9. DEPARTMENTAL POLICIES ON INDEPENDENT STUDIES AND DIRECTED READINGS COURSES

Introduction
This section outlines the department’s policies on taking these options. Independent Studies and Readings courses can be taken at the 300- or 400-level, with the actual course numbers being either JMC or SP 391 and 491, and JMC or SP 386 and 486, respectively. The department permits students to take these courses only when a need exists that cannot be met another way. These courses provide a useful option to help our students meet certain graduation requirements, but in most instances they are less desirable than regular course offerings. The interaction and other learning that arises from regular classroom courses offers benefits that simply cannot be obtained in Independent Studies or Readings courses.

What are Independent Studies and Readings Courses?
An Independent Study is a course designed to meet a student’s individual needs. Most commonly, the student cannot take a course when it is offered, perhaps because he or she is away from campus on a study abroad program. Students also apply for this because a failing grade was obtained in the course and the course is not scheduled to be offered again before the student graduates. Some students wish to do extra work in a particular area, going into more depth than was possible in courses he or she has already taken.

An Independent Study is designed either to parallel an existing course or be tailored to the student’s needs and interests, and will include elements such as readings, exams, research papers, reflection papers, journal items, or other components that might be elements of a regular course. An Independent Study typically gets a letter grade. While professors will vary in their requirements, the intent is to reflect in the workload the college’s expectation that a minimum of 40 hours of work is required for each semester credit earned. Thus, a typical Independent Study of three hours should require a minimum of 120 hours of work. Independent Studies require completion of a form outlining the professor’s requirement. This form must be approved by the department chair, as well as the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and the registrar.

Readings courses, by contrast, are based on readings of books, journal articles and other items, and possibly viewing of video material, on a topic to which the student wishes to gain greater exposure. These courses are graded on a Satisfactory/Not Satisfactory basis. Professors’ expectations may vary when directing Readings courses, but a rule of thumb is that faculty will expect four books or equivalent work for each hour of semester credit. No form is needed to complete a Readings course.

Departmental requirements
To take an Independent Study or a Readings course, you must meet the following requirements:

1. Be registered as an official major or minor in the department.
2. Have an overall GPA of at least 2.5.
3. Have taken at least three courses in the department, so professors know you have the academic ability to work independently.

Other Considerations
In addition, please bear in mind that relatively few of our courses can be taken as Independent Studies. For example, courses such as JMC 125-Writing for Mass Media, and JMC 242-Editing, or SP 113-Interpersonal Communication, and SP 210-Introduction to Public Speaking, cannot be taken independently. If you think you might miss a regularly offered course because you expect to be away on a study abroad program, for example, talk to your departmental advisor soon to explore the best ways of dealing with your situation.

Professors try to be especially flexible in meeting students’ needs for required upper-division courses that are offered only every two years. But any time you are contemplating taking an Independent Study or Readings course, plan ahead. Also, please be aware that no individual faculty member is required to work with you on your request. Your obligation is to persuade a faculty member of your need for such a course and to secure his or her commitment to working with you on it. Please note that only regular full-time and part-time faculty (not adjunct faculty) can oversee Independent Studies and Readings courses. Individual faculty may have additional guidelines that indicate how they handle these courses.

Variations from these policies are permitted only with written permission from the department chair and will be granted only in exceptional circumstances.