



January 14, 2014

To: Academic Deans, University Council on Academic Affairs and Assessment (UCAAA), Crossroads Committee, Department Chairs

From: Jocelyn Milner, Director, Academic Planning and Institutional Research

RE: UW-Madison Policy on Independent/Directed Study for Undergraduates

I am writing with formal notice that the University Academic Planning Council approved a policy on independent/directed study for undergraduates. Most of the pieces of this policy already existed in separate and disparate policies or guidelines or in general practice. However, this is the first time UW-Madison has assembled all of the policy related to undergraduate independent study into one document. We ask that you familiarize yourself with the guidelines.

The goal of this effort was to provide a single source of guidance and advice about good standards for policy and practice for independent/directed study. As noted in the policy, a fundamental value of directed study is to be a high-quality mentored learning experience that includes regular instructional contact between the instructor and the student. By their nature, these experiences are highly variable and common expectations ensure the integrity of the student experience across the breadth of the university offerings.

This office (APIR) is charged with the implementation of the policy and running routine audits. Starting this semester we will be checking in with schools/colleges and departments and making efforts to bring our offerings in line with the policy.

The policy and supporting documents are posted online at: <https://kb.wisc.edu/vesta/page.php?id=36263>. The policy covers the following major topics: A. Common values and expectations; B. Who may be an instructor for directed study?; C. Responsibilities of the directed study instructor; D. Enrollment timing and limits; E. Plan of study; F. Assigning appropriate levels of credits; G. Appropriate use of course numbers for directed study courses; H. Directed study courses may not be used for group instruction; I. Limits on Enrollment for Instructors; J. Policy Hierarchy.

Here are some of the key features of this policy:

- Directed study instructors must have the appropriate academic credentials to teach the specific course and they must hold a UW-Madison instructor appointment. Each department is obligated to establish criteria and maintain a list of instructors who may oversee directed study in their subject area. (Section B)
- The instructor oversees the student's learning experience and is expected to establish the instructional criteria for the credit awarded, define the instructional contact, and approve the student projects and student learning experience. The student will integrate this information

into the plan of study (described in section E). The instructor is responsible for evaluation of student work and determines the appropriate grade. (Section C)

- Students are responsible for initiating and developing arrangements with the instructor. Students make the request to the instructor, who may accept or decline. The arrangements should be made in advance of the course add deadline for the given term. Students who enroll late will need additional approvals at the departmental and school/college level. (Section D)
- Students are responsible for preparing a written study plan, in agreement and consistent with the responsibilities of the instructor. Both the student and the instructor keep a copy of the agreement as important reference document; the instructor may be asked to make the agreement available for review by the dean's office, especially if the instructor is the instructor for a large number of directed study students (section I) or if the student seeks to add the directed study course late in the semester (section D). Many schools/colleges have a standard form that is used to document the plan of study. (Section E)
- The number of credits the student earns should be carefully considered and be consistent with federal guidelines about credit requirements. Credit levels must be justified in the plan of study and must be consistent with the standards of the discipline. Directed study encompasses a broad range of student learning experiences (examples include laboratory work, research projects, creative productions, faculty-supervised peer-mentor experiences, and academically supervised internships). No single standard can apply to all of the possible experiences. See Section F of the guidelines for more detail and examples.
- Directed/independent study courses are identified by number, and are required to have a middle digit "9". Typically, X99 is used for independent/directed study. Departments should make a range of numbers available to serve undergraduates at all levels (e.g., 199 and 299 for elementary level, 399 for intermediate level, 699 for advanced level). (Section G)
- Directed/independent study courses must not to be used for group instruction. This will ensure that students receive appropriate documentation of their learning experience in their formal record and on their transcript. If instructors are meeting with groups of students on a regularly scheduled basis, the instructor must arrange for the students to be enrolled in a group instruction course (lecture, seminar, discussion, lab) instead of directed/independent study. (Section H)
- Because of the expected amount of faculty effort to teach directed study students, the number of undergraduates enrolled in directed study with an instructor will be set to 40 student credit hours of undergraduate instruction in directed study per instructor per semester. Annual audits will be conducted and if audits identify instructors who exceed this threshold, the school/college and home department will be contacted to confirm that the instructor is meeting all of the academic standards outlined in this policy and that the high levels of directed study have been approved.

Implementation of the policy will involve the implementation of some administrative rules that will be applied through the Office of the Registrar. These administrative rules will help keep course offerings aligned with the policy. Specifically, the following limits will be applied starting in Fall 2015:

1. Enrollment in an undergraduate course numbered x98 or x99 or 691 or 692 will require consent of instructor (indicated in the course catalog entry),
2. The course will not be provided a room assignment, and
3. The component type will always be set to IND, independent.

Draft versions of these guidelines were circulated to all schools/colleges for comment during the 2012-13 academic year and were revised several times on the basis of feedback from colleagues all over campus including faculty and faculty committees, school/college dean's offices, and from the Ad Hoc Interdivisional Curriculum Committee (now the University Curriculum Committee). I would like to thank the dozens of individuals who provided feedback and ideas of improvement when this policy was in development.

The policy was formally adopted at the May 9, 2013 meeting of the UAPC (<http://apir.wisc.edu/uapc201213may.htm>).

Please let me ([jmilner@wisc.edu](mailto:jmilner@wisc.edu)) or Michelle Young ([meyoung@wisc.edu](mailto:meyoung@wisc.edu)) know if you have any questions.

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