods, and/or findings.

Applying for the Internship or Research Experience

Students must complete an application at least one term prior to beginning the internship or research project.

Please note: Many agencies require that a contract or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be signed by the university. If such a contract/MOU is required, ask the field supervisor to email it to the IOA Director, who will then forward it to the PSU Contracts office. Negotiations over contract provisions and obtaining the appropriate signatures may take several weeks, so the student is urged to begin the internship site selection process early.

Meet with the potential field supervisor at the site/agency who will supervise your work to determine the scope of work and learning objectives. Please inform the field supervisor that they will need to complete an evaluation form at the conclusion of your internship.

The application and learning contract includes:

1. The application face sheet, with student name and contact information and site and field supervisor information
2. A description of:
 - The student's career objectives
 - The work/activities to be engaged in as a part of the experience
 - Any specific conditions (e.g., an MOU with PSU) or requirements (e.g., experience and/or skills required) and how the student's background meets those requirements
 - The specific learning objectives for the internship
 - The final product(s) of the internship (e.g., the final paper and any other products) and the expected date of submission

3. Signatures of the student, field supervisor, and IOA Director

4. A current resume for the student

The student will be notified by the IOA once the application has been approved. Registering for the Internship or Research Once your internship application has been approved by the IOA Director, complete an online By-Arrangement Form to register (example on next page). Please complete the form fields:

Instructor Name: The IOA Director or another IOA faculty member who will be supervising your internship.
Subject: AGE

Course number: 504 or 501

Course title: This will be the academic record entry and is limited to 20 characters. For internships, write "INTERN:" followed by a phrase (up to 12 characters) specific to the nature or site of your internship (e.g., INTERN: PROV ELDERPL for an internship at Providence ElderPlace).

IMPORTANT: What is written here is what will appear on your transcript. Credits: Between 1 and 3 (Gerontology students must have 18 credits to graduate) Graded Method: "Graded" (Masters and doctoral students may select graded or Pass/Fail option)

Course Description: One or two sentences specifically describing what you will be doing in your field experience. (These are not the required learning objectives, which will be provided on a separate page.)

Final Reflective Paper

The paper (approximately 1750- 2,500 words, double spaced, Arial or Times New Roman Font) should include the following:

1. **Internship site/agency or Research topic:** Describe the site or agency in which the internship or research took place (e.g., mission; when established; public, private for profit, or non-profit; funding sources; services provided; number of staff, number of clients served; opportunities and challenges faced; does the program appear to be effective). Describe the research topic and why it is relevant to older adults.
2. **Learning objectives and activities:** Describe the internship or research experience, including your learning objectives and the activities in which you engaged.
3. **Relationship to knowledge gained through coursework:** Explain what you experienced in your internship or research project related to the coursework you took (e.g., consistencies, inconsistencies). Did your experiences confirm the literature? Were the services in your internship or the findings from your research built upon what we know about the older population?
4. **Lessons learned:** Share what you learned about yourself and how your career plans were affected by your internship or research experience.

For example, consider the following:

Your skills (What are you especially good at? (What are areas of less competence?)

Your knowledge (What do you know fairly well? What do you need to know better?)

Your temperament (What things do you do easily and well? What things are likely to leave you frustrated? Is your temperament compatible with a position in an agency such as your internship site?)

Your values (Which elements of the work reinforced your values? Which did not fit easily?)

Your aspirations (Does a career in the area of your internship or research satisfy your present aspirations?)

5. **Advice to peers:** What advice would you offer your fellow classmates, such as how to make their internship or research experience a good one, what not to do, etc.? What would you do differently next time?