

Zeitschrift: Commentarii Mathematici Helvetici
Herausgeber: Schweizerische Mathematische Gesellschaft
Band: 43 (1968)

Artikel: Foliations on Open Manifolds, I.
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-32917>

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Foliations on Open Manifolds, I

by ANTHONY PHILLIPS (Berkeley)

1. Introduction

Let M be a smooth n -dimensional manifold, with tangent bundle TM . A smooth section in the bundle of p -planes of TM is called a p -plane field (also, “ p -dimensional distribution”) on M . A p -plane field σ gives a p -dimensional subbundle of TM , with fibre over $x \in M$ equal to $\sigma(x)$. This bundle will also be denoted by σ . Picking a Riemannian metric for M associates to σ a complementary $(n-p)$ -plane field σ^\perp : $\sigma^\perp(x)$ is the tangent subspace orthogonal to the p -plane $\sigma(x)$.

The p -plane field σ is called *integrable* if M has a smooth foliation \mathcal{F} (see § 2 for this definition) such that at each $x \in M$ the p -plane $\sigma(x)$ is tangent to \mathcal{F} . This is equivalent to saying that each $x \in M$ has a neighborhood U with coordinates x_1, \dots, x_n such that the tangent vectors $\partial/\partial x_1|_y, \dots, \partial/\partial x_p|_y$ span $\sigma(y)$ at each $y \in U$. There is a classical criterion for integrability of a p -plane σ , namely that σ be *involutive*. This means that if v and w are vectorfields contained in σ , i.e. such that $v(x) \in \sigma(x)$, $w(x) \in \sigma(x)$ at each point x , then their Poisson bracket $[v, w]$ is also contained in σ . It is easy to see that integrable implies involutive. The converse is FROBENIUS’ Theorem [4, Theorem 5.1].

From the point of view of differential topology it is natural to ask which p -plane fields are *homotopic* to integrable fields (see [1], p. 373). This article presents a partial answer to that question.

THEOREM 1.1. *Suppose M is open (i.e. has no compact components). A p -plane field σ on M , whose complementary bundle σ^\perp is trivial, is homotopic to an integrable field.*

THEOREM 1.2. *Suppose M is open, and n -dimensional. Every $(n-1)$ -plane field σ on M is homotopic to an integrable field.*

Remark. The hypothesis, that M be open, seems quite restrictive. For instance, in the case $n=3$ Theorem 1.2 for *compact* M and orientable σ has been proved by JOHN WOOD, a graduate student at Berkeley. On the other hand, it is easy to check that all the foliations constructed in this article are *analytic*, in the sense of [1], p. 368. In this respect, Theorem 1.2 should be compared with the theorem on p. 392 of [1]: if $\pi_1 M$ contains only elements of finite order, then M can carry an analytic foliation of co-dimension 1 only if M is open.

Proof of theorem 1.1. By assumption, the bundle σ^\perp contains a field ξ of $(n-p)$ -frames. The theorem is an immediate consequence of Theorem B of [3] which implies that, since M is open, ξ is homotopic to the gradient $(n-p)$ -frame sections

$\nabla F = (\nabla f_1, \dots, \nabla f_{n-p})$ of a submersion $F = (f_1, \dots, f_{n-p})$ of M in Euclidean space R^{n-p} . (A submersion $M^n \rightarrow W^k$ is a smooth map of rank k .) Taking orthogonal complements at each stage of the homotopy deforms σ to a p -plane field orthogonal to ∇F and therefore tangent to the foliation defined by the submanifolds $\{F = \text{constant}\}$.

Example $M = S^2 \times R$. Here every foliation is orientable. The manifold is parallelizable, so homotopy classes of nonzero vectorfields (and of their complementary 2-plane sections) correspond to homotopy classes of maps of M into S^2 , i.e. to elements of $\pi_2 S^2 = Z$. A foliation \mathcal{F}_n which corresponds to the map of degree n can be obtained, for $n \geq 0$, by stacking the slices of foliations shown below (for $n < 0$, reverse orientation), as follows: $\mathcal{F}_0 = XY$, $\mathcal{F}_1 = XAX$, $\mathcal{F}_2 = XABY$, $\mathcal{F}_3 = XABAX$, etc. It should be clear how to interpolate the missing leaves, and how to fit the slices together to give coherently oriented foliations of $S^2 \times R$. Let us verify that \mathcal{F}_n belongs to the correct homotopy class.

