

Department of Communication, Illinois State University
COM 398 – Fall 2026
Field Experiences in Professional Communication
The Vidette

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Course Description

Field Experiences are an exciting step for students from classroom learning to professional experience and Com 398 is a course designed to enhance and support that experience for students. This class may be repeated for credit up to the university limit of 16 credit hours for professional practice. First internships for credit are, by policy, 3 hours each. Second and subsequent internships for credit may be obtained for a minimum of one hour of credit. All interns should plan to put forth a minimum of 144 hours of professional effort to their internship.

By definition, a Field Experience is a cooperative professional experience in communication among:

- **Intern, student** -- a student in the School of Communication or other department as agreed to.
 - **Employer** -- where the Field Experience takes place.
 - **Supervisor** -- the student's supervisor where the Field Experience takes place.
 - **Coordinator** -- Field Experience faculty coordinator in the School of Communication at Illinois State University or other department as agreed to.
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- Students often excel in their Field Experiences. Please note that the success in this experience will depend on the student and how much extra effort and professionalism he/she is willing to put in.
 - The Field Experience should be instructional and fun. Field Experiences help students learn about career choices, build a portfolio, network and again valuable insights about the professional world.

Other Key Elements

- **Professionalism:** Essentially, interns are employees; they are expected to behave, act and dress in a way which respects the job, the employer, professional colleagues and organizational culture. Interns' experience may limit performance, but they should display a level of professional conduct equal to that of their professional peers and colleagues.
- **Mentorship:** This defines the educational and professional relationship between interns and supervisors. It is a vital component of the internship experience and the reason internship supervisors should be professional communicators who have the leadership and experience to contribute to the professional education of interns.
- **Reflection:** "Doing" and "learning" in a professional setting is the foundation of an internship, but the student's ability to place that experience in a meaningful context through reflective writing allows the

student to better understand the value of the “doing” and “learning” at a higher level. “What I did” is important to an intern’s development ... but writing coherently about “what I learned” raises the value.

- **Evaluation:** Unlike most other classes, evaluation for Com 398 is a collaborative effort among the intern, the internship supervisor and the internship coordinator for three purposes:
 - To help interns learn, improve, grow and network professionally from the internship;
 - To expand and enhance interns’ professional performance;
 - To assist the internship coordinator in assigning a grade for a class which is part of interns’ permanent academic record.

Course Goals

- Gain first-hand knowledge and experience about the professional area that they have chosen, including:
 - the atmosphere, attitudes and values of an organization.
 - the purpose, structure and operation of an organization.
 - the communication functions and their relationship to an organization’s mission and goals.
 - a view of the decision-making process in an organization.
- Have the opportunity to engage in professional activities related to their studies;
- Apply conceptual knowledge and skills learned in the classroom into the professional production with a purpose that impacts people;
- Learn to deal with the challenges and opportunities of communicating in an organizational context;
- Interact with supervisors and professional colleagues in order to learn about their work and receive feedback about their performance;
- Experience dealing with the professional opportunities and responsibilities similar to those of graduates in their first professional positions.

Internship Schedule

Starting date: Aug. 20, or later (this may vary, but total hours worked must still equal to those listed below)

Last official workday for interns: Dec. 4, 2025 (semester project due date)

Professional Practice

Time Commitment: For each hour of credit earned, students are required to spend a minimum of 48 hours working on their internships, with a maximum of 144 per semester. This includes time spent both on location, and working on projects away from the internship’s location, including research and on-line efforts. Most interns spend more than the required number of hours, and some internships require more hours because of the nature of the work and the business. Students are urged to discuss time commitment with their supervisors before accepting, or beginning, their internships ... including planned time off for vacations, weddings, etc.

Hourly Breakdown: The Field Experiences program does not require documentation of hours worked, and the amount of time spent on task is not determined by, or limited to, a weekly amount. Like most communication professionals, interns don't punch a clock. However, here is a "weekly breakdown" of professional practice hours for a 16-week or 12-week term:

Credit Hours	Semester Weeks	Average Weekly Internship Hours	Minimum Total Hours
1	16	3	48
2	16	6	96
3	16	9	144

Early Communication About Professional Commitment: It is up to interns to initiate discussion about time commitment requirements before the semester and/or internship begins. Students who wish to conclude their internships before the last scheduled date of the semester must secure written approval from their internship supervisors to the Director of Field Experiences. Any "time off" from regularly scheduled internship activities (even scheduled university breaks) **MUST** be cleared with the internship supervisor in a professional, timely manner by the intern. Just "not showing up" is unprofessional and grounds for dismissal by the internship supervisor and, potentially, a failing grade for the semester.

