

Independent Study in Mexico

Cross Listings and Credit Options

Students may choose to register for credit in any of the following departments:

- Business (BUS)
- Environmental Studies (ENV)
- History (HIS)
- Interdisciplinary Studies (INS)
- Marketing (MKT)
- Political Science (POL)
- Religion (REL)
- Spanish (SPA)
- Women's Studies (WST)
- Youth and Family Ministries (YFM)

However, students seeking Spanish credit must complete all assignments in Spanish and seek approval from the chair of their Spanish departments before registering, as there are numerous other Spanish course options.

Course Description

The independent study option allows students who are highly self-motivated and able to work independently to conduct independent research during the second half of the semester. The independent research may consist of an ethnographic study, participant observation research, other field-based research, or independent reading, combined with other more experiential methods. This course option is particularly aimed at students who want to carry out research in a cross cultural environment or who want to begin research related to a senior thesis or capstone project. Students who register for this seminar must submit a preliminary independent study proposal that includes a reading list by December 1 at the latest. Students must bring related books and articles with them to Mexico as it is difficult to find sources here. Once in Cuernavaca, the student and instructor or advisor will develop a syllabus and independent study design according to the student's project needs. The student will then be responsible for carrying out the agreed upon assignments.

Before beginning their independent research, students will participate in an orientation session with the faculty advisor, at which time they will discuss research methodology and ethical issues in research. Students must follow all ethical guidelines. Those who fail to do so will not pass the course.

Each student will collaborate with the faculty advisor who will supervise the study and provide a few suggestions regarding experiential activities related to the topic. Students will meet with their faculty advisor at least six times over the course of the semester. However, students should be prepared to work independently and responsibly.

Responsibilities of the Faculty Advisor

1. Meet with independent study students to discuss their proposals and provide feedback.
2. Discuss ethical guidelines for research and tips regarding research design for realistic projects within Mexico.
3. Provide a few articles on research methods, as necessary.
4. Give suggestions regarding local resources and provide names and phone numbers of contacts for students to set up their own interviews and/or service-learning projects, depending upon the project.
5. Meet with the students periodically – at least six times over the course of the semester. Near the beginning of the semester the faculty advisor will give the students a tentative schedule of dates for such meetings.

6. Read students' assignments, grade them, and provide feedback on the content of the assignments. The faculty advisor is not responsible for correcting spelling or grammatical errors in Spanish for those students who complete assignments in Spanish.

Responsibilities of the Student

1. Work independently.
2. Find and read adequate books, articles, and internet resources regarding the chosen topic.
3. Make phone calls to set up interviews and/or service-learning projects or other work related to the independent study.
4. Pay for books, articles, library fees, photocopies, transportation, translations, and any other expenses related to the independent study.
5. Follow deadlines established by the faculty advisor. If the student needs to negotiate a deadline due to illness or other circumstances, s/he must contact the instructor in advance of the original deadline.
6. E-mail or call the advisor to ask questions or set up a meeting if s/he needs additional assistance.
7. Complete all assignments in Spanish, IF s/he is registered for Spanish credit.
8. Submit an extra copy of all assignments to the designated Spanish professor (if applicable). It is highly recommended that students who are registered for Spanish credit submit their assignments to the Spanish professor in time to receive feedback prior to the deadlines established by the faculty advisor so that they can make corrections before submitting work to their advisor.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Learners will:

1. Design and carry out an effective research proposal and plan, complete with research tools and instruments.
2. Discuss the ethics of field-based research and follow ethical guidelines.
3. Explore in depth a topic of personal and academic interest.
4. Record observations and insights from their research in a field journal or reading log.
5. Develop skills in writing a research paper and presenting their research findings in such a way that it could be presented at an academic or professional conference.
6. Compile a professional portfolio that portrays the success of their research.
7. Potential Research Methods
8. Students may choose to do any one or combination of the following:
9. Read books and articles about the topic of interest.
10. Visit museums, archeological sites, or other locations where will help the student learn more about the research topic.
11. Watch videos, films, or TV programs related to the topic.
12. Complete volunteer/service-learning work related to the independent study topic.
13. Conduct participant/observation research in a particular organization or community related to the research topic.*
14. Conduct interviews or record oral histories of people relevant to the topic of interest.*

*Please note: If a student does not have very strong Spanish language skills, s/he should probably consider taking a second Spanish course or conducting an independent study that will not require extensive interviews or participant observation research. If a student wishes to conduct extensive interviews even without a strong grasp of the Spanish language, then s/he will need to hire a translator at approximately US\$10/hour (at their own expense) in order to conduct the interviews. This should be taken into consideration by students as they design their independent study. If a student does decide to conduct interviews, s/he will need to discuss the ethics of ethnographic research with his/her advisor and supervisor