Imagine the stacking to be done vertically in R^3 . There is an X -slice on the bottom, then a sequence of A - and B -slices, and on top either a Y -slice or an upside-down X -slice, according as n is even or odd. To calculate the degree of the normal map associated to \mathcal{F}_n , it is clearly sufficient to calculate the degree of the map it induces

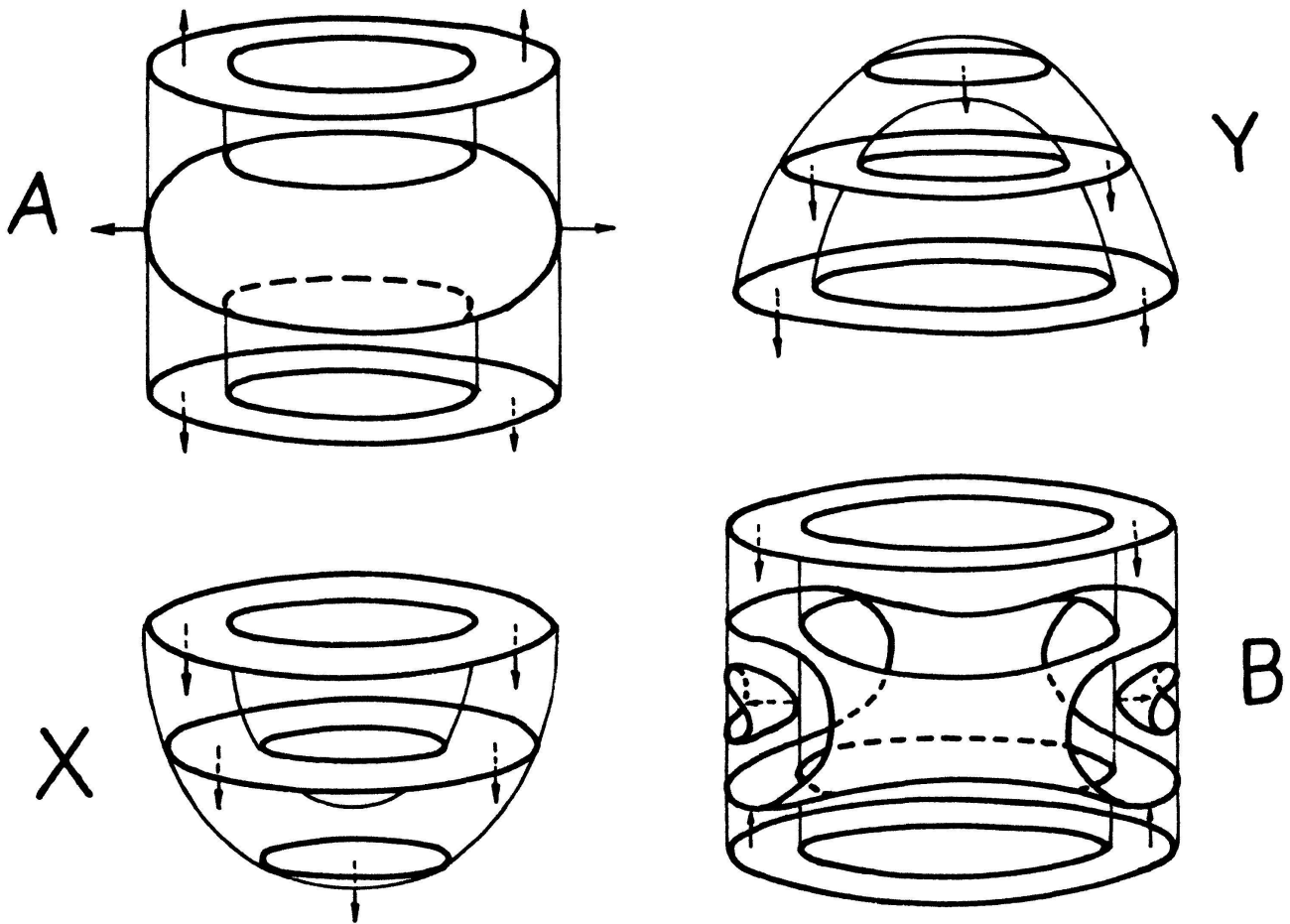


Fig. 1.1

on the S^2 imbedded as $S^2 \times \{0\}$ in $S^2 \times R$. This is well known to be equal to the number of inverse images of a regular value, each one counted plus or minus according as the map preserves or reverses orientation there. Choose as value the point corresponding in Fig. 1.1 to a horizontal arrow pointing to the right. The figure shows that this value is taken precisely once, and with positive orientation, on each A - or B -slice, and not at all on an X - or Y -slice; it follows that \mathcal{F}_n has normal degree n , as claimed.

