

Guidelines on 389: Independent Reading

Introduction: Independent Study in American Culture

There are good reasons why a student should elect an independent reading course. Independent study courses provide students with the opportunity to further explore a topic they became interested in through a class or to develop a research topic or area of interest.

The department offers two kinds of independent study courses: Reading and Field Study. The reading option (389) is "an independent study course available to undergraduates who are interested in designing a reading list for the purpose of exploring new areas in the field of American Studies." The Field Study option (388), covers "field experience in organizations, institutions, and service agencies." Internships have their own numbers and set of procedures.

The Guidelines set forth here deal with Reading Independent Studies.

Reading Independent Studies

Independent Study Commitments by Faculty

The goal of these guidelines is to maintain the integrity of the Reading Independent Study as a valuable, serious, *but rare* option for both students and faculty. Particularly in the case of Lecturers I-II and Assistant Professors, the department makes an effort to protect faculty from over-commitments. Therefore, the department discourages Lecturers I-II and Assistant Professors from teaching Independent Study courses. In addition to these considerations, with increasing concern about course enrollments—especially in courses to which GSIs are assigned—it makes sense to match our students with regular courses whenever feasible.

Faculty members normally should not supervise independent studies during terms when they are on leave, nor should they supervise them on subjects that fall outside of their areas of specialization, or on subjects covered by regular course offerings in AC or in other programs. Graduate students are not eligible to sponsor independent studies or internships.

The Associate Chair will initiate a conversation with the faculty member associated with an Independent Reading Course application (1) if there is concern about faculty effort or (2) if the criteria for an Independent Reading Course are not met. The goal of these discussions is to make a decision after weighing the merits of a particular Independent Reading Course proposal, as well as the priorities and workload of the faculty member.

Independent Study Applications

Independent study courses are initiated by the student and pursued with the guidance of an American Culture faculty member. Ideally, the student should have developed a well thought out project before contacting a potential faculty sponsor. Students interested in proposing an independent study or internship project need to complete an independent study contract in consultation with the faculty member of their choosing. The application deadline is the end of the second full week of classes in the term for which the student is applying.

As a rule, independent Study projects should not be used to fulfill requirements for the American Culture and Latina/o Studies majors or for a minor. Exceptions may be approved on a case by case basis in consultation with the Ethnic Studies program director and the Associate Chair. LSA policy excludes Field Study and Independent courses from area distribution plans.

Guidelines for work per credit hour on Reading Independent Studies

# of Credit Hours	Frequency of meeting with faculty member	Hours of work per week
1	monthly	3 hrs
2	1 hr/biweekly	5 hrs
3	1 hr/wk	8 hrs

Criteria for Approval

In approving Independent Study proposals, we look at five criteria:

- The independent study does not duplicate a regular course taught in the current academic year or (especially in the case of first and second year students) in the upcoming academic year.
- The student has the necessary background to work in his or her interest area.
- The student has a project that has been well thought out
- A full-time faculty member in AC or Ethnic Studies is willing and able to direct the Independent Study.
- The student is taking classes with a variety of AC faculty members rather than repeatedly seeking out a single faculty member.

Review Process

Once the student and proposed faculty mentor have filled out the application form, the Associate Chair reviews all independent study applications in consultation with the faculty member and, when relevant, the Ethnic Studies program director. In the case of students who are Ethnic Studies minors, the relevant Ethnic Studies director signs off on the request first, forwarding it on to the Associate Chair for collaborative review.

Alternatives to a Reading Independent Study

When an Independent Reading course does not seem like the best option, the Associate Chair will confer with the faculty member in order to explore possible alternatives to independent studies.

The faculty member may work with the student:

- to find an appropriate course in AC or in another department or program, ideally a course with sufficient flexibility to allow the student to investigate a topic of special interest in a paper, research project, or presentation, or
- to develop a plan for the student to pursue his or her interest through a UROP project or Honors Thesis.

Whenever possible, faculty who find themselves regularly teaching several independent reading courses in a single term--especially when the faculty member meets with students in small groups--should look for ways to turn these informal clusters into regular courses (first year seminars, senior seminars, etc.).

Informational Materials

Current information on AMCULT web site:

Students interested in proposing an **independent study** need to complete a [389 Direct Reading Application \(PDF\)](#) in consultation with the faculty member of their choosing. The **application deadline** is the end of the first full week of classes in the term for which the student is applying