

Students pursue formal independent studies for a variety of reasons. In many cases, students wish to take advantage of faculty knowledge or expertise in a particular area for which there are no regularly-scheduled courses. In other cases, students are interested in exploring an issue in depth and from a feminist standpoint as a potential career, or graduate school, path and/or in the absence of Women's Studies faculty and coursework in that field here at Penn State. Many students also earn independent study credit for their work on an honor's thesis with a faculty member. Independent study, in other words, is an opportunity to explore topics not covered by standard course offerings, or to pursue topics covered in standard courses in much greater depth or from a more specific angle.

Independent study should not be used as a substitute for regularly offered courses--in part because working independently can be much more demanding than ordinary coursework. Students should not undertake independent studies assuming they will automatically receive a "good" or even a passing grade; evaluations will be based on performance, and evaluative standards will be rigorous. In order for an independent study to be approved, the student's workload must be commensurate with that of other Women's Studies 400-level courses. Thus, students should anticipate that an independent study will be at least as demanding as a regular 400-level course and be prepared to devote the necessary time and energy to the project.

Students interested in pursuing independent studies should do some preliminary thinking on a specific topic, issue, or question to be examined. Next, they should discuss their ideas with faculty possessing knowledge and expertise in that area, in order to refine the research focus. If a professor agrees to supervise an independent study project, then s/he and the student will negotiate a specific plan of readings, papers, meetings for discussions, and/or other coursework, as well as a standard for evaluating the student's work. However, an independent study is expected to yield substantive research, which the Women's Studies Department strongly encourages the professor and student to submit for publication and/or conference presentation if possible.

Formal approval is required *prior to* registering for WMNST 496. NB: professors are not required to take on independent study projects; most are willing to supervise independent studies, but many have their own guidelines (e.g., the student must have already taken a class with that professor). Students should meet with the Undergraduate Director in order to get assistance identifying an appropriate faculty mentor, to discuss independent study responsibilities and requirements, and to be registered for independent study credits. ***The forms in this packet must be submitted prior to registration for independent study credits.***

University guidelines dictate that for each credit of WMNST 496 a student must work 3 hours per week; thus, in order to earn 3 credits of WMNST 496 a student is expected to work 9 hours per week for each of the 15 weeks of a fall/spring semester, or 18 hours per week during a 6-week summer session. Students must register for credits the same semester in which coursework is completed. (For instance, students cannot complete the research for an independent study in the summer and earn the credits in the fall or spring). Students can only count 6 credits of any one independent learning experience towards Women's Studies degree requirements, even as elective credits.

All independent study coursework is due on the final day of regular classes for the term in which the student is completing the project. No late work will be accepted without prior permission. If an extension is needed, it is the student's responsibility to apply for a deferred grade in accordance with University policies.

*The following information must be provided (either on this form or on a separate sheet of paper) and submitted with the attached Signature Form before a student can be registered for WMNST 496.*

**Number of credits** \_\_\_\_\_

**To be completed** (semester/year) \_\_\_\_\_

■ **Learning Objectives**

*Describe the student's reasons for pursuing an independent study, as well as the research topic and focus to be explored.*

■ **Plan of study**

*Describe in as much detail as possible the student's workload (meetings with faculty mentor, research, reading, writing, and other assignments), including the form that the final project will take (ex: 30-page research paper, documentary, etc.)*

■ **Method of evaluation**

*On what criteria will the student's final grade be based?*

*I have read and understand the Rules and Procedures for Women's Studies Independent Studies, and I agree to the terms established for this project. (Independent Study registration will not be permitted without the signatures below.)*

Student

student's name (please print)

PSU ID#

phone number(s)

e-mail

student's signature

date

Faculty

faculty supervisor (please print)

PSU ID#

phone number(s)

e-mail

faculty supervisor's signature

date

Undergraduate Director

I approve this student's registration for \_\_\_\_\_ WMNST 496 credits in \_\_\_\_\_  
# semester/year

undergraduate director's signature

date