

FAQs re Independent Project Requirement

Forms

Q. Is there any form that needs to be completed before I do my independent project?

Q. The paperwork online implies that I only have to submit a report upon completion, so what do I need to do to get my research approved as an independent project prior to beginning?

Q. It was my understanding that an independent project proposal had to be approved prior to engaging in the project so that upon completion you don't have to deal with your completed project not being accepted.

A. You do not need to complete any form before doing your project nor do you need any prior approval. However, since you will need an RWJMS faculty member to sign off on your project at the end, it is certainly advisable to make sure that there is a faculty member who would be willing to do so in advance.

Q. I completed a Progress Report earlier in the year, but it was not up-to-date with my current plans for my Independent Project. What do I need to do in order to have my project approved for an Independent Project and what paperwork needed to be done?

A. It is advisable that when you submit a new Progress Report every time you make major changes in the status of your independent project. You can update your progress report as often as you like. You do not need to have your project approved in advance by the Office of Education, but it is advisable to get the approval by the faculty member who is eventually going to sign off on it.

Q. What do I have to do when my independent project is completed?

A. For students who do their projects here at RWJMS, they complete the one last Progress Report, fill out the Final Submission form, have it signed by the faculty advisor, and submit the Form with the accompanying materials to the Office of Education in Piscataway or the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in Camden. The final materials accompanying the cover sheet can be a paper, a set of slides from a presentation, an eight by eleven copy of a poster, a set of journal entries or other such evidence of scholarly work.

For students who did their research project at another institution, they need to have it approved by the Office of Research at RWJMS as well as the faculty member at the other location. Please visit http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/research/mst/independent_study.html for guidance on gaining credit for research-based independent study. You will need your mentor at the other location to sign your final form and provide a letter as outlined in the aforementioned website. All materials should be submitted to Diane Ambrose, PhD in the Office of Research (ambrosedm@umdnj.edu; 732-418-8464) for review. Once approved there it will be sent on to the Office of Education in Piscataway or the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in Camden.

The Process of Doing the Independent Study

NOTE the Credit You Receive for Completing the CITI Certification

Q. How would I account for the number of hours spent on the project?

A. You do not have to submit a time sheet regarding your work on your independent project. Your final submission, including your signature and a copy of your work (paper, poster, slides from a presentation, journal entries, etc.), along with the signature of your supervising faculty member at RWJMS will attest to the amount of scholarly work that you engaged in.

Q. If I were to interview patients and their parents about their experiences, do I need some sort of IRB approval?

A. Yes, you need IRB approval. Importantly, the IRB won't approve students directly, so the faculty member who is supervising you must obtain the approval. In addition, you cannot participate in an IRB approved research project until you get a Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) certification. This can take up to 30 hours and can count toward your 160 hour requirement. Please see <http://www.umdj.edu/hsweb/Education/index.html> for more information.

Q. My idea is to spend the summer reviewing the literature on a specific model of care, spend about 2 weeks observing in a facility where they use this model, and then produce a paper, likely to be mostly literature review. Is the plan that I described above sufficient?

A. Yes, that is sufficient as long as the total of the scholarly of the scholarly activity is at least 160 hours.

Q. In terms of literature review I am wondering: Could this be a report /summary of study results of published papers? How long should be my writing; that is, what is the minimum number of pages? Is there a minimum number of studies that should be included?

A. I would suggest you find the faculty member who is going to sign off on your project and discuss this with that person (I would assume that the faculty advisor would be someone with expertise in the topic area you are choosing). Remember, the independent project is something that entails at least 160 hours of work. If you are going to write a review paper (certainly a scholarly exercise) you will have to search the literature using some sort of criteria. This is where the advice of your faculty advisor comes into play. While there is no page limit or number of studies to be included, it obviously has to be consistent with the requirement.

Q. I am going to be working in the lab of the neurologist for whom I worked for a year while I applied to medical school. I will likely be writing up a previously completed experiment for publication. Will my summer research fulfill my independent project requirement?

A. The independent project has a broad set of areas in which you can work. However, simply writing up the results of a project done before medical school would not qualify. On the other hand, if such a write up entails additional scholarly work (of at least 160 hours), and your faculty member approves of this as your independent project, then yes, you can use this (you do have to have a faculty member sign off on your final project).

Q. Last summer, I participated in a Spanish language immersion program Peru, where I worked in a hospital and learned about the country's healthcare system. My independent project will compare certain aspects of healthcare in Peru with healthcare provided to the Spanish speaking population in New Brunswick and will include assessments of clinical and hospital care in the two locations. I am seeking to gain information about the Promise Clinic, Chandler Health Center and a local hospital.

