

University at Buffalo Information Science Graduate Student Association

MS-ILS Special Classes Information Session (With Dr. Dan Albertson) Q&A Sheet

Practicum (LIS 526)

General Information: There's no "cookie cutter" approach to a practicum, the course option is intended to provide the flexibility that the student needs to meet their academic and professional goals. This means that you can design the experience accordingly. You will need an on-site advisor and an instructor on record (a department faculty member). You should be in contact with both of them frequently, and they should be in contact with each other to ensure that things are running smoothly. The instructor on record is the one who evaluates the outcomes of the practical experiences and awards credit as they see fit. The course is graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory scale (so you either get the credit or you don't). You could think of it like an internship, but for credit.

Q: Can I get paid to do the practicum?

A: The answer isn't always no, that guideline is just in place so students are not able to get graduate credit for doing their day-to-day job.

Q: What do I need to have done by the end of the practicum?

A: You should write a short narrative on what was learned, about how your experiences contribute to your professional goals, how it expands upon your knowledge or the skills you learned in your courses. It shouldn't be a huge assignment, because your hours should be focused on hands-on work, but it should reflect how you know these outcomes of the projects really benefits them professionally and academically and complements what you're learning.

Master's Thesis

General Information: The thesis is typically for people who really enjoyed their 575: Intro to Research Methods course or those who see themselves going into a doctoral program to ultimately go into a career of research in LIS. It could be compared to being a master's Dissertation, in a sense. The thesis is typically completed over the course of two semesters, as it's a 6-credit project. It could potentially be done in one, but preferably not in your final semester. Those credits are graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory scale. You would be assigned a faculty advisor, and in addition to that, you would also assemble a committee of 3-4 faculty members to ultimately defend/present your thesis in front of.

Q: Is there a minimum word count for the thesis?

A: No, there is no word requirement specified, but it should be a compelling, interesting research study. A rough estimate could be somewhere in the range of 10,000-15,000 words, or about 50 pages, but also speak with your advisor, because maybe they don't want to read that much.

Q: Do I get to choose the topic?

A: You get to choose the topic, but the advisor you prefer to have may not take you on if the topic doesn't align with their research methods. Also keep in mind that the topic must fall somewhere within the domain of "information."

Q: How do we do the defense, is it virtual?

A: As this is an online program you will be allowed to do a virtual defense, but it cannot be asynchronous as you have to answer questions as a part of the presentation. If you wanted to do the defense in person, you would have to convince all the faculty members to be present on campus, which may not be doable.

Q: Can we choose to use a qualitative research methodology?

A: Your research method can be qualitative or quantitative, but again, keep in mind that you will need to choose a faculty member that works with that type of research.

Special Project (LIS 527)

General Information: Procedurally it's very similar to the practicum and the thesis, but the scope of the project is a lot different. It's not an internship where you log hours, it's not conceptual, theoretical, or research based. It's more about hands-on skills. Maybe you want to expand your knowledge beyond a certain class you took, perhaps you want to build a collection, test user interfaces, explore how people collect different types of information. A special project is also more inclined for students who are interested in "special libraries," like law librarianship or health sciences librarianship where it's hard to find an instructor for that subject. It's similar to the practicum in some ways, but it's more about exploring context-specific career goals.

Directed Study (LIS 598)

General Information: This is more writing than it is hands-on, much heavier on the research side of things. Say there's a topic you really enjoy or want to learn more about, but you don't want to write a full thesis on it. That's what the directed study is for, to do a literature review over the course of a semester. By the end of the semester, you should have 3 credits worth of "product" (like a final project for the standard 3 credit course).

Contact Information

If you have any follow up questions, please contact either Ayiana Crabtree or Dan Albertson.

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