

College Curriculum Council  
Brown University



Statement on Independent Studies  
December 2008

The open curriculum at Brown places a high value on independent learning experiences for undergraduates. Chief among these are individual and group independent study courses. Brown supports two different kinds of independent study options. Students can design a new, independent course by proposing an Independent Study Project (ISP) or Group Independent Study Project (GISP) through the office of the Dean of the College.

<http://www.brown.edu/college/courses/gisp.php> The process involves preparing a course rationale, a syllabus, and a reading list with a faculty sponsor, and gaining approval from the College Curriculum Council. ISPs and GISPs are approved during the previous semester and appear on the student's Brown transcript with a unique course number and title.

A departmental independent study offers another, more flexible variation in which students can pursue a reading, research, or thesis project with a faculty member of their choosing. These classes are listed with a generic course number and title in the departmental curriculum and do not require approval from the CCC. Some departments have a detailed plan for students to follow in developing such courses. The CCC encourages all departments to adopt a few simple guidelines to ensure that students and faculty make the most of this open learning option:

*Statement of project:* We recommend that students submit a short written statement to the sponsoring faculty member, describing the project they wish to pursue during the semester. The statement will include the central idea, the goals of the project, a brief description of the work to be completed, and the nature of the work that will be graded. It will also include a plan for a regular number of meetings across the semester. To allow students and faculty enough time to discuss and refine the plan, we recommend that conversations begin during the pre-registration period, and that the statement be drafted no later than the first week of classes during the semester when the project is undertaken. A sample form is included below.

*Signatures:* We recommend that both student and faculty member sign the project statement, indicating their mutual commitment to the semester's work. Students will receive registration access from the faculty sponsor after the form is signed. Since this independent study is actually a departmental course offering, we also recommend that faculty submit the signed form to the department chair. This will allow chairs to learn about the level of independent work occurring in their department as the semester begins.

*Deadline:* The last day to register for a departmental independent study course will be the same as the last day to add any course, i.e., the end of the fourth week of classes.

Note that in 2008 the CCC agreed that the enrollment for departmental independent studies will normally be limited to 10 students per faculty member per semester. Anything larger should be offered either as a GISP or as a regular course. The CCC hopes these guidelines will lead to better planning, and to more fruitful independent learning experiences for undergraduates.

## Departmental Independent Study Proposal Form

*To the student:* Prepare this form in consultation with your faculty sponsor. It is recommended that you begin discussions during the pre-registration period, i.e., in the semester before the independent study. This form should be completed and signed by the end of the shopping period.

*To the faculty:* You may wish to send a copy of this form to your department chair. Please note that the last day for students to add an independent study falls at the end of the fourth week of classes.

**Brief statement of project** — *including goals of project, semester work plan, meeting schedule, and nature of work that will be graded.*

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Student name (please print)

Signature

date

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Faculty name (please print)

Signature

date