

Independent Study Information Packet

Mr. Martin, Independent Study Coordinator

Room 205

Email: andy_martin@rockbridge.k12.va.us



Program of Studies Entry

Independent Study

Prerequisites: Application and approval by Independent Study Coordinator, Principal, and Counselor

Grade Levels: 10-12

Credits: 0.5 credits per semester will be awarded on a pass/fail basis (90 hours per semester)

Independent Study provides the opportunity for students to study a topic of intense personal interest that is not offered in the RCHS curriculum. This opportunity is prioritized to juniors and seniors. However, sophomores may apply as long as they are in good academic standing and approved by the independent study coordinator. Due to the transition during freshman year preference is given to juniors and seniors. Students will have the opportunity at the end of the semester and the first two weeks of each semester to sign up for an independent study. All independent studies must be conducted during the scholastic year. In the proposal, students state objectives, specific problem definition, methods of learning, end product, and criteria for evaluation. Included in the proposal is a commitment from an advising mentor, with a plan for meeting with the student for advising and consultation during the independent study semester. The course is pass/fail, and upon successful completion, 1/2 credit per semester is awarded. A final presentation at the end of the semester is required. Students may submit a proposal for further study for the second semester and a continuation form will be filled out or students may select a different study, but a new packet will need to be completed.

Intro

Warm greetings!

I am so happy that you have found something that interests and inspires you to the point that you want to devote a semester or year to it. The independent study program is a fantastic opportunity for you and the rest of our student body. This provides you with learning more about a topic of your choice but it also helps you manage your time, network, and lead your own learning. These are all critical skills to have outside of high school.

I have mentored six presentations up to now. They have ranged from peninsular literature to the refugee crisis. They have all been such good experiences and I have even learned a lot in the presentations that I have attended.

This is my fourth year directing this program and I am very excited to get underway with YOUR idea and topic of research. If you are serious about this, please come see me in room 205/email me and let's get going!

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns!

Sincerely,

Mr. Martin

Contact Info:

Andy_martin@rockbridge.k12.va.us

Independent Study Guidelines

Initiating an Independent Study

- To initiate an independent study, begin with a consultation with your school counselor. Your counselor will assist you in assessing your academic record and time commitments for classes you are currently taking.

- Having determined that you have the time (and the academic track record) that supports independent work, complete a *Student Information Schedule*, a *Request to Participate in an Independent Study* and indicate your proposed topic of study. This should be an area you have a great desire to study! **Independent Study may not take the place of a course needed/elective credit for graduation. This study is something apart from the RCHS course catalogue that you want to learn more about.**

- Contact the person you wish to have for a mentor. If you do not have a mentor, every effort will be made to find a qualified person to serve in that capacity. A mentor may NOT be a family member and must have credentials in your area of study. Mentors may come from the RCHS faculty or from the larger community. Faculty members of RCHS, W&L, VMI and SVU are approved mentors if you are working in their area of expertise. Other members of the community who have never acted as mentors should have a conversation by email with the coordinator (Mr. Andy Martin at andy_martin@rockbridge.k12.va.us) to establish their expertise to guide a student's study.

- Give a copy of this set of *Independent Study Guidelines* and a copy of *Information for Mentors* to your proposed mentor at your first meeting, so your mentor understands the program. Be sure your mentor fills the Google Form out!

Enrollment meeting

There either will be a mandatory meeting of those who are new to the independent study process to discuss your responsibilities, OR Mr. Martin will meet with you individually, depending on schedules and enrollment each semester. This meeting will take place soon after each semester begins. At that meeting/conference, you will have an opportunity to ask questions about your obligations, and review the Independent Study Guidelines. An additional individual conference will be scheduled soon after this meeting to discuss and refine your objectives and methodology.

Time commitment

A minimum of 90 hours per semester is required for an independent study credit. You must plan to spend approximately seven hours per week working on this project, and the time must be documented in a log created in Google Sheets on a computer. Most students invest more (sometimes *much* more) than the required 90 hours. To stay on track, you should complete 30 hours by the end of September/February, 60 hours by the end of October/March, and 90 hours by the end of November/April, depending on the semester. Presentations will take place in early December and early May, respectively. The work is to take place during the academic year. While an independent study should not take more time than a traditional class, it should not take less time either. The time requirement is established by the Virginia State Department of Education and must be observed in order for credit to be given. *You should meet with your mentor a minimum of once every two weeks. This may be done in person and/or by email or video conferencing.*

Evaluation

Students will present an *overview* of the new learning that has taken place to complete the credit. This presentation should take 30-50 minutes. Your mentor and the Independent Study Coordinator should be present for this presentation. Family and friends are also welcome to attend if the student wishes. This presentation takes the place of a semester exam and *must* be completed for credit to be awarded. There are no exceptions. Presentations generally take place at school either during the school day or after school.

