

PSYCHOLOGY INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDE

This Guide contains important information about planning and completing an Independent Study project. Psychology students are responsible for meeting the requirements that are described.

INDEPENDENT STUDY CHECKLIST

- Plan your project during the semester before you want to begin an Independent Study
- Identify with a faculty director and develop an agreement for you to pursue an independent study with his or her supervision.
- Prepare a typed proposal and have it approved by your faculty director.
- Prepare and obtain approvals required on the "Independent Study or Individualized Instruction" Form available on the Registrar's Web Site.
- Complete Request for Review of Research form in compliance with Psychology Department Policy and University Human Subjects Research Guidelines.
- Prepare and submit a Final Report.
- Complete the study on an agreed-upon time schedule and submit preliminary drafts of your work to your faculty director.
- Schedule Presentation of Findings.

Students are encouraged to undertake their independent study over a two-semester period. The first semester can be devoted partly to the literature survey and careful planning of the study. The research can be completed and reported during the second semester. All independent studies must be presented at the Department's annual spring research symposium.

INTRODUCTION

All students in Psychology are required to complete an Internship Experience, a Research Apprenticeship, or an Independent Study. The Independent Study option is selected by a significant number of psychology students to meet this requirement. This guide is designed to inform you of our expectations about an Independent Study.

Students in Psychology will typically take an Independent Study for at least 3 credit hours. It is possible to repeat this course. A maximum of 6 credits can be allowed for PSY 4497, Independent Study. This may be done in the summer or over more than one semester. With the advisement of a professor, the student selects a subject to be examined in an intensive manner. It is important to emphasize that you must plan in advance for an Independent Study. Last-minute proposals that indicate a lack of planning have a high probability of being rejected, so you are well advised to begin considering an Independent Study at least one semester in advance of when you would like to actually begin a project. Additional information about planning is outlined below.

To register for PSY 4497, Independent Study, you must prepare an *Independent Study or Individualized Instruction Form* that is available from the Registrar's Web page. A faculty director, the department chairperson, and finally the Provost must approve the form and additional information that is required by the Psychology Department. The paperwork should be completed before the end of the semester that precedes the intended study.

TYPE OF STUDY

In Psychology, students often undertake a research project for their Independent Study. This means that you may be charting new ground to answer some question that you have posed. Our assumption is that by the time you are prepared for an Independent Study, you will have had an opportunity to examine a wide range of topics in psychology and will have formulated some questions that you might like to answer on your own. The Independent Study presents an opportunity for such a project. There are, however, several routes to actually beginning a project.

In some instance students will be permitted to do a review paper that does not involve original research but addresses an important issue in psychology or human resource management. The paper should be extensive. Such a paper will normally receive three credits and be accomplished within one semester.

PLANNING STEPS

If you have an idea that you have already identified for potential study, you might consult with a faculty member in the department who seems to have shown some interest in the topic, or, for example, in whose classroom the topic was first introduced. Explore with them your thinking about a particular issue or problem and see if they would be interested in supporting a study. Try in advance of your meeting with the professor to define specific questions and even a tentative methodology for answering the questions. You need not, however, have a specific proposal in hand before you actually meet with a professor. You should feel free to consult with anyone in the department about the possibility of undertaking an Independent Study.

There are many different methodologies for approaching Independent Studies, and no particular approach should be considered as the correct one. You may wish to do a piece of experimental research in a controlled setting. For that purpose we will make every effort to provide laboratory space or whatever reasonable equipment you may need for a study. You should consult with a faculty director about what types of support might be available.

Planning Steps (continued)

On the other hand, many approaches to an Independent Study might involve a field survey of some kind. You will need to be realistic about what is possible to accomplish within a 3 to 6 credit Independent Study and carefully examine what resources might be available.

Generally, the department is able to support surveys with small sample sizes (a maximum of \$25 per project). There are various planning implications, depending on where you would like to do your study and what groups might be involved. Naturally, careful planning and consultation with a faculty member will be required.

Preparing a Proposal. As noted above, to enroll for the Independent Study special paperwork is required. With the Independent Instruction Form that you must complete, you should also plan to submit a brief proposal. The proposal should be typed, introduce the area you want to study, define a question or questions for the focus of your study, outline a tentative methodology, and include appropriate references. If your proposal involves a comprehensive review of the literature in some area, it should be accompanied by a tentative outline for your paper.

You should draft the proposal after an initial consultation with your faculty director. The proposal draft will then be reviewed in consultation with your faculty director, and then submitted with the *Independent Instruction Form* to both the faculty director and the department chairperson. After it has been approved at the departmental level, it will be sent to the Provost's Office for final approval. Do not submit an incomplete or poorly prepared proposal for your study. Neither your faculty director nor your chairperson will be willing to submit it to the Provost's Office for approval.

GETTING STARTED

Usually the paperwork involved in reviewing the Independent Instruction Form takes only a few days. Once the form is signed and returned from the Registrar's Office, you should plan to meet again with your faculty director to begin work on the project. The first step will be development of a more thorough proposal, followed by intensive work on whatever form of instrumentation or research plan the project requires. In reality this may not get well underway until the semester in which your Independent Study is actually scheduled.

