

INO Independent Study Guidelines

Guidelines and Suggestions for Independent Study Proposals

[INO Independent Study Form \(PDF - 25.6 MB\)](#)

OVERVIEW

LIS 499 and 380 for undergraduates and INO 580 and 599 for graduates offer opportunities to design various types of independent studies. All are offered for variable credit, ranging from 2 - 12 credit hours. Credit for a course at UIS is based on the assumption that a typical 4 credit course meets 3 1/2 hours a week for 16 weeks (56 hours) and that a typical student spends 2 hours of outside preparation time for every hour in class (112 hours). $56 + 112 = 168$ hours. Consult program information and your faculty sponsor to determine the appropriate course and number of credit hours for the project you have in mind.

Your faculty sponsor is chosen by you on the basis of her/his expertise in the topic of your independent study and her/his willingness to be your sponsor. You might also choose a faculty sponsor who might work best with you to stimulate your learning. For example, if you tend to procrastinate, find a sponsor who will work with you on overcoming this.

For each independent study you conduct under the LIS/INO prefix, you must complete an Independent Study Proposal. (Forms are available in the INO office and must be completed prior to registration for the project.) With this proposal you will describe what you want to learn, how you intend to learn it, and how your learning will be evaluated. Consult your sponsoring faculty member to obtain assistance in clarifying these components of your study. (If a resource person outside the University will be involved in your study, s/he should also participate in the planning process.)

The Independent Study Proposal Form asks you to draw on skills you have utilized in creating your degree proposal. Specifically, it directs your attention to the following questions:

1. What do you want to learn? (Objectives)
2. Why do you want to learn it? (Rationale)
3. What resources are available for you to draw on? (Resources)
4. How do you plan to use the resources to meet the objectives? (Work Plan)
5. How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your work?
6. How will you document your learning? (Evaluation/Documentation)
7. When will you accomplish this learning? (Tentative Schedule)

SPECIFICS: HOW TO DEVELOP A PROPOSAL

Objectives:

The goal is to write objectives that are clear, understandable, and realistic. Can you state clearly and in detail what you want to learn? To formulate your learning objectives, ask yourself: Which learning needs from my LIS/INO degree proposal can I meet in this project? What information and understanding do I want to acquire? What skills do I want to learn or improve? Why? To clarify further your objectives, continue by asking yourself: What attitudes do I want to develop or change? Why? How and where will I use this information, skill, or attitude? How much of it do I need? How will I behave differently or what will be changed when I am finished? What do I want to be able to do when the project is finished? How many learning objectives do I want to set? How much time do I really have?

Learning objectives may be stated in a variety of ways. Some can refer to specific skills and levels of competence. Others may be more general, and exploratory, perhaps becoming clearer as you proceed. Many behaviorist approaches require that objectives be stated in terms of specific, measurable, behavioral outcomes. It may be helpful to think of learning objectives in terms of the discrepancy between where you are now and where you would like to be in the future with respect to a particular competence or ability or level of understanding. Precise outcomes may or may not be useful to you.

Objectives are often written in the form of observable activities which you will be able to do at the project's completion. Describe what you intend to learn using verbs such as identify, distinguish, compare, contrast, solve, differentiate, write, construct, apply, describe, demonstrate, communicate, draw, role play, list, critique, etc. Not all learning needs can be described adequately in this way, as the totality of that experience is more than information, skills, and attitudes.

Rationale:

When you have completed the objectives section, ask yourself, "Why do I want to learn this?" Your answer should place the objectives within the larger context of your educational goals. How do your objectives relate to your overall degree plan? Refer to your Autobiography, Goals, and Learning Needs from your LIS/INO degree proposal.

Which Learning Needs are you meeting within the framework of this independent study? Why do you need to acquire this information/skill/attitude? How is your Independent Study Proposal congruent with some component of the larger picture presented in your degree proposal?

Resources:

What relevant resources (people, books, films, laboratories, agencies, etc.) do you have available? You may find it helpful (a) to identify some of these resources by thinking of

specific activities you will engage in to accomplish your learning and then (b) to ask what resource each activity makes use of. Attach lists of relevant materials (bibliography, film lists, etc.) to your Proposal.

Work Plan and Tentative Schedule:

How do you plan to use the resources and facilities to meet your learning objectives? Each learning objective should be addressed by one or more learning activities. Each activity should correspond to one or more of your stated learning objectives. Traditional approaches include attending lectures, participating in small group discussions, reading and expressing your reactions on paper or in discussion groups, examination, laboratory experiments, painting, photography, etc. Non-traditional approaches might include travel and discussion, film or videotape production, "hands-on" experience, writing a book or manual, building or creating something, keeping a journal, organizing a conference, etc.

When you have a tentative plan, consider a time frame. Try to stay within the framework of the university semester. Under "Tentative Schedule" indicate when the various activities of your plans will take place and when you will complete work on the concrete components of the plan. Schedule may be daily, weekly, and/or monthly task completion dates and/or specific deadline or performance dates. Include the frequency of contact with your faculty sponsor and the proposed completion dates for various stages of the project.

The work plan should reflect your thinking about how you are actually going to carry out your learning project. What logical sequence will you follow? What step-by-step procedure will you develop to complete your study?