Outline of proof of theorem 1.2. If the line bundle σ^\perp is orientable, this is a special case of the previous theorem. The following sections treat the case where σ^\perp is not orientable. Let $f: M \rightarrow P^n$ be the classifying map for σ^\perp , suppose that f intersects $P^{n-1} \subset P^n$ transversally, and let the submanifold N be the inverse image of P^{n-1} . There is a foliation on P^n , studied in § 2, of which P^{n-1} is a leaf. The map f will pull back a foliation \mathcal{F} of an open tubular neighborhood U of N in M . It will be shown in § 3 that σ^\perp is homotopic to a line field τ normal to \mathcal{F} near N . Since f sends $M - N$ into the contractible set $P^n - P^{n-1}$ it follows that $\sigma^\perp|_{M-N}$ is trivial, so that the restriction of the homotopic field τ to $M - N$ contains a vectorfield η . The theorem is proved by showing that η is homotopic through non-zero vectorfields to the gradient of a submersion $g: M - N \rightarrow R$, by a homotopy leaving η fixed near N . This requires a relative form of the submersion classification theorem (§ 4). The foliation defined on $M - N$ by g matches \mathcal{F} near N ; the two fit together to give a foliation of M with tangent field homotopic to σ , as required.

Part II of this article will apply these methods to foliations of co-dimension 2.

I am grateful to MORRIS HIRSCH for bringing this problem to my attention, and for several helpful conversations.

2. Definition of Foliation and an Important Example

Consider a smooth manifold M of dimension n . Let TM_y represent the tangent space to M at $y \in M$.

DEFINITION. (See [1] for a general reference on foliations.) A *smooth foliation* \mathcal{F} of dimension p on M is given by a covering $\{U_\alpha\}$ of M and maps $\varphi_\alpha: U_\alpha \rightarrow R^{n-p}$ satisfying 1) and 2).

1) φ_α is a submersion (i.e. has rank $n-p$). Then for each $x \in U$, $\varphi_\alpha^{-1}(\varphi_\alpha(x))$ is a smooth p -dimensional submanifold of U .

2) If $x \in U_\alpha \cap U_\beta$, then $\varphi_\alpha^{-1}(\varphi_\alpha(x)) \cap U_\beta = \varphi_\beta^{-1}(\varphi_\beta(x)) \cap U_\alpha$.

The tangent space $T(\varphi_\alpha^{-1}(\varphi_\alpha(x)))_x$ (the tangent space to the foliation at x) will be denoted by $T\mathcal{F}_x$; $T\mathcal{F}$ will then represent the p -dimensional subbundle of TM whose fibre over $x \in M$ is $T\mathcal{F}_x$. The functions φ_α are called the *distinguished functions* of the foliation.

The *leaf topology* on U_α comes from considering U_α as the disjoint union of the p -dimensional manifolds $\{\varphi_\alpha = \text{constant}\}$. Since these topologies coincide on overlaps they fit together to define the *leaf topology* on M . A connected component of M in this topology is called a *leaf* of the foliation.

Example 1. Let $S^n = \{(x_0, \dots, x_n) \in \mathbb{R}^{n+1}, \sum x_i^2 = 1\}$. The function $p_n: S^n \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$, given by projection on the last coordinate axis, has rank one when restricted to $S^n - (0, \dots, 0, 1) - (0, \dots, 0, -1)$ and defines a foliation of S^n minus the poles by sheets of constant latitude. In this case *one* distinguished function defined the whole foliation. More generally, a submersion $\varphi: M^n \rightarrow W^{n-p}$ gives a p -dimensional foliation of M , with leaves the connected components of the submanifolds $\{\varphi = \text{constant}\}$. This is a special case (where \mathcal{F} is the foliation by points) of the next example.

