

Boston College Law School  
Guidelines for Independent Study

Project Proposal: The independent study option is designed to accommodate projects that are initiated and will be completed independently by students who have significant research interests that cannot be met in the context of existing courses. Accordingly, students should have an interest that is reasonably well defined before approaching a faculty member for supervision. The first step for the student is to prepare a preliminary proposal for a project to submit to a potential faculty supervisor by email. The proposal should set forth a potential topic, noting the background research the student has conducted. The student should request a time to meet with the potential supervisor to discuss the proposed project. When approaching potential supervisors, students should keep in mind that a faculty member may not supervise more than 3 students in independent study projects at any one time.

Topic Development: The initial meeting with the potential supervisor will help to identify an interesting and focused problem for further development. An independent research project should produce more than a summary of the state of the law or scholarship in a particular area. Students should engage in independent analysis and seek to advance the discussion in the literature. After the initial meeting with a potential supervisor, the student should submit a brief (one paragraph to one page) précis/abstract to the supervisor for approval and comment. At this point, if the faculty member agrees to supervise the project, the student should complete an Independent Study Approval Form [\[hyperlink\]](#) for the supervisor's approval. The Independent Study Approval Form should then be submitted to Academic & Student Services by the deadline set forth in the Academic Calendar for approval by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

Grading and Credits: The Independent Study Approval form must indicate the number of credits requested, whether the student seeks to use the paper to satisfy the Upper Level Writing requirement, and whether the project will be graded or pass/fail. A student can receive a maximum of six independent study credits during their second and third years of law school (a maximum of three credits in any one semester). Students may not receive independent study credit for work for which they are paid or for which they otherwise will or have received credit, and no independent study project will satisfy the course, seminar, independent writing requirements of any other course.

The student must produce 15 double-spaced pages (with customary font size and margins) of independent writing per credit requested. Students who wish to use their independent study paper to satisfy the Upper Level Writing requirement must register for at least two credits and write a paper of at least 30 pages in length. In addition, to satisfy the Upper Level Writing requirement the independent study must be taken for a grade (not pass/fail).

If the proposal is approved by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, the faculty supervisor and student will be notified. If the proposal is not approved the student will be notified and will have an opportunity to revise the form as necessary, or propose an alternative project.

Assignments and Deadlines: A Canvas site will be created for the independent study project, which the faculty member will customize so that the student can submit all components of the independent study project via Canvas.

For a 2 or 3 credit independent study, the component assignments will typically include:

Reading List: During the first three weeks of the semester, the student should submit via Canvas a bibliography that lists the primary and secondary sources the student plans to review and cite in the paper.

Detailed Outline: By the sixth week of the semester, the student should submit an outline via Canvas and schedule a follow-up meeting with the supervisor. The 3-5 page outline should be a roadmap of the arguments the student plans to make, the cases and commentary on which the student will rely and the remaining questions the student aims to answer.

Rough Draft: By the tenth week of the semester, the student should submit a first draft to the supervisor via Canvas. The draft should be substantially complete and should set forth and support the student's thesis. The supervisor will provide comments on the paper to guide revisions for the final draft. Revising the paper in response to the supervisor's comments will greatly improve the student's final product, and is necessary to satisfy the law school's Upper Level Writing requirement.

Final Paper: The final paper that is submitted for a grade/credit must be of publishable quality. It should be submitted to the supervisor via Canvas by the deadline established by the faculty supervisor (but no later than the final day of exams for the semester in which the independent study was conducted). The final paper should be fully cited with citations in proper Bluebook form and carefully proofread to qualify for independent study credit.

For a 1 credit independent study, the supervisor and the student will agree upon appropriate component assignments and deadlines which will be submitted to the supervisor via Canvas.