

HARVARD COLLEGE  
Independent Study Guidelines

Independent Study is designed to provide credit for field research, academic study not available in regular course work, or practice or performance in the arts. It is not suitable for group instruction, paid work, or activities outside the competence or concern of one of Harvard's departments. For example, studying the financial accounting system of a business firm might be an appropriate project, but working in an accounting office to gain business experience would not by itself merit academic credit. Investigating child development through observation in a day care center could qualify, but simply tutoring a child would not. Analyzing the organization of a political group might be a suitable subject, whereas organizing a political campaign would not alone suffice. In each case what distinguishes the suitable project is the application of analytical skills to the object of the Independent Study, not the intrinsic worthiness or instructiveness of the experience itself.

Any sophomore, junior, or senior whose previous record is satisfactory may petition to undertake Independent Study for non-letter-graded credit. A student may petition to take up to a total of four semester-long courses of Independent Study. Independent Study courses are subject to the same rules for dropping and withdrawing as any other course.

A petition to undertake Independent Study requires two signatures:

1. That of a qualified adviser (ordinarily a voting member of a Harvard Faculty) who must be an officer of the University, and whose professional competence is appropriate for the subject area of the Independent Study. In those exceptional cases where the adviser is not a Faculty member—for example, a teaching fellow—the petition must also be supported by an appropriate academic department or unit.
2. That of the Allston Burr Resident Dean, which signifies that the proposal satisfies the guidelines and has been signed by the adviser.

The petition also requires an outline of the student's proposed project. The full proposal must be submitted to the Allston Burr Resident Dean for approval, ordinarily in the first week of the term during which the independent study will take place. The completed petition paperwork, including the proposal, must then be submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE), ordinarily before the course enrollment deadline. Finally, the Allston Burr Resident Dean must lift the advising hold from the student's study card. Any change-of-course petition that is filed to add, drop, or withdraw from Independent Study

also requires the approval of the Allston Burr Resident Dean. A separate petition, properly completed, must be filed for each course of Independent Study.

The adviser will assist the student in the development of a plan for Independent Study and provide guidance but not regular instruction. Independent Study does not imply regular formal instruction and should not be confused with tutorials or House Seminars or Supervised Reading and Research courses offered by several academic departments and committees. **A student enrolled in Independent Study must undertake to work independently. Classroom work, regular instruction, and group projects are inadmissible.** Students whose projects include interviews or research involving human subjects should contact the Committee on the Use of Human Subjects (<https://cuhs.harvard.edu/urtp-portal>) before submitting their Independent Study petition.

The adviser will submit a midterm grade based on a preliminary written report by the student of his or her activities. At the beginning of the Reading Period, the student must submit to the adviser an analytical paper concerning the term's work. A simple description or report of the term's activities is not by itself adequate. In the case of artistic practice or performance, evidence of substantial accomplishment should be supplied in lieu of written work.

The granting of credit will be determined by the adviser. In those cases where the adviser is not a voting member of a Harvard Faculty, the Chair or Head Tutor/Director of Undergraduate Studies of the department, or equivalent officer with voting membership in a Harvard Faculty, must review and approve the petition and the grade assigned by the adviser. Independent Study is graded "Pass" or "Fail." The adviser will submit a copy of the student's paper and a brief statement about his or her work for inclusion in the student's folder in the Allston Burr Resident Dean's office, ordinarily by the first day of the Examination Period.

Independent Study is not counted toward General Education or divisional distribution requirements and is not normally counted toward concentration or secondary field requirements.

First-year students may not enroll in Independent Study. They may, however, seek special permission from their First-Year Resident Dean to enroll in one Supervised Reading and Research course within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (91r- and 910r-level course category) if an appropriate member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences has indicated a willingness to supervise.

