



## GUIDE TO THE INDEPENDENT CONCENTRATION PROGRAM

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### I. The Nature of Independent Concentrations

Independent Concentrations represent a distinctly personal and individualized approach to undergraduate education. An Independent Concentrator creates his or her own program of study, organizing a body of courses around a central theme, topic, or set of related inquiries. The approach and coursework draw on different departments, but the concentration must articulate a coherent field of study, with a disciplinary focus and cohesion between its various components. This program encourages students to master a subject or area of knowledge that is academically rigorous and personally rewarding.

The work of creating the concentration is integral to a student's experience in the program. In developing the Independent Concentration, the student maps out a distinctive undergraduate program and in the process, considers the very nature of an academic concentration. Each Independent Concentrator must provide a historical or theoretical context for the area of inquiry, must develop a suitable methodology, and must incorporate introductory and upper-levels classes. She or he will create a well-balanced curriculum that could stand on its own as a Brown concentration.

*The Concentration must focus on a question or field of study that cannot be explored in one of the standard concentrations available at Brown.* However, the Independent Concentration Program is still part of the Liberal Arts program at Brown and must be consistent with Brown's Mission Statement. Concentrations that focus on vocational, technical, or business training of the kind not offered at Brown will not be accepted.

### II. Requirements

#### A. Faculty Sponsor:

Any student who wishes to propose an Independent Concentration must work closely with a faculty member who sponsors the concentration. The faculty sponsor helps the student develop the concentration and submits a letter of support that accompanies the proposal. Once the concentration is approved, the faculty sponsor is responsible for meeting regularly

with the student throughout the period of the concentration to provide guidance and to assess progress made toward attaining the concentration's goals. This relationship will form a central feature in the evaluation of a student's proposal and performance in the concentration.

The faculty sponsor must be a member of the University Faculty **above the rank of instructor or lecturer**. A senior lecturer will be considered with the support of his or her departmental Chair. A student may have more than one faculty sponsor if s/he feels that it is necessary for the concentration.

### **B. Capstone Project or Honors Thesis:**

Students pursuing Independent Concentrations must complete a one-semester "capstone" project, usually in the senior year. A capstone refers to any kind of extended project that draws on what a student has learned in the concentration. An independent study culminating in a research paper is one obvious type of capstone. A performance or art opening is another. And, depending on your goals, a focused internship or other kind of educational work experience could qualify as a capstone. In the construction and implementation of the capstone, the student works closely with a faculty member, often the faculty sponsor, to bring together the central themes of the concentration.

Capstone projects are registered as one-semester Independent Study courses in the faculty sponsor's department.

Instead of a one-semester capstone project, a student may choose to pursue honors in the concentration. Honors requirements for the IC are as follows:

- Grades of superior quality
- 3 faculty readers of the student's selection that will constitute the honors committee (the advisor and 2 other readers of the thesis). One or more of the readers may be the sponsor(s) of the Independent Concentration. The thesis advisor serves as chair of the honors committee. The student is responsible for identifying these three readers early in the senior year, and is advised to keep in touch with them during the research and writing of the thesis.
- The chair coordinates the evaluation of the thesis and submits the recommendation of the group to the student and to the IC Program at the end of the year, around the end of April. Consult with the IC Dean in the Dean of the College office for the exact date.
- The student must register for 2 semesters of honors coursework in the thesis advisor's department.

### **C. A minimum of 10 core courses; 5 related courses**

Additional guidelines are provided later in this guide.