Note: For paid Vidette interns, like sub-editors or senior reporters, the internship hours are IN ADDITION TO what the worker has logged as paid hours.

Reflective Essays

Non-reporter interns (copy editors, sub-editors who do not write at least three stories per week) are required to submit a reflective essay of around 350 words to be submitted before the mid-term break or make prior arrangements with Vidette editorial adviser for a content-generation project. Potential essay prompts for your essay can be:

The first big surprise of my internship came when...
Professionally, my internship has changed my mind about ...
Before I started this internship, I never would have believed that

Expectations

Expectations for each internship will vary by position.

Reporters (based on three credit hours)

- Minimum three, full-length stories with at least two sources every two weeks. While the story idea may originate from another news outlet. These need to be originally reported and cannot be just rewritten from The Pantagraph, Illinois State University news service or WGLT, etc.
- Communicate and collaborate with your sub-editors and the Photo sub-editor to strive for meaningful and well-planned photos, illustrations and/or multimedia elements with all of your full-length stories.
- When interviewing sources in person, always shoot a mugshot and capture a short video file when appropriate. Your phone can be used to capture this content. Let your sub-editor know immediately so this visual content can be posted promptly and efficiently to the website with the story. Capturing audio files during in-person interviews is also recommended.
- Be available, flexible for short-notice story assignments. Newsgathering can be a fluid enterprise.
- At least one full-length personality profile of someone (student, faculty, staff, community member) of interest to ISU readers per semester.
- One in-depth, multi-source (at least three) reporting project per semester. Topic for the story needs to be discussed in advance with your sub-editor and the Vidette editorial adviser. Story needs to be timely and

it needs to address a topic of interest to ISU readers. It may be necessary to collaborate with Photo or Graphics departments.

- Be respectful of deadlines. In the news business, source availability sometimes impedes stories/photos being submitted by the pre-determined deadline. Some allowance will be made for this. However, consistently missed deadlines will not be tolerated.
- Carefully review all work of yours that has been critiqued by the Vidette editorial adviser.
- Document all published or posted content (stories, photographs, videos). Include content headline or title and date published. Give list to the Vidette editorial adviser at the middle and end of each month.

Photographers (based on three credit hours)

- Minimum three photo or video opps per week with detailed cutlines to include names of people shown in photos.
- At least one of the three above photo opps needs to generate a photo gallery of multiple and somewhat diverse images.
- One in-depth photo-story project in which the photographer spends a significant portion of the semester documenting a subject or situation. Depending on the topic, it may be necessary to involve a reporter from the News & Features or Sports staffs to help fully tell the story. Topic for the story needs to be discussed in advance with your sub-editor and the Vidette editorial adviser.
- Contribute to at least four video reports (like “Bird on The Street”) over the course of the semester.
- Be available, flexible for short-notice photo assignments. Newsgathering can be a fluid enterprise.
- Be respectful of deadlines. In the news business, source availability sometimes impedes stories/photos being submitted by the pre-determined deadline. Some allowance will be made for this. However, consistently missed deadlines will not be tolerated.
- Carefully review all work of yours that has been critiqued by the Vidette editorial adviser.
- Document all published or posted content (stories, photographs, videos). Include content headline or title and date published. Give list to the Vidette editorial adviser at the middle and end of each month.

Copy Editors (based on three credit hours)

- Log all stories copy edited (identify by story headline). Save a hard copy of work in which you caught an excessive number or factual, grammatical, spelling or AP style errors. Submit with time sheet
- When applicable, document at least one recurring or nagging error you find every two weeks and report to your sub-editors to allow discussions with appropriate sub-editors or reporters or photographers.
- Develop a firm grasp of basic AP Style requirements and enforce basic spelling and grammar rules.
- Become reasonably proficient with web content management system TownNews as well as supplemental content sources Tribune News Service and Getty Images. By mid-point of semester begin adding elements to posted stories like embedded links, pull quotes, fact boxes, etc.
- Become reasonably proficient Photo.net photo editing software.
- Carefully review all work of yours that has been critiqued by the Vidette editorial adviser.

