

What is an Independent Study?

In an independent study, you essentially create your own course on a topic of your choice, working in concert with your faculty advisor or other COE faculty member.

If you are looking for something different - a special field experience, a chance to try research, or simply explore a topic in more depth - you should consider doing an independent study under faculty supervision. In some cases, faculty members are willing to have you assist with their research projects or will guide your study on a topic of mutual interest.

You must bring a lot to the table in preparing for your Independent Study, but the benefits include one-on-one attention, more focused exploration of a topic that interests you, and more flexible scheduling. Some programs even allow two or three students to do an independent study together if you prefer.

Faculty members will differ in the way they conduct the meetings, but most faculty expect students to take the lead in discussions. They will ask questions in order to help you clarify what they are thinking and what kinds of issues they want to discuss.

An independent study is also a great chance to explore modes of learning that might differ from the established culture in the College of Education.

Ideally, an independent study supplements and complements what your program's curriculum already offers. Some faculty members also let you use an independent study to cover a topic that doesn't fit your schedule, as some courses may only be offered every other year or even less frequently.

2. How do I get signed up for an Independent Study?

Prior to signing up, make an appointment with your faculty advisor.

Independent Study, Internship, Thesis, and Dissertation credits require a faculty ID code for registration. To receive a code, [please fill out this form](#). Once you click the submit button, an email will be sent to your supervising faculty adviser. When they confirm their approval of your proposed independent study you can expect an email with your add code within the next one to three business days.

If you do not receive an add code, please do NOT fill out this form again. Contact your supervising faculty adviser through the [online directory](#)»

If you have any questions regarding the add code process, please contact edcodes@uw.edu.

Planning your Independent Study

Start thinking early about what you might want to study. The scope of an independent study can be broad or deep, but the extent of your engagement with the topic should be of sufficient amount to equal a standard course. Consult with your faculty advisor potential topics to make sure that what you want to study isn't already covered by a course within the College of Education.

You will want to start thinking at least a quarter in advance so that you can find a suitable faculty member whose expertise matches your topic. You will generally have to write up a proposal, which can include:

- the proposed study topic;
- a rationale for the focus;
- a preliminary reading list;
- a description of the learning documents that you will produce. These documents have traditionally been informal and formal papers, but be creative! Think of evidence that add you in your future academic or professional goals.
You might do a poster presentation to your faculty member or groups of peers. You might compile an annotated bibliography. You might create a service learning project with a local organization. You might create a website.

Things to Consider

As the name implies, an independent study puts much of the responsibility for learning on your shoulders. Don't wait around for your faculty advisor to tell you what to do. Do seek her or his advice, though. If you find yourself lost in the material or at a loss for how to proceed, don't be afraid to say so.

Make sure you have good rapport with your faculty advisor. You don't want to suffer through a quarter of awkward or difficult meetings!

Determine how often you plan to meet and when. Faculty might differ in terms of how closely they want to be involved with you during an independent study. Some will want to meet every week, and others will say, "Come back at the end of the quarter." Most are likely somewhere in between. It is a good idea for you and adviser (or supervising faculty) to be very clear about this before starting.

Ask around to see what independent studies your peers might have done (on what topics and with which faculty). Your faculty advisor might also allow you to look at proposals others have submitted in the past.

Also be aware that faculty members generally take on independent studies above and beyond their usual teaching, research, and service obligations and they may or may not be compensated for the extra work. The UW has expectations for how much time students should expect to spend

on a course generally; if a 3-credit course, then 3 hours in class plus two hours outside of class for each credit, for a total of 9 hours per week, or about one whole day.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

You will get a chance to learn what you want to learn.

You can demonstrate your ability to work independently and proactively, something your future employers will surely love.

You can tackle in depth that really interesting topic you started thinking about from a previous class.

You can get a head start on exploring the literature for a topic you would like to write about for your thesis or dissertation.