Regulations for Honors and Independent Studies

Department of Biology, City College of New York, City University of New York

OVERVIEW

The Department encourages undergraduate students to gain research experience. Students meeting certain criteria (see below) and conducting research with departmental faculty members may enroll for credit via Honors or Independent Study courses in Biology. The principal differences between the two are that: (a) the GPA requirements for Honors are higher than those for Independent Study; (b) laboratory, field, or library research may be conducted for Independent Study, but Honors requires laboratory or field research; and (c) three semesters of 3 credits each are required for Honors, whereas Independent Study can be taken for 1-3 credits for each of one to three semesters. Although no strict time commitments exist for these courses, they should entail an overall effort similar to that for a typical Biology elective course of an equivalent number of credits. The mentor (who is responsible for evaluating the student’s performance and assigning their grade) must be a faculty member in the Department of Biology. However, students commonly conduct research in the labs of co-mentors, such as faculty members in other departments or Ph.D.-level scientists at other institutions. Students who wish to enroll in Honors or Independent Study but who are not yet working in a lab should consult the faculty research interests listed on the Biology webpage and contact faculty members whose research interests them. In addition, students are encouraged to explore various programs at CCNY that may be able to provide stipends for undergraduates who are doing research (e.g., AMP, AMS, City College Fellows, MARC, NOAA-CREST, and RISE; contact the CCAPP/Science Advising Office for more information).

HONORS IN BIOLOGY

Application and enrollment:

1. Before beginning Honors courses in Biology, students must have completed at least 15 credits in the Biology core courses; these include BIO 10100, 10200, 20600, 20700, 22800, and 22900. Students interested in research but who have not yet completed this requirement are encouraged to begin working in a lab and later apply for enrollment in Honors once they meet the requirement.

2. Students enrolling in Honors in Biology must have at least a 3.5 GPA in the Biology core courses and an overall GPA of 3.0 or higher. Students must maintain a 3.5 GPA in Biology courses and an overall 3.0 GPA for enrollment in subsequent semesters and for granting of Departmental Honors upon graduation. In cases where the student’s GPA
slips slightly below the level required for reenrollment, the committee may approve enrollment for a one-semester probationary period in consultation with the mentor.

3. The application must be signed by the mentor and submitted to the departmental Committee on Honors and Independent Studies (CHIS) for evaluation. A brief summary of the proposed research (typically one paragraph) should be attached to the application. Only laboratory or field projects will be accepted for Honors.

4. Students are highly encouraged to apply to the CHIS during the normal registration period towards the end of the semester before which they want to begin Honors. However, to ensure consideration of their application, students should apply **no later than one week before the first day of classes each semester**. Any application received after that time will be considered only pending the availability of the Chair of the CHIS. No applications can be processed after classes have begun.

5. The Chair of the CHIS will forward approved applications to the Registrar, who will open a section for the mentor and place the student in it.

6. After successful completion of a semester of Honors research, students should submit the Renewal Form to enroll for the subsequent semester. The Committee highly recommends that students do so when turning in the Progress Report Form at the end of the semester (see below). Deadlines for renewal are the same as for initial enrollment.

**Requirements for completion of Honors in Biology (including grading):**

1. To earn Honors in Biology, students must complete three semesters of Honors credit with a grade of A- or higher for the first two semesters (BIO 30100 and 30200) and a grade of A or higher for the final semester (BIO 30300). Students will receive 9 credits for these courses, but only 6 credits may be applied as Biology elective credits.

2. Each semester, students must submit a research paper (see below) to their mentor; the mentor reads the paper and assigns a grade. Students should consult mentors early in the semester regarding a suitable timeline to ensure that they provide the paper to the mentor sufficiently in advance of the deadline to allow for comments, rewriting, and final grading. The student is responsible for submitting the graded paper and Progress Report Form to the CHIS by the last day of classes; once this is done, the mentor may submit the student’s grade to the College.

3. If a student has not completed sufficient progress (i.e., if no graded research paper is submitted to the CHIS on time), the mentor may choose to assign an INC grade, which will convert to FIN if not completed 10 weeks into the next semester. This is extremely detrimental to a student applying to professional schools. Alternatively, the mentor can submit a grade of Y (Y is a pending grade). A great deal of paperwork is involved in changing an INC or Y to a final letter grade; hence, mentors should avoid this whenever possible. In cases where an INC or Y is assigned, the Progress Report Form and final
graded paper still must be submitted to the CHIS before the mentor files paperwork with the College to change the INC or Y to the final letter grade.

4. The research paper should be in the format of a scientific paper. It is expected that papers will be longer and include more substance with each passing semester. Although the Committee has no specific requirements regarding length, first-semester papers often run 6-10 double-spaced pages (including references, tables, and figures), and final research papers (third semester) typically are substantially longer (often 20-25 pages).

