Guidelines for Undergraduate Independent Study

In an ongoing quest to provide our undergraduates with innovative and challenging courses of study, the Department of Computer Science offers students an opportunity to pursue fields of study that are not currently a part of the Computer Science Undergraduate curriculum. We encourage all students to consider taking part in an independent study in order to broaden the scope of their knowledge in this ever-changing field.

The purpose of an Independent Study (CMSC 298A/498A) is to allow advanced undergraduates to pursue an individualized course of study. Generally, a student interested in completing an independent study contacts a faculty member who is working in (or knowledgeable about) a particular field in which a student has developed an interest. The student then asks the faculty member to help him or her complete the independent study. More often than not, a student works on an independent study with a faculty member who is already familiar with his or her class work.

Once the student and faculty member decide on the course of study for the semester, it becomes the student's responsibility to set up a meeting schedule with his or her faculty sponsor; it is also the student's responsibility to maintain contact with his or her faculty sponsor throughout the semester. It is the faculty member's responsibility to make sure that he or she is available to meet with his or her student(s). The student fills out an application form, writes a short description of what will be covered during the semester, and has the faculty sponsor sign the application form. The application form acts as a contract between the faculty sponsor and student to ensure that both parties meet the expectations that are set out during their initial meeting.

Steps to complete an Independent Study:

1. Decide what field of study you would like to pursue; either set up an appointment with the faculty member that would best be able to assist you, or get advice about which faculty member would best assist you. Schedule a meeting with a faculty member and ask him or her to be your sponsor for the independent study.

2. If the faculty member agrees to become your faculty sponsor, make sure to set out a course of study (in writing) which outlines the work that you will be doing throughout the semester. At this time, the faculty member should explain to you how he or she plans to evaluate your work (e.g. homework assignments, problem sets, and specific projects).

3. Write a brief description of your course of study--300- 500 typed words--outlining what you plan to accomplish during the course of the semester.

4. Fill out an Application for Undergraduate Independent Study form; you can obtain one of these forms from the Computer Science Undergraduate Education Office (A.V. Williams 1119). Make sure that you get your faculty sponsor to sign the application form.

5. Bring the brief description of your course of study along with the application form and turn them both in to the Computer Science Undergraduate Education Office.