A. You may or may not need IRB approval. It all depends on what type of data you are using for making the comparisons. If there are no patient identifiers, you are probably alright. However, it is very valuable to understand the issues involved with human subjects and research so you are strongly encouraged to become Collaborative IRB Training Initiative (CITI) certified. **This can take up to 30 hours and can count toward your 160 hour requirement.** Please see <http://www.umdnj.edu/hsweb/Education/index.html> for more information. The CITI certification course will also help you determine if you need IRB approval.

Q. I have spoken to the physician I will be working with and he is interested in working with me and serving as my mentor. I plan to interview some of his patients and their parents.

A. If you are going to do a research project that involves human subjects you will either need him or some other pediatric department member to help get the IRB approval. You can work with the IRB to get the needed forms, fill them all out, etc., and just have your preceptor sign them, assuming he is already CITI certified. I would suggest that you wait to talk with the IRB until after you have finished the CITI certification.

Finding an Advisor

Q. I've been trying to find a mentor, but it's been difficult to find any faculty who would be interested in working with me. Is it correct that the advisor for the independent project needs to be an RWJMS faculty member?

Q. This summer I will be researching at Jersey Shore Medical Center and was hoping to use this research for my Independent Project. I understand that I need a RWJ faculty member to be my mentor and I was intending on asking my PCM facilitator if he would be willing to assume that role.

A. As a graduation requirement, the independent project must be signed by an RWJMS faculty member. You can certainly use your PCM facilitator if that individual is willing to do so. Also, you can still do an away experience, in which case the faculty member with whom you worked in that other institution has to sign off, as well as someone at RWJMS. For finding someone at RWJMS in your field of interest, I would recommend looking at the Advisor Program list in Student Affairs or the "A Day in the Life" list of faculty who are interested in having students shadow them as a place to start.

Q. I will be traveling to Costa Rica this summer with a few other medical students through a program that Dr. Escobar has organized. I would like to do my independent project while there but I am not exactly sure where to begin. Who should I ask to be my advisor, how to I choose a topic, and is there anyone that might be able to help me do these things.

A. I would start by asking Dr. Escobar to be your advisor. He can also help you find a topic or find someone else to work with.

Q. I will be working with a faculty member at CINJ this summer on a breast cancer project. Since this faculty member is associated with UMDNJ/RWJMS, do I need to look for anyone else to have my independent project approved?

A. No, as long as the faculty member has an appointment with UMDNJ-RWJMS, you do not need anyone else to sign off on your project (until the final signature in the Office of Education in Piscataway or the Office of Student and Academic Affairs in Camden).

What has to be Produced and/or Submitted

Q. During a summer project, I am conducting lit reviews, collecting data, and writing a fact sheet on multiple risk behaviors in adolescents as my main project. Other responsibilities include attending senate briefings and forums, grant-writing, and memo-writing on a wide range of adolescent health and health policy topics. Would this meet the criteria for the Independent Project Requirement?

A. Yes, as long it involves at least 160 hours of scholarly work.

Q. What is included in a reflective journal? What are the expectations for frequency of entries? How long should the journal be?

A. A reflective journal is a series of entries made by you in reference to an experience or topic. It cannot be simply random thoughts nor only one's own opinion. It must reflect scholarly consideration of a topic. This may include references or citations of books or experts. The journal itself does not have to take 160 hours, but the journal should reflect work done of a substantial and scholarly nature.

Q. Do I need to supplement my participation in my away research experience and my presentation about that research with a paper to fulfill the requirement?

A. And as long as you can submit the slides of your presentation along with the abstract, that should be good enough for your submission.

Q. The Final Submission Form asks for a Final Product/Results copy to be attached. I am not sure what kind of attachment is needed here. I submitted to the Research office a thorough abstract which highlights what we found. Should I attach that?

A. What needs to be attached is evidence of the project that goes beyond the abstract. This is usually a copy of the paper, but could be a set of slides that was used for a research presentation, or an eight by eleven copy of a poster.

Q. I have finished doing my project and already presented my work at the Global Health Fair in December (poster presentation). Am I required to also write up a paper on this as well or is it considered completed?

A. The poster as evidence of your work should be sufficient, along with your signature and that of the faculty advisor.

Q. I understand that a short paper is not sufficient as evidence of completing the project. There is a possibility for me to help present the research at a conference this fall, though I would not be the first author on the abstract. Would that be sufficient?