Evaluation/Documentation:

What evidence will you produce to demonstrate to yourself and others that you have achieved your objectives? Documentation will largely consist of the products you have created as a result of your learning activities. These products may include research papers, copies of surveys, transcripts of interviews, video or audio tapes, maps, reports, letters sent and received, samples of work, products of artistic activity, records of experiments, performances, journals, etc. Discuss documentation methods with your faculty sponsor.

What criteria will be used to evaluate each piece of evidence? Criteria may differ for each learning objective and for each piece of evidence. Some criteria traditionally used in evaluating academic work include scholarliness and comprehensiveness of a written work, frequency and substance of journal entries, relevance of research completed, correctness of grammar or math, presence or absence of specified qualities in a performance, number of survey forms completed, usefulness of study notes, etc.

If you experience difficulty in selecting criteria, ask yourself what aspects, traits, or characteristics of this piece of evidence are most important or meaningful and are most

likely to clearly demonstrate that you achieved your learning objective?

Having selected criteria, what standards will you apply as you look at them? Standards imply judgment in terms of the criteria along a scale of values in order to determine the quality of that which is being judged. To set standards, ask what quantity or what degree of the specified criteria must be present (or absent) in the evidence in order to determine attainment of the learning objective. Ask: what level, how close to the ideal, how many, how few, how frequent, how fast, how clear, how graceful, how much, how long, etc.? Confer with your project evaluators about criteria and standards early in your study.

Your faculty sponsor usually will be the person to evaluate the evidence of your learning. External resource persons with whom you have worked closely could also be evaluators, as could peers or others with experience in the topic. Your faculty sponsor will take your criteria and documentation into consideration in order to assign a grade for the course.

As you progress in your learning, you may wish to make changes in your Independent Study Proposal. Very often our ideas change as we work on a project. Simply consult with your faculty sponsor (and any other key resource persons) when you need to modify your description of the work you intend. Substantial departures from your original proposal must be negotiated with all parties involved. Amended proposals may have to be submitted.

HELPFUL HINTS

LIS/INO faculty strongly recommend that you and your faculty sponsor schedule a series of conferences to pace your reading or research, to set deadlines, and to commit yourself to a time frame.

Be realistic about how many hours you have to spend on your project. What other demands on your time are there? Are you trying to do more than you have time or energy for? How much can you reasonably accomplish in the time available? Students planning an independent study for the first time often try to do too much. Determine what is central to your goals and what, however relevant, is peripheral and focus your initial efforts on the central. Then, if time permits and it still seems appropriate, you can turn to some of your less important concerns. Of course, you will want to avoid the other extreme of making your project so narrow that it achieves only part of what you most wanted to do.

Then, too, your project need not be overly conventional. You may find it helpful to engage in fantasy as a means of stimulating thoughts and ideas.

The more fully we are conscious of dreams, day-dreams, fantasies -- i.e., free associations --the more likely we are to be in touch with what our total organism desires ...Potent action arises when the organism is in touch with the fullness of its desire, has explored in imagination and fantasy the probable results of alternative acts, and has taken the risk of decision and commitment to one among many possibilities. (Sam Keen, *To a Dancing God*)

Independent study should be a learning experience in which you challenge yourself, grow, and develop new skills and ideas. Then, too, while your resource people will be concerned to keep you mindful of appropriate standards, you can generally count on them as wanting most of all to be helpful and supportive. Do not be afraid to be adventuresome.

As one expression of the university's commitment to the individual student, faculty members occasionally supervise independent studies in the form of tutorials, INO 599 and INO 580. These independent studies are intended to supplement, not supplant regular course offerings. Students desiring to structure one-to-one learning experiences not regularly available but nevertheless relevant to their programs of study must complete an independent study proposal and secure the consent of a faculty member prior to registration. You can choose this option only after you have contracted your degree.

These courses are offered for a variable credit, ranging from 2-12 credit hours. Credit for a course at UIS is based on the assumption that a typical 4 credit hour course meets 3.5 hours/week for 16 weeks (56 hours) and that a typical student spends 2 hours of outside preparation time for every hour in class (112 hours.) $56 \text{ plus } 112 = 168$ hours devoted to a 4 credit course. Consult program information and your faculty sponsor to determine the appropriate course and number of credit hours for the project you have in mind.

Your faculty sponsor is chosen by you on the basis of her/his expertise in the topic of your independent study and her/his willingness to be your sponsor. You might also choose a faculty sponsor who might work best with you regarding your weaknesses. For example, if you tend to procrastinate, schedule regular meetings and a sponsor who will help you adhere to deadlines. For each independent study you conduct under the INO prefix, you must complete an "Independent Study Proposal" form. Also known as "blue forms", these forms are available in the INO office and must be completed prior to registration for the term in which the project is to be conducted. Submit an "Independent Study Proposal" form that indicates a proposed title, topic, method of study, amount of instructor-student contact and means of evaluation, as well as the level of study and the hours of credit sought. If the faculty member accepts the proposal, s(he) signs a "With Permission of Dean" (WPD) form that also must be approved by the appropriate dean and submitted to the Registrar's office. Consult your sponsoring faculty member to obtain assistance in clarifying these components of your study. If a resource person outside the university will be involved in your study, s/he should also participate in the planning process.

If you are uncertain about the ways that these types of alternatives can be used as part of your degree proposal, contact your academic adviser.