




PRESIDENTIAL POLICY MEMORANDUM NO. 300

To: Virginia Tech Faculty and Students
From: Timothy D. Sands 
Date: May 2, 2016
Subject: Establishing Guidelines for Independent Study and Undergraduate Research

Approved by the Commission on Undergraduate Studies & Policies: April 11, 2016
Approved by the University Council: May 2, 2016
Approved by the President: May 2, 2016
Effective Date: Fall 2016

University Council approved a resolution establishing guidelines for independent study and undergraduate research.

Following is the text of the resolution.

WHEREAS, the University’s guiding document, A Plan for a New Horizon—Envisioning Virginia Tech 2012-2018 states that, “a commitment to research and experiential learning for students requires that we incorporate a diverse and inclusive range of perspectives and resources into undergraduate and graduate courses across all disciplines. We will respect multiple ways of knowing and experiencing phenomena under study,” and

WHEREAS, the University values and documents these experiences; and

WHEREAS, special courses and independent studies are described and defined in University Policy 6365—Approvals for Special Courses and Independent Studies (X974 (Independent Studies), and X994 (Undergraduate Research)); and

WHEREAS, Independent Study (X974) courses generally involve extensive reading and tutorial sessions with the faculty supervisor, and the subject of Independent Study usually is a continuation in greater depth of a topic covered in a regular course, allowing students to study topics of particular individual interest; and

WHEREAS, Undergraduate Research (X994) courses are individual research projects carried out by students under faculty supervision, where the student defines the research topic, proposes a methodology, and carries out the research; and

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WHEREAS, these courses, which are of variable credit, are utilized by students to enhance and individualize their educational experience; and

WHEREAS, it is acknowledged that there are differences by discipline regarding content and methodology of these courses that are appropriate and necessary reflecting the unique perspectives of each discipline; and

WHEREAS, the Carnegie Foundation defines a credit hour as a unit of measure representing an hour of instruction and 2 hours of homework per week over a 15 week period in a semester, with this information documented by the Office of the University Registrar (<http://www.registrar.vt.edu/faculty/teaching/instructional-minutes.html>); and

WHEREAS, the instructor of record for each course is required to provide a significant amount of supervision to the student via appropriate contact hours as defined in University Policy 6901—Definition of a Credit Hour; and

WHEREAS, the University has established limits for the number of credit hours that may be taken pass/fail toward a degree; and

WHEREAS, a University Policy regulating the number of independent study and/or undergraduate research credits that a student may take overall or may use to count towards a degree does not currently exist;

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED that:

- A student may take a maximum of 12 credit hours of Independent Study (IS) and/or Undergraduate Research (UR) to be counted towards their undergraduate degree, exclusive of IS and/or UR courses required by a specific degree as indicated on a check sheet
- Each time the student enrolls in IS or UR, the instructor is required to identify a tangible output produced by the student at the end of the course that will be used to determine the student's grade.
- The time that the student devotes to satisfying course requirements shall be reflected in the number of credit hours awarded based on the Carnegie Foundation definition.

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