

Welcome to the Register of Professional Archaeologists Field School Certification program!

Below are the current RPA standards for archaeological field schools. RPA actively advocates the professional growth of all archaeologists, and believes that a strong professional career should begin with a sound introduction to archaeological field methods. Archaeological field schools serve as primary introduction to the discipline. The RPA believes that certification of archaeology field schools will strengthen these important training and learning contexts by requiring certain standards for basic research methodologies, field experiences, reporting of results, and time devoted to field school activities

The following guidelines and standards were revised and approved by the RPA Board of Directors on Jan. 6, 2015

In 1974, the Society of American Archeology passed the following resolution:

Whereas each archeological site contains evidence of specific human activities and is therefore a unique source of data about past socio-cultural behavior, no site can be written off in advance as unimportant or expendable. No site deserves less than professional excavation, analysis and publication, and whereas the training of students in archeological skills is an important part of an anthropological curriculum, and whereas such training is likely to be grossly inadequate and misleading to the student if it is not given in the context of a serious research commitment on the part of the instructor to the archeological resources in question.

Therefore be it resolved that the practice of excavating or collecting from archeological sites solely or primarily for "teaching" purposes is contrary to the provision against indiscriminate excavation of archeological sites contained in Article I, Section 2 of the bylaws of the Society for American Archaeology. Such activities are to be deplored, whether conducted by anthropologists who are not adequately trained in archeological field techniques, or by trained archeologists who do not have continuing research interest in the resources in question.

Be it further resolved that such activities are unethical as defined in Article III, Section 4 of the bylaws of the Society for American Archaeology and by the guidelines of the ethics committee of the American Anthropological Association, and that members of these organizations who engage in such practices are subject to appropriate sanctions.

In accordance with these principles, and by virtue of its role in providing guidance and standards for the performance of archeological research, the Society of Professional Archeologists recommends that an academic archeological field school meet the following minimal criteria:

A. Purposes.

- The primary objective of an academic field school must be the training of students; explicitly, that the field school give the initial field experience required as the first step in student career progress in her/his development as a professional (in accordance with RPA standards) archeologist. Other goals (such as employment, contract work or salvage or threatened resources) must be secondary.
- The field program and recovered data must be part of an explicitly designed research or cultural resource management program, which includes evidence of conservation of resources, curation, and publication of results.
- The field program and curriculum design should include an explicit, detailed schedule of instruction and supervision, evidence of adequate facilities (see E.1.), and provision for early analysis and reporting of data generated by the program. This should be provided to all participants.

B. Personnel.

- The Director of the field program should meet RPA qualifications and have dominant responsibility for direct supervision in the field and in the laboratory.
- Assistant(s)/Supervisor(s) must be qualified by completion of at least one field school which meets these guidelines or by an equivalent combination of field and laboratory experience.
- Other specialized instructors and lectures should be used as appropriate.

C. Operational procedure should include:

- Prefatory formal lectures on field excavation and survey observations, excavation procedures and hazards (stratigraphy, arbitrary versus "natural" levels, intrusions, reuse or rebuilding of structures), descriptive note writing, interpreting cross sections, survey, camp and dig logistics, administration, etc. Films, slides, models, and other techniques should be used as available and appropriate. At least 12 hours of lecture instruction should be devoted to this introduction prior to actual field excavation and survey.

- Formal small group field instruction in topographic and plane table mapping, including nomenclature and terms by an experienced instructor who should be a professional topographer or an archeologist skilled in topographic mapping.
- Formal small group field instruction by a photographer skilled in archeological field photographic techniques and problems (lighting, angles, wide angle lens, closeup, etc.).
- Formal lectures in field or laboratory including but not limited to research plan, long-range goals, culture(s) being investigated, field problems, curation and reporting plans, etc.
- Formal laboratory instructions and supervision in cleaning, labeling, sorting, identification of artifacts, and limited flotation exercises, mammal bone identification, etc., as appropriate. Field supervisors to alternate as lab supervisors, preferably scheduled so that field personnel process their own field data.
- Some time devoted to reconnaissance level survey, not only to instruct in finding and recording data but also for instruction in the use of such data for defining archaeological problems.

