

COS Signature Experience Program Policies for Experiential Learning

1. Overview

The College of Sciences (COS) Signature Experience program offers experiential learning opportunities for undergraduate students in which they can gain real-world experiences while also learning about the broader impacts of their work within their fields of study. All undergraduate students have the option to participate in a College of Sciences (COS) Signature Experience.

Experiential learning requires two main elements: (1) learn by doing and (2) reflection on this learning as it relates to one's field of study and skills gained (marketable skills).

1.1 Categories of Experiential Learning in COS

There are five general categories for experiential learning that could serve as a COS Signature Experience:

- **Professional Development** - Participation in semester-long professional development aimed at enhancing student's academic training, career readiness, and marketability.
- **Internship** - The opportunity for semester-long work experience in a private business or public agency related to the student's field of study.
- **Research** - Supervised research mentored by a faculty member engaged in active research within the student's designated area of concentration.
- **Study Abroad** - An international experiential opportunity that allows students to obtain valuable knowledge relevant to their field of study.
- **Community Outreach** - A community service opportunity in which students actively engage in the local and greater university community to promote STEM and create more STEM experiences for a broader population.

1.2 Participation

COS students are encouraged to have an experiential learning opportunity, described as a COS Signature Experience, within their degree programs in which they can apply what they learn in the classroom at UTSA in broader, real-world contexts.

For the 24-26 Undergraduate Catalog, it is highly recommended that students participate in a COS Signature Experience. COS students are not currently required to have a COS Signature Experience to graduate.

Some majors have required experiential learning courses that are automatically considered Signature Experiences. While Signature Experiences should be taken as capstones near the end of their program, students can participate at any time while they are at UTSA.

2. Experiential Learning Courses

Whenever possible, students should try to take credit-bearing courses in which there are experiential learning opportunities embedded in them.

COS offers several zero-hour courses that can capture completion of experiential learning experiences for the following situations: a) when the credit-bearing course does not have any designations for experiential learning in its course title or attributes, or b) when the student completes an eligible experiential learning experience outside of a course.

Successful completion of the zero-hour course will be reflected in the student's academic transcript as a course. It has no semester credit hours, and students do not have to pay for tuition and fees for these zero-hour courses.

2.1 Zero-Hour Courses

COS offers the following zero-hour courses¹. There is one course for each category of experiential learning for lower division students (1000 level) and upper division students (4000 level):

- SCI 1100. COS Signature Experience – Professional Development
- SCI 1200. COS Signature Experience – Internship
- SCI 1300. COS Signature Experience – Research
- SCI 1400. COS Signature Experience – Study Abroad
- SCI 1500. COS Signature Experience – Community Outreach
- SCI 4100. COS Signature Experience – Professional Development
- SCI 4200. COS Signature Experience – Internship
- SCI 4300. COS Signature Experience – Research
- SCI 4400. COS Signature Experience – Study Abroad
- SCI 4500. COS Signature Experience – Community Outreach

Students should take the level that is closest to their own standing: freshmen and sophomores should register for the 1000-level courses while junior and seniors should register for the 4000-level courses.

2.2 Offerings

These courses are offered directly by the College of Sciences. The College will offer these courses by request from the departments.

2.2.1 Credit-bearing Experiential Learning Courses

If a student selects a credit-bearing course that has a title or attribute indicating the experiential learning, it is not necessary to register for the zero-hour course. For example, students registered in CS 4933 – Internship in Computer Science would not need to be registered for SCI 1200 or SCI 4200 since internship is in the course title.

2.2.2 Standalone Zero-Hour Courses

Any credit-bearing courses that do not have a title or attribute that indicates that there is experiential learning, the course's department can request that the College create a section of the appropriate zero-hour course to accompany the course. For example, there is one section of ES 3073 – Environmental Rhetoric and Technical Communication that is taught as part of a study abroad program in Italy each Fall. In this case, students will automatically be registered for that zero-hour course with the same instructor.

2.3 Registration

Students will automatically be registered in any zero-hour course tied to a credit-bearing course that does not have a title or attribute that indicates that there is experiential learning. Students can opt-out of being registered for the zero-hour course.

¹ SCI 4600. Undergraduate Thesis is a zero-hour course for students completing the COS Undergraduate Thesis option, and has its own set of guidelines and policies.

If a student is doing an experiential learning experience not connected to a course, they would need to apply for the course following a registration process like an independent study. The student would need to have a faculty supervisor and submit any documentation required by the department, college, and university for a comparable credit-bearing course. The faculty supervisor should be a faculty member within the student's major department. Even though the course does not earn academic credit, the student is still expected to complete any assigned activities set by the faculty supervisor in accordance with department, college, and university policies for a comparable credit-bearing course.

2.4 Grading

For credit-bearing courses, students will receive a letter grade or a credit/no-credit (CR/NC) grade depending on how the course is set up. The course would be treated like any other organized class, and students are responsible for following the registration timeline for adding and dropping courses as set by the Registrar.

Zero-hour courses are graded on a credit/no-credit (CR/NC) basis. Students who complete all requirements for the experiential learning will receive a CR for the course. However, if students are not on track for receiving a CR, they will be dropped from the course by the College.

3. General Guiding Principles for Experiential Learning Requirements

Each department and program is responsible for setting its own minimum requirements for experiential learning for both credit-bearing and zero-hour courses. Note that credit-bearing courses should require more activities to be completed than the zero-hour courses.

- The experiential learning must be connected to a science field, preferably to the student's major.
- Students must complete a minimum number of hours of engagement within the experiential learning experience with the semester. Engagement hours refer to the number of hours students are engaged in a learning by doing activity within a science field. Departments and programs may have a higher threshold for minimum engagement hours.
 - For Professional Development and Community Outreach, students should complete at least 30 hours of engagement per semester.
 - For Internship, Research, and Study Abroad, students should complete at least 60 hours of engagement per semester.
- The experiential learning must be supervised by a faculty within the College of Sciences, preferably in the student's major department.
- Students are required to submit an artifact at the end of the experiential learning experience which accounts for the hours spent and activities completed, feedback from the faculty supervisor and any relevant supervisors, and a reflection of how the students' experiential learning has contributed to their professional and academic goals.