

What is Independent Study?

Independent study courses are available to students who wish to pursue a particular topic in depth under the direction of a faculty sponsor. They generally take the form of a reading course with weekly one-on-one discussions, a research experience with completion of a written mini-thesis report involving regular consultation with the faculty sponsor, or a combination of these two formats. Other formats are possible with the approval of the sponsor selected by the student to direct the course.

Is Independent Study in Resource Economics the Right Choice?

Independent study courses do not count toward any departmental requirements but are an excellent option for fulfilling elective credits for students who are motivated to delve deeply into a topic and engage in a thought-provoking one-on-one learning/mentorship experience. Steps to take before you start the independent study process:

- Consult with your academic advisor on how independent study credits will fit into your overall graduation plan and determine what is feasible. Note, Res-Econ independent study is separate from and cannot be considered as internship credits or Honors individualized credit.
- Develop an initial concept or plan to pitch to a faculty sponsor.
 - How many credits are you interested in pursuing and when?
 - What topic(s) interest you and why?
 - Do you have ideas to contribute to reading or research content?

Process

After answering the questions above, the following steps must be taken:

- 1) Student seeks out a faculty sponsor within the Department of Resource Economics. Students are encouraged to begin conversations proactively (ideally during pre-registration or registration).
- 2) Student and Faculty Sponsor establish a mutually agreed upon set of expectations using the contract to guide conversation. Both parties must be satisfied with the level of rigor established and overall clarity of the contract. A student who does not wish to meet the minimum expectations of the faculty sponsor may elect not to pursue independent study credits.
- 3) Student finalizes the contract (likely writing-up details from a verbal exchange with faculty sponsor) and acquires the 3 required electronic signatures (student, faculty and UPD -Undergraduate Program Director). The student and faculty sponsor signatures indicate mutual agreement with all contract details. Faculty should assist with UPD communication as needed.
- 4) Student sends the completed contract to Sophie Williamson, Academic Programs Manager for Resource Economics at swilliamson@umass.edu (cc faculty sponsor) before the add/drop period ends for the term in which the independent study will take place. See here for relevant dates: <https://www.umass.edu/registrar/calendars/academic-calendar>.
- 5) The Academic Programs Manager adds the independent study in Spire as a section of Res-Econ 396. The faculty sponsor will be listed as the instructor.
- 6) Faculty Sponsor enters the final grade in Spire by the term deadline. (Again, see academic calendar.)

Contract (continues on page 2)

Student Name: _____

Student Major: _____ Student ID #: _____

Faculty Sponsor/Instructor: _____

Contract (continued)

Number of Credits (1-6 with each credit equivalent to 3 academic hours per week): _____

Grading Basis (UG Letter or Mandatory Pass/Fail): _____

Meeting Structure:

Consider meeting frequency and dates, mode, and other pertinent details.

Communication & Feedback:

Consider details regarding communication expectations and/or methods for giving, receiving and responding to feedback beyond established meeting structure.

Core Expectations:

Consider learning objectives, key components of the independent study, and related due dates.

Grading:

Provide details regarding how the student's work will be evaluated. Consider meeting attendance, communication, adherence to core expectations, and overall quality of work. Factor in the UG Letter vs. Mandatory P/F grading basis decision. The choice of grading basis cannot be changed after the Add/Drop period ends.

Other:

Provide further notes as desired, including any additional documentation that will accompany the contract.

Signatures

Student: _____

Faculty Sponsor: _____

Resource Economics Undergraduate Program Director (UPD): _____

*This form is for Fall/Spring independent study within the Department of Resource Economics.
Winter/Summer independent study follows University Without Walls (UWW) procedures.
See <https://www.umass.edu/uww/resources/independent-study-or-practicum>.*