

IDSVA SYLLABUS

Seminar 802: Independent Study 1

Course Number:	802
Course Name:	<i>Independent Study 1</i>
Dates:	Sept 2-Dec 17
Format:	Online
Instructor:	Prof. Giovanbattista Tusa
TA:	Jeanne Moore
Credits:	5

Course Description

The Independent Study I programme provides an invaluable opportunity for students to deepen their academic interests while seamlessly integrating them into the broader IDSVA curriculum. The programme has been carefully designed to guide students through comprehensive research, helping them to identify and develop potential dissertation topics to encourage focused and strategic scholarly exploration. A central goal of Independent Study I is to enhance critical thinking and academic writing skills. Students engage in in-depth analysis that promotes mastery of sophisticated writing techniques essential to the clear and persuasive articulation of complex ideas.

Throughout the programme, students are divided into small groups and have the opportunity to receive personal feedback on their topics from guest lecturers, the professor and the teaching assistant. In this way, students lay a solid foundation in critical methods and scholarly communication — key to the success of their dissertation and future academic career. By the end of the programme, they will be able to refine their research focus and produce well-structured, compelling academic papers that demonstrate critical understanding and intellectual rigour. The programme emphasises the importance of developing a distinct voice that appeals to a wide audience and encourages students to communicate their ideas coherently and with sophistication. This intensive experience is designed to enable students to formulate sophisticated arguments, conduct critical analyses, and communicate their findings effectively. Ultimately, the programme prepares students to become influential scholars and artists who produce impactful, original work and are equipped with the skills necessary to make significant contributions to their field and participate confidently in high-level academic discourse.

Learning Objectives

The IDSVA Independent Study program is designed to help the student develop particular scholarly interests and to integrate those interests within the IDSVA curriculum. It is also meant to encourage exploration and extended research toward a dissertation topic, keeping in mind that eliminating unsuitable topics can be just as beneficial as identifying suitable ones. Thus, the Independent Study provides the occasion to cultivate advanced critical methods and scholarly

writing skills, which will be indispensable later on when embarking on the more ambitious project of the dissertation itself.

Course Requirements

Videoconferences involving all students in the seminar are scheduled roughly every three weeks; Individual Phone Calls are also scheduled every three weeks. The TA will moderate Open Class Forum (OCF) discussions roughly every three weeks.

Open Class Forum. In designated OCF weeks, there will be a formal and collaborative discussion of readings. OCF is a focused conversation with the readings and one another (not a social-media forum).

- During these weeks, the TA will post on OCF up to three intertextual questions based on the assigned readings. These questions will be posted as one post no later than Monday at 12 am Eastern Time.
- Replies to questions should be thoughtful and succinct (under 200 words) in order to keep the conversation lively and to the point.
- Replies should (i) address at least one of the questions, and (ii) engage productively with other student comments.
- You are welcome to reply to more than one question, but please post the replies separately.
- Every student is required to answer a question in OCF in designated weeks. Replies must be posted by **Sunday** at midnight at the latest, but you are strongly encouraged to post replies sooner, to enable more fruitful discussion.
- There will also be optional discussions in Canvas every week.
- In addition to serving our immediate learning and engagement with the material, Open Class Forum discussions should also lay the groundwork for the seminar essay questions. Cohort OCF discussion is archived and, if you have a good solid OCF trail, oral exam prep is very doable. Without that, orals prep can be very difficult.

Videoconferences (VC).

Students are required to *participate* in videoconference seminar discussions, so please come to class. For this specific course, they'll be structured as an interactive workshop, so please bring the materials/presentations requested each time.

You should factor in 2 hours per videoconference (plus some buffer time in the beginning and the end) and make every effort to be present via webcam & audio.

Attendance policy: students are expected to attend *every* class. Video recordings are available as a make-up resource for missed classes, but they should not be considered equivalent to attending the class in person. More than two missed Videoconferences will lower the final grade of 0.25 points per missed meeting. Please inform the TA and the professor in advance if you cannot attend the VC.

Individual Phone Calls (IC).

Each student will engage in a phone discussion with Prof. Tusa. The Calls will be scheduled approximately a week in advance; they last approximately 30 minutes. Students should come to

the calls prepared to discuss the readings for that week and with a couple of questions to the reading to be discussed with the professor.

