

Virginia Commonwealth University
Forensic Science Department:

FRSC 692 Independent Study
Policies & Procedures

Course Description:

Semester course; variable hours. 1-3 credits. Maximum credit for all independent study is 6 credits. The amount of credit must be determined, and written permission of mentor and program director must be obtained prior to registration for this course. This course is designed to provide an opportunity for independent laboratory research in an area of forensic science or related scientific discipline. The products of this experience will be an oral presentation at a campus seminar and a written report.

General information:

- a) Students must have achieved an overall minimum overall GPA of 3.0 in his/her graduate study at VCU in order to enroll in this course.
- b) A maximum of six credits of independent study may be accepted towards the 36 credits required for the MS in Forensic Science degree.
- c) A minimum of four hours per week of supervised laboratory activity *per credit hour* is required.
 - a. Exceptions to the laboratory requirement maybe allowed for some non-laboratory research projects. Exceptions to this will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the departmental graduate committee. This includes any request for substituting independent study credit for a required course in the curriculum.
- d) Failing to follow all policies or meet all requirements specified in this document, including deadlines, will result in the lowering of the final grade by one letter grade. Enforcement of this policy will be at the discretion of the Graduate Director after consultation with the independent study mentor.
- e) Many outside agencies and private companies, including VA DFS, require lengthy application processes and background checks before students can begin working in the laboratory. Further, some will also require lengthy review and approval of presentations and reports that are based on data acquired at that agency. In those agencies/companies, this is generally required prior to that data being discussed or presented. Students should be aware of and carefully follow all agency/company guidelines regarding these issues.

Enrollment Procedure:

- a) In the semester prior to enrollment in FRSC 692, the student should identify an independent study mentor with whom he/she will conduct the internship and agree on a general project.

- b) Students should enroll during the pre-registration, registration or drop/add period.
Note: The Graduate Director's permission is not required to complete the registration at this point.
- c) Students should complete a FRSC 692 Intent and Request Form, obtain a signature from the faculty member or mentor with whom he/she will conduct the independent study, and deliver the form to the Graduate Director by the first day of classes during the semester of enrollment.
- Independent Study requests not in by the stated deadlines will be denied and the student will be dropped from the course the following Monday.
 - The Graduate Director will approve all mentors and projects. *Note: Mentors working at institutions other than VCU may also require approval from their normal supervisor(s).* Students are therefore encouraged to start this process as early as possible.
 - Independent Study projects to completed at VA-DFS laboratories must be approved by the Director of Technical Services; in this case, this signature should also be obtained prior to final delivery to the Graduate Director.
 - VA-DFS requires interns to complete the state application form (available online), confidentiality statement, and other paperwork. Please inquire with your mentor before beginning internship. All paperwork must be completed and on file prior to beginning in the laboratory.
 - Requests for non-laboratory research projects should be submitted to the Graduate Director as early as possible as to avoid any scheduling conflicts for the semester of desired enrollment.
- d) Proposal: By the end of the second week of the semester of enrollment, a proposal must be submitted to the Graduate Director for approval.
- Proposals not in by the stated deadline will be dropped from the course the following Monday.
 - The graduate committee may request that proposals be submitted early for non-laboratory research projects.
 - Students should receive assistance from their mentor during preparation of the proposal.
 - The 3-4 page proposal should detail the work in which the student will be engaged, including:
 - 1) An introduction providing background information and the goals and/or objectives of the work
 - 2) Specific goals & objectives of the proposed work.
 - 3) A description of the methods and materials to be used, instrumentation to be used, and data analysis methods.
 - 4) A timetable for the conduct and completion of the work including the submission of a final report and the oral presentation.
 - 5) Appropriate references.
- e) Mentors should review the proposal, approve of the proposal, and sign it prior to submission to the Graduate Director. The signed hardcopy should be delivered to the Graduate Director for final approval.

Requirements for Completion of Independent Study:

- a) Written Report – Students are required to submit a paper detailing their research.
- This report should be a minimum of 15 typed pages. Figures/tables/charts, references, and appendices will not count towards this minimum page requirement.
 - The format and contents of the written report should follow the style of a journal manuscript. For additional guidance, see “FRSC 793: Internship Report Guidelines” and/or a science journal from your discipline.
 - At minimum, the report should include:
 1. An introduction providing background information and the goals and/or objectives of the work
 2. A research methods section describing the methods and techniques used
 3. A research results section detailing the results of the work. This should include reference to data that is displayed in the form of figures, charts, and tables.
 4. A discussion/conclusion section detailing the major discussion points and conclusions of the research completed.
 5. References (literature cited).
 6. Critical data should be displayed in numbered figures, charts, or tables. Each should be displayed on a separate page and attached at the end sequentially (in the order of reference) at the end of the paper. Figures and charts should include a figure legend.
 - Students will be encouraged to publish the results of their research.
- b) Seminar – Students are required to present their research at a seminar.
- The seminar presentation will be for approximately 20-40 minutes, with ~5-10 minutes for questions.
 - This seminar *may or may not* be completed in the FRSC 570 Forensic Science Seminar Series depending upon scheduling and availability. If no FRSC 570 slots are available, students are to make arrangements for a seminar through the Departmental administrative assistant.
 - Students are encouraged to present their research at a professional meeting.

Grading of Independent Study:

- a) The final letter grade will be determined by the mentor based on the following criteria:
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| • Laboratory or Overall Performance | 50% |
| • Seminar | 25% |
| • Written Report | 25% |
- b) Evaluation forms will be provided *upon request* to the mentor. These forms may be useful in evaluating the student’s performance.

- c) Documentation of the seminar and a copy of the final paper must be provided to the Graduate Director for completion of the course and finalization of the grade.
- d) The final grade should be submitted by the mentor in writing (email is preferred) to the Graduate Director. The grade must be submitted no later than 2 weeks prior to the end of the semester of enrollment or the semester of the seminar, whichever comes last.