

Houghton College Academic Records Office

Procedures for Independent Studies

Independent Studies

1. Definition: An Independent Study is a directed course in reading or research in which the student pursues an approved topic of general or special interest and meets with the instructor for direction, progress reports, and evaluation.
2. Purposes:
 - a. To provide supervised flexibility within the curriculum;
 - b. To increase individual student's responsibility for education by allowing independent reading and research;
 - c. To develop self-starting, self-propelling, self-teaching ability in the student.
3. Restrictions:
 - a. Student must be at least a sophomore.
 - b. GPA minimum: 2.75 overall.
 - c. Independent Study cannot duplicate any catalog-listed course.
 - d. Independent Study cannot be used to satisfy Integrative Studies requirements.
 - e. Semester maximum: 4 credit hours of Independent Study.
 - f. Graduation maximum: 12 credit hours of Independent Study.
4. Procedures:
 - a. Application: Each student wishing to take an Independent Study must complete an application form in which he or she clearly states how the guidelines are to be met. Forms are available at the Records Office or on the website. Responses should not be hand written; good practice is to write a rough draft and edit it carefully before submitting the form to the Records Office. (Steps 1-8 on the Independent Study form are not required if the student is using the Independent Study for preliminary work toward an approved Honors Project.)
 - b. Approval: Each application must be reviewed and approved (in turn) by the instructor, advisor, and Department Chair.
 - c. Expected background: studies commensurate with sophomore standing for 200 level; studies commensurate with junior-in-major standing for 300 level; studies commensurate with senior-in-major standing for 400 level. (Department Chair is to determine course level.)
 - d. Application due date: All applications should be prepared and submitted to the Academic Records Office during the semester prior to the semester of study. Mayterm and Summer Independent Studies must be submitted to the Records Office by April 1.

Guidelines for Structuring an Independent Study

Given that the purpose of an Independent Study is to provide flexibility and creative focus to the academic curricula, it is impossible to set rigid guidelines for such coursework. However, the student and instructor should keep in mind that an Independent Study should match the rigor of any traditional upper level course in the academic program to which it is assigned. Therefore, the criteria listed below should become the components or patterns for deciding appropriate requirements for an Independent Study.

1. Time spent in study: A general rule of thumb for college-level work is that students should be involved in reading or research two hours outside of class for each hour of classroom instruction. Given the fact that there is no classroom instruction associated with an Independent Study, a minimum amount of time spent per week by the student should equal three to four hours per credit hour. Students should expect to spend approximately 50 hours for each hour of an Independent Study.
2. Reading: In a class that is primarily designed for collateral reading and exposure to primary/secondary sources students should expect to read 800-1,000 pages per credit hour during the semester. Students should prepare a selected bibliography of books or sources to be read and attach this list with the Independent Study. Applications which simply describe “some reading in the subject area” will be rejected. In all cases the total number of pages to be read must be included with the Independent Study application.
3. Research Paper: For an Independent Study students should expect to write a minimum of ten pages per credit hour for a paper that requires research in sources for background material. The inclusion of a research paper in an Independent Study would usually lower the reading requirements specified above in proportion to the amount of writing expected. Writing of formal prose or poetry would follow the same guidelines as research writing. Again, all independent studies should specify the length of any research paper included in the study.
4. Reflective writing/journaling: For writing that does not require research in library sources but rather depends upon narratives description or reflective thinking, the number of pages should be doubled (20 pages per credit hour). The number of pages to be written in the Independent Study must be included in the proposal.
5. Projects, laboratory research, etc.: The criteria for activities and special projects are too varied to permit description here. However, the student and instructor should prepare clearly defined objectives and tasks for these components in an Independent Study. These descriptions should include quantifiable aspects (number of experiences, hours to be spent, descriptions of materials to be produced, etc.) as well as measurable outcomes to be expected from this Independent Study.
6. Examinations: Each Independent Study should include some form of final product. This experience could be a major written project, a final examination (oral or written), or some type of public presentation (recital, lecture, demonstration) which can be used to assess the student’s accomplishments during the semester. The nature of this final experience should be included in each Independent Study.

It is the privilege and responsibility of the student and professor to combine the elements described above into a significant learning experience that equals or exceeds the rigor found in regular catalog offerings. Each application for an Independent Study will be reviewed by the appropriate Department Chair and the Academic Records Office in order to maintain the integrity and the consistency of the Independent Study program at Houghton College. The burden of responsibility for learning will be on the student. Work on an independent study is to be completed within the semester, as in other courses.

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