

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS) ABOUT INDEPENDENT STUDY (498) AND INDEPENDENT RESEARCH (499)

- **(Q): WHAT IS INDEPENDENT STUDY (PSYC 498) AND INDEPENDENT RESEARCH (PSYC 499)?**
- (A): The Psychology Program at CSUSM places a strong emphasis on psychology as an empirical science and seeks to provide advanced students with in-depth, hands-on experiences with significant issues in the field and with the techniques psychologists employ to address those issues. Toward this end, Independent Study (PSYC 498) and Independent Research (PSYC 499) were developed.

- **(Q): WHO SHOULD ENROLL IN INDEPENDENT STUDY (PSYC 498) AND/OR INDEPENDENT RESEARCH (PSYC 499)?**
- (A): Some students get the impression that they “must” take Independent Study (PSYC 498) and/or Independent Research (PSYC 499) or their psychology degree will be incomplete or inferior. This is not the case. PSYC 498 and 499 are designed primarily for students who are interested in, and excited by, the prospect of learning how to plan and conduct research projects, and who are planning on applying to competitive Masters or Ph.D. programs. If you do not enjoy the various activities that are part of the research process (e.g., designing studies, collecting data, coding data, analyzing data, writing APA papers, presenting research results at conferences), then you should not enroll in Independent Study (PSYC 498) and/or Independent Research (PSYC 499).

- **(Q): WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES QUALIFY AS INDEPENDENT STUDY (PSYC 498)?**
- (A): PSYC 498 is an elective course designed to allow advanced students to undertake an in-depth study of a particular issue or area in psychology that interests them. Psychology 498 projects are intended to be primarily library projects, in which the student conducts extensive library research on a topic of interest in psychology. The resulting manuscript will typically be either a detailed research proposal or a theoretical paper written in APA style.

In some cases, students may receive 498 credit for serving as a student assistant for a class or for the Psychology Academic Resource Laboratory (PARL). In such cases, in keeping with the Psychology Department TA/GA Policy, students will complete a set of readings either on pedagogy or on the content of the course for which the student is serving as a student assistant. The writing requirement details will be arranged and specified in the contract.

- **(Q): WHAT KINDS OF ACTIVITIES QUALIFY AS INDEPENDENT RESEARCH (PSYC 499)?**
- (A): PSYC 499 is an elective course designed to provide advanced students with "hands-on" research experience in the laboratory or the field. PSYC 499 projects are intended to be primarily laboratory or field research projects, in which students receive a variety of "hands-on" research experiences (e.g., preparing stimulus materials, running research participants, coding data, entering data into computer files, analyzing data). Students should read a minimum of 10-12 background articles or equivalent scientific literature related to the research project on which they are working. Students must submit an APA style research report, research proposal, or equivalent writing at the conclusion of the 499.
- **(Q): DO I NEED TO DEVELOP MY OWN IDEA FOR A PSYC 498 OR 499 PROJECT BEFORE I ENROLL?**
- (A): No. Sometimes an undergraduate student may develop his/her own 498 or 499 project. More typically, undergraduates receive PSYC 498 or 499 credit for assisting a faculty member with an ongoing research project(s) in the faculty member's lab.
- **(Q): HOW DO I FIND OUT ABOUT PSYC 498 OR 499 OPORTUNITIES?**
- (A): Many faculty have ongoing research projects and will generally talk about some of their research during class. Thus, one of the most common ways to learn about research opportunities is to talk with those professors during office hours and ask whether they have any volunteer research position openings in their lab. You may also find a list of labs with research openings at the following website: https://www.csusm.edu/psychology/ra_labs/index.html. Professors have different criteria and different processes for filling open research positions. Some may require an application and interview; others may have a less formal process. Some may require that you have successfully completed one of their classes before taking you on as a research assistant. It's important to keep in mind that mentoring students and supervising PSYC 498 and 499 takes a good deal of the faculty member's time. Thus, they are more likely to be willing to devote that time to you if they have gotten to know you and if you have demonstrated that you are a serious, mature, and motivated student by attending class consistently, participating in class discussions, going to office hours, and generally performing well in class.
- **(Q): WHICH FACULTY MEMBERS SPONSOR PSYC 498 AND 499 PROJECTS?**
- (A): Not all eligible faculty members offer PSYC 498/499 each semester, and there is a limit on the number of PSYC 498/499 projects that each faculty member may sponsor per semester.

- **(Q): HOW MANY UNITS CAN I RECEIVE FOR PSYC 498 OR 499?**
- (A): PSYC 498 or PSYC 499 may be taken for 1, 2, 3, or 4 units. Students who receive 1 unit of credit shall be required to work on project related tasks a minimum of 60 hours over the semester (4 hrs/week x 15 weeks) and to produce at minimum a 3-page APA paper, report, or equivalent writing. Those who receive 2 units of credit shall work on project related tasks a minimum of 90 hours over the semester (6 hrs/week x 15 weeks) and to produce at minimum a 7-page APA paper or equivalent. Students who receive 3 units of credit shall be required to work on project related tasks a minimum of 120 hours over the semester (8 hrs/week x 15 weeks) and to produce at minimum a 10-page APA paper or equivalent. Those who receive 4 units of credit shall work on project related tasks a minimum of 150 hours over the semester (10 hrs/week x 15 weeks) and to produce at minimum a 10-page APA paper or equivalent. The number of units appropriate for each particular special studies project shall be the final determination of the faculty member.

- **(Q): CAN I ENROLL IN PSYC 498 OR 499 MORE THAN ONCE?**
- (A): Yes, however it is important to note that a MAXIMUM of 6 units of PSYC 498 and/or PSYC 499 (combined) will count as elective units toward the PSYC major.* There is no limit on the number of units of PSYC 498 and 499 that can be taken as general electives. [*NOTE. Any combination of up to 6 units of 498 & 499 can count toward the PSYC major. Any 498/499 units in excess of 6 will not count toward the PSYC major, but will count toward general elective units toward graduation.]

- **(Q): HOW WILL MY GRADE FOR PSYC 498 OR 499 BE DETERMINED?**
- (A): The nature of the work and assignments required for successful completion of the course will be stipulated in the PSYC 498/499 contract that you develop with the faculty sponsor. It will be entirely up to the faculty member to determine how successfully you have completed the assigned work and the grade to assign. You are encouraged to talk with your faculty sponsor about his/her expectations and requirements.

- **(Q): DO PSYC 498 AND PSYC 499 MEET AT A PARTICULAR TIME?**
- (A): You and your faculty sponsor will determine when and how often you will meet for your independent study/research course. It is required by department policy that your faculty sponsor meet with you an average of one (1) hour per week across the term.

- **(Q): WHAT ARE THE PREREQUISITES FOR PSYC 498 AND PSYC 499?**
- (A): To be eligible for either PSYC 498 or PSYC 499 you should have completed at least 48 units of undergraduate study, and you should have a cumulative GPA of 3.00 or better. Both PSYC 498 and 499 require the consent of the instructor to enroll and may require specific pre-requisite coursework.

- **(Q): HOW DO I ENROLL IN PSYC 498 OR 499?**
- (A): After a faculty member has determined that you meet the prerequisites and indicated that they are willing to sponsor you for a 498 or 499 project, ask them to provide you a digital Independent Study/Research Contract. The faculty member will provide the topic, outline of work, and grade expectations in Sections B and C; review this and then complete Section A. Once you have completed Section A, the faculty member will route the form for signatures and submit the signed form to the Registrar via email. Monitor myCSUSM to verify enrollment.