

## MBA Independent Study Guidelines

Foster School of Business faculty recognize that there may be occasions on which Foster curricular offerings do not align fully with a given student's academic, professional, and personal development goals. In those situations, students may be interested in pursuing independent work for academic credit with the permission and guidance of a Foster faculty member and the MBA Program Office. The following guidelines are designed both to aid you in assessing whether independent study is likely to align with your academic, professional, and personal development goals and to help you navigate the independent study process.

Following the guidelines below, you may register for independent study in either 2 or 4 credit increments, and you may register for a maximum of 4 credits of 600-level independent study coursework during any one quarter. Successful completion of such independent study counts toward fulfillment of one-half or one elective requirement, respectively. The MBA Program Office must approve independent study in excess of 4 credits. A maximum of 8 independent study credits count toward the MBA degree. Although 600-level courses count toward degree requirements, the grades are not included in your cumulative GPA. These 8 credits exclude participation in Field Study projects and independent study credits taken as part of the Buerk Entrepreneurial Law Clinic. For the Entrepreneurial Law Clinic please review requirements with the appropriate Buerk Center staff member. For all other categories of independent study, please review the remainder of this document and submit both an Independent Study Proposal and the Independent Study Credit Request Form. Both documents are available on the Current Students portion of the MBA website.

### *Types of Independent Study and Required Work Product*

Foster faculty envisions three types of independent study, each with its own minimum work product required to earn academic credit. These are:

1. Academic-based independent study in which a student's work mirrors that of an existing course offered at another university. At times a student may be interested in pursuing a traditional academic course that is not offered at the University of Washington. In such a situation the student may secure a syllabus from an existing course at another university, complete the work outlined on the syllabus, and author a paper which critically evaluates the content domain of the course. The paper must follow a standard format for grammar and citation consistent with graduate-level university work (e.g., MLA, APA, etc.) and address the potential application of independent study content to real-world organizational challenges or opportunities. The minimum paper length for a 2-credit independent study course critically evaluating an academic content domain is 10 pages (double-spaced, 11-12 point font, with 1-inch margins), and the minimum for a 4-credit course is 20 pages.

Please note that the paper requirement is in addition to any project paper(s) required as part of the regular course syllabus. If the syllabus specifies an exam in lieu of a project or paper, the student should propose and complete an additional project-based paper as negotiated with the sponsoring faculty member.

2. Research-based independent study for which the final deliverable is a teaching case that may be used in subsequent MBA courses. In this variety of independent study, the student conducts independent research related to a topic of academic and/or professional interest and creates a Harvard-style teaching case to illustrate the concepts in question. For example, in the past a student assessed a market opportunity for a new venture and then wrote a teaching case that described the nature of the opportunity such that readers could assess the opportunity themselves. Please note that the case organization and actors may be either real or fictional, and students should secure the proper release for any non-public material used in the case. The case must follow a standard format for grammar and citation consistent with MBA-level teaching materials, and it must include a teaching note that provides a case synopsis, suggested study questions, a discussion of those questions, and Excel spreadsheets or other supporting analysis materials. If the case is based upon a real organization, the teaching note should also provide a brief overview of what happened in the organization following the period covered by the case. The minimum case length for a 2-credit independent study course is 6 pages of text (double-spaced, 11-12 point font, with 1-inch margins), and the minimum for a 4-credit course is 12 pages. Typical teaching notes run 4-10 pages in length, though you should feel free to use as much space as necessary to convey the information you would like to offer.
3. Application-based independent study which concludes with a persuasive recommendation to a real-world organization outside the University of Washington. Foster faculty appreciate the inherent value of application of rigorous, evidence-based academic content to empirical problems. In this type of independent study, the student addresses a complex, real-world, unstructured challenge or opportunity faced by an organization outside the University of Washington. He or she identifies a specific problem, chooses a goal or goals to serve as the performance standard for alternatives addressing the problem, evaluates viable alternatives, and outlines a recommended course of action complete with implementation plan, timeline, resource requirements, anticipated outcomes, and risks and contingent actions. Net Impact Service Corps, the New Ventures Practicum and independent studies completed with the Jones+Foster Accelerator are considered Application-based independent study projects.

