



To: Department Chairs

From: Elizabeth Stone, Chair, Undergraduate Curriculum Committee of the Arts and Sciences Faculty Senate

Re: Independent Readings and Research

Date: January 1999

The Curriculum Committee recently undertook a review of independent reading and research courses with an eye toward providing some uniformity at least in terms of credit range. Some departments allowed 3-6 credits, some allowed 1-3 credits, some allowed only 3.

In examining patterns of credits allowed in independent reading and research courses in order to determine whether the maximum of 6 credits needed to be retained, the committee was very disturbed to discover that, in some departments, students were allowed to register for as many as 8 credits. In each case, this was beyond the maximum allowed credits. (In several cases, this was beyond the allowed maximum of 3 credits.)

In addition, patterns among departments emerged. Several departments allowed a surprising number of students to receive as many as 6 credits. (In one department, 102 students received 6 credits for independent research.) But most departments allowed students to register for 4 or fewer credits of independent readings or research in any one semester and, as a result, we have some concern about abuses of credits and wonder how feasible it is for a student to attempt 6 credits of independent work in one semester. Nevertheless, since there seemed to be considerable demand for 5 and 6 credits in independent reading and research courses, the committee established a common credit range of 0-6 credits for independent research and 1-6 credits for independent reading courses. Since most departments require students to submit independent project proposals to the Undergraduate Director or other specified reviewer, we expect that most departments will not take advantage of the 6 credit limit but will instead continue to assign no more than 3 or 4 credits.

I am writing to ask you to remind the faculty in your department that both the level and quantity of work in an independent reading or research course must be comparable to the work required for any other 400-level course and to solicit your department's guidelines for independent readings and research. If your department does not have established guidelines printed for faculty and student reference, I encourage you to do so. The committee recognizes that differences in disciplines make for differences in the nature of independent work but both faculty and students need to have a clear understanding of how independent projects are approved and what is to be expected of both students and faculty. I would appreciate your sending your department's guidelines to the committee secretary, Kathleen Breidenbach, in the Arts and Sciences dean's office, Library E-3320,