D. Field procedures/ structures.

- All students should be instructed in the use of all tools, equipment, and vehicles (as qualified), rotating as assistants with photography, grid mapping, provenience control, sketching, sampling of soils, and other specialized functions. All steps in procedures and evaluation of appropriate techniques should be repeatedly explained.
- All students should be required to keep daily systematic notes as parts of the permanent record. All notes and records must be reviewed and critiqued daily by supervisors. Additional notebooks, photo records, etc., shall be maintained as necessary, under systematic supervision.
- All field procedures should be guided by the concept of data and record responsibility as an integrated component of professional fieldwork, with responsibility and authority for field decisions and record keeping clearly defined.
- All students should have access to type collections and relevant library materials (including maps, photographs, site reports and literature on the archeology and environment relevant to the fieldwork). In most cases, this Will require maintenance of such resources in both field and laboratory.

E. Sponsor.

- The institution sponsoring the field school must, by virtue of available resources, meet minimal specifications for institutional support, including appropriate space for laboratory work, for storage, appropriate accessioning and cataloging procedures, adequate curation, and support for publication/distribution of the research results.
- The institution sponsoring the field school must provide for the safety and health of participants. Providing for the safety and health of participants includes maintaining an environment free of sexual harassment as defined by applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations; and, taking steps necessary to prevent sexual harassment from occurring.
- A ratio of six to ten students per supervisor is optimal.

F. Profit

Certified field schools may not be run for profit; fees charged to participants may only be used to cover the cost of field work (transportation, equipment replacement, site access and crop damage, etc.), personnel, and associated expenses including items such as expendable lab supplies, radiocarbon dates, and in-perpetuity curation fees.

G. Field School Duration and Certification Criteria

Field school duration has a direct influence on the education and training process. Field schools should provide at least four weeks of field experience including both field and laboratory training during the course of the program. These weeks do not have to be in a single block of time, but must be completed within a single year. One week is equal to five full 8-hr days of field and/or laboratory experience.

The Register will attach identification criteria to each field school certification to indicate its duration and the presence or absence of prerequisite training prior to field school participation.

Criterion 1 — the total number of weeks of field and laboratory experience each participant will gain if she/he completes the full field school program. Each full five days of field or laboratory experience will count as one week. For example, a certified field school with twenty days (4 weeks) of total training time will be certified as “RPA-4.”

Criterion 2—Presence of any prerequisite training prior to taking the field school. If field school participants are required to complete formal courses prior to the field school, or continue various research activities after their participation in a certified field school, a “P” will be added. For example, if a twenty day field school requires coursework before or after the completion of the field portion of the program, that program will be certified as “RPA-4P.”

Field schools which provide fewer than twenty days of field experience may be certified as “RPA-Introductory.” This category recognizes field schools which provide students with an important exposure to archaeological field work, but do not constitute a full training experience.

H. Listing of RPA-Certified Field Schools

An updated list of RPA Certified Field Schools will be maintained on the official RPA web site. RPA certification of a field school may also be indicated in various clearinghouses of field school information, including the Archaeological Field School Opportunities Bulletin (AIA) and field work opportunities web pages.

Annual Application and Review Process

In order for RPA to certify a field school, we must make a determination if the proposed program meets the published RPA guidelines. In order to do this, simply fill out the Application Questionnaire and submit it, along with the requested documents, to the current RPA Certification Chair for review. There is an annual processing fee of \$35. Field schools will be certified for two years. Applications should be made as early as possible to provide ample time for review.

[Click here to download the Field School Application Questionnaire.](#)

Certification

Once the Certification Committee has reviewed your application, you will be notified of the results. If your application is approved, you can publicize your field school as being Certified by the Register for Professional Archeologists.

Follow-Up Review

Based on information you provide, the Certification Committee will conduct a follow-up review to determine if your deadlines for completion of laboratory work and reporting have been met.

In addition, occasional peer review visits to field schools while they are in session may be conducted to determine if a certified field school is abiding by the RPA guidelines and standards.

Information from follow-up reviews and peer visits may be used during the processing of applications for subsequent field schools associated with the same institution or director.