

## **Independent Study Guidelines**

Department of Sociology  
University at Buffalo, SUNY  
Revised: Fall 2015

### **Purpose of Independent Studies**

Independent study projects provide an opportunity for an interested student to explore a subject area of particular importance to her/him that is not otherwise available in the department's curriculum. They allow students to pursue in-depth field or library research as apprentice scholars or as policy analysts. The possible topics for independent studies are nearly unlimited.

Independent studies require initiative, high motivation, and self-discipline on the part of the student. It is the responsibility of each student undertaking an independent study to find a faculty member who is prepared to guide the project. The student will then take the initiative with the assistance of the faculty mentor in seeking out and selecting materials for study, in providing coherence to the project, in helping limit the scope of the project so that it may reasonably be accomplished in one (or two) semesters, and in deciding on the appropriate work product to result from the project. Throughout the independent study, the faculty mentor's major role is to serve as a sounding board for the student's ideas and analysis. The mentor also has the responsibility to evaluate the student's performance by means of a grade at the end of a semester. That grade will be based largely on the evaluation of the interim or final work product (e.g., a paper or papers and/or public lectures), which will also be submitted to the Undergraduate Studies Committee for record keeping and archival purposes.

### **Student Eligibility**

Because credit is earned for these courses, students should expect to devote the same amount of time that they would to any other upper division course in the major (if not more time). To be eligible to take SOC 499, the student must have completed at least 60 credit hours of coursework, including at least 15 credit hours in Sociology. An independent study proposal is much more likely to be approved if the student has an overall grade point average of at least 3.0 and can successfully document (on the Independent Study Proposal form) that she/he has adequate preparation (combination of course work and life experience) to undertake the work.

### **Types of Independent Studies**

In general, UB Sociology independent studies follow one of two formats:

- 1) Guided reading. In consultation with the faculty sponsor, the student chooses a number of readings (books and/or journal articles) around a topical theme or question. Completion of learning outcomes is assessed by preparation of a written document, which may be an annotated bibliography or a literature review. For this option, a student must have successfully completed (with a grade of B- or better) SOC 349, Sociological Theory, and at least one 300- or 400-level elective Sociology course(s) relevant to the independent study topic or question.
- 2) Empirical research. This option involves the student developing a realistic proposal that includes one or more research questions, a proposed method (including appropriate

discussion of data availability and research ethics), and a workplan. Completion of learning outcomes is assessed by preparation of a research paper, with an introduction, focused literature review, a methods section, and findings. For this option, a student must have successfully completed (with a grade of B- or better) SOC 293, Social Research Methods, and at least one 300- or 400-level elective Sociology course(s) relevant to the independent study topic or question

Either of these formats may also include the expectation of an oral presentation to an appropriate audience, which will be video recorded and archived with the Undergraduate Studies Committee.

### **Credit Hours**

Students may take from 1-6 credit hours of independent study in the fall or spring semesters. As a general guideline, each credit hour counts for 3-4 hours of work every week, so that a 3 credit hour independent study entails 9-12 hours a week of work, a 6 credit hour independent study entails 18-24 hours a week of work. Independent study credit is not offered in the summer.

Frequency and duration of contact with a faculty mentor is negotiated between the student and the faculty mentor. It is expected that the student will maintain at least weekly contact with the faculty mentor, and should anticipate meeting with that person for at least an hour every other week during the semester(s) in which the independent study is taking place.

### **Choosing a Faculty Mentor**

A member of the UB Sociology faculty **MUST** agree to serve as mentor for your independent study before the Department will consider your proposal. This person will be responsible for overseeing the conduct of the independent study from inception to completion and will assign an appropriate letter grade.

Ideally, your faculty mentor should have some background and interest in the topic of your independent study. It is recommended that you begin making arrangements with a faculty mentor as early as possible. Because the extent of a mentor's participation in each independent study should be substantial, no mentor may sponsor more than three independent studies per semester (unless approval to sponsor additional independent study students has been received from the Undergraduate Studies Committee).

### **Proposal and Final Report**

The Undergraduate Studies Committee (USC) must approve all proposals for independent studies. You should begin the process by preparing a rough draft of your idea and asking a faculty member whose opinion you value to give you feedback. That person may agree to be your mentor or may suggest that you approach another faculty member about playing that role. You will need to submit a Proposal for Independent Study (see below) to Ms. Kelly Crean, Undergraduate Program Coordinator, before the end of business on the third day of the fall or spring semester you would like to register for independent study credits; earlier is better. The USC will review the proposal and convey to you the response. The response may be:

- Approve
- Approve with recommendations
- Not approved

At the end of the semester, you must submit an Independent Study Final Report (see below). This completed report must be submitted to your faculty mentor and to Ms. Kelly Crean, Undergraduate Program Coordinator, by the end of business on the last day of classes in the semester in which you registered for independent study credits.

Department of Sociology  
University at Buffalo, SUNY  
Independent Study (SOC 499) Proposal

NOTE: The Undergraduate Studies Committee must approve all proposals for independent studies. Please prepare and submit your proposal before the end of business on the third day of the fall or spring semester you would like to register for independent study credits; earlier is better.

YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED: \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE POINT AVERAGE: \_\_\_\_\_

SEMESTER FOR WHICH STUDY IS PROPOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF CREDIT HOURS PROPOSED: \_\_\_\_\_

FACULTY MENTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE OF PROPOSED INDEPENDENT STUDY: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

ON ONE OR MORE ATTACHED PAGES, PLEASE WRITE THE FOLLOWING:

**BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED INDEPENDENT STUDY** (Please explain in this section what courses you have taken or are taking that prepare you for this work and how this independent study will contribute to your sociology major at UB).

**PROPOSED READINGS (PLEASE LIST)**

**PROPOSED LEARNING OUTCOMES AND MEANS OF ASSESSING THEM**

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Sociology  
University at Buffalo, SUNY  
Independent Study (SOC 499) Final Report

NOTE: A completed final report must be submitted to both Ms. Kelly Crean, Undergraduate Program Coordinator, and your faculty mentor by the end of business on the last day of classes in the semester in which you registered for independent study credits.

YOUR NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

SEMESTER IN WHICH STUDY WAS COMPLETED: \_\_\_\_\_

NUMBER OF CREDIT HOURS COMPLETED: \_\_\_\_\_

FACULTY MENTOR: \_\_\_\_\_

TITLE OF COMPLETED INDEPENDENT STUDY: \_\_\_\_\_

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PLEASE ATTACH YOUR FINAL PAPER OR PROJECT SUBMITTED TO YOUR FACULTY MENTOR. THEN, ON ONE OR MORE ATTACHED PAGES, PLEASE WRITE THE FOLLOWING:

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF COMPLETED INDEPENDENT STUDY (Please explain in this section what you completed over the semester and discuss how your completed work compares to the work proposed at the beginning of the semester and explain any differences. Please refer to the learning outcomes proposed at the beginning of the semester and evaluate to what extent each outcome was met through the independent study).

COMPLETED READINGS (PLEASE LIST)

DEPARTMENT APPROVAL: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_