

GUIDELINES FOR INDEPENDENT STUDY FOR YEAR ABROAD

All ACS majors at the University of Birmingham must complete a dissertation of no more than 12,000 words by late March of their final year. The dissertation, which is assessed by both internal and external examiners, accounts for 22.5% of the marks for the final degree classification. Joint Honours students with ACS will have to do a 6000-word extended essay that is worth 11.25% of the final degree classification.

Preparation for the dissertation while abroad takes the form of an independent study. Students must find a supervisor and register formally for the course to ensure that credit for independent study appears on their transcripts (although we can accept an independent study that is done informally if your supervisor confirms you have completed it). It is not essential that your supervisor be a specialist in the subject that you are considering provided that he or she is interested in your work and can offer feedback both on your research and on the written assessment. All students should begin the process of finding a supervisor by November at the latest. Please note: the independent study should be graded on a pass-fail basis so as to ensure that the work you do for the independent study can be used toward your final-year dissertation or extended essay. It is not a problem if you receive a grade, however we will record it only as a pass when we convert grades and it will not affect your overall grade for your year abroad.

The basic timetable for the independent study is as follows:

Autumn of Year Abroad: begin to think about independent study topic; find supervisor; register for independent study

January-May: complete and pass independent study

April: Students should declare a draft title for their dissertation along with a brief description (maximum 250 words) of its focus (this will help us assign you a supervisor in your final year) and inform Mags Conway of their choice. Please note: Although the title can be broad enough to allow flexibility, you should ensure that the independent study work is something you are interested in working on for your final-year dissertation or extended essay. Changing your dissertation topic/extended essay from what you worked on for your independent study means extra work for you and could negatively affect your grade.

All Campuses:

We do not set the requirements for independent study since it is a module like any other you take while you are abroad. Formally that is up to your supervisor, who may suggest a series of short assignments, one extended essay, or even 'practical' tasks such as internet searches, a bibliographic essay or source review or a review of North American catalogues.

If the supervisor is open to suggestions for assignments, our recommendation is that at a minimum a student prepares at least two written assignments, one of which must be a minimum of 3,000 words.

If a potential supervisor has any questions about your project or these guidelines, she/he should be encouraged to contact the Year Abroad Tutor at email: s.r.hewitt@bham.ac.uk