

**Background:**

In Fall 2017, Steering charged CAP with reviewing and updating TCNJ's Independent Study - Undergraduate Policy, which has not been reviewed since 2004. The current policy is outdated, and it discusses only Independent Study and Special Arrangement (Section 70) courses. Steering asked CAP to write a new policy that also covers Guided Study and Independent Research Courses. As part of this process, CAP reviewed all possible course options involving independent or group study/research, and also asked Academic Leaders for information on current practice, including sample syllabi or contracts. We received information from 18 departments, at least one in each of TCNJ's 7 schools. Using this information, CAP created a revised policy that covers undergraduate Independent Study, Independent Research, Group Study, Group Research, and Special Arrangement courses. CAP is now seeking campus-wide testimony on the preliminary policy recommendation.

**Preliminary Recommendation:**

|   |             |                             |
|---|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Section:  |             |                             |
| Title:  |             |                             |
| Undergraduate Independent Study, Independent Research, Group Study, Group Research, and Special Arrangement Courses |             |                             |
| Effective Date:   |             |                             |
| Approved By:  |             |                             |
| Responsible Unit:   |             |                             |
| Academic Affairs ( <a href="mailto:academic@tcnj.edu">academic@tcnj.edu</a> , 609-771-3080)                         |             |                             |
| Related Documents:  |             |                             |
| MOA 62, Syllabus Policy   |             |                             |
| History:  |             |                             |
| <u>Version</u>  | <u>Date</u> | <u>Notes</u>                |
| 1.0   | 2004        | New policy; initial release |
| 2.0   | 2018        | Revised policy by CAP       |

**I. INTRODUCTION**

This document outlines policies and procedures for undergraduate courses involving independent or group study or research. Specifically, the policy covers the following undergraduate course types: independent study, independent research, advanced tutorial (group study), group research, and courses offered by special arrangement (Section 70).

## II. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided in MOA 62.

Independent Study - an independent study course is one in which the student works independently with only minimal faculty direction.

Advanced Tutorial (Group Study) - an advanced tutorial (aka group study) course presents a focused topic with individualized mentoring, intensive reading, and library work with student led discussions. The sponsoring faculty member meets with a small group of students together for approximately one hour per week; students meet more frequently to design presentations and critique each other.

Independent Research - an independent research course is one in which the student works independently with significant faculty involvement.

Group Research - a group research course is one in which a group of students perform an investigation on a focused topic in collaboration with each other and led by a faculty mentor.

Course by Special Arrangement - A course offered by special arrangement is an experience in which the student(s) cover[s] the content of a regularly scheduled course through individual or small group study under the guidance of a faculty sponsor.

## III. POLICY

### 1. Common policy elements for all course types:

- a) The courses must have either an individual proposal or a generic syllabus (or both) to ensure that students and faculty have a common understanding of the content of the course, learning outcomes, course requirements, grading policies, prerequisites, the frequency and duration of faculty-student interaction, and other key aspects of the course.
- b) Proposals/syllabi will be approved by department chair and dean (or designate) prior to enrolling in the course.
- c) All eligibility criteria and application processes must be publicly available and published on the department or program's website and in the TCNJ Undergraduate Bulletin.
- d) The topic of the course will be reflected on the student's transcript.

### 2. Independent Study

- a) Purpose: Independent study courses are for individual pursuit of topics within or

beyond a student's major field of study which transcend the regularly available curriculum. It will normally involve research, primary source reading, or field work. When planning for independent study, the student and advisor strive to maintain a balance between this mode of study and other elective courses. A disproportionate number of independent study courses will tend to prevent a student from taking other elective courses which are equally important to scholarly development.

b) Eligibility: To be eligible for an independent study, matriculated students need to have completed at least 12 total course units with at least four course units completed at The College of New Jersey. A minimum grade point average of 2.5 is required, subject to waiver by the departmental chair. The faculty sponsor is responsible for checking the student's grade point average and determining that the student has the ability to plan and execute a long-range project. Departments may establish additional criteria for approval and supervision of independent study projects.