Presentations must have a visual component and may include products from the work, videos of the work, delivery of an original paper about the area of study, an oral discussion of the work or any combination of these. Visual aids are *strongly* encouraged! It is up to the student to make arrangements with the mentor before scheduling the presentation. If you wish to have your school counselor present, prompt notification is especially important, as there are generally a number of presentations, and counselors have many other obligations. [Evaluation Form](#)

Receiving credit

Upon successful completion of your independent study, you will receive a semester credit that is ungraded (pass/no pass), and the title of your study will be included on your transcript. The final evaluation will be based on the quality and quantity of work as documented by your log and through input from your mentor and others with whom you have interacted in the course of the study. If you're continuing your study into the second semester, you're to fill this [form](#) out.

Required Conferences

If you have an independent study class period built into your schedule, ***you must go to that directed study room and check in each day.*** Individual progress conferences will be held during that period whenever possible. You will have a brief conference about your progress with Mr. Martin every 2-4 weeks. Most conferences will take place in room 205, but some may take place in the library. If you do not have a study period for independent study, conferences may be scheduled during lunch or before or after school. You will be notified in advance of Mr. Martin's schedule, so you may prepare to discuss your progress. *If you cannot make a scheduled conference, please notify Mr. Martin immediately so another IS participant may be scheduled.* Mr. Martin is generally at school from 7:30am-4pm, Monday through Friday. You will receive an email regarding his schedule. Do not plan to be out of class to discuss an independent study. Plan instead before or after school or another agreed on time or during lunch. You can bring your lunch and eat while we chat assuming I have 4th period for Independent Study.

Log

You must keep a log detailing the work you have completed for your independent study. The log must be kept *on a Google Sheet* and shared with Mr. Martin.

- 1) A title page with name, title of independent study, name and affiliation of mentor, date, and hours logged
- 2) A bibliography of materials that you referenced to support your study may be included as an addendum to your log or in a visual presentation

Bring one copy of your log with you to your presentation to be circulated among those in attendance.

Field Trips

It is possible to take a field trip in support of your study, but you must arrange it in advance with Mr. Martin and Dr. Craft. Be prepared to show how the experience will support the study. Classroom teachers must have one week's notice of such a trip, and you must be prepared to make up for the work you have missed. You must also submit *in advance* a letter from a parent/guardian stating their approval of the field trip. If the letter has not been submitted before the trip, you will not be allowed to leave school.

The Best Laid Plans or...a graceful exit

To quote an old proverb which was recycled in a famous poem by Robert Burns, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go astray." If you find that your independent study (which seemed to be such a great idea *in concept*) just is not working the way you envisioned, it is possible to make a graceful exit. Perhaps you underestimated the time needed to keep up in that AP English class, or maybe you and your mentor are struggling to schedule meetings. Perhaps something has come up in your family that requires your complete dedication. These things happen! If you find that you are slipping behind, it is time to reexamine the project. Either we need to pare down your plan to a more executable level, reconsider which semester you should pursue your study, or perhaps drop it altogether. If this is the case, ***DO NOT PROCRASTINATE!!!*** See me ASAP and talk it over. Your traditional classes come first. Time management is an art that most of us are still trying to perfect! If you just cannot handle it all, you will not be the first (nor the last) student to drop it. **Talk to me!**

Independent Study Information for Mentors

Independent Study Coordinator: Andy Martin

Andy_martin@rockbridge.k12.va.us

Office: Room 205, ext. 3205

Feel free to email me anytime!

Thank you on behalf of the Rockbridge County High School faculty and administration for your willingness to guide a student in the study of a topic in which he or she has a great deal of interest. The topic this student has chosen is not offered as part of the curriculum at RCHS, therefore we offer the option of coordinating and offering credit for a student to pursue learning in this area through an independent study. All independent study content must be *new* learning, though it may certainly link with prior knowledge.

