

Independent Study as Part of the Psychology Major at New Paltz

While majoring in psychology, students might want to consider doing some sort of "independent study" work during their time at New Paltz.

In completing independent study work, students receive college credit (that can be applied toward the electives part of the major) for engaging in first-hand research that should prove invaluable in helping students understand the actual scientific work being conducted by academic psychologists. "Independent study" can take many forms, such as:

A. Assisting a professor conduct research on a topic tied to the professor's research agenda.

This work can include (but is not limited to) helping the professor design research, write IRB proposals, collect data, analyze data, summarize data in written format, prepare presentations on research at conferences, conduct literature reviews, etc.

In some cases, this work results in students traveling to conferences with professors to present data at national or international conferences. Such trips are occasionally subsidized by the university. In the recent past, New Paltz psychology students have traveled to England, New Orleans, Williamsburg, Philadelphia, and San Francisco (among many other places).

Further, in certain cases, this work results in publications of scholarly book chapters or peer-reviewed articles. Several New Paltz independent study psychology students in recent years have served as co-authors on important scholarly publications.

B. Conducting a research project all your own.

This kind of work is less common - but is certainly possible for highly motivated and capable students. Students sponsored by faculty members to pursue this route work closely with the professor to design, develop, implement, and summarize novel empirical research in some area of psychology. This work may also result in important scholarly products such as presentations at conferences or publications. This option often requires multiple semesters of independent study as completing a full project in one semester of is extremely difficult. Note that students who go this route often are re-running their PSY311 project.

C. Other.

There are, in fact, several other possibilities. As one example, consider that some students have conducted intensive readings that coincide with specific research areas as part of their independent study projects.

How do I get involved in an independent study project?

1. You need to find a psychology department faculty member who is willing to sponsor you. Don't be afraid to stop by the office hours of professors (find the office hours from the main office; JFT 314). We don't bite!
2. It helps enormously if you are genuinely interested in the research of the professor you work with. One tip, consider talking to a professor you really found interesting in class. Additionally, check out the webpage for psychology faculty members at:
<http://www.newpaltz.edu/psychology/faculty.html>

This page has information regarding how to contact all the faculty members and it has information on our research interests. Also, it has links to the extended websites for many of us - providing specific information on our publications and scholarly interests. You may also want to look up the publications of faculty members on PsychInfo or scholar.google.com to get a sense of the scholarly interests of the different psych faculty.

3. There are logistics.

- A. Officially, you need a 3.0 to enroll in this 'course' (which meets whenever the student and faculty want to meet). Students with lower GPAs may petition for a waiver.
- B. Also, realize that the number of credits is variable - from 1-6 a semester - with 3 being most common. Students may apply up to 12 credits of independent study toward graduation.
- C. You and the faculty member need to complete paperwork in an accurate, clear, and timely manner. Talk to your faculty sponsor about the details (the paperwork needs to be signed by the department chair and a dean in the office of Liberal Arts and Sciences).
- D. Note that the official paperwork includes a copy of a student's internal transcript and a sample reading list (prepared in conjunction with the professor).
- E. You can either sign up immediately prior to a particular semester, or at the beginning of a new semester - talk to your faculty sponsor about his or her preference. Note that a student cannot register for independent studies beyond the end of the Late Registration/Add period (usually the 3rd week of the semester - registration this week also comes with a \$15 fee).

4. While most undergraduate student research is conducted without extra funding provided by grant sources, note that there is money available to support the work of students engaged in this kind of work. On our campus, much of this money comes from the office of Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activities. See: <http://www.newpaltz.edu/research/usr.html>. This office has money to support students who conduct research during the year or during the summer with faculty members - and it includes money to support student travel to scholarly conferences.

5. Extrinsic Benefits.

The last reason to think about getting involved in this kind of extra-curricular experience has to do with your resume. Simply put, employers and graduate schools tend to be impressed by students who have gone the extra mile and engaged in independent study experience - it's a sign of initiative, effort, and competence. Let that be you!

Finally, note that students' best letters of recommendation often come from professors who oversee their independent study experiences as they can speak extensively on their skills and experiences.

For more information, talk to your psychology major advisor or any psychology faculty member today!