Community Health Independent Study

Independent Study is a wonderful opportunity for our students to get exposure to the community health/public health field outside of the classroom. In the Department of Behavioral and Community Health (BCH), there are two main types of Independent Study experiences:

1. Undergraduate students work with a Department of Behavioral and Community Health faculty member on research or special projects that are based out of the department or School of Public Health.
2. Undergraduate students do community health related work via volunteer or internship opportunity (secured on your own) and report back to a Department of Behavioral and Community Health faculty sponsor.

Regardless of Independent Study experience, the following steps must be followed to secure Independent Study credit within the Department of Behavioral and Community Health:

1. Determine a topic you would like to learn more about, or determine if there is existing health-related research in the department, and approach a BCH faculty member who you think may be a good fit to work with you on an Independent Study. It is the student’s responsibility to find and approach a faculty member who will agree to work with you. Key items to discuss are the type of work you would do with them, how many hours per week you would work with them, and what deliverables you’d produce and the dates they’d be due.

If you have a community health-related volunteer or internship opportunity secured and would like to attempt to earn credit for it, you must approach a BCH faculty member who you would like to serve as your faculty sponsor and who will agree to work with you. Students are expected to report back to the faculty sponsor about their internship/volunteer-work throughout the semester. Key items to discuss with them are the type of work you are doing at your internship/volunteer-work site, how many hours per week you will work at the site, deliverables or projects you will be doing at the site, how frequent you will be in touch with your faculty sponsor, and any expectations of deliverables that the faculty person has for you.

*Tip: If you are not sure about which faculty member you can ask to work with you, think about professors in the department who have taught courses you found interesting; also, look at the list of faculty profiles on the Department of Behavioral and Community Health website to see whose areas of interest match yours.

2. Once you have secured a BCH faculty person to work with on the Independent Study, go to the Department's website and complete the Undergraduate Independent Study Contract. The contract can be found by going to www.bch.umd.edu, selecting the "Undergraduate" tab, then clicking the “Independent Study” link. Both the student and the BCH faculty person must sign off on the form.

3. Submit the original copy of the application to the BCH Undergraduate Program Director (Jenny Hodgson). If approved, you will be cleared to register for the course, and will be instructed to register for HLTH289, HLTH386, HLTH389, or HLTH489. The completed and signed Independent Study Contract MUST be submitted to Jenny prior to the first day of class in the semester in which the independent study is to be done.
Key Independent Study Items to Remember

- Over the duration of the semester, you should plan to spend approximately 45 hours per Independent Study credit hour. For example, if you'd like your Independent Study to count as 3 credit hours on your transcript, you must spend approximately 135 hours on it in a semester. This takes into account the time onsite with your faculty supervisor as well as additional time outside of your "onsite" hours for papers, projects, etc.
- It is solely your responsibility to find a BCH faculty member who would be willing to work with you on your Independent Study. Students are not “placed” with or “assigned” to a faculty person.
- Make sure to approach the BCH faculty member you would like to work with early on. Most faculty members require that students approach them the semester before the Independent Study is to be completed. Faculty rarely agree to work with students who wait until the last minute and approach them only a few weeks or days before the semester begins.
- Students who are on academic probation are not permitted to complete an Independent Study.
- An Independent Study must total 3 credits to be eligible to count toward Community Health major health elective credit.
- No more than 6 credits of Independent Study may be used toward health elective credit, and MUST be separated into two different experiences or content areas.
- No more than 3 credits of Independent Study may be used toward health elective credit in a given semester.
- If you are completing an internship or are doing volunteer-work for Independent Study credit, you must provide your BCH faculty sponsor the contact information for your site supervisor.