

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
INDEPENDENT STUDY GUIDELINES**

PURPOSE OF INDEPENDENT STUDIES

Independent studies (listed in the Undergraduate Catalog as SOC 390, Individualized Instruction I and SOC 391, Individualized Instruction II) provide students with a means to earn credit toward a major or minor in Sociology outside the structure of a regular course. They may be used to enable a student to undertake a learning project of personal or scholarly interest that s/he has already started working on in a class or that isn't included in any class that is currently being offered. Ordinarily, a student may not take an independent study instead of registering for a course on the same topic.

STUDENT ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible to take SOC 390 and 391, the student must have completed at least 60 credit hours of coursework, including at least 15 credit hours in Sociology. An independent study proposal is much more likely to be approved if the student has an overall grade point average of at least 3.0, and can successfully document (on the Independent Study Proposal) that s/he has adequate preparation (combination of course work and life experience) to undertake the work. Thus the student is expected to have successfully completed Sociology 100J, Sociology 210E, and any other combination of upper-level required and elective courses appropriate for the proposed activity. For more details, please refer to the next section.

TYPES OF INDEPENDENT STUDIES

In general, USM Sociology independent studies follow one of two formats:

One format focuses on guided reading. In consultation with the faculty mentor, the student chooses a number of readings (books and/or journal articles) around a topical theme or question. Completion of learning outcomes is assessed by preparation of a written document, which may be an annotated bibliography or a literature review. For this option, successful completion of Sociology 300, Sociological Theory, and any upper-level elective course(s) relevant to the independent study topic or question is recommended.

The second format is explicitly grounded in empirical research, and involves the student developing a realistic proposal that includes one or more research questions, a proposed method (including appropriate discussion of data availability and research ethics), and a workplan. Completion of learning

outcomes is assessed by preparation of a research paper, with an introduction, focused literature review, a methods section, and findings. For this option, successful completion of Sociology 301, Qualitative Research Methods OR Sociology 307D, Quantitative Research Methods, along with any upper-level elective course(s) relevant to the independent study topic or question is recommended.

Either of these formats may also include the expectation of an oral presentation to an appropriate audience (for example, at the annual USM undergraduate student research conference, "Thinking Matters").

WHAT'S A CREDIT HOUR WORTH?

Students may take from 1-6 credit hours of independent study. As a rule of thumb, each credit hour counts for 3-4 hours of work every week, so that a 3 credit hour independent study entails 9-12 hours a week of work, a 6 credit hour independent study entails 18-24 hours a week of work.

Frequency and duration of contact with a faculty mentor is negotiated between the student and the faculty mentor. It is expected that the student will maintain at least weekly contact with the faculty mentor, and should anticipate meeting with that person for at least an hour every other week during the semester(s) in which the independent study is taking place.

CHOOSING A FACULTY MENTOR

A member of the USM Sociology faculty **MUST** agree to serve as mentor for your independent study before the Department will consider your proposal. This person will be responsible for overseeing the conduct of the independent study from inception to completion and will assign an appropriate letter grade.

Ideally, your faculty mentor should have some background and interest in the topic of your independent study. It is recommended that you begin making arrangements with a faculty mentor early in the semester before you would like to register for SOC 390. Typically, SOC 391 would be used if you and your faculty mentor decide that you should continue the course of study for a second semester.

REVIEW AND APPROVAL PROCESS

Sociology Department policies specify that the Department (faculty members) must approve all proposals for independent studies. Please plan to prepare and submit your proposal in the semester **before** you would like to register for

independent study credits. The last Sociology Department meeting of the fall semester is typically in early December; the last Sociology Department meeting of the spring semester is typically in early May. You should begin the process by preparing a rough draft of your idea and asking a faculty member whose opinion you value to give you feedback. That person may agree to be your mentor or may suggest that you approach another faculty member about playing that role. You will need to complete a Proposal for Independent Study (available on the Department website) that members of the Department can review. Your proposed mentor will bring the proposal to a Department meeting and will convey to you the response from the faculty. The response may be:

Approve

Approve with recommendations

Not approve

OTHER INDEPENDENT LEARNING OPTIONS FOR SOCIOLOGY MAJORS AND MINORS

In addition to independent studies the USM Sociology Department offers undergraduate teaching assistantship opportunities (SOC 450).

You may also consider a cooperative learning experience, offered through Career Services and Professional Life Development. These will give you general elective credit, rather than credit toward your Sociology major or minor.

PLEASE NOTE: Sociology Department policies specify that majors can take no more than 9 credit hours total from a combination of internship (SOC 395), teaching assistantships, and independent studies.