

# Independent Study Guidelines and Application

## Graduate Studies

### College of Arts and Sciences

To help ensure the quality and consistency of graduate learning for independent study, the following guidelines have been created and adopted April 2010.

#### **Nature and Purpose**

An independent study is designed to allow students to pursue academic topics in greater depth than the coverage of the topic in a class. It normally involves formal, academic study resulting in a substantial written paper or other final project(s). The purpose of the independent study is to enhance a student's program of study and to further one's personal and professional goals. An independent study is not typically used in lieu of a regularly offered course.

#### **Applying for an Independent Study**

The content of an independent study, and the reason for requesting it, must be detailed in an *Independent Study Contract* developed by the student and instructor. Before the contract is submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies, it must be approved by both the instructor who will direct the study and the department chair or program coordinator. To promote successful completion of an independent study, the following steps should be followed:

1. Meet with a faculty advisor and/or other faculty member to discuss possible ideas for an independent study.
2. Working with an independent study faculty advisor, develop a proposal for an independent study (see Guidelines below).
3. Complete an *Independent Study Contract*
4. Obtain the required signatures for approval of the independent study: Instructor, Department Chair/Program Coordinator and submit to the Office of Graduate Studies for final approval by the Associate Dean. **Contracts should be submitted by the Friday of the first week of the semester.**
5. Department Chair/Program Coordinator submits an *Addition to the Schedule Form* to the Office of Graduate Studies for the independent study.
6. The Office of Graduate Studies, through the Records Management Assistant, will notify the student when he/she has been registered for the independent study.

#### **Guidelines for an Independent Study**

The following general guidelines should be followed in developing an independent study. There may be additional guidelines for specific degree programs.

1. The scope and rigor of an independent study proposal must equal or exceed those of regular graduate courses offered by the department/program.
2. The intellectual demands of the proposed study must be equivalent to those of graduate courses carrying equal credit in the department/program (rule of thumb: 12-15 contact hours plus 25-30 hours of preparation time per credit; for example, a student proposing a

3 credit hour independent study should develop a project that will involve at minimum 150 hours of work over the course of the semester).

3. The adviser assists the student in the development of an independent study proposal, monitors the student's progress, and provides a final evaluation of the work. The adviser provides guidance but not regular instruction.
4. Typically, a student's program of study for the degree will include no more than six credit hours from independent study projects. Individual department/programs may have different limits.
5. An independent study contract proposal will include reference to the following information:
  - a. **What are the learning objectives?** What new knowledge, skills and abilities will the student have at the end of the study? This may be concrete or flexible, but it's important for the student and his/her instructor to know what they are expecting to gain from the experience.
  - b. **How will the learning objectives be achieved?** The plan might include readings, interviews, discussion with a faculty advisor, or other forms of research as appropriate. A preliminary bibliography should be included.
  - c. **What are the expected outcomes?** The faculty advisor must be able to evaluate what the student has learned. Possibilities might include; one or more written documents or reports, PowerPoint presentations, teaching cases, or other products that would be of value to the student and/or key audiences. A typical rule of thumb for traditional courses is one significant outcome (a paper, a presentation) per credit, but this can be rearranged to best meet the stated learning objectives.
  - d. **What is your timeline for the outcomes?** Include interim mileposts such as advisor meetings, feedback on drafts, and final project completion. The advisor and student can use this to gauge progress and provide feedback and support as needed.