Attendance policy:

If you need to reschedule your IC, please notify the professor in advance. Please reschedule only for urgent reasons, and possibly within the designated IC week.

More than two missed VC will lower the final grade of 0.25 points per missed meeting. Please inform the TA and the professor in advance if you cannot attend the VC.

(We suggest you add the scheduled IC into your calendar: in this way, you'll make sure not to miss it.)

Written assignment:

Independent Study I involves substantial research that results in a **4000-5000** words paper on a topic of the student's choice. This paper will be turned into a 20-minute written and spoken presentation (conference-style) after the end of the semester, and it will be presented at the end of January (TBS). Your written presentation should not exceed 9 pages, double spaced.

While many students have excellent library access at their home institutions, we ask that you also use the IDSVA library resources for some portion of your research. Doing so familiarizes you with those resources prior to working on your dissertation, when you will have a great need for the specialized materials and wisdom the IDSVA library can provide.

Papers should include a minimum of eight bibliographic entries, approximately half drawn from current or past seminar readings and the remainder from new research.

Independent Study Directors should use their discretion regarding the appropriate quantity of additional reading. If questions arise, the student and/or the IS Director should contact the Chair of Independent Studies for guidance.

The IDSVA Writing Guide must be used, especially at the early stages when drafting the outline and working on the thesis statement, to ensure that a proper argument-driven paper is developed throughout the process. Please make sure you use the latest version, as it contains some useful tips on how to turn your paper into a 20-minute-long presentation (see Appendix of the Writing Guide).

The MLA manual of style must be used. Students should buy the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, through which they can gain access to the online version as well. A succinct version of the MLA style is available online at:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

(Unfortunately at the time of writing MLA does not offer institutional access to its handbook).

Papers must be written in Times New Roman or serif font, point 12, double-spaced, leaving a 1" margin on top and bottom, and 1" on right and left sides. *No other fonts or formats will be*

accepted. Make sure all your documents (including drafts) are editable: files should have a word .doc or .docx extension – no .pdf will be accepted.

The papers must include at least three books from the course of study - and no more than 8 references in total.

Papers should be around 4,000-5,000 words total (corresponding to 12-15 pp double-spaced). It is strongly advised that papers adhere to a three-part structure, with intro and conclusion, in which each part develops a main point of evidence in support of the argument (with key concepts, thinkers, and artistic examples as needed). For example:

Introduction: 500-700 words

Section 1: 1000-1200 words

Section 2: 1000-1200 words

Section 3: 1000-1200 words

Conclusion: 400-700 words

It is good practice to follow this model and the Outline format specified in the Writing Guide from the first meeting with your advisor. After writing down the topic and the main research question, followed by the working thesis, please write down (as a little table of contents) the three sections of your paper. Or in other words, what could be the three sub-concepts that constitute your main subject? What is the key concept and thinker you will analyze in each section? What is/are the specific art/media example(s) that you will critique in relation to those concepts?

Note: in this course, please upload your drafts directly to Canvas (under Assignments). With your final paper, you will also submit a separate **abstract** with **keywords** (see Canvas/Assignments). This abstract will be posted in the [IDSVA IS Database](#), accessible to all students at IDSVA (Canvas homepage), creating a valuable resource for students.

All students must submit one paper each year for conference presentation or scholarly publication, and should provide information about that submission to the Independent Study Director, as well as to the Chair of Independent Studies. While other long papers may be submitted for publication or conference presentation (for instance, the “quasi-IS”), the Independent Study is an obvious candidate for this, and attempts should be made toward publication. Please consult the **IDSVA Guide to Academic Publishing** for information on professional journals and conferences (available in the Canvas Homepage, “Useful Links”).

Assessment and Grading

The course grade will be based on the average grade of your writing assignments (60%; all must be completed); the grade for your collaboration work on OCF (15%); the grade for your

contributions to Videoconference seminars (15%) and the grade for your Individual Phone Call discussions (10%).

Students are required to familiarize themselves with the Rubric for Long Papers Evaluation (available in Canvas), which will be used as a meter to assess final papers.

Late submissions will be accepted but not given credit unless prior arrangements have been made. A grade reduction may apply to late submissions.

Extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis in response to special circumstances. For extensions exceeding two weeks after the due date at the end of the semester, students should request an Incomplete (see Student Handbook).