

# INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAM GENERAL GUIDELINES NEW PALTZ HIGH SCHOOL

## 1. **RATIONALE and OVERVIEW**

Independent studies are intended to provide NPHS students with opportunities to pursue specialized topics of particular interest to them in greater depth than is possible in concurrently scheduled courses. To mention a few of the many possible examples, an independent study might be done in:

- (i.) Social Studies, focusing on one social topic as it is manifest in different parts of the world, or focusing on many aspects of a particular part of the world:
- (ii.) English, focusing on an area of literature or a particular literary endeavor:
- (iii.) Science, focusing on an extended science project on a chosen topic:
- (iv.) An Interdisciplinary Area, combining several traditional disciplines which bear on a single topic.

By an independent study we mean a course done by a single student in which the traditional role of a teacher is replaced by that of a mentor. Normally a teacher gives daily lessons and assignments, and monitors students closely to insure that they learn those lessons and do those assignments. No faculty member will be asked to organize and monitor a course for single student to this degree. Instead, a faculty member (or other adult) serving as a mentor for an independent study is expected to provide expertise, guidance and overview, but the motivation and initiative for doing the work must come from the student. Credit will be awarded in the end in those cases where the student actually completes the contracted work.

## 2. **INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANCE**

It will be the responsibility of the Student to secure the assistance of a NPHS faculty member to act as a Supervising Teacher and an adult Mentor for the study. Often these two roles will be played by the same person, but sometimes the Mentor will be an outside person.

- (i.) Supervising Teacher. This will be a faculty member in the subject area of the study who will approve the initial application, review the final work, and assign a grade for the course.
- (ii.) Mentor. This will be an adult who will meet regularly with the Student to provide the guidance necessary to carry out the study. Often this person will also be the Supervising Teacher, but it is hoped that community embers will assist in this capacity to open more possibilities to more students and to reduce the workload on the faculty.

## 3. **QUALIFICATIONS**

Because independent studies require a high level of maturity and responsibility on the part of the Student, they are not for all students. In order to qualify for independent study, a Student must convince a Supervising Teacher (and a Mentor, if they are not the same person) that he or she has the maturity, the ability, and the perseverance to complete the proposed independent work. Since it will normally require time to establish this kind of rapport with a particular teacher, it would be expected that most independent studies would be done by juniors and seniors.

#### **4. APPLICATION PROCEDURE**

In order to do an independent study for HS credit; a Student must submit in advance an application to the Independent Study Committee for its approval. Application information will be made available through the HS Guidance Office. The application should give a clear indication of the scope of the study and the work that will be done. Specifically, it will include the following:

- (i.) title of study;
- (ii.) rationale for the study which, in particular, makes it clear as to why the same end could not be achieved by taking a regular course;
- (iii.) summary of work to be done, including texts and activities;
- (iv.) schedule of meetings with the Mentor;
- (v.) summary of work that will be completed and submitted by the Student (reports, papers, essays, projects or exams);
- (vi.) signature of the Student, a Parent or Guardian, the Mentor, the Supervising Teacher, the Guidance Counselor and the Principal. Each signature indicates that the signing party agrees that, to the best of his or her knowledge, the proposal is consistent with the criteria and intentions laid out in this document.

It is understood that such independent exploratory projects might well find new directions as the progress, which cause them to deviate from the original plan. Any major changes in the direction of the study should be discussed with the Supervising Teacher.

#### **5. DOCUMENTATION**

At the conclusion of the study, copies of final drafts or written products of the study listed in 4 (v) will be submitted to the Independent Study Committee to be reviewed and kept on record with an eye toward improving the overall process

#### **6. GRADING and CREDIT**

Independent studies will normally run for a half year and carry half unit credit, but some may run for as long as a full year for a full unit of credit. The criteria for awarding credit will be the same as that of normal HS courses carrying the same amount of credit.

All independent studies will be graded on a pass/fail basis, since they do not occur in a context where comparative grades are meaningful. After the documentation has been submitted, the Supervising Teacher (in consultation with the Mentor) will assign the pass/fail grade that will be listed on the Student's school record, and the High School will award appropriate credit toward graduation.

#### **7. INDEPENDENT STUDY COMMITTEE**

An Independent Study Committee, consisting of:

- (i.) the Principal (or designee),
- (ii.) two teachers,
- (iii.) one parent and
- (iv.) one student,

will be charged with the general oversight and supervision of this program, to whatever extent such guidance is required. It will meet at appropriate times to assess independent study applications (item 4.) and to review and file the final product of each independent study (item 5.).

Prepared by D. Clark for the Ad Hoc Independent Study Committee, a subcommittee of the NPHS Site Based Committee. Approved by the Site Based Committee on June 5, 1995.