# PETITION FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

After reading the Independent Study Guidelines (attached), please complete this petition in close consultation with your Independent Study adviser and your Allston Burr Resident Dean. Please submit the petition to your adviser and Resident Dean for their approval before the course enrollment deadline of the term in which you plan to complete the Independent Study. A final, signed version of this petition, including the project outline, must then be submitted to the Office of Undergraduate Education (OUE), ordinarily before the course enrollment deadline. The OUE may refer incomplete or unclear proposals back to you and/or your Resident Dean for further clarification. Once approved, your Resident Dean must lift the advising hold for the Independent Study course (INDSTUDY) on your study card.

Your adviser and Resident Dean may refer questions about the guidelines for Independent Study or your petition to the OUE ([oue@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:oue@fas.harvard.edu)).

## STUDENT INFORMATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

College address: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Field of Concentration: \_\_\_\_\_

*I request to enroll in one course of Independent Study (carrying four units of credit), described in this petition, to be graded PASS or FAIL, in the*

Fall Term 20\_\_ or  Spring Term 20\_\_.

*In addition to the Independent Study, I intend to take the following courses this term:*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## PROPOSED PROJECT

Please attach your responses to the following questions to this petition.

1. **Proposal:** What is your proposed project? What is the research question or problem that you are investigating? Please situate your project within an academic or scholarly context. For Independent Study in the arts, please describe the artistic project that you propose to undertake.
2. **Plan:** What will your independent study entail? Please describe the readings, data collection, creative work, or interviews that you plan to do (NB: you may need approval for human subjects research from the [Committee on the Use of Human Subjects](#)), attaching a bibliography to this petition as needed.
3. **Submissions:** For Independent Study, you must submit a preliminary written report and, at the beginning of reading period, a final analytical paper to your Adviser. This is typically a 20-30 research paper or other project of similar scope. In the case of artistic practice or performance, you must provide evidence of substantial accomplishment. Please describe in detail how you will demonstrate what you have learned through independent study, including the length and scope of any written work.

Student's signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

REC'D, OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE INDEPENDENT STUDY ADVISER**

Advisers are strongly encouraged to consult with the student’s Allston Burr Resident Dean or the Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Education (Lisa Laskin, elaskin@fas.harvard.edu) about Independent Study. Non-FAS faculty, who may be less familiar with the policies of Harvard College, are especially encouraged to do so in advance of committing to advise an Independent Study.

**INDEPENDENT STUDY ADVISER’S APPROVAL**

*I approve of this student’s proposed project, and I certify that, if successfully completed, it should be granted one course (four units) of Harvard College degree credit. I agree to evaluate the submissions specified by the student, to submit a midterm grade based on the student’s preliminary activities, and to submit a final grade of either Pass or Fail no later than one week after the first day of the examination period, along with a brief statement about the student’s work, to the student’s Resident Dean.*

Adviser’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Harvard address: \_\_\_\_\_

Harvard telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Harvard title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the Faculty of which you are a voting member\*:

FAS, Business, Dental Medicine, Design, Divinity, Education, Government, Law, Medicine, Public Health

\*The adviser must be an officer of the University. If the adviser is not also a voting member of a Harvard Faculty, the Chair or Head Tutor/Director of Undergraduate Studies in an appropriate department or unit, such as the adviser’s department, must review and approve the petition (by signing below) and the grade assigned by the adviser at the end of the term. This person must be a voting member of the Harvard Faculty.

**CHAIR’S OR HEAD TUTOR’S/DIRECTOR OF STUDIES’ APPROVAL (IF APPLICABLE)**

*I approve of the petition described above and agree to review the grade assigned by the adviser at the end of the term.*

Chair’s or Head Tutor’s/Director of Undergraduate Studies’ signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Harvard address: \_\_\_\_\_

Harvard telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Harvard title: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle the Faculty of which you are a voting member:

FAS, Business, Dental Medicine, Design, Divinity, Education, Government, Law, Medicine, Public Health

**RESIDENT DEAN’S APPROVAL**

This petition satisfies the guidelines for Independent Study. The student petitioning for Independent Study is in good standing.

Resident Dean’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_