

INDEPENDENT (DIRECTED) STUDIES

Description

An Independent (Directed) Study is a course of guided learning in which a faculty member provides an opportunity for learning, jointly structured by the faculty member and student, and the student acquires knowledge and skills by studying and working relatively autonomously. Such a course is often more challenging than a standard course because the student meets alone with the faculty member and is responsible for reporting on activities and demonstrating that learning is taking place. If the Independent (Directed) Study is not implemented for any reason, full-time students will need to register for an alternative course for that semester.

There is wide variation in Independent (Directed) Studies in terms of the type of work completed by the student (e.g., reading and discussions with faculty member; working on a research project; writing a program evaluation for an agency) the amount of reading completed, the number of assignments, and the number of meetings with the faculty member. However, at least one assignment is required so the student can show mastery of the material. This should be a substantive product of the work completed and can take whatever form the faculty and student agree upon. The faculty member and student must meet periodically so that the faculty member is kept informed of the student's progress and can redirect the student if necessary.

Students must be in good academic standing (minimum 3.0 GPA, no outstanding Incomplete grades) to participate in an independent study.

Student's Time Investment: Students should plan to invest approximately the same amount of their own time in an Independent (Directed) Study course as they would in a standard course. Some faculty members estimate this to be 28 hours of classroom time, plus 2 hours per week of reading, plus 3 hours per week for assignments; thus, 30 hours per credit hour, or 90 hours for a three-credit course is not considered to be an unreasonable estimate. The number of hours of contact between faculty member and student will vary depending on the nature of the learning experience, the needs of the student, and the availability of the faculty member.

Process

(a) Discussion with Faculty Member

The student seeks approval from a faculty member with whom he/she would like to work. (Some faculty members may be unable to guide an Independent (Directed) Study due to other work commitments.) If the faculty member agrees to participate, the student and faculty member should discuss recommended course content, activities, and methods for grading, as well as frequency of meetings and other methods of contact.

(b) Brief Proposal

Once an agreement is reached, the student must submit this to the faculty member in writing in the form of a brief proposal (usually 1-2 pages) identifying the student's learning objectives, course content, readings, assignments, proposed timeline, methods for grading, and credits. This should be done prior to, or as early as possible within, the semester in which the Independent (Directed) Study will occur. This serves as a contract for the work that will be completed. A copy is provided to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs so that she/he can provide feedback

to the faculty on the number and nature of Independent (Directed) Studies that occur each semester.

(c) Brief Form for Registrar

The student must get an Independent (Directed) Study Agreement Form from the Registrar, fill it out, and have the faculty member sign it. It requests the following information: student name, ID number, instructor name, credit hours, semester/year, completion date, and the course for which the Independent Study is being substituted, and whether this meets the requirement for a Category A or B elective. The registrar uses this form to assign a unique course number.

(d) Restrictions

Students may do no more than one Independent (Directed) Study at one time and no more than two during their Masters Program. The Associate Dean for Academic Affairs must approve any exceptions to this.

Options

- Number of semesters and credits
The Independent (Directed) Study is generally done over one semester. The standard number of credits is 3. However, students may request fewer. This needs to be worked out ahead of time with the faculty member and included in the proposal.
- Number of students
While the process generally involves one faculty member and one student, it could involve more than one student if the faculty member so chooses.
- Elective courses or material not in the curriculum
Generally, only an elective that is not being offered or is not available due to overenrollment is done as an Independent Study.

Working with a Faculty Member on his/her Research

If the work involves helping a faculty member on his/her research, the student and faculty member must be able to differentiate which portion is the independent work of the student, that is, some identifiable product should be indicated. This type of work must advance both the student's and faculty member's agenda and the educational objectives should be laid out ahead of time in the student's proposal. Possible products might include, but are not limited to, a grant proposal, bibliography, survey instrument, or data analysis.