

Independent Study Student Guidelines—Empirical

Independent study (PSYC 405, 406, 407) is designed to provide the student with an opportunity to conduct an empirical study under the direction of a faculty mentor. The work is carried out independently, with guidance from a faculty mentor. PSYC 405 and 407 are ½-credit courses to spread the work across two semesters; PSYC 406 is a one-credit course.

Independent Study is strongly recommended for students who plan to attend graduate school in any of the research areas of psychology. Admission criteria for M.A. and Ph.D. programs often include research experience, and one's likelihood of acceptance into a competitive program is enhanced by having a record of research participation.

To participate in Independent Study, a student must have an overall GPA and a Psychology GPA of at least 3.0, unless special permission is granted by the Psychology faculty. To enroll in an Independent Study, a student must complete a written research proposal (see example on website). Typically students enrolling in Independent Study have completed a research proposal as part of a **Research Practicum**; however, as long as the student has found a faculty mentor who is willing to work with them and that student writes a research proposal, taking Research Practicum prior to an Independent Study is not required (though it is recommended). Students must submit a research proposal and complete the **Application for Research in the Department** by the first Wednesday of the semester. Note, that your research mentor may require an earlier proposal deadline. If approved by the Department, the Department Chair will contact the registrar's office and register you for the course.

Expectations for students

- To work 12-15 hours per week on your research project. This work may include assisting faculty or other students working with the faculty mentor in research, including literature searches, summaries of primary sources, data collection, data analysis, writing, attending meetings, etc.
- To follow the *Independent Study Student Guidelines (empirical)*.
- In consultation with the faculty mentor, to complete a *Research Assistant Contract* outlining duties and expectations.
- To complete work on a timely basis.
- To treat all data as confidential. Data should never be taken home or stored on personal laptops, PCs, flash drives, etc.
- To write a 3-5 page reflection paper at the end of the semester.
- To complete a Final Empirical Independent Study Paper (see example). If the proposed research is planned to be carried out over multiple semesters (e.g., taking 405 and 407), students will be asked to submit a revision of their original Research Proposal with preliminary results if applicable.
- Your grade will be based on fulfilling these expectations and any other expectations and goals outlined in your *Research Assistant Contract*. If you are required to write a paper, your paper is expected to be at or above the quality level of the *Final Independent Study – Empirical Paper (EXAMPLE)* available on the [Independent Study website](#).
- To seek out help with writing, study design, data entry/analysis, etc. when needed (from your research mentor, other faculty, other research assistants, the writing center, the library, etc.).

Expectations for faculty

- To enumerate expectations for the research assistant using a *Research Assistant Contract*. This should include expectations about hours, deadlines, duties, meetings, specific outcomes (e.g., completion of data collection, final paper, etc.), and behavior.
- To provide guidelines and a due date for the final reflection paper (see *Student Research Reflection Guidelines* for an example).
- To follow the *Independent Study Student Guidelines (empirical)*.
- To provide guidelines, feedback, and a due date for a Final Empirical Independent Study Paper.
- To provide feedback and assistance with writing, study design, data entry/analysis, etc. when needed.

Student Qualifications

A student must have an overall GPA of at least 3.0 and a psychology GPA of at least 3.0 at the time the independent study is proposed. Students ordinarily undertake independent study during the junior or senior year. It is not advisable to initiate independent study in the last term of the senior year, since an uncompleted project would cause a delay in the student's graduation. In order to undertake empirical research, the student should have completed PSYC 202 and PSYC 204. Under rare circumstances, a senior may be permitted to conduct an empirical study while enrolled in PSYC 202 or 204.

Procedure for Enrolling in Independent Study

1. The student must obtain a faculty mentor.
2. The student must complete the [Application for Research in the Department](#) form.
3. The student must submit a written proposal to the psychology faculty by the first Wednesday of the semester. Note, that your research mentor may require an earlier proposal deadline.
4. The psychology faculty will discuss the student's proposal and either accept or reject the student's plan. The student may be asked to defend the proposal orally at a department meeting.
5. The student may enroll in independent study only after a proposal has been accepted by the psychology faculty.

Guidelines for Empirical Research Independent Study Proposal. A research proposal in the usual APA format is to be submitted (see Research Proposal EXAMPLE). It should contain the following:

- a) Statement of Purpose, including hypotheses.
- b) Literature Review. At least a short review should be made to provide support for your hypotheses.
- c) Method:
 - i. Subjects-including the nature of, how chosen, what population is the sample to represent.
 - ii. Apparatus or tests-where appropriate.
 - iii. Procedure-in as much detail as possible.
- d) Results: The nature of the data that will be gathered and how it will be analyzed statistically
- e) Discussion: Examination of the possible findings and how they would affect the hypothesis.
- f) References.

Product. The outcome of the research project should be a report in APA format (unless otherwise specified by your faculty mentor). The final report will be similar to the proposal, except that the actual procedure and results will be given, the actual results will be discussed, and the literature review in the introduction will be more extensive.

Evaluation. The student is expected to make an oral progress report to the mentor at least four times during the term. At these times the mentor may offer suggestions for improvement of the student's project and will assess the quality of the student's efforts in data collection and analysis. After the final report has been submitted, the student

will be interviewed by the mentor. The student will be expected to answer questions concerning the research and to summarize the knowledge gained in the project. The grade for the course will be based primarily on the mentor's evaluation of the final report with a lesser contribution from the mentor's assessment of the student's efforts during the conduct of the study and the interview. The mentor may consult other members of the psychology faculty in evaluating the final report, but the final grade will be assigned by the mentor.

Ethical Considerations. The student is expected to follow APA guidelines concerning ethical treatment of research participants. These include such matters as consent and confidentiality for human participants and humane care for animal subjects. The student is also expected to follow Departmental procedures for obtaining human participants. The student is also expected to maintain the integrity expected of a scientist. Falsification of data and plagiarism are violations of academic integrity.

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