### III. Submitting an Independent Concentration Proposal: Step-by-step Guide

#### 1. How do I begin?

- Visit the Curricular Resource Center in the Robert Campus Center to review accepted IC proposals and to meet with the IC student coordinator. IC Coordinators are experienced advisors who can help you determine whether or not your idea could develop into an IC.
- Talk to as many people as you can about your ideas: faculty members, TA's, and other students – anyone who seems to be doing something similar to the project in which you are interested. Your professors and peers can help you ascertain whether or not your idea is part of an emerging field of study.
- Meet with the concentration advisors from all areas related to your IC. These faculty advisors will help you figure out whether your proposed concentration can be completed in a standard concentration.
- Meet with prospective faculty sponsor(s) to discuss concentration and proposal. *You must have a faculty sponsor in order to pursue an IC.*
- Meet with the IC Dean to discuss your plans during dean's open hours.
- Schedule an appointment with the Writing Center ([writing\\_center@brown.edu](mailto:writing_center@brown.edu)). Proposals must be coherent, thoughtful and well written. Writing Center Associates will assist with this process.

#### 2. When should I propose?

- *Students must submit their proposals prior to the end of their 6th semester.*
- You are ready to submit when your faculty sponsor approves your final draft.
- You **must declare a concentration in your 4th semester** in order to register for your 5th semester. If your IC proposal has not yet been accepted, you must declare a standard concentration. Pick one that you'd be happy completing if your IC is not approved. You will not have an IC until the committee gives you full approval; you might have to accept the standard concentration as your actual concentration.

#### 3. How do I submit my proposal and what must it include?

- **Submit a hard copy** of the materials described below, including the sponsor's letter, to University Hall Room 201.

- Letter of support from faculty sponsor. **Proposals will not be considered without a sponsor's letter.** Sponsor letters must be printed on University letterhead and signed.
- The **Cover Sheet** and the **Course List** at the end of this Guide. The Cover should include the **Name of Concentration**, a concise title that describes your area of study.
- Your proposal must include:
  - **Justification for Creating a New Concentration** (1-2 pages):
    - A)** A brief statement of your personal interest in this area, and
    - B)** A statement explaining why this program of study cannot be completed through an existing concentration.
  - **Description of the Academic Aim of the Concentration** (1 page max): A clear description of the proposed concentration's academic or scholarly goals.
  - **The Concentration in Context** (1-2 pages): A discussion of the state of this potential area of study in the larger academic world. What relevance does this concentration have for the broader academic community?
  - **Research Methods and Related Disciplines** (1-2 pages): What research methods or forms of inquiry will scholars use for academic work in this concentration? This section may include a discussion of research methods and theories from other disciplines as well as a discussion of courses and/or texts from other disciplines (as described in the Course List and Bibliography) that will be used to complete the concentration.
  - **Annotated Course List:** Provide 2-3 sentence descriptions of the academic material covered by each course and the specific way(s) each course supports the proposed IC. For example, is it a large lecture course that will provide foundational knowledge, an upper-level research seminar that will assist with methodological precision, or an intermediate-level course that will help integrate related areas of inquiry? How will each course contribute to the concentration's breadth and depth? In other words, after you articulate what your field of study is, you will need, through the annotated course list, to tell the committee how your list of courses will strengthen your knowledge and skills in this field.
- A) Minimum of 10 Core Courses** are required to complete the concentration. The course list ought to provide both breadth and depth of learning. These can be both content and method courses and there should be both **introductory and upper-level** courses. Please specify whether each course is introductory/foundation, advanced, etc.

**B) Up to 5 Related Courses** include those courses that expand upon but are not essential to the concentration. Coursework relevant to the concentration but completed at other institutions (*e.g.*, at RISD or during study abroad) fall under this category.

- **Annotated Bibliography:** List at least 10 books and/or articles, which you have already read or plan to read, central to your proposed concentration. Use standard bibliographic format: **Author. Title. Place: Publisher, date.** This bibliography should be annotated with a brief description (1-2 sentences) of the way(s) in which each text is relevant to your concentration.
- **Capstone Project Proposal OR Honors Thesis Proposal** (1 page): See above for additional details.

#### 4. When is it due?

The deadlines for submission are the first (1<sup>st</sup>) of September, October, November, February, March, and April.

