

Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine
Guidelines for Independent Study Courses
MPH, MSPH, MPH&TM, MS, MHA, DrPH, PhD

The independent study course is a rigorous academic experience equivalent to SPHTM courses of the same number of credits. Independent study courses provide the opportunity to individualize graduate study or explore a topic in greater depth than available in a regular course. Independent studies may not provide credit for paid work or activities outside the degree program.

The independent study course is flexible and may include a wide variety of formats and activities, including critical literature reviews with syntheses or analyses of a problem, meta-analysis, data or policy analysis, field or laboratory research, interdisciplinary investigation or practice-based learning. Whatever the format or activities, the independent study has defined objectives. Student performance is assessed by the achievement of these objectives. The product is a high-quality written document. Independent studies may not duplicate a regular SPHTM course. Tuition rates for independent studies are the same as for regular courses.

Advanced planning is essential. An independent study course is carefully planned by the student in consultation with the advisor and a faculty instructor with expertise in the topic.

Faculty Responsibilities and Oversight: A full time faculty member oversees all independent study courses. The student's advisor is responsible for determining if a proposed independent study course fits within the program competencies and if appropriate planning has taken place.

Independent study courses are conducted under the supervision of a regular faculty member who has expertise in the area with approval of the faculty advisor. The student and faculty instructor design the independent study for in-depth study of a topic directly related to the master's or doctoral degree program. The faculty instructor and student outline a plan for an independent study and its evaluation. This includes development of a rubric for assessment of the independent study course.

As with all courses, the faculty instructor must have the appropriate educational or experience qualifications in the topic of the independent study. If the qualifications are not apparent from the faculty's degree area, then the faculty must submit the other means by which they have attained the qualifications through Digital Measures. Adjunct faculty may provide advice on a topic or project, but may not serve as the instructor of a special study course.

Independent Study Course Plan: The independent study course may take many forms and the plan is a way for the student and instructor to agree on what and how it will be done beforehand. The Course Plan includes:

- Course description
- Minimum of three objectives
- Outline of activities and expectations for the independent study with timelines; this includes type of activities, expectations for amount and type of work, location, etc.
- Expectations for a written product/deliverable (type of document, elements to be included in the written product, depth of study/analysis, length, etc). The document may take many forms appropriate for the types of activities or discipline.
- Grading schema and a rubric for assessment

Credits: Independent study courses may be up to 3 credits (one, two or three credits). They may not be more than 3 credits.

Level of effort: The independent study must meet the same level of rigor and effort as a regular SPHTM graduate course with the same number of credits. Each credit awarded represents:

- 1 credit – equivalent to 15 hours class time plus 2 hrs/ credit for study/research time
- 2 credits – equivalent to 30 hours class time plus 2 hrs/ credit for study/research time
- 3 credits – equivalent to 45 hours class time plus 2 hrs/ credit for study/research time

Meeting Schedule: The student meets regularly with the independent study instructor (every two weeks suggested) during semester. Meetings may be virtual (phone call, Skype, other technology) if the student and instructor are not in the same place. The meetings are for guidance, critical discussion, and demonstration of progress throughout the semester.

Final Product: The student will produce a high-quality written document(s) at the end of the independent study. The content, depth, format, length and other details are defined prior to the initiation of the independent study. The document's length should reflect the work required for the number of credits. The document should reflect a depth of study and analysis at the graduate degree level. In addition, there may also be other products as a presentation or other outcomes.

Grading/Assessment: The instructor will provide expectations for the level of work for achievement of the learning objectives and number of credits awarded prior to the start of the independent study.. The instructor will provide the student with an assessment rubric by which the written products will be evaluated and an explanation of how the product/deliverable will be evaluated. Independent study papers and other products are graded as regular courses using the SPHTM grading scale. As with all courses, the independent study must be completed within one semester. Failure to complete the independent study in one semester will result in an F.

Recording the Independent Study in Terra Dotta

After the independent study course is planned and approved by the advisor and instructor, the student enters the information into **Terra Dotta Independent Study** and registers for the course. These two steps must be completed prior to the last day to register in a semester. See below for directions.

