

Guidelines: Independent Study

I view introducing both graduate and undergraduate students to the world of political science research as one of my fundamental responsibilities as a professor. Collaborative research projects are one of the fundamental ways the professors cultivate curiosity among students and recruit and train future scholars. I take my responsibility to engage in collaborative research seriously and am happy to direct independent research projects. If you are considering engaging in an independent study with me, please review the information below. The first section outlines what an independent study is and offers guidance on whether or not you are prepared to engage in such an endeavor. The second section provides the requirements necessary to arrange an independent study with me. The final section offers directions for how to arrange an independent study.

1 So you think you want to do an independent study?

Before you decide to participate in an independent study, you need to be aware of what an independent study is and what is expected for successful completion.

An independent study is an opportunity for you to further explore a topic of interest. I structure independent studies around research projects. Students register for a specified number of independent study hours and arrange a weekly meeting time with me. Weekly meetings are generally about an hour in length and include discussion of assigned readings and progress on the research project. Outside of meetings, you are expected to be actively engaged in research, including seeking out and reading the scholarly literature, collecting and analyzing relevant data, and/or writing your final paper.

The final output for all independent studies is a research paper. To successfully complete an independent study, your final paper must resemble a political science article, including a clear research question, development of theory and testable hypotheses, adequate discussion of research design, and analysis of appropriate data.

Although the we will have weekly meetings, an independent study requires you to work independently. This means that you will be responsible for managing your own time and for monitoring your own progress. If you struggle with time management, this may not be a good option for you. In addition, writing a research paper will require you to actively advance the project. You will need to seek out scholarly materials, independently devise research questions, theory, hypotheses, as well as collect and organize data on your own. I will, of course, be available for consultation and direction, but you will be responsible for motivating and organizing yourself and completing the relevant work.

2 Requirements for an Independent Study

There are two primary requirements necessary in order for me to agree to an independent study with you. First, you must have a specific topic of interest or, better yet, a specific research question on which you would like to conduct independent research. An independent study is meant

to provide you with the opportunity to engage a topic of *your* interest. Aside from my interest in introducing students to scientific research, I receive no benefit from directing an independent study. If you cannot identify a topic of interest, an independent study would not be a beneficial use of your time or mine.

Second, you must have successfully completed POLS3310 or an equivalent research methods course in a related field (e.g. economics, ag-econ, psychology, etc.). Because I structure independent studies around research projects, it is essential that you come to the endeavor with a basic understanding of research design and methods. I expect you to be able to compose a working research question, construct a basic theory, derive hypotheses, and construct an appropriate research design. I fully anticipate having detailed conversations about all of these aspects of the research process. I will provide ample direction and expect to spend considerable time working with you as you collect and analyze data. However, I do expect that you come to the endeavor with the basics provided by POLS3310. For graduate students, you must have successfully completed the first year core course requirements as well as the research design course.

3 Arranging an Independent Study

If you have read the previous two sections and find that you meet the necessary requirements, you should do the following in order to arrange an independent study:

1. Before contacting me:
 - Choose a research topic. After deciding upon a topic you are interested in conducting research on, compose a short paragraph explaining why you find the topic interesting, and what aspects of the topic on which you would like to focus your research. If possible, include a clear research question. If you are a graduate student, this email should include a clear research question and brief outline of your theory.
 - Find and compose a list of relevant scholarly readings. If you are an undergraduate, compile a list of at least 5 scholarly articles that are relevant to your topic. These article should be peer reviewed and published in academic journals. If you are a graduate student, you should be able to provide a bibliography of at least 10 relevant scholarly articles. Please note, you do not have to have read all of the articles, but you must be able to demonstrate that you know where to look for relevant research and have done so in preparation for our meeting.
2. At least two weeks before the start of the semester, contact me to arrange a meeting time. In the email, include your name, and the paragraph you wrote explaining your interest in your research topic. During this meeting, we will agree upon the topic, structure, number of credit hours, and expectations for an independent study. Be sure to bring your list of relevant articles to the meeting.
3. After our meeting:
 - You will need to visit the political science academic adviser to register for an independent study.
 - I will compose a course syllabus that reflects what we agreed upon during the meeting. I will send it to you for approval. If you approve the syllabus, I will then send it to the academic adviser.

I reserve the right to decline any request for an independent study if I feel you do not possess the necessary skills, are unprepared to conduct independent research, or due to time constraints in my own schedule.