Example 2. Suppose W has a foliation \mathcal{F} of codimension q , with distinguished functions $\{\varphi_\alpha: U_\alpha \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^q\}$. If M is a smooth manifold and $h: M \rightarrow W$ is transversal to the leaves of \mathcal{F} , then h pulls back \mathcal{F} to give the foliation $h^*\mathcal{F}$ of M with distinguished functions $\{\varphi_\alpha \circ h: h^{-1}U_\alpha \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^q\}$. In connection with this example there is the following useful result.

LEMMA 2.1. Let $T\mathcal{F}^\perp$ and $T(h^*\mathcal{F})^\perp$ be the normal q -plane bundles to \mathcal{F} and $h^*\mathcal{F}$ respectively. Then $T(h^*\mathcal{F})^\perp = h^*(T\mathcal{F}^\perp)$, i.e. there is a bundle map

$$\begin{array}{ccc} T(h^*\mathcal{F})^\perp & \rightarrow & T\mathcal{F}^\perp \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ M & \xrightarrow{h} & W. \end{array}$$

Proof. Let $p: TW \rightarrow T\mathcal{F}^\perp$ be orthogonal projection. Composing p with the differential dh gives a map $p \circ dh$ whose kernel in TM_y is $T(h^*\mathcal{F})_y$, and thereby induces an isomorphism $TM_y/T(h^*\mathcal{F})_y \simeq T(h^*\mathcal{F})_y^\perp \rightarrow T\mathcal{F}_{h(y)}^\perp$, for each $y \in M$.

Example 3. This is the example referred to in the section heading. It will play an important role in the proof of Theorem 1.2.

Observe that the foliation of Example 1 is preserved by the antipodal map, and therefore defines a foliation (*the standard foliation*) of the punctured projective space $P^n - x$, where P^n is taken as S^n with antipodal points identified, and $x \in P^n$ corresponds to the poles. Let $\pi: S^n \rightarrow P^n$ be the projection. Since π is a local diffeomorphism, it follows that maps of the form $p_n \circ \pi^{-1}|_U$, for appropriate U , give a family of distinguished functions for the standard foliation. In particular, notice that π maps the open upper hemisphere diffeomorphically onto $P^n - P^{n-1}$ (here take $P^{n-1} \subset P^n$ as the image of the equatorial S^{n-1}); thus the submersion $\varphi_n = p_n \circ \pi^{-1}: P^n - P^{n-1} - x \rightarrow \mathbb{R}$ determines the standard foliation on the complement of the leaf P^{n-1} .

LEMMA 2.2. *Let $\alpha \rightarrow P^n - x$ be the tangent line bundle normal to the standard foliation. Then α is equivalent to $\gamma_n^1|P^n - x$, where $\gamma_n^1 \rightarrow P^n$ is the canonical line bundle.*

Proof. The two bundles are equivalent over P^{n-1} , a deformation retract of $P^n - x$. In fact, $\alpha|P^{n-1}$ is the normal bundle of P^{n-1} in P^n , which is easily seen to be equivalent to $\gamma_{n-1}^1 = \gamma_n^1|P^{n-1}$.

3. Proof of Theorem 1.2

The complementary line bundle σ^\perp is equivalent to a bundle over a complex of dimension $\leq n-1$, since M is open (cf. Proposition 4.1), so there exists a bundle map

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \sigma^\perp & \rightarrow & \gamma_n^1 \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ M & \xrightarrow{f} & P^n. \end{array}$$

In fact, one may assume that f misses a point in P^n and, using Lemma 2.2, that there is a map

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \sigma^\perp & \longrightarrow & \alpha \\ \downarrow & & \downarrow \\ M & \xrightarrow{f} & P^n - x. \end{array}$$

Finally, it may be assumed that f intersects $P^{n-1} \subset P^n$ transversally and, by Lemma 4.2, proved in § 4, that $N = f^{-1}P^{n-1}$ is an embedded manifold (of dimension $n-1$) with no compact components.

The manifold $P^n - x$ carries the “standard foliation” described in Example 3 of § 2. The intersection of f with a leaf sufficiently near P^{n-1} will also be transversal, so f pulls back (see Example 2 of § 2) a foliation \mathcal{F} of an open tubular neighborhood U of N . Let $\tau \rightarrow U$ be the field transverse to \mathcal{F} .