#### 5. How are the proposals reviewed?

The Independent Concentrations Committee, a subcommittee of the College Curriculum Council, reviews each proposal. The ICC includes CCC faculty members, deans, and undergraduates (including one current IC student) from different disciplines. Each proposal is considered on a case-by-case basis. Decisions are arrived at only during committee meetings after lengthy discussion about the individual proposal.

#### 6. What kinds of questions does the Committee consider when reviewing proposals?

- Is it a concentration? Is there a clear and substantive theme that knits the courses into a coherent educational experience? Is this theme reflected in the proposed title (which should be both broad enough and specific enough to convey the meaning of the concentration)?
- Is it independent? Does it differ significantly from related standard concentrations? If it does resemble a standard concentration, has the student described something that is still substantially different from what he or she could take in an existing department?
- Does the faculty sponsor's letter demonstrate his or her strong commitment to the project?
- Does the concentration have pedagogical merit? Does it move from introductory to advanced coursework, even across disciplinary boundaries? Do the courses allow the

student to develop ideas and apply new techniques of investigation? Do some courses point to a larger context or theoretical perspective for looking at the field of study?

- Are the educational and intellectual goals clear? Is the intellectual groundwork (or basis or approach) compelling?
- What is the methodology of the concentration? Are there any special skills or methods, such as a foreign language or quantitative skills that are relevant for the course of study?
- Could it be a standard Brown concentration? That is, does it fall under the umbrella of a liberal arts education, as Brown has defined it?

### **7. When will I know what the Committee decided?**

Students who submit proposals will receive an official letter from the IC Dean within three weeks of the ICC meeting where the proposal was reviewed.

### **8. What are the Committee's possible responses to a proposal?**

- **Approval**
- **Tentative Approval:** the Committee asks for one or two specific changes. When the student submits these changes in writing to the IC Dean, the proposal is approved. A student whose IC receives Tentative Approval does not need to resubmit the entire proposal to the Committee.
- **Not accepted, but encouraged to resubmit:** The Committee likes the proposal but feels that the concentration still needs work. The Dean's letter will convey the Committee's suggestions to the student. If the student chooses to revise the proposal, s/he will submit all components of the proposal in a revised format addressing the Committee's questions and concerns. The Committee will consider the revised proposal only if all components are resubmitted. Along with the revised proposal, the student should submit a statement outlining the revisions, and a new letter from the faculty sponsor, acknowledging and approving of the changes.
- **Not accepted:** The Committee does not feel that the proposal is a viable Independent Concentration. The student may resubmit a proposal only if it is **substantially** different from the one that was not accepted. In some cases, the Committee has accepted proposals that have been so revised. Students who decide to resubmit a proposal which was Not Accepted need to keep their options open to complete a standard concentration.

**NOTE:** The Committee is under no obligation to accept any one proposal. Keep your options open for completing a standard concentration until you receive official approval.

### **9. Revising the proposal**

The Committee rarely grants full approval to a proposal the first time it is submitted. As Independent Concentrators have no established department, the revision process is the student's opportunity to benefit from the expertise of a guiding committee acting like a

department. Defining the concentration is a central component of the Independent Concentration, and reworking the proposal in conversation with the Committee's recommendations is a key part of that definition. Students are expected to understand that the process of proposal writing and revision is an integral part of doing an Independent Concentration.

If the Committee encourages the applicant to resubmit, the letter will list the Committee's concerns and give detailed recommendations for the revision of the concentration. Students are asked to think critically about the issues and suggestions and to consult with their faculty sponsors as they revise their proposal.

#### **IV. Changes in Approved Independent Concentration Programs**

The Independent Concentrations Committee must be notified in writing of any minor changes in the program or in the title as declared. Submission should be in the form of a letter to the IC Dean, and should be signed by the student's faculty sponsor. Major changes in the concentration, such as change of sponsor or substantive change to the final project, must be resubmitted to the ICC in the form of a new proposal.

