

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

Independent Study Policy

Faculty policy.

Revision History: Formerly a part of the Grading Policies, Honors, and Specialized Courses policy (now called the Grading and Scholastic Honors Policy); established as a standalone policy in October 2023; technical edits made in December 2025.

Related form and policies: Independent Study Project Form; Determination of Credit Hours for Coursework; Incomplete Grade Policy; Grading and Scholastic Honors Policy; SCALE Program Policies; Master of Laws Programs Policies; Graduation Requirements Policy (Section D, for papers used to satisfy the upper-division writing requirement); Maximum and Minimum J.D. Units Policy (Including ABA Standard 311(a) Classroom Credit Hours Requirement) (under development)

Scheduled Review Date: May 2027 (Associate Dean for Research, Student Services Office, and Registrar's Office)

A. Purpose

Eligible students with a demonstrated interest in a subject may complete a for-credit independent study project under the guidance of a full-time faculty member ("Faculty Supervisor") with expertise in the subject.

B. Eligibility

To register for an independent study project, for two credits, a student must:

- be in good academic standing;
- submit a proposal ("Proposal") consistent with the provisions of this policy;
- submit a completed Independent Study Project Form; and
- obtain the approvals required under this policy.

A student is not eligible to register for more than one independent study project for credit toward graduation.

Independent study projects will not be approved retroactively. In addition, independent study projects only satisfy the upper-division writing requirement under extraordinary circumstances, such as the inability to meet the requirement through existing courses. For more information on the upper-division writing requirement, refer to the *Graduation*

Requirements Policy.

Adds/drops deadlines for independent study projects follow the dates published in the relevant academic calendar.

C. Independent Study Project Proposal

The student should prepare the Proposal in close consultation with the Faculty Supervisor, after the student has reviewed samples of past proposals that are available on the Student Services Office portal page. The student must indicate whether they have previously conducted research on the same topic. The Faculty Supervisor will then assess whether the Proposal is sufficiently distinct to qualify as an independent study project. After receiving the Faculty Supervisor's approval, the student must submit their signed and dated Proposal of three to five pages, along with the Independent Study Project Form, to the Student Services Office.

At a minimum, the Proposal must include:

1. The student's statement that the Proposal was prepared in consultation with the Faculty Supervisor and after reviewing past proposals.
2. A description of a discrete legal question, as opposed to a general topic or issue, that the student wishes to explore or investigate, and an initial thesis or hypothesis regarding this question.
3. An explanation of the academic or professional background that makes the student interested in the question and capable of researching it.
4. An explanation of why the question merits an individual study as opposed to in-depth learning offered by seminars or other elective courses.
5. A brief discussion, in light of the existing academic literature relating to the topic, of the importance of the independent study project, and how producing a written paper would contribute something new or original to that literature. Merely reciting or summarizing case law, legislation, or existing academic research or literature will not assist the Faculty Supervisor or the Co-Associate Deans for Research in determining whether to approve a Proposal for an independent study project.
6. A bibliography of research materials that the student consulted in preparing the Proposal.
7. The name of the Faculty Supervisor and a discussion of the Faculty Supervisor's expertise as it relates to the Proposal's question.
8. A date by which the student will complete the independent study project, and an appropriate penalty for failure to meet this deadline (e.g., a gradual grade reduction proportionate to the lateness). The Faculty Supervisor may extend the deadline for good cause upon timely request by the student. Please see the *Incomplete Grade Policy* for additional information.
9. Any other information that would help the Co-Associate Deans for Research determine whether to approve the independent study project.

D. Required Approvals

To pursue an independent study project, students must obtain prior written approval from their Faculty Supervisor and at least one of the Associate Deans for Research. To initiate this process, students must submit a completed Independent Study Project Form (available on the Student Services Office portal page), signed by the Faculty Supervisor, along with their Proposal to the Student Services Office. The Student Services Office will forward the materials to the Co-Associate Deans for Research for review. Once one Associate Dean approves the Proposal in writing, the Student Services Office will confirm the student's eligibility, and the approving Associate Dean for Research will sign the cover form. If the student wishes to change or modify the Proposal, the student must seek approval from the Faculty Supervisor and resubmit the Proposal to the Student Services Office.

E. Completing an Independent Study Project

The student is expected to devote the time and resources necessary to complete the independent study project described in the Proposal. An independent study project requires 90 hours of work per unit of credit; therefore, two units of independent study project credit require a total of 180 hours of work. The Faculty Supervisor alone will determine whether the student has devoted sufficient time and resources to the project based on scheduled progress updates.

At the end of the independent study project and by the agreed-upon deadline, which must be before the last exam day of the semester or term, the student must submit an original paper prepared and written solely by the student to the Faculty Supervisor. To earn credit, the paper must be at least 12,000 words, including adequate footnotes, similar to articles published by law journals. The Faculty Supervisor will review and grade the paper, using the letter scale (e.g., A+, A, etc.) and offering the student constructive comments that explain the grade.

After a grade is assigned and finalized, the student may pursue independent publication of the paper (or some version of the paper) or joint publication with the Faculty Supervisor, if both the student and the Faculty Supervisor agree and the Faculty Supervisor has contributed to the work being submitted for publication. This publication decision belongs to the student alone.

F. Policy Revisions

Southwestern expressly reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.