Podcasting (based on one credit hour)

- Develop a focused theme for a recurring podcast that is unique to the lineup of existing Vidette podcast topics. Topic must be agreed to by the Vidette editorial adviser and or the Editor in Chief.
- Host a weekly podcast of a minimum seven minutes of unique podcast content. Sessions to be recorded at The Vidette, unless other arrangements are approved by the Vidette editorial adviser.
- Feature a local/topical/timely guest(s) on podcast at least every other episode.
- Log all podcasts (identify by episode title). Submit log sheet to the Vidette editorial adviser at the middle and end of each month of the semester.

- Become reasonably proficient in Audacity (the software used to record and edit audio files) and with The Vidette's SoundCloud account.
- Carefully review all work of yours that has been critiqued by the Vidette editorial adviser.

Social Media (based on three credit hours)

- Specific expectations will be determined at beginning of semester by the Vidette editorial adviser and Editor-in-chief (student supervisor)

Sub-editors (based on three credit hours)

(Because sub-editors are paid positions, internship credit must be the result of work above and beyond your normal job requirements.)

- One in-depth reporting, photo or video projects per semester or coverage of one beat. Topic for the project needs to be discussed in advance with the Editor in Chief and the Vidette editorial adviser. One larger project may qualify for this objective but must be pre-approved by the Vidette editorial adviser.
- Be respectful of deadlines. In the news business, source availability sometimes impedes stories/photos being submitted by the pre-determined deadline. Some allowance will be made for this. However, consistently missed deadlines will not be tolerated and could impact the grade for the semester.
- Carefully review all work of yours and that of your staff that has been critiqued by the editorial adviser.
- Provide the Vidette editorial adviser with mid-semester and end-of-semester feedback related to staff interns under your supervision.

Evaluation of Interns

The evaluation of students for this course is based on three components:

- Mid-term Evaluation from supervisor/Reflective Essays (when applicable) from student interns
- Other influencing factors as determined by the internship director

Internship Supervisor Evaluations (Midterm & Final)

Mid-term and final grades based on how well the intern met the Expectations listed above. Feedback from General Manager and supervising sub-editors will be provided throughout the semester. Because this is not a classroom course, interns are encouraged to check in with the Vidette editorial adviser at least every two weeks.

Grades

Grades are awarded based on the quality of interns' professional performance and evaluated in the context of the general expectations from an upper division university student at Illinois State University. Letter grades recommended by internship supervisors should reflect the following standards:

- A (90-100 percent Expectations met)
- B (80-89 percent Expectations met)
- C (70-79 percent Expectations met)
- D (60-69 percent Expectations met.)
- F (less than 60 percent Expectations met)

Course Policies

- **Completed Form.** All interns must submit a completed “Internship Form” including email addresses, phone numbers and street addresses for both the student and the internship supervisor before being extended a permit to enroll. These can be submitted in person at the Field Experiences office (456 Fell), in the School of Communication Main Office (request the form be placed in the Field Experiences director’s mailbox) or via email to the director. This form will be provided by Tom Lamonica after you initially contact him.
- **ILSTU email accounts.** All interns must have regular, daily access to an ilstu.edu email account. Email is the primary course of communication.
- **Late assignments may not be accepted.** In professional life, a missed assignment or blown deadline nearly always impacts the efforts of colleagues and/or results in a missed opportunity for the organization. Just as professionals cannot ‘blow-off’ assignments or deadlines, or just ‘not show up’ for assigned duties, interns must act responsibly and promptly when circumstances arise which impair their ability to be on time and meet deadlines. Students must notify BOTH the faculty coordinator and internship supervisor in the case of verifiable extenuating circumstances (i.e., family emergency) in advance of assignment due dates AND about missed scheduled time at the internship. Otherwise, exceptions will not be granted, and late assignments will not be accepted.
- **Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty is an extremely serious matter, with serious consequences. Those consequences range from probation to expulsion. If the student is unclear about plagiarism, paraphrasing, quotes or collaborations, the student should consult the instructor. Plagiarism will result in a zero grade for the assignment, and the incident must be reported to the Office of the Provost.
- **Any planned absence or unavailability** should be discussed with the internship supervisor and/or supervising sub-editor not later than the first week of the internship. DO NOT assume that your internship supervisor is familiar with the Illinois State University semester schedule.
- **Commitment:** Interns and supervisors should know that the School of Communication at Illinois State University respects the value of their commitment to each other and to the student’s opportunity. Supervisors are expected to uphold the commitment to providing meaningful opportunities to the student from the first day of the internship to the last. Interns should understand that they are expected to fulfill their commitments to their organization and supervisor. Interns who leave voluntarily or are dismissed by their internship prior to completion of the internship are subject to a grade of “F” for the term no matter what the previous graded material might indicate.
- **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.