**MBA Independent Study**

The Independent Study is available to students who have completed their first semester to engage in independent work for academic credit over the course of one semester and with the oversight of a full-time Faculty Advisor or Adjunct Professor. The nature and extent of this independent study are determined by the student and a Faculty Advisor. A student may register for an Independent Study worth either 1.5 or 3.0 credits, and MBA students may count a combined maximum of 6 credits of graduate-level courses from other Columbia schools, Independent Study, and Cross-Cultural Seminar toward the MBA degree. In order to apply for an Independent Study, students must be in good academic standing. For details, please review the [MBA degree requirements](https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/mba-students/academic-essentials/courses/degree-requirements).

**Independent Study may not be used to obtain credit through auditing arrangements or to circumvent course capacities and stated pre-/co-requisites.**

**Types**

The following are recommended categories of Independent Study and typical scope and deliverables.

| **CATEGORY** | **TYPE** | **TYPICAL SCOPE** | **TYPICAL DELIVERABLE** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Academic Study | Independent Research | Student researches an industry, company, country, or other relevant topic of interest | Paper, PowerPoint presentation, Case Study describing the analysis and its business implications (sometimes including financial model / data analysis) |
| Class Extension | Student engages in a project our coursework that builds upon learning from a CBS class they completed | Paper or PowerPoint presentation demonstrating applied learnings and self-reflection |
| Work Study | Field Study Project\* | Students engage with a client or group of clients on a discrete project requested by the company(ies) / organization(s); Often conducted in association with CBS programs, courses, or student clubs | Paper or PowerPoint presentation for the client, usually accompanied by an in-person presentation, and sometimes including financial model / data analysis; Plus additional deliverable for CBS program, course, or student club connecting field study learning to academic coursework |
| CBS Academic Improvement Project\* | Students engage with a CBS faculty member on a project related to improving academics which may include research study, curriculum feedback, and case or curriculum development | Paper, PowerPoint presentation, Case Study, Curriculum, Faculty Recommendation, New Course Proposal, Pilot Course Feedback |
| Developing Your Own Start-Up\* | Students perform market sizing, prototyping, or other analysis and for their own existing or potential business ventures | Paper, PowerPoint presentation, Business Plan, sometimes accompanied by a presentation to potential investors and/or financial model |
| *Internship\*\** | *Students who have been hired by a company or organization for a discrete scope of work use that scope of work to extend their CBS academic learning.*  **An Independent Study internship can only be taken for P/F grading and will not count towards degree requirements.** | *5-10 page paper or PowerPoint presentation summarizing the work they did, how they applied or can connect learnings from CBS coursework to their on-the-job work, and insights from their experience (note: providing only the deliverable created for the company will not suffice; students must get advance permission from their employer to share information accessed during the internship which may be subject to NDA)* |

\* Students may participate in Independent Study via project teams if appropriate. Independent studies should typically involve one student, but group studies involving multiple students may be considered on a case-by-case basis. *Note: The time commitment per student should match that of a single student study and the deliverable will likely be more extensive than that of a single student study. Team Projects should typically receive a maximum 1.5 credit as the amount of work per student would likely not reach ~72 hours.*

\*\* Independent Study is not a means for earning academic credit for an internship.

**Note: An Independent Study internship can only be taken for P/F grading and will not count towards degree requirements.**

There are important considerations dependant on a student’s immigration status:

International students who are F-1 Visa holders seeking to pursue off-campus work should not use this Independent Study process after they have completed two semesters of study but instead use the [Curricular Practical Training (CPT)](http://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/mba-students/academic-essentials/policies/curricular-practical-training) application process for which they would then be eligible.

Domestic students should be aware that unpaid internships can be a gray area with respect to U.S. labor laws ([see here](https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/legal-and-compliance/employment-law/pages/is-your-unpaid-internship-program-legal.aspx)). Independent Study via an internship work study is based entirely on the academic deliverable created from the internship experience; it is not credit for the internship employment (time and work product) itself.

**Independent Study Origination**

In most cases, the study request will be originated by a student (based on their own academic or work study idea or in conjunction with an internship opportunity). In some cases, a CBS faculty member or administrator may identify a study and solicit student engagement. In the latter case, we highly recommend faculty members use a selective application process.