5. The Committee strongly suggests that students make every effort to collect all data in the first and second semesters (BIO 30100 and 30200), with the third term (BIO 30300) used for writing the final research paper. Students are responsible for submitting their final research papers to their mentors for evaluation, correction and final acceptance. The final research paper must have a cover sheet with the title of the research, student name, and date. The name and title of the mentor (and those of any co-mentor) should be in the lower right corner of the cover sheet, with a line below that for his/her signature of approval. Students should submit two copies of their final research paper to the Chair of the CHIS.

6. Students completing the third semester of Honors are eligible and highly encouraged to present their research at the annual Biology Undergraduate Research Presentations, usually held in late March or early April. Students who completed BIO 30300 the preceding fall or summer term should present their research along with the students finishing BIO 30300 in the spring semester. Each student will have ten minutes to present his or her research and five minutes to answer questions. The quality of presentations factors into determination of the recipients of departmental awards.

INDEPENDENT STUDIES IN BIOLOGY

Application and enrollment:

1. Before beginning Independent Study courses in Biology, students must have completed at least 15 credits in the Biology core courses; these include BIO 10100, 10200, 20600, 20700, 22800, and 22900. Students interested in research but who have not yet completed this requirement are encouraged to begin working in a lab and later apply for enrollment in Independent Study once they meet the requirement.

2. Students enrolling in Independent Study in Biology must have at least a 3.0 GPA in the Biology core courses and an overall GPA of 2.8 or higher. Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA in Biology courses and an overall 2.8 GPA for enrollment in subsequent semesters.

3. The application must be signed by the mentor and submitted to the departmental Committee on Honors and Independent Studies (CHIS) for evaluation. A brief summary of the proposed research (typically one paragraph) should be attached to the application.
Individual laboratory, field, or library investigation of a problem is suitable, but no more than three credits of library research may be taken.

4. Students are highly encouraged to apply to the CHIS during the normal registration period towards the end of the semester before which they wish to begin Independent Study. However, to ensure consideration of their application, students should apply no later than one week before the first day of classes each semester. Any application received after that time will be considered only pending the availability of the Chair of the CHIS. No applications can be processed after classes have begun.

5. The Chair of CHIS will forward approved applications to the Registrar, who will open a section for the mentor and place the student in it.

6. After successful completion of a semester of Independent Study research, students should submit the Renewal Form to enroll in the subsequent semester (if desired). The Committee highly recommends that students do so when turning in the Progress Report Form at the end of the semester (see below). Deadlines for renewal are the same as for initial enrollment.

Requirements for Independent Study in Biology (including grading):

1. Students may earn 1-3 credits of Independent Study in a given term (BIO 31001, 31002, and 31003, respectively). The maximum total number of credits that can be earned is 9, but only 6 credits may be applied as Biology elective credits. Students may do one semester (up to 3 credits) of non-laboratory Independent Study; students intending to earn 6 or 9 credits must do laboratory research.

2. Each semester, students must submit a research paper (see below) to their mentor; the mentor reads the paper and assigns a grade. Students should consult mentors early in the semester regarding a suitable timeline to ensure that they provide the paper to the mentor sufficiently in advance of the deadline to allow for comments, rewriting, and final grading. The student is responsible for submitting the graded paper and Progress Report Form to the CHIS by the last day of classes; once this is done, the mentor may submit the student’s grade to the College.

3. If a student has not completed sufficient progress (i.e., if no graded research paper is submitted to the CHIS on time), the mentor may choose to assign an INC grade, which will convert to FIN if not completed 10 weeks into the next semester. This is extremely detrimental to a student applying to professional schools. A great deal of paperwork is involved in changing an INC to a final letter grade; hence, mentors should avoid this whenever possible. In cases where an INC is assigned, the Progress Report Form and final graded paper still must be submitted to the CHIS before the mentor files paperwork with the College to change the INC to the final letter grade.

4. The research paper should be in the format of a scientific paper. It is expected that papers will be longer and include more substance with each passing semester (if the
student completes more than one semester). Although the Committee has no specific requirements regarding length, first-semester papers (for 3 credits of Independent Study) often run 6-10 double-spaced pages (including references, tables, and figures).

5. If (a) the student wants to, (b) their mentor approves it, and (3) space is available, students completing three semesters of Independent Study (9 total credits) may present their research along with the Honors students at the annual Biology Undergraduate Research Presentations, usually held in late March or early April. Each student will have ten minutes to present his or her research and five minutes to answer questions. The quality of presentations factors into determination of the recipients of departmental awards. Independent Study students in this situation should contact the Chair of the CHIS early in the spring semester.