

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

Independent Study Policy

Revision History: Formerly a part of the Grading Policies, Honors, and Specialized Courses policy (now called the Grading, Scholastic and Other Honors, and Specialized Courses Policy); established as a standalone policy in October 2023.

Related policies: Incomplete Grade Policy; Academic Policies and Procedures; SCALE Program Policies; Master of Laws Program Policies

Scheduled Review Date: May 2025 (Associate Dean for Research, Student Services Office, and Registrar's Office)

A. Purpose

Eligible students with a demonstrated interest in a subject may complete an independent study project under the guidance of a full-time faculty member ("Faculty Supervisor") with expertise in the subject.

B. Eligibility

A student must be in good academic standing to be eligible to take an independent study project. An eligible student may petition to undertake an independent study project for two credit units. A student is not eligible to register for more than one independent study project for credit toward graduation. The student must submit a proposal ("Proposal") consistent with the provisions of this policy and obtain the approvals required under this policy.

No study will be approved retroactively.

An independent study project does not satisfy the upper-division writing requirement.

Adds/drops for an independent study project will be governed by the same deadlines as listed in the current academic calendar.

C. Independent Study Project Proposal

A student must prepare and submit a signed and dated Proposal of three to five pages. The student should prepare the Proposal in close consultation with the Faculty Supervisor

and after the student has reviewed samples of past proposals that are available on the Student Services Office portal page.

At a minimum, the Proposal must include:

1. The student's statement that the Proposal was prepared in consultation with the Faculty Supervisor and after reviewing past proposals.
2. A description of a discrete legal question, as opposed to a general topic or issue, that the student wishes to explore or investigate, and an initial thesis or hypothesis regarding this question.
3. An explanation of the academic or professional background that makes the student interested in the question and capable of researching it.
4. An explanation of why the question merits an individual study as opposed to in-depth learning offered by seminars or other elective courses.
5. A brief discussion, in light of the existing academic literature relating to the topic, of the importance of the independent study project, and how producing a written paper would contribute something new or original to that literature. Merely reciting or summarizing case law, legislation, or existing academic research or literature will not assist the Faculty Supervisor or the Associate Dean for Research in determining whether to approve a Proposal for an independent study project.
6. A bibliography of research materials that the student consulted in preparing the Proposal.
7. The name of the Faculty Supervisor and a discussion of the Faculty Supervisor's expertise as it relates to the Proposal's question.
8. A date by which the student will complete the independent study project, and an appropriate penalty for failure to meet this deadline (e.g., a gradual grade reduction proportionate to the lateness). The Faculty Supervisor may extend the deadline for good cause upon timely request by the student. Please see the Incomplete Grade Policy for additional information.
9. Any other information that would help the Associate Dean for Research determine whether to approve the independent study project.

D. Required Approvals

Students must obtain prior written approval from the Faculty Supervisor and the Associate Dean for Research for an independent study project. Students must submit their Proposal to the Student Services Office with a completed independent study project form signed by the Faculty Supervisor. The Student Services Office will send the Proposal and cover form to the Associate Dean for Research to seek their approval in writing and will confirm in writing that the student is eligible to apply for an independent study project. The Associate Dean for Research will notify the Student Services Office of their decision and, in case of approval, will sign the cover form. The cover form is available on the Student Services Office portal page.

E. Completing an Independent Study Project

The student is expected to devote the time and resources necessary to complete the independent study project set forth in the Proposal. An independent study project requires 90 hours of work per unit of credit; therefore, two units of independent study project credit require a total of 180 hours of work. The Faculty Supervisor alone will determine whether the student has devoted sufficient time and resources to the project.

At the end of the independent study project, the student must timely submit to the Faculty Supervisor an original paper prepared and written solely by the student. To earn credit, the paper must be of at least 12,000 words, including footnotes, and adequately footnoted, similar to articles published by law journals. The Faculty Supervisor will review and grade the paper, utilizing the same scale used for other courses (e.g., A+, A, etc.) and offering the student constructive comments that explain the grade.

After a grade is assigned and finalized, the student may pursue independent publication of the paper (or some version of the paper) or joint publication with the Faculty Supervisor, if both the student and the Faculty Supervisor agree and the Faculty Supervisor has contributed to the work being submitted for publication. This publication decision belongs to the student alone.

F. Policy Revisions

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.