Independent Concentration Frequently Asked Questions
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What is an independent concentration?
An independent concentration offers a chance to study an area not currently offered as a standard concentration. At Brown, students have the exciting opportunity to create their own interdisciplinary concentration, organized around a central theme, topic or research question.

How likely is my IC to get approved?
If your concentration has a clear, cohesive theme, can’t be pursued through a standard concentration, and you have a well-planned course of study, your IC has a good chance of receiving tentative or full approval. Even if your IC is not immediately approved, you’ll get specific and detailed feedback with concrete suggestions for strengthening your proposal. Our goal is to make Independent Concentrations happen, not prevent them from happening.

How hard is the application process?
To apply, you must fill out a straightforward application you can find on the Curricular Resource Center website (brown.edu/go/ic). In addition to answering the questions listed on the application, you must include an annotated course list and an annotated bibliography. In addition, you must find at least one Faculty Sponsor to support you and help you shape your IC (note: faculty advisors must be full-time professors with a rank above senior lecturer - this includes assistant, associate, and full professors. Advisors cannot be visiting professors, lecturers, or emeritus faculty). We, the IC Coordinators, are here to help you every step of the way!

What will it say on my diploma, and how will that look to future employers?
Your diploma will list your degree as either an A.B. or Sc.B. with the title “Independent Concentration.” The title of your independent concentration will be listed below in the “comments” field. We think this is great, for a few reasons. The first is that creating and completing an Independent Concentration takes initiative, motivation and self-discipline, all of which are reflected in your degree. The second is the rigor of the IC selection process - the IC committee considers proposals very carefully to maintain the integrity of Brown’s academic curriculum; a Brown degree signifies years of dedication and hard work, and future employers know that. A degree in an Independent Concentration makes you interesting as a job candidate. Employers come across candidates in standard concentrations all the time; chances are, degrees like yours are more unusual. You can demonstrate your creativity, ability to work independently, discipline, and entrepreneurial spirit. Many independent concentrators simply refer to their IC by its title rather than presenting it as an “independent concentration in [x field].” With approval from the CCC - like every standard concentration - they’ve earned the right to do so.

What does the IC Committee look for in a proposal?
The primary thing we look for is a cohesive course of study. Does your concentration have a central theme, and have you constructed a curriculum centered upon this theme? Beyond that, we want to see well-crafted proposals that demonstrate passion, enthusiasm, and thoughtfulness. The committee can tell who has put in true time and effort into their application, and only approves those who have thoroughly answered each question, provided a substantive faculty letter and proposed a course list and capstone/thesis that are both achievable and rigorous. Your course list should - like course requirements in standard concentration - follow a natural pyramid-shaped progression, with
introduction and foundation courses, followed by more advanced courses, at least one methodology course, and advanced seminars, leading up to a capstone or honors thesis project. We know this sounds like a lot, but don’t be overwhelmed! You can find all the resources you need at the Curricular Resource Center, and we are here to help guide you every step of the way!

**What’s a capstone project?**
A capstone project is the culmination of your studies in your IC, completed in either the fall or spring of your senior year (your 7th or 8th semester). This is your chance to explore a case study that ties together your IC’s central themes, concepts and methods of inquiry. It is completed as a 1-semester independent study overseen by a faculty member, often your IC’s sponsor. Instead of a 1-semester capstone, students have the option of applying for honors by completing a 2-semester thesis.

**Can I still complete an honors thesis?**
Absolutely! You can find the guidelines for how to complete an honors thesis on the CRC website’s IC page. (brown.edu/go/ic)

**What happens after my IC is submitted?**
After handing in your complete application at the start of the month, the IC Committee will meet to discuss your proposal. By the end of that month, you should hear back about the committee’s decision. Either a “Accepted” or “Tentatively Accepted” application are very positive responses, with only very minimal changes needed, while a “Not Accepted But Encouraged to Resubmit” requires a few larger changes.

**When do people embark on the IC journey?**
Most IC applicants are sophomores and juniors. We encourage students to submit an IC application as early as possible. The further you are into your Brown career, the less room and time you have to incorporate the committee’s feedback on, for example, your course plan.

**When do I have to declare an IC by?**
The end of your 6th semester - April 1 (or November 1 if your 6th semester is in the fall.)

**How do I get an advisor?**
You should start by reaching out to faculty who have similar academic passions and who you may have met through previous courses taken. Additionally, research.brown.edu can be a useful resource for finding faculty with related interests. Find out about their research, email them, meet in person and learn whether they have time to and interest in advising you.

**Why should I do an IC?**
By letting you create a concentration, Brown enables you to choose your very own course of study. If the topic or theme you most want to study combines different departments and does not yet exist as a concentration path but still maintains the rigor of Brown’s Liberal Learning goals, we encourage you to pursue an IC!
Why shouldn’t I do an IC?
Does a similar concentration already exist at Brown, but perhaps you want to avoid a few requirements that aren’t really “necessary” to you? Do you want to specialize in professional, technical or business training? If yes to any of these, an IC is likely not the right path for you.

Is it harder to get into certain classes like honors seminars?
It can be tricky to get into certain seminars and upper level classes, but it is by no means impossible. With a little patience and persistence, if a specific course is necessary to your curriculum, you can almost always find a way to take it. This will probably mean sending a few extra emails and/or meeting with professors to explain your situation, and while this may seem scary, we’ve found that many professors actually welcome the differences in perspective independent concentrators bring to their classrooms.

When does the committee meet?
The committee meets every month (with the exception of January and May*) to discuss applications received by the 1st of that month. Applicants will be notified via email of the committee’s decision after the meeting.

What if I’m going abroad?
You can definitely still apply for an IC! The entire application process is online. However, finding a Faculty Advisor is definitely easier when on Brown’s campus, which is why applying for an IC while abroad can be a bit difficult. With that said, organizing an IC and then studying abroad is a great option. As with a standard concentration, it’s best to secure capstone or honors advisors before you leave campus, especially if you’ll be away junior spring.

I’m a transfer; can I still do an IC?
Yes! In fact, many ICers are transfer students. Depending on your semester level, the timeline might be a little tighter, but it’s totally doable! If you’re coming in as a transfer and are interested in doing an Independent Concentration, we recommend getting started early, especially if you’re coming in as a fifth-semester student – this means taking a look at the application (brown.edu/go/ic), thinking about which courses might comprise your “core” curriculum, finding a faculty sponsor, and, of course, stopping by the CRC to talk to our IC coordinators.

Is it worth it?
There’s no question: doing an IC is more work than a traditional concentration. However, there’s nothing more rewarding than taking complete ownership of your Brown education. Creating an Independent Concentration means studying exactly what you want to study, working with the professors you want to work with, and knowing you’re making the most of your time at Brown!

For more information, email independentconcentrations@brown.edu!