

Independent Study  
(Instructions)

1. Limit of one student- or faculty-initiated independent study unit per student during tenure in the MPH Program. *Exclusions:*
  - a. independent study that covers a previously approved course syllabus;
  - b. non-degree, special students who do not desire a graduate degree, e.g., health services research fellows.
2. If the independent study proposal involves taking a course outside of Northwestern University, then transfer of credit for this course cannot be allowed (refer to Transfer of Credit Policy); however, the experience can still be included as part of an approved Independent Study credit (follow the instructions below).
3. A completed “Independent Study Request Form” must be submitted by the first of the month and BEFORE registration.

***Quarterly deadlines are:***

September 1 for Fall quarter enrollment  
December 1 for Winter quarter enrollment  
March 1 for Spring quarter enrollment  
June 1 for Summer quarter enrollment

4. The “Independent Study Request Form” must include:
  - a. Descriptive statement (2 page maximum):
    - i. State the relevance to student’s career goals – what skills and abilities is the student hoping to learn and why?
    - ii. Provide a brief background summary of the issue/topics that are the focus of the course, including their importance within the context of public health.
    - iii. If the independent study involves research, provide a brief description of the hypotheses to be evaluated and an overview of the methods.
  - b. Specific learning objectives, which are “observable and measurable.”

Each course syllabus should contain a set of objectives for that course. In order to satisfy the requirements of our accrediting body, the Council on Education for Public Health, these objectives must be “observable and measurable.” This means that the achievement of the objective by each student must be able to be evaluated in a way which can be observed and measured by the instructor.

Phrases such as “the student shall know,” “understand,” “be familiar with,” “realize,” and “be aware of” are therefore unacceptable. Instead, the objective should be stated in a way that enables the instructor to observe and measure the student’s knowledge, understanding, familiarity with, etc. It is helpful to think of the method you will use to have the student demonstrate the acquisition of the knowledge or skills in the given objective. Such words and phrases as “list,” “describe,” “calculate,” “design a program,” “define,” “demonstrate” (as a skill or method), “identify and utilize” (as in sources of information or data), “compute” are often useful in composing objectives.

## NU MPH Program – Policy on Independent Study

### Examples of UNACCEPTABLE objectives are:

Students will:

- have an understanding of key concepts and current theories...
- understand sources of bias ...
- have knowledge of the multiple steps required for ...
- be familiar with ...

### Examples of PROPERLY WRITTEN objectives are:

Students will be able to:

- list and describe the multiple steps required for a new drug to be approved...
- explain what screening is, when is it appropriate, and describe the basic elements of a good screening program.
- describe the criteria commonly used to discriminate ... from ...
- critically evaluate the means by which ...
- describe common sources of bias in...
- use SPSS to analyze and interpret data from .... studies...

- c. Instructor's role/responsibilities in the independent study. If the independent study involves fieldwork, describe the facilities and resources that will be available to the student at the field site.
  - d. Work plan/schedule
    - i. specify frequency/duration of face-to-face contact with faculty;
    - ii. specify total effort in hours;
    - iii. include bibliography – annotated.
  - e. Evaluation process (e.g., 50% of grade depends on weekly paper and 50% of grade depends on discussion) – via usual grade sheet and also verbal/written communication/feedback to student (qualitative and quantitative).
  - f. Depending on the nature of the independent study, it will be necessary for the student and faculty member to verify that IRB approval has been obtained if there are human subjects involved (refer to University IRB Web site at <http://www.northwestern.edu/research/OPRS/irb/>).
5. The “Independent Study Request Form” must be signed by the instructor and the student. The form must be submitted to the MPH Curriculum Committee via Karen Quintana at 680 N. Lake Shore Drive, Suite 1102, Chicago, IL 60611 (k-quintana@northwestern.edu). Final approval must be granted by the MPH Curriculum Committee BEFORE the student is able to register.