

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.

Guidelines and Standards for Archaeological Field Schools

In 1974 the Society of American Archaeology passed the following resolution:

“Whereas each archaeological 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 archaeological 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 archaeological resources in question. Therefore be it resolved that the practice of excavating or collecting from archaeological sites solely or primarily for “teaching” purposes is contrary to the provision against indiscriminate excavation of archaeological sites contained in Article I, Section 2 of the by-laws of the Society for American Archeology. 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. It further resolved that such activities are unethical as defined in Article III, Section 4 of the by-laws of the Society for American Archeology 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 Register of Professional Archeologists requires that an archeological field school meet the following minimal criteria in order to receive RPA certification:

A. Purpose

A field school is a research project that also aims to train students in how to do the research. Both the research and the training components are essential; an ethical field school cannot do one without the other. The research design must be appropriate to the contexts and material types expected at the planned locations of investigation. Student training activities should be integrated into the planned research and designed to both fulfill needed data collection activities as well as expose students to best practices in the planning and implementation of field research.

B. Personnel

The Director or Principal Investigator of the field program must be RPA certified by the beginning of the field school program. The Director or PI should have primary responsibility for direct supervision of field school participants in the field and the laboratory.

The Director or Principal Investigator must be affiliated with an institution of higher education, cultural resource management archaeology company, or other institution that meets the “Sponsor” criteria outlined below.

Assistant(s)/Supervisor(s) must be qualified by completion of at least one field school which meets the RPA certification guidelines or by an equivalent combination of field and laboratory experiences as determined by the field school Director.

Supervisors should be responsible for no more than 6-10 students, with an ideal student:supervisor ratio of not more than 6:1.

C. Operational procedure of each field school

The Register realizes that field school research programs include a wide variety of research objectives, field methods, and theoretical perspectives. For that reason, we do not list a set of procedures that all field schools must follow. We do, however, list a number of procedures required of certified field schools if they employ particular field methods.

For field schools involving excavation:

1. Provenience must be recorded for all collected artifacts.
2. Excavated sites must be plotted on a 1:24,000 scale map, and a site map must be made for showing the site boundaries and areas of excavation.
3. Prior to excavation, prefatory formal lectures must be given to participants on basic excavation procedures such as stratigraphy, arbitrary versus "natural" levels, intrusions, descriptive note writing, interpreting cross sections, etc.
4. Prior to lab work, formal laboratory instructions must be given to participants regarding cleaning, labeling, sorting, and identification of artifacts.

For field schools involving survey:

1. Provenience must be recorded for all collected artifacts.
2. All sites encountered on survey must be recorded using a standardized form.
3. All recorded sites must be plotted on a 1:24,000 scale map. If artifacts are collected, the collection areas must be plotted on a site map.
4. Prior to survey, prefatory formal lectures must be given to participants on basic survey procedures such as site and artifact identification, maintenance of straight-line transects, compass use to maintain bearing, etc.

D. Reporting

All field schools are expected to produce a report summarizing their findings within one (1) calendar year of the end of the field school. A report must be produced for each year a field school is conducted. The report should be accessible to the research community.

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, storage, appropriate accessioning and cataloging procedures, adequate consideration of the health and safety needs of participating students, adequate curation, and support for publication/distribution of the research results. We expect most field schools to be affiliated with an institution of higher education or federal agency, though other affiliations are possible.

The program sponsoring the field school must show evidence of past success at conservation of cultural resources, curation, and publication of results.

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.

F. 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.

G. 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.

H. Application and Review Process

To be considered for RPA certification, field school directors must submit an Application Questionnaire (available on the RPA web site), along with a course syllabus and research design. There is a processing fee of \$35.

Field schools will be certified for two years. Recertification after the end of the second certification year will require completion of a new application form.

I. Follow-up Review

Based on information provided in the application, the Certification Committee may conduct a follow-up review to determine if deadlines for completion of laboratory work and reporting have been met. In addition, the committee may conduct a peer review visit to field schools while they are in session to determine if a certified field school is abiding by the RPA guidelines and standards.