Steps for Independent Studies

1. Student discusses the independent study proposal with his/her advisor. Questions to consider: How does the independent study fit in the degree program? What is the topic and how does this fit with the degree program and career goals? The advisor must approve the topic. It is best to begin this process in the semester before the student intends to take the course in order to work out the details.
2. Student identifies the faculty instructor. The instructor may be the advisor or another full time SPHTM faculty with the appropriate expertise. The instructor must agree to oversee and coach the student through the independent study course.

The student and faculty instructor determine the course plan and milestones, including:

- a. Descriptive title of independent study (<=30 characters including spaces) This title will appear on the student transcript.
- b. Number of credits
- c. Description of independent study (<=120 words)
- d. Minimum of three course objectives

- e. Course deliverable. A high-quality written document representative of graduate level work and number of course credits. Define the type of document, length, and expectations for the product.
 - f. Grading rubric
3. Student records the study in **Terra Dotta**. (Complete planning and course details prior to entering information into Terra Dotta.)
 - a. Enter the information into the initial Terra Dotta Independent Study page.
 - b. Enter the course description, objectives and other study information into Terra Dotta.
 - c. Send e-mails for advisor and instructor approval of the independent study course.
 - d. Terra Dotta will show when approvals are received, and the student may submit the Independent Study Registration form to the departmental program manager.
 4. Student registers for the independent study course.
 - a. Download the Independent Study Registration form from the Website
 - b. The departmental program manager will assist with the registration process.
 - c. Master's students use the department call letters with the course number 7990 (e.g., GCHB 7990) to register for independent studies. Doctoral students use the department call letters with the course number 8990 (e.g., BIOS 8990).
 - d. Registration must be complete by the last day to register in a semester.
 - i. Go to Student section and log into the SPHTM intranet with your Tulane credentials.
 - ii. Go to Academic Resources and Support
https://inside.sph.tulane.edu/student/academic_resources_support

Academic Resources and Support

Doctoral students can also find resources specific to their needs on the [Doctoral Students](#) page.

[Spring 2018 Final Exam Room Schedule](#) - downloads a PDF

| Important Policies | Academic Forms | Course-related tools and links |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic Standards for Master's Students • Doctoral Handbook (link to doctoral students page) • Practicum Handbook • Culminating Experience Handbook • Student Code of Academic Conduct (full text) • Honor Code (pledge only) • Student Grievance Policy • Harassment Policies and Procedures • Grievance Information and Links | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add/Drop Form • Application for Degree • Core Course Waiver • Departmental Degree/Program Change • Incomplete Grade Extension • Independent Study Registration • Leave of Absence • Practicum Extension Form • Transfer of Credit | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gibson– Tulane's online gateway to course registration, grades, and more • Tulane is transitioning from the use of Blackboard to Canvas • Academic Calendar |

- iii. Click on Independent Study Registration. Download and print.

- e. Fill out the form, sign it and obtain the instructor's and your advisor's signatures.
- f. Submit the completed form to your departmental program manager. S/he will get the Department Chair's signature and submit the form to the Office of Students Affairs.
- g. The student must formally drop the independent study course under the same timelines as regular courses if they do not proceed with the course. Failure to drop the independent study course will result in a grade of "F," and tuition will not be refunded.

Timelines:

Planning for an Independent Study: The independent study should be a planned part of the degree program. The topic and instructor should be identified in the semester prior to that in which the work takes place.

Entering into Terra Dotta: Students may enter the independent study into Terra Dotta up to three months prior to a semester in which it is done, but no later than two days prior to the last day to register for a course in that semester. Advisor and instructor approvals must be obtained before the student registers for the course.

Registration: Independent study courses follow the same timelines as SPHTM regular courses. Registration must take place no later than the last day in the semester to register for a course, typically the 3rd week of classes (Check SPHTM academic calendar.) All planning and entry into Terra Dotta and approvals must be complete prior to submission of the Independent Study Registration form.

Dropping an Independent Study Course: Same dates for dropping a course and percent of tuition refunded apply to independent studies as for all other courses.

Submission of grades: Faculty must submit the grade for the independent study course by the last day to submit grades for that semester.

Incompletes: Independent study courses should be completed within one semester. In the event it is not fully completed, the instructor may submit a grade of "I" (incomplete). Assignment of an "I" allows one month to complete the work. The "I" has the same requirements for completing the work in a designated time (see SPHTM guidelines for "I" incomplete work as for regular courses.). Failure to complete the independent study course will result in a grade of "F".