**Faculty Advisor**

The Faculty Advisor will thought partner and agree on the project prior to the student submitting the application and then will be available as a resource and for feedback during the Independent Study; receive, review, and give feedback on the final deliverable; determine and submit a final grade. Faculty Advisors will dedicate at least 3-10 hours to the student as agreed upon up front.

The Faculty Directory can be searched by name, division or area of expertise, and is a useful resource when exploring possible faculty sponsors.

Faculty members can accept or decline Independent Studies based on their discretion and in consideration of the quality of the proposed study and the faculty member’s availability during the semester requested.  Faculty members are allowed to sponsor no more than 9 credits (6 for Junior Faculty) of Independent Study supervision per faculty member per semester. Each Independent Study supervision must be approved by the Divisional Chair.

**Credit and Course Delivery**

The student and Faculty Advisor should agree on the credit hours associated with the Independent Study prior to submitting the application. A 3.0 credit is appropriate for studies that will include about 50-70 hours of work or more during the semester. A 1.5 credit is appropriate for work that will include about 25-40 hours of work during the semester.

Independent Study is offered and classified as a Hybrid/HyFlex course offering.

*Note: Independent Studies based on internships should typically receive a maximum 1.5 credit as the additional study work on top of the internship itself would likely not reach ~72 hours.*

*Note: Team Projects should typically receive a maximum 1.5 credit as the amount of work per student would likely not reach ~72 hours.*

*Note: For three-credit (3.0) Independent Studies, you must register the entirety of those credits in the semester for which you have the credit capacity. "Rollover" or split registrations are not permitted.*

**Deliverable and Grading**

Upon completion of the independent study, students must submit their deliverable(s) to the Faculty Advisor.

Upon reviewing the final deliverable, the Faculty Advisor will communicate and submit a final grade for the Independent Study. The grading scale is as follows and is not subject to a curve: H: 10, H-: 9, HP+: 8, HP: 7, HP-: 6, P1+: 5, P1: 4, P1-: 3, LP: 1, F: 0. The Faculty Advisor has discretion over grading and will likely give grades of H (-) for projects that exceed expectations, HP (+/-) for projects that meet expectations, and P/LP/F for projects that fall short of expectations.

Note: Independent Study internships can only be taken for P/F grading and will NOT count towards degree requirements.

Students are expected to commit to the original project plan approved by the Faculty Advisor; any change to the topic or scope of the project must be agreed to by the professor. Students who fail to obtain this approval risk not receiving academic credit for the course.

**Process for Student-Originated Independent Study Application**

1. Draft the purpose, scope, and deliverable(s) for your study, this should include fieldwork requirements, frequency of meetings, and parameters for evaluation.
2. Identify a relevant potential Faculty Advisor and draft rationale for why this Faculty Advisor is the best fit to sponsor you. Consider how your study might be mutually beneficial for you and the Faculty Advisor based on their coursework and focus of research or industry expertise.
3. Reach out to the potential Faculty Advisor directly to ask if they are interested and available to sponsor your study (see sample template below)Sample Template
4. If potential Faculty Advisor agrees, meet to discuss and refine your study proposal based on your conversation.
   1. If potential Faculty Advisor does not agree to sponsor your study, consider reaching out to a different faculty member.
   2. If potential Faculty Advisor does agree to sponsor your study, use the form below to submit the Independent Study application. Note that you should prepare to attach a copy of an email or signed letter in which the Faculty Advisor agrees to sponsor your study.

**Independent Study Application Form & Application Deadline**

If you are an MBA student, please use [this form](https://columbia.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5bRvBFXFlY5HUZ7) to submit an Independent Study application. This form will be reviewed and approved by the selected Faculty Advisor and Department Chair for appropriateness and rigor and processed by the Office of Student Affairs. Applications must be submitted no later than the last day of A-Term Add/Drop (refer to the [Course Match homepage](https://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/mba-students/academic-essentials/registrar/course-match) for registration dates) for the semester you are requesting enrollment. If you have any questions, please email the Office of Student Affairs at [osa@gsb.columbia.edu](mailto:osa@gsb.columbia.edu).

**If you are an EMBA student, please refer to**[**this page**](http://www8.gsb.columbia.edu/emba-students/academic-essentials/classes/independent-study)**for application instructions.**