A. It depends on your involvement in the research project. Usually when you are an author this will be significant, but your mentor and/or your faculty advisor will have to decide. That is, if one of them signs off on the project as sufficient, it most likely will be all you need. Review of research that are occurring at the level of the Office of Research and in the Dean's office have so far not overturned faculty findings.

Research Outside of RWJMS

Q. I am currently participating in the Medical Student Research Training Program at another university and would like to use my work to complete the independent project. Since that school did not assign preceptors until we were on site and because there are so many different topics being researched this summer, I was unable to attain an RWJMS faculty advisor before leaving New Jersey. How do I find an advisor after the fact?

A. While it is better by far to have a faculty advisor in advance, in those situations when it is not possible, the Office of Research will review the project, and they may even sign off on it themselves. Please contact, Diane Ambrose, PhD in the Office of Research (ambrosedm@umdnj.edu; 732-418-8464). Please visit http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/research/mst/independent_study.html for guidance on gaining credit for a research-based independent study.

Q. I am currently participating in a Research Summer Fellowship Program at another institution. At the conclusion of the program, I am required to give a 10-15 minute presentation discussing the details of the study (i.e. purpose, methods, and results) as well as my personal role in the project. Does my participation in the fellowship program and my presentation satisfy my independent project requirement?

A. Your summer research fellowship does qualify. However, you need to have an RWJMS faculty member sign off on the project before it comes to the Office of Education in Piscataway or the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in Camden. Please visit http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/research/mst/independent_study.html for guidance on gaining credit for research-based independent study. You will need your mentor at the other location to sign your final form and provide a letter as outlined in the aforementioned website. All materials should be submitted to Diane Ambrose, PhD in the Office of Research (ambrosedm@umdnj.edu; 732-418-8464) for review.

Q. Who can be the advisor for my project since I am participating in a program outside of RWJMS? Can my program sponsor/supervisor at the other location be considered my advisor?

A. If you are at an outside location, because this is a graduation requirement, you must still have sign-off by an RWJMS faculty member. You will need your mentor at the other site to sign your final form and provide a letter as outlined at http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/research/mst/independent_study.html. All materials should be submitted to Diane Ambrose, PhD in the Office of Research (ambrosedm@umdnj.edu; 732-418-8464) for review.

Q. I'm an MS I and I'm planning on doing my independent project in conjunction with a program in China on acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine. Dr. Escobar said he would be the faculty sponsor, but do I need him to do anything before I go? Is there a form he should sign?

A. No, Dr. Escobar does not need to do anything in advance.

Q. The progress report asks whom the project was approved by: "department/institute" and then "faculty member." I did my research at another university last summer. Should I leave this part blank, or fill in the appropriate items as they pertain to that other school? On the final submission form, it again asks for a faculty advisor's signature. Should this be my advisor from the other school? Do I need to obtain any other information from him?

Q. I attached a letter from my advisor from the research I did last summer at another university. Will this be sufficient to meet the requirements for the project?

A. You need to have an RWJMS faculty member sign off on the project before it comes to the Office of Education in Piscataway or the Office of Academic and Student Affairs in Camden. Please visit http://rwjms.umdnj.edu/research/mst/independent_study.html for guidance on gaining credit for research-based independent study. You will need your mentor at the other location to sign your final form and provide a letter as outlined in the aforementioned website. All materials should be submitted to Diane Ambrose, PhD in the Office of Research (ambrosedm@umdnj.edu; 732-418-8464) for review.

Final Submission Questions

Q. Who in the office of education should I give my final submission materials to and where are they located?

A. Laura Mujia in the Office of Education, N-119 – if she is not there you can give it to Donna MacGregor in room N-1120. The Office of Education is located down the hall from the West Lecture Hall on the Piscataway campus.

Q. I participated in the COPC program last summer and completed my 8 weeks at the Eric B. Chandler Health Center in New Brunswick. I received an email earlier this year from Dr. Looney stating that you approved the COPC program, since it fulfilled the requirements for the independent project. I have my abstract and the materials from my work over the summer attached to the project form. Dr. Looney signed it as my faculty advisor this past week. I was wondering if you were the signature I would need from the department of education in order to complete this graduation requirement?

A. Yes, please provide the final form to the Office of Education.

Q. I submitted my final report and a copy of my abstract with acceptance into a conference back in October or November to the education office. Do I still need to do this update? I am just waiting to see if my submission back then was approved.

A. Once you have submitted all of your materials you need to do one more Progress Report what shows you have completed the project.