LEMMA 3.1. *The line field $\sigma^\perp|U$ is homotopic to τ as sections in the bundle of lines of TU , a bundle with fibre P^{n-1} .*

Proof. The two sections determine isomorphic bundles, since they are both mapped to α by bundle maps covering $f|U$. This is true for σ^\perp by definition of f , and follows from Lemma 2.1 for τ .

The obstructions to a homotopy between them lie in $H^i(U; \pi_i P^{n-1})$. Since U is chosen to have N as deformation retract, and N has no compact components, it follows that U has no cohomology in dimensions n or $n-1$; so the only possible obstruction is in $H^1(U; \pi_1 P^{n-1}) = H^1(U; \mathbb{Z}_2)$. It is sufficient to show that the obstruction cocycle gives zero when evaluated on any 1-cycle A of U . Suppose that the sections have been deformed to match on the 0-skeleton; then the value of the obstruction cocycle on a 1-simplex Δ^1 of A is 1 or 0 according as the bundle over S^1 formed by $\sigma^\perp|_{\Delta^1}$ on the upper semicircle and $\tau|_{\Delta^1}$ on the lower is orientable or not; and the value of the obstruction cocycle on A will be 1 only if $\sigma^\perp|A$ is orientable and $\tau|A$ is not, or vice-versa, impossible if $\sigma^\perp|A$ and $\tau|A$ are isomorphic bundles.

Let U' be an open neighborhood of N , with closure contained in U . Then the restriction to U' of the homotopy between $\sigma^\perp|_U$ and τ may be extended to a homotopy deforming all of σ^\perp to a new line field $\tilde{\tau}$ equal to τ on U' . The orthogonal $(n-1)$ -plane field $\tilde{\tau}^\perp$ is clearly homotopic to σ .

The next lemma allows one to consider, instead of $M-N$, a manifold \hat{M} which is more convenient for submersion theory.

LEMMA 3.2. *There is an open manifold-with-boundary \hat{M} and a smooth map $\psi: \hat{M} \rightarrow M$ which maps $\text{Int } \hat{M} = \hat{M} - \partial \hat{M}$ diffeomorphically onto $M-N$, and $\partial \hat{M}$ onto N as a double covering.*

Proof. \hat{M} is constructed by cutting along N , as follows.

The construction may be repeated for each component of N , so suppose that N is connected. Let $v \rightarrow N$ be the normal bundle of the embedding, assume M to carry a Riemannian metric, and let W be an open neighborhood of N in the total space of v small enough to be mapped diffeomorphically into M by the exponential map \exp .

a) If v is trivial, orient v ; then let $W^+ = \{v \in W, v \geq 0\}$, $W^- = \{v \in W, v \leq 0\}$, and define \hat{M} to be $M-N \cup \cup W^+ \cup \cup W^-$ ($\cup \cup =$ disjoint union) with the identification $v \equiv \exp(v)$ for $v \in W^+ \cup W^-$, $v \neq 0$.

b) If v is non-orientable, let $\tilde{W} \rightarrow \tilde{N}$ be the orientable double cover, and $p: \tilde{W} \rightarrow W$ the projection. Then define \hat{M} to be $M-N \cup \tilde{W}^+$ with the identification $v \equiv \exp(p(v))$ for $v \in \tilde{W}^+$, $v > 0$.

The natural map $\psi: \hat{M} \rightarrow M$ clearly has the required properties. Since N had no compact components, neither does $\partial \hat{M}$; since $\text{Int } \hat{M}$ is also an open manifold, it follows that \hat{M} is an open manifold with boundary. This completes the proof of Lemma 3.2.

Now let $\hat{U} = \psi^{-1} U' \subset \hat{M}$, so \hat{U} is an open neighborhood of $\partial \hat{M}$ in \hat{M} . The line field $\tilde{\tau}$ lifts up to a line field $\hat{\tau}$ on \hat{M} , which is orientable by construction of \hat{M} (shrink \hat{M} into $\text{Int } \hat{M}$; then $\hat{\tau}$ maps to the trivial bundle $\alpha|_{P^n - P^{n-1} - x}$). Let η be a non-zero vectorfield contained in $\hat{\tau}$. The restriction of $\hat{\tau}$ to \hat{U} also contains the non-zero gradient $\nabla(\varphi_n \circ f \circ \psi)$, but the two orientations may or may not coincide. To remedy this, define a new submersion $F: \hat{U} \rightarrow R$ by $F(x) = \pm \varphi_n \circ f \circ \psi(x)$, plus or minus according as the two orientations do or do not agree on the connected component of \hat{U} containing x .