The recommendations must be presented orally to the host organization and also be offered in a written document intended to persuade in order to warrant independent study credit. The minimum paper length for a 2-credit independent study course providing managerial recommendations is 6 pages exclusive of supporting exhibits (double-spaced, 11-12 point font, with 1-inch margins), and the minimum for a 4-credit course is 12 pages exclusive of supporting exhibits. The paper must follow a standard format for grammar and citation consistent with graduate-level university work (e.g., MLA, AP, etc.) and include an executive summary outlining the essence of the logic and rationale supporting the recommendation. In the case of Full-Time students, the written document may be submitted to the MBA Program Office along with the appropriate forms for consideration of fulfillment of a Practical Experience requirement.

#### **Qualifying Organizations**

Students may work with a variety of companies including start-ups, large corporations, and non-profit organizations. Students may not receive independent study credit for a project that they are completing as part of a job or paid internship. Students may not

complete a project for the company where they are currently employed unless the student is doing a project that substantially differs from their current functional role with the company, and the project sponsor is not their supervisor. The approval of such projects will be at the discretion of the MBA Program staff. Students may complete projects for a start-up company of their own. In this case the final presentation should take place in a colloquium to MBA Program staff and a representative from the Buerk Center if appropriate.

**Team projects**, involving more than one student, will be considered with the following stipulations:

- The team may consist of no more than four students.
- The scope must be sufficient to provide meaningful, identifiable tasks and responsibilities for each student. Students must submit a proposal that shows the tasks assigned to each student involved in the project.
- There must be clear evidence of participation and contribution by all team members.

All other requirements will apply. Each student is individually responsible for his or her credit application.

### *The Independent Study Process*

Independent study offers the student a great deal of flexibility with respect to topics to pursue. In exchange, the faculty and staff of the Foster MBA Program expect such study to be truly independent. MBA Program staff provides information to facilitate independent study registration. A faculty sponsor's principal tasks are to provide critical feedback at the beginning and end of the process—first to a student proposal and last to the student's completed work—in order to certify the student's effort as worthy of academic credit. Thus, the student is the primary driver of the independent study process and outcome.

More specifically, the student interested in pursuing independent study credit is responsible for the following:

- Identifying a topic area of interest and communicating with the MBA Program Office Staff  
Meet with the appropriate MBA Program Office staff to discuss your independent study idea and learn the process for pursuing this study option. For academic-based or research-based independent study projects, meet with the Director of Student Affairs (Kara Fichthorn for Evening MBAs, Sigrid Olsen for Full-time MBAs). For application-based independent study projects, meet with the Director of the MBA Strategic Consulting Program (Jen Bauermeister).
- Developing a concise, written proposal and submit it to the MBA Program Office. Using the proposal template, develop a written proposal outlining the basics of the project. Include a description of your proposed area of study, learning goals, the time investment to which you are committing, intermittent and final deliverables to be submitted, a timeline for each deliverable or phase of the project, evaluation criteria for

measuring project success, and a communication plan for interacting with a faculty sponsor. Submit your proposal for review. Academic-based or research-based proposals should be submitted to the Director of Student Affairs. Application-based proposals should be submitted to the Director of the MBA Strategic Consulting Program.

