

**Department of Geography and Planning – Independent Study Courses**  
**GPHY 594/3.0; GPHY 595/6.0**  
**(there are more course numbers but these are the two most popular ones)**  
**General Information**

Exceptionally qualified students entering their third-or fourth-year may take a program of independent study. These are intended for students who want to do an intensive study of a specific topic or research question in a self-directed study context. For admission you must have the consent of a supervising member of the Department and permission of the Undergraduate Committee based on the submission of a proposal and consent/approval form.

A Department may approve an independent study program without permitting it to be counted toward a concentration in that Department. It is, consequently, the responsibility of students taking such programs to ensure that the concentration requirements for a degree will be met.

The accepted learning hours in an undergraduate course is 110 to 130 hours per 3.0 unit course. The learning hours for courses with a weight of 6.0 units would be double.

**Some of the advantages of independent study courses are:**

- provide flexibility in topic selection to match an area of interest;
- allow in-depth study of a topic when an advanced course does not exist;
- provide flexibility with respect to timetabling (i.e. no lecture schedule and there are fall, winter and fall/winter registration options);
- provide opportunity to work closely with a faculty member;
- provide possibility to work with a faculty member in established area of research;
- demonstrate ability to work independently, manage time, meet deadlines, etc.;
- provide students with a thesis or thesis-like experience in preparation for graduate studies.

**What are the Steps needed to register in a 500 level course?**

**Step 1: *Find a Supervisor***

Identify a continuing faculty member in the Department of Geography and Planning with whom to complete the independent study or thesis.

Faculty members who teach particular courses in a given area of study (e.g. physical geography, human geography, urban planning, geographic information systems) are the individuals who are most likely to supervise independent study/thesis projects in that area.

A few other relevant notes when seeing a supervisor:

- Not all faculty members are interested in supervising independent studies or theses. It is their right to make that choice.
- Most faculty members will not supervise more than two students in a given academic year.
- Faculty members can be on sabbatical for some or all of the academic year. This will affect their willingness to take on student supervision.
- Leaving the decision to do an independent study or honours thesis until the fall may result in not being able to find a supervisor. It is recommended that you make the contact prior to the end of the current academic year so that you have the greatest likelihood of being able to find a supervisor.

## **Step 2: Registration Process**

- Consult with your supervisor, and identify and define a topic to pursue;
- The supervisor and student must submit a proposal to the Undergraduate Committee for approval, together with a signed 'consent/approval form'. This should be done in early July. Once approval is granted, Sharon Mohammed will register you in the course.

## **Step 3: Supervision**

The supervisor should provide advice related to defining the scope of the study, suggest relevant literature and other sources of information, and provide input on the basic plan for the student's work. Together, the student and supervisor will determine what components will be included in the project/study. The end product will include at a minimum, a comprehensive final paper with a review of literature appropriate to the scope of your project/study.

The supervisor should assist with problems encountered in the course of the study and provide ongoing input over the duration of the research and writing stages. Supervision should take place at regular intervals, on a schedule defined by the student and supervisor. Timelines for the submission of work should also be arranged cooperatively between the student and supervisor and may consist of deadlines for specific components of the study or a final deadline for submission of a draft of the final product.

## **Step 4: Developing the Proposal**

The student, in conjunction with the faculty advisor, must prepare a written proposal for the study/thesis and submit the proposal to the Undergraduate Committee for approval. The proposal should include the following items:

- Title of the study/thesis;
- Purpose of the study/thesis;
- A detailed outline of the study/thesis, including its aims, the topics to be studied, and a preliminary list of readings;
- Methods and/or procedures to be utilized (e.g. testing, questionnaires, surveys, etc.);
- The method by which the student's performance is to be evaluated, and the method by which the grade or grades will be assigned.
- A proposed time schedule for completion of the independent study;
- Ethics Review form (if appropriate) - for all studies involving human subjects (e.g. testing, observing, interviewing, questioning, etc.). If administering a questionnaire, a copy of the questionnaire with accompanying cover letter and consent form should be submitted with the proposal.

## **Step 5: Ethics Review and Approval**

Any student doing work with human subjects must complete an ETHICS Review and complete the University's online ethics certificate. Supervisors are able to give guidance in this regard.

## **Step 6: Presentation at the Annual Undergraduate Symposium (optional)**