Human Subjects Review. Once your proposal is prepared and you actually have developed detailed information about the research methodology, you will need to complete two copies of a departmental form titled *Request for Review of Research Sponsored by the Department of Psychology*. Under the *Human Subjects Review Guidelines* of Mansfield University, research projects undertaken by students or faculty must be approved *prior* to involvement of human subjects. The review process is intended for the protection of human subjects and is part of an important ethical obligation that applies to all psychology students and faculty.

All psychology research involving data collection from students or off-campus populations covered under Category A of the University Human Subjects Research Guidelines is included in this requirement. Category A research involves minimal risk to human subjects and is reviewed at the Department level. The Institutional Review Board must also review studies falling into Category B of the University Human Subjects Research Guidelines. In all cases that utilize resources of the psychology department or are supervised by psychology faculty, you must receive approval of the chairperson and a designated reviewer. All students are advised to familiarize themselves with the *Human Subjects Review Guidelines* in more detail. Only after you have been through the approval process may you actually begin the research.

Supervision. Once you are underway with the project, you should meet regularly with your faculty advisor. Often weekly meetings will be scheduled for this purpose, although meetings may actually be less frequent as you complete your data collection. Once the data is collected, you will probably need to meet more regularly to plan and carry out the analysis of your data.

FINAL REPORT AND PRESENTATION

You should follow the guidelines generally stated for APA research reports in the development of your complete report. Your report should be prepared as if it were being submitted to a journal for review. The actual final report will probably require at least two drafts. You should plan to have a first draft to your faculty advisor no later than 3 to 4 weeks before the end of the semester.

All students are also responsible for scheduling a public presentation of their Independent Study projects. This will provide faculty and students with an opportunity to ask questions about your work. Usually, this presentation is scheduled as part of the department's spring undergraduate Research Symposium. Consult with your advisor about the best time to plan such a presentation. You will be responsible for posting a notice about your presentation on the main bulletin board and sending a memo to all faculty in the department.

Once your study has been presented, you must arrange for a final, corrected copy to be placed on file in the department office. This should be neatly printed as well as a digital copy. Consult with your advisor for details on this process.

REFERENCES

American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Reed, J. C., & Baxter, P. M. (1992). *Library use: A handbook for psychology* (2nd ed.). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

**REQUEST FOR REVIEW OF RESEARCH SPONSORED
BY THE DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY
(SUBMIT TWO COPIES AND ALLOW AT LEAST ONE WEEK FOR REVIEW.)**



PRINCIPLE RESEARCHER:

SUPERVISING FACULTY MEMBER:

POLICY: Under the Human Review Guidelines of Mansfield University, research projects undertaken by students or faculty must be approved prior to involvement of human subjects. The review process is intended for the protection of human subjects and this shall be the sole object of the review.

All psychology research involving data collection from students or off-campus populations covered under Category A of the University Human Subjects Research Guidelines are included. In all cases, research that utilizes resources of the Psychology Department or is supervised by Psychology faculty must receive approval of the chairperson and a designated reviewer. Only studies conducted by instructors within a course setting and that involve risk-free demonstrations of psychological principles are exempt.

INSTRUCTIONS: The principle researcher or student must: (a) complete items 1 through 9, (b) obtain the supervising faculty member's signature, and (c) submit the original and a copy of the form to the Psychology chairperson who will arrange for an appropriate review of the request. Attach a clear description of the methods and procedures that will be used in this research.

TITLE OF RESEARCH:

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH:

MATERIALS OR INSTRUMENT TO BE USED:

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURE:

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:

POTENTIAL RISKS (INCLUDE INFORMATION GIVEN SUBJECTS, OPPORTUNITES FOR DEBRIEFING, ETC.):

PERSONNEL OTHER THAN THE RESEARCHER AND SUPERVISOR WHO WILL BE INVOLVED:

PARTICIPANTS (WHO THEY WILL BE, NUMBER, HOW RECRUITED.)

APPROXIMATE DURATION OF PROJECT:

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS ATTACHED (INCLUDE ANY RELEVANT INFORMATION, SAMPLES OF INSTRUMENTS TO BE USED.)

DATE PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR/STUDENT

DATE SUPERVISING FACULTY MEMBER

REVIEW RECOMMENDATION:

COMMENTS:

THE PROPOSED STUDY IS (CHECK ONE) APPROVED DISAPPROVED UNDER CATEGORY A OF THE HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH GUIDELINES OF MANSFIELD UNIVERSITY.

EXEMPTION THAT APPLIES:

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DATE REVIEWER

DATE DEPARTMENT CHAIR

- *EXEMPTIONS: #1 – NORMAL EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN SCHOOLS.
 #2 – EDUCATIONAL TESTS WHERE CONFIDENTIALITY IS ASSURED.
 #3 – SURVEYS OR INTERVIEWS.
 #4 – OBSERVATION OF NONSENSITIVE AND LEGAL BEHAVIORS.
 #5 – STUDY OF EXISTING DATA.