- Finding a Foster School faculty member (not a teaching assistant) willing to sponsor an independent study. Depending upon the nature of your project idea, staff in the MBA Program Office may be willing to offer recommendations about which faculty might best fit your learning goals; however, they are unable to manage communications with faculty or otherwise secure faculty support on your behalf. Please note that the School is unable to guarantee that a faculty member will sponsor a given independent study project. Rather, securing a faculty sponsor is a negotiated process between the student and prospective faculty that may regrettably not end in a match due to faculty availability, interest, or expertise.
- Reaching agreement with the faculty sponsor on your independent study proposal. We advise you to first email a potential faculty sponsor to assess initial interest and availability. Presuming a positive initial reaction, you should email your written proposal and request a follow-up discussion. Doing so lowers the transaction costs of negotiating with faculty, increases the odds of securing a faculty sponsor, and provides a roadmap for your own successful completion of the independent study project. Moreover, you must submit a project proposal signed by both you and your faculty sponsor prior to receiving permission from the MBA Program Office to enroll in any independent study course. **Independent Study Proposal Templates and Credit Request Forms** are available on the MBA Independent Study webpage.
- Completing the Independent Study Proposal and Credit Request Form and bringing the forms to the MBA Program Office. **Independent study registration must be completed by the end of the first week of the quarter for a 4-credit project or by the end of the third week of the quarter for a 2-credit project.** You are advised to begin your search for a faculty sponsor well in advance of the start of the academic quarter in which you seek credit. Course credits for independent study are assigned on an “equivalent credits” basis, e.g., a 2-credit independent study should entail 60-80 hours of effort during the quarter (akin to a traditional 2-credit course that meets in-class for 2 hours per week and entails 4-6 hours of effort outside of the classroom per week). A 4-credit independent study should entail 120-160 hours of effort during the quarter. Please note that this total is exclusive of work developing the proposal and securing faculty sponsorship.

All students must drop off hard copies of the signed Proposal and Credit Request Forms to the MBA Program Office. Once the forms have been received the student will be registered by MBA Program staff.

- Executing the independent study project plan, submitting all deliverables as outlined in the plan, and presenting your findings. Just as with any other Foster course, student deliverables should be submitted to faculty via an agreed medium and on time. The MBA Program Office and Foster School of Business faculty recommend that independent study students meet with their faculty sponsor on a minimum of 3 occasions beyond initial set-up meetings. These include meetings in weeks 3, 6, and 9.

**Submission of the final deliverable—including any presentation to an external company sponsor—must occur by the last day of the final examination week** listed on the University of Washington Academic Calendar in order for the faculty sponsor to evaluate the work product, offer feedback if appropriate, and assign a course grade. Just as in a traditional course; late work jeopardizes the student's ability to earn academic credit for the experience.

Students registered for an Academic-Based or Research-Based independent study must prepare and deliver a brief (10-minute) oral presentation outlining his or her study and findings at the end of quarter Independent Study Colloquium. The presentation should describe the independent study you pursued, explain its significance, and summarize key findings or learnings for a motivated observer who was otherwise not involved with your project. The Colloquium itself is held during the last week of the quarter. The MBA Program Office will send you information about scheduling your Colloquium presentation time when you submit your Independent Study registration materials. Sponsoring faculty are invited but not required to attend, though at least one Foster faculty member or MBA Program staff member will attend.

Each student registered for an Application-Based independent study must prepare and deliver an oral presentation outlining his or her study and findings to the sponsoring company at the end of the project. The presentation should describe the project, explain its significance, and summarize key findings or learnings including a managerial set of recommendations, for your company sponsor. The Director of the MBA Strategic Consulting Program must be in attendance at the final presentation in order for the student to receive credit. The faculty sponsor is not required to attend the final presentation with the company. If the company is unable to host the presentation or attend a presentation on campus, the student must present at the Independent Study Colloquium referenced below.

A student who does not present a satisfactory oral presentation to their sponsor company or at the Colloquium will be ineligible to receive academic credit that quarter. Presuming that he or she has otherwise made satisfactory progress on the project, a grade of I (incomplete) will be assigned until the student has completed the presentation requirement. Please note that this means the student's grade will be delayed by one full quarter (which in some cases could delay a student's planned graduation).

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