Your expertise is especially needed in shaping realistic and rigorous goals for independent study. High school students often tend to plan to accomplish too much or too little—and who among us is not continuing to work on time management skills?! Your knowledge of the subject will help the student create a realistic plan with worthy and interesting learning goals.

Students have been reminded that you will be there to offer guidance, suggestions and direction, *but the student must take the initiative*. Mentoring a student should NOT take a great deal of your time. The emphasis is still on independent learning with guidance. You are *not* expected to teach this student as though he or she were in a classroom. The number of meetings or contact hours that mentors and students plan is left up to you. Time with mentors will vary according to the type of study. A recommendation is that the student will meet with you weekly or every two weeks, but circumstances may vary.

Your mentee should provide you with the Independent Study Guidelines. The guidelines provide information on the requirements, including the evaluation process, students must meet for credit. We hope you will be able to attend the final evaluation presentation, but if that is not possible, a written communication to me evaluating the student's effort will be acceptable. Your evaluation may be in the form of a printout or an email affirming the student's achievements and work habits. The student earns a non-graded semester credit for successful completion of 90 hours of work with his/her mentor.

Unfortunately, there is no honorarium for this very worthwhile undertaking. We thank you in advance for your selfless efforts and commitment to enhance the educational opportunities for students at RCHS, and we hope that this generous investment of time and knowledge will bring you a great deal of enjoyment and personal satisfaction. We are extremely proud of our students, and we hope you enjoy working with them as much as we do!

Thank you again for your time and commitment to our students.

Andy Martin, Independent Study Coordinator

Independent Study Presentation Checklist

Upon logging a minimum of 90 hours, you may begin to plan your presentation with your mentor. Remember that this is your final exam for one-half semester credit. The purpose of the presentation is to demonstrate that learning has taken place. Consult with your mentor on how best to provide evidence of your learning. Some possibilities might be: present a paper or talk, demonstrate a process, show a PowerPoint, show photographs or video of a process or how you acquired new skills, bring in objects that are pertinent to your study or which you have created. There should be a strong visual component! Create interest in your topic!

- Presentation should be 30-50 minutes long.
- A description/outline of your presentation should be given to or discussed with the coordinator at least two days before your presentation.
- A copy of your completed log, including title page and bibliography should be printed and in the room to circulate among your guests.
- You must have a plan about where to hold your presentation. If, for example, you are using the Library Periodicals room for a PowerPoint, it is up to you to go to the library and reserve the room. The same holds true for making arrangements for equipment (like a projector for PowerPoint).
- As soon as a date and time have been arranged, alert/invite your school counselor and your mentor to attend your presentation.
- Invite any other friends, teachers and/or family members well in advance. Some students create invitations for this purpose.
- Plan to attend another presentation to get a feel for how this works.
- Practice your presentation with the necessary equipment several days before it is to be given.
- Arrange to be in the presentation area 10 minutes before you will begin. If you need a pass from class to do this, please see me.

Independent Study Mentor's Letter

It is very important for your mentor to be present at your independent study presentation. If this is not possible, a letter from your mentor is required to complete your requirements for an independent study credit.

The letter should not exceed one page and may be only one paragraph.

The letter should contain the following information from your mentor:



Learning has taken place.



You have reached the goals specified in your initial independent study proposal.



You were dependable, motivated and agreeable.



You deserve the RCHS high school credit for your work.

Time frame: This letter should be received (by hand, by mail, or by email) up to one week before your presentation and no later than one week after your presentation. It may be emailed from the mentor's email address, but if emailed to andy_martin@rockbridge.k12.va.us, it must have a signature included and/or be sent from the mentor's professional work email.

This letter should be directed to:

Andy Martin, Independent Study Coordinator
Rockbridge County High School
143 Greenhouse Road
Lexington, VA 24450

Links to Required Forms

Please include a 1-2 sentence blurb about your study and then include the appropriate Google Form link in each email.

- [Independent Study Information Form](#)
- [Request to Participate in Independent Study Program](#)
- [Teacher Recommendation Form](#) (You need two teacher recommendations)
- [Mentor Approval Form](#)
- [Parent/Guardian Approval Form](#)
- [School Counselor Approval Form](#)
- [Principal Approval Form](#) (use Dr. Craft)

****Note: You can copy and paste the links above into an email to the appropriate person. Be sure to include your Independent Study Topic in your email as well as Mr. Martin's email.**

*****It is your responsibility to stay on top of what forms have been completed and have not been completed. Feel free to check in with Mr. Martin if you have any further questions.**