Corollary 4.4 now applies. It follows that η is homotopic through non-zero vectorfields to the gradient of a submersion $g: \hat{M} \rightarrow R$ such that $g|_V = F|_V$, for some open neighborhood V of $\partial \hat{M}$. Moving back down to M , the submersion $g \circ \psi^{-1}: M-N \rightarrow R$ defines a foliation which clearly agrees with \mathcal{F} on the overlap $\psi(V) \cap M-N$. The proof of Theorem 1.2 is completed by the easy observation that the tangent field of this foliation is homotopic to $\tilde{\tau}^\perp$ and therefore to σ .

4. Two Lemmas on Open Manifolds

These lemmas both depend on the following result.

PROPOSITION 4.1. *Let M be an open (no compact components) manifold with (possibly empty) boundary ∂M . Give the pair $(M, \partial M)$ a smooth triangulation. Then M has an $(n-1)$ -dimensional subcomplex K containing ∂M , with the following property. Given an open tubular neighborhood M' of K , there is a homotopy of embeddings $\varphi_t: M \rightarrow M$ such that φ_0 is the identity, $\varphi_1(M) = M'$, and $\varphi_t(x) = x$ for x belonging to some neighborhood V of K and for all $t \in [0, 1]$.*

Proof. A combinatorial form of this statement is essentially contained in the proof of Theorem 3.2 of [5]. The differentiable form can then be derived by the methods used in [2], Theorem 3.7.

LEMMA 4.2. *Let M be an open manifold, and let $f: M \rightarrow W$ be a continuous map. Let $N \subset W$ be a submanifold of codimension p . Then f is homotopic to a smooth map $h: M \rightarrow W$ transversal to N and such that the submanifold $h^{-1}N$ (which has codimension p) has a complex of codimension $\geq p+1$ (in M) as deformation retract.*

Proof. Let K be the subcomplex of Proposition 4.1. The map f is homotopic to g where g is smooth and transversal to N and such that $g|_K$ is transversal to N . The inverse image $g^{-1}N$ is a smooth submanifold of codimension p which intersects K along a subcomplex of codimension p in K . Pick an open tubular neighborhood M' of K small enough so that $g^{-1}N \cap M'$ has $g^{-1}N \cap K$ as deformation retract. Let $\varphi_1: M \rightarrow M'$ be the diffeomorphism described above. Then $h = g \circ \varphi_1$ is homotopic to g , and $h^{-1}N = \varphi_1^{-1}(g^{-1}N \cap M')$ has a complex of codimension $\geq p+1$ as deformation retract.

LEMMA 4.3. *Let M be an open manifold with boundary ∂M , and let $f: U \rightarrow W$ be a submersion defined on a neighborhood U of ∂M . Suppose that the differential $df: TU \rightarrow TW$ extends to a tangent bundle map $H: TM \rightarrow TW$ of maximal rank. Then H is homotopic through tangent bundle maps of maximal rank to the differential dg of a submersion $g: M \rightarrow W$ which is equal to f on some neighborhood of ∂M . The homotopy leaves H fixed near ∂M .*

Proof. This is a relative form of part of [3], Theorem A. The proof is a straightforward application of Proposition 4.1 and the techniques of [3].

In [3], Theorem A has the corollary Theorem B treating the case where $W = \mathbb{R}^p$. In precisely the same manner, the following is a consequence of Lemma 4.3.

COROLLARY 4.4. *Let M be an open manifold with boundary ∂M , and let $f: U \rightarrow \mathbb{R}^p$, $f = (f_1, \dots, f_p)$, be a submersion defined on a neighborhood U of ∂M . Suppose that the gradient p -frame field $(\nabla f_1, \dots, \nabla f_p)$ extends to a p -frame field η defined on all of M . Then η is homotopic (as a section in the bundle of p -frames of TM) to the gradient*

p-frame field of a submersion $g:M\rightarrow R^p$ which is equal to f on some neighborhood of ∂M . The homotopy leaves η fixed near ∂M .

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Received July 31, 1967