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## **To the Faculty Sponsor of the Independent Concentration (IC)**

The CCC Subcommittee on Independent Concentrations has prepared these comments to help faculty understand the IC Program and their essential role as sponsors of Independent Concentrations.

### **Description of the IC Program and its Role at Brown**

Independent Concentrations serve the interests of highly independent and motivated students whose programs build on but are autonomous from standard concentrations. The program provides an opportunity for students compelled by a unique disciplinary inquiry that cannot be undertaken within an existing concentration. Each Independent Concentration is both Independent and a Concentration; it is a construction of the student's own design and also a discipline in its own right.

As an outgrowth of this student-driven exploration of new disciplines, Independent Concentrations have often heralded the emergence of new standard interdisciplinary concentrations, such as Environmental Studies, Health and Society, and Ethnic Studies. In this way, they have been useful to the curriculum as a measure of curricular evolution.

### **Faculty Sponsor's Role**

The faculty sponsor of an Independent Concentration is often both the chief advisor for a student and the faculty member responsible for the thesis or capstone. However, sometimes two individuals perform these roles. Because the Independent Concentration requires an integrating senior project, the faculty sponsor should be on campus during the student's senior year or in the case of the one-semester projects at least during the semester in which the project will be prepared. Logistics withstanding, most faculty who have sponsored ICs in the past have found this to be a very rewarding experience.

As you consider sponsoring an Independent Concentration Project, you should consider the following questions:

- Will you be able to supervise the work adequately? How and why will you be particularly helpful to the student proposing the concentration? Will you be on campus and available to the student during the time the work is being undertaken?
- Does the proposal show an integrated approach? Does it develop a coherently focused theme using a distinctive methodology? Does it have disciplinary rigor? What can you offer to the student's proposed study, thematically and methodologically?
- How do the courses related to one another to represent a new and original field of inquiry?

- What is the nature of the final project? Does the student describe it in depth? Is the project feasible? Can you properly advise it?
- Is this really an Independent Concentration or is it simply a modified standard concentration?

The IC Committee has found it most effective when the students and faculty consult at length during the development of the proposal. The student benefits also by consulting widely in the development of his or her ideas and should be encouraged to refer to approved independent concentration proposals on file in the Curricular Resource Center and to consult with the IC Dean in the Dean of the College office.

### **Sponsor's Statement**

Please provide a statement describing your support of this Independent Concentration and the ways in which you plan to advise it. Please describe your role as an advisor in this concentration and the ways in which you propose to participate in and supervise it.



BROWN

**PROPOSAL FOR AN INDEPENDENT CONCENTRATION**  
**Submit completed proposal to UH 201**

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Banner ID \_\_\_\_\_

Box \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Year of Graduation \_\_\_\_\_

Degree AB ScB Honors Candidate Yes No Semester submitted \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Concentration Program \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Sponsor \_\_\_\_\_ Sponsor's Dept. \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor's Title \_\_\_\_\_ (Must be above rank of lecturer.)

Is this a revision of a proposal submitted earlier? Yes No

Will this program replace one previously declared? Yes No  
If yes, which one? \_\_\_\_\_

Will this program be in addition to one previously declared? Yes No  
If yes, which one? \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTRUCTIONS**

- List the core and related courses of your concentration on the attached form.

- On additional pages, provide the following:

- A letter of support from the faculty sponsor
- Justification for creating a new concentration
- Description of the academic aim of the concentration
- Description of the concentration in context
- Statement of research methods
- Annotated course description
- Annotated bibliography
- Capstone project or Honors thesis proposal

Student's signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**CORE COURSES**

*Minimum of 10 courses for a Bachelor of Arts degree program*

<b>Student's Semester</b>	<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Course Number</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Instructor</b>
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**RELATED COURSES**

*Maximum of 5 courses*

<b>Student's Semester</b>	<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Course Number</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Instructor</b>
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