



## Approvals for Special Courses and Independent Studies

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**Affected Parties:**  
Undergraduate  
Graduate  
Faculty

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### 1.0 Purpose

Special courses aim at greater flexibility in Virginia Tech's course offerings. They allow students to pursue topics in which formal courses are not available. They also provide students an opportunity to assume a greater share of the responsibility for their own education other than in the traditional classroom situation.

### 2.0 Policy

Virginia Tech offers several types of courses that are tailored to the needs of individual students or special groups. All departments are authorized to offer Independent Study and Special Study courses to allow students to pursue subject matter study in areas for which there are no approved formal courses. The subject matter of independent study courses must not duplicate that of regular courses. INDEPENDENT STUDY COURSES SHOULD MEET ON A REGULAR BASIS.

Each time a special study course is offered, approvals must be obtained from the department head, the dean of the college, and from the dean of the Graduate School if the course is at the 4000 or higher level. Independent Study at the undergraduate level may not be used for graduate credit. Approval to offer a given special study additional time may be obtained if it is in process for approval as a regular course.

The use of 5974 Independent Study is to be avoided in connection with research covered under 5994 (Research and Thesis) or 7994 (Research and Dissertation). If the intended independent study relates closely to a student's research problem, it is more appropriate to register for 5994 or 7994 credits than for 5974.

### 2.1 Types of Courses

INDEPENDENT STUDY (X974) COURSES generally involve extensive reading and tutorial sessions with the faculty supervisor and also may involve written papers. 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.

5974, "Independent Study at the Graduate Level," requires a syllabus, a title, justification, and the method of evaluation. Independent study courses may be used to satisfy degree requirements.

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH (X994) COURSES mean individual research projects carried out by students under faculty supervision. The student defines the research topic, proposes a methodology, carries out the research, and writes a report.



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SPECIAL STUDY (X984) COURSES are designed for a group of students, rather than for a single individual. This type of course may be used to study a timely topic, one in which there is current, but not lasting, interest. It also may be used as an experimental course before incorporating it into the regular curriculum.

The designations used for Special Study courses are as follows:

- 4984: Special Study at the Undergraduate Level. Requires a syllabus and method of evaluation. Credits for 4984 courses approved for graduate credit may be used in meeting degree requirements.
- 5984: Special Study at the Graduate Level. Requires a syllabus and method of evaluation. Credits may be used in meeting degree requirements. They are not to be offered on a recurring basis but they may be courses that are being tested before being proposed as regular courses.

FIELD STUDY (X964) COURSES are work experiences approved by some departments and are selected to augment traditional classroom activities. The student is evaluated on the knowledge and skills acquired as a result of the experience. Emphasis is placed on the academic and practical value of the work.

### 3.0 Procedures

#### 3.1 Approvals for Independent Studies

Each time an individual undergraduate or graduate student plans to enroll in an independent study, a syllabus must be submitted to the dean for the student's curriculum. The syllabus must first be approved by the instructor, the department head, the dean for the student's curriculum, the dean for the department offering the course, and the dean of the Graduate School for 4974 and 5974 enrollments. Submission of the syllabus is an adjunct to the regular registration process, not a replacement for it.

Syllabi for 4984, 5984, and 5974 courses should be submitted to the Graduate School office at least 10 days before the end of the semester preceding the semester the course is to be offered. All 4984, 5974, and 5984 syllabi must be approved by the department head and the college before being submitted to the Graduate School. The course syllabi should contain a distinctive title, not simply "Special/Independent Study."

### 4.0 Definitions

### 5.0 References

### 6.0 Approval and Revisions

Approved January 9, 1990, by University Registrar, Wanda Dean.

Reviewed August 22, 1990, by the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, James F. Wolfe. No changes.

Annual review, December 15, 1998, by the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, David R. Ford. No revisions.

Annual review October 31, 2001 by Vice Provost for Academic Affairs, David R. Ford. No revisions.

- Revision 1  
Technical update in Section 3.1 to clarify the syllabus submission goes to the dean for the student's curriculum.

Approved August 24, 2023 by University Registrar, Rick Sparks.