

Guidelines for Completing an Independent Study: Research Paper

Project Proposal: An independent study that will result in a research paper is designed to serve students who have significant research interests that cannot be explored in the context of existing classes. Accordingly, you should have an interest that is reasonably well-defined before requesting faculty supervision. You should begin by preparing a proposal for a project to submit to a potential faculty supervisor. The proposal should set forth a potential topic and note the background research you have conducted.

Topic Development: An initial meeting with your faculty supervisor will help to identify an interesting and focused problem. An independent research project should be more ambitious than a summary of the state of the law or scholarship in a particular area—you should engage in some independent analysis and seek to advance the discussion. Within two weeks of your first meeting, you should submit a brief (one-paragraph to one-page) précis to your faculty supervisor for approval and comment. The précis should state the specific question you will explore and articulate a preliminary thesis. You should expect your faculty supervisor to provide comments within one week.

Grading: At your initial meeting, you should ensure you understand the faculty advisor's expectations for awarding a passing grade.

Reading List: In the first month of your research you should consult with a Research Librarian and thereafter send your faculty advisor a bibliography that lists the primary and secondary sources you plan to review. You should expect your faculty supervisor to provide comments within one week.

Detailed Outline: At least two months before your paper is due, you should submit an outline to your faculty supervisor and schedule a second meeting. Your three to five page outline will be a roadmap of the arguments you plan to make, the cases and commentary to which you are reacting, and the remaining questions you need to answer. You should expect your faculty supervisor to provide comments within one week.

Rough Draft: At least one month before your paper is due, you should submit a draft to your faculty supervisor for review and discussion. The draft should be largely complete and should set forth and support your thesis. You should expect your faculty supervisor to provide comments within one week.

Final Paper: The final paper that you submit for should be fully cited and carefully proofed.