c) Proposal: An independent study contract consists of two parts: the proposal and the enrollment form to be filed with the Office of Records and Registration. In consultation with the faculty sponsor, the student will prepare a proposal containing the following information:

- i) a detailed description of the project and course requirements;
- ii) the amount of time likely to be devoted to each major aspect of the project;
- iii) a description of prior course work and/or other experience which prepares the student for the proposed activity;
- iv) the frequency and duration of meetings with the faculty sponsor;
- v) dates for completion of project milestones where applicable;
- vi) The methods by which the student's work will be evaluated must be clearly stated in the proposal. Some appropriate forms of evaluation include a paper, a performance, and/or a presentation.

d) Credit: The number of credit hours for the independent study is determined by the guideline of a minimum of 12 hours of effort per week per course unit. A student may enroll in no more than 1.5 course units of independent study in a given semester. A department may establish a limit of independent study course units which a student is permitted to complete within that department's programs.

### **3. Independent Research**

a) Purpose: An independent research course is one in which the student works independently with significant faculty involvement.

b) Eligibility: Due to the advanced nature of the course and the necessary student maturity implied by the title, a minimum grade point average of 3.0 is required for a student to be eligible for independent research, subject to waiver by the department chair. Additionally, students need to have completed at least 12 total course units with at least four course units completed at The College of New Jersey. The faculty sponsor is responsible for checking the student's grade point average and determining that the student has the ability to plan and execute a long-range project. Departments may

establish additional criteria for approval and supervision of independent research projects, including a sequence of independent research courses that should lead to even more significant research results.

c) Proposal: Independent Research courses require the preparation of a proposal of the research objectives and the techniques expected to be employed in the research work. This is typically prepared by the student in consultation with the faculty research supervisor. An enrollment form including a summary of this proposal must be signed by the student, the research advisor, the department chair, and the dean (or designate) and submitted to Records & Registration.

d) Syllabus: Whenever possible, departments should have generic syllabi for independent research courses that include student workload (a minimum of 12 hours per week for 1 course unit), expectations for the length of student/faculty meetings (usually at least 80 minutes per week), and grading standards. Any department offering this type of course may establish further requirements for this type of course.

e) Credit: A student may enroll in no more than 1.5 course units of independent research in a given semester. A department may establish a limit of independent research units which a student is permitted to complete within that department's programs.

#### **4. Advanced Tutorial (Group Study)**

a) Purpose: This course is arranged so that a group of students can study a focused topic with individual mentoring by a faculty member. The faculty member usually meets the students for one hour a week, with the students meeting more frequently to discuss and critique each others' work.

b) Eligibility: Any department offering this type of course must establish appropriate eligibility requirements.

c) Credit: A department may establish a limit of advanced tutorial units that a student is permitted to complete within that department's programs.

#### **5. Group Research**

a) Purpose: Faculty must lead this course, which involves a focused investigation of a topic by a group of students and the faculty member.

b) Eligibility: Any department offering this type of course must establish appropriate eligibility requirements.

c) Credit: A department may establish a limit of group research units that a student is permitted to complete within that department's programs.

#### **6. Special Arrangement (Section 70)**

a) Purpose: There is a clear distinction between courses offered by special arrangement and all other categories, including those listed above. A special arrangement course is an experience in which the student covers the content of a regularly scheduled course

through individual study under the guidance of a faculty sponsor. The special arrangement course designation is to be used only when scheduling difficulties would otherwise prevent the student from completing his or her program of study in a timely manner.

b) Eligibility: Enrolling in a special arrangement course requires signed authorization by the chair of the department offering the course and the dean of that school. Permission for a special arrangement course will not be granted during a semester in which the regularly scheduled course is available.

c) Syllabus: The instructor must ensure the assessment and evaluation of the same learning objectives associated with the regular course. The syllabus and course policy must be aligned with the regular course, including grading expectations, appropriate textbook(s), and other course content.

d) Credit: Because the course code and number is the same as regular course offerings and only distinguished by a section number of “70”, courses offered by special arrangement must be designated as such on the student's transcript by the following statement: “Requirements for this course were met through individual study under the sponsorship of a qualified faculty member.”