How to apply for courses in independent studies & experiential placements
What you need to do

- Determine the type of course you want to take
  - Independent research projects:
    - Research Practicum (3RP3), Independent Study (4A03), Independent Project (4B06) or Independent Thesis (4C09)
  - Experiential Placements:
    - Academic Placements (2AP3), Applied Placements (3EP3) or Advanced Placements (4EP6)
- Obtain supervisor(s) as appropriate
- Develop a proposal for placement or study
- Complete an application and submit by deadline
Types of Supervisors

- **Academic Supervisor**
  - Evaluates the relevance of the placement to the student’s academic program and the knowledge/experience gained by the student. Assesses and grades all work associated with a course.

- **Placement Supervisor**
  - Oversees the work conducted during a community, volunteer or professional experience.

- **Co-supervisor**
  - Along with the Academic Supervisor, provides additional support and guidance to the student and may be responsible for assessing and grading components of the course work.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of supervisor(s) required</th>
<th>LIFE SCI 2AP3</th>
<th>LIFE SCI 3EP3/4EP6</th>
<th>LIFE SCI 3RP3</th>
<th>LIFE SCI 4A03/4B06/4C09</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR</strong></td>
<td>Any faculty member of the Faculty of Science or Health Sciences working on campus at McMaster University</td>
<td>Any faculty member of the Faculty of Science or Health Sciences with appropriate background</td>
<td>Any faculty member of the Faculty of Science or Health Sciences</td>
<td>Any faculty member of the Faculty of Science or Health Sciences</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>PLACEMENT SUPERVISOR</strong></td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>*Oversees the work conducted during a community, volunteer or professional experience</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Not required</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CO-SUPERVISOR</strong></td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Not required</td>
<td>Possible, but not required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* If appropriate, academic supervisor may serve as Placement supervisor
Timeline for finding a supervisor

- Students are expected to find their own supervisors for each course.
  (The Life Sciences program does not keep lists of prospective supervisors)

- Set up interviews with professors as soon as possible (well before the application due date):
  - LIFE SCI 2AP3, 3EP3/4EP6, 3RP3:
    - at least 2 months before the beginning of term in which you wish to take the course
  - LIFE SCI 4B06/4C09:
    - October-November of your 3rd year
Finding a suitable research topic

- Finding a supervisor for a research project (i.e. Life Sci 3RP3, 4A03, 4B06 or 4C09) is usually difficult for students so you are not alone if you feel intimidated.
- Most students do not have a particular professor or workplace in mind when they start this process.
- It’s actually better to first determine what type of projects you want to do before you find a suitable supervisor.
- As a student in the Life Sciences program, you already have a diverse set of skills students in Year 3 are already equipped to research a wide variety of topics in the life sciences.
Finding a suitable research topic

- Use the following questions to guide you in finding a suitable topic:
  1. What courses, skills, research topic have you found interesting and that you would like to learn more about? (Look over course descriptions on the Life Sciences website)
  2. Are there topics/skills that fit well with your future career plans?
  3. Is the field research of any of your professors interesting to you?
  4. Do you want to gain more lab/field experience in a particular field?
  5. Do you want to gain more experience working in a particular research, clinical or work environment?
Finding a suitable research supervisor in Faculty of Science

- Use the following links to Department and Faculty websites to find potential Academic supervisors:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Department Faculty Website</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/biochem/people_faculty.html">http://www.fhs.mcmaster.ca/biochem/people_faculty.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td><a href="http://www.biology.mcmaster.ca/faculty">http://www.biology.mcmaster.ca/faculty</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry and Chemical Biology</td>
<td><a href="http://www.chemistry.mcmaster.ca/research-home">http://www.chemistry.mcmaster.ca/research-home</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography and Earth Sciences</td>
<td><a href="http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/faculty/faculty.html">http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/geo/faculty/faculty.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including Environmental Sciences)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kinesiology</td>
<td><a href="http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/kinesiology/people/faculty.html">http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/kinesiology/people/faculty.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physics &amp; Astronomy (&amp;Biophysics)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.physics.mcmaster.ca/?menu=18#page=All">http://www.physics.mcmaster.ca/?menu=18#page=All</a></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Finding a suitable research supervisor in Faculty of Health Science

- There are too many departments in the Faculty of Health Sciences to list here:
- The following link is a good starting place: http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/main/schools_and_departments.html
- Explore the Departments that interest you and look for potential faculty members to contact for an interview
Things to keep in mind

- Look for supervisors whose research interests and excite you
  - Think about how your unique skills could be an asset to their work
- If professors explicitly state they DO NOT accept Independent Study Course students,
  - Remove them from your list– do not contact them!
- Create a shortlist of three or four potential supervisors
  - Note their email addresses, office locations and office hours (if posted)
Finding a suitable supervisor for an experiential placement

- Finding a supervisor for an experiential placement (i.e. Life Sci 2AP3, 3EP3, 4EP6) can be just as difficult as finding a research supervisor.
- Most students do not have a particular supervisor or work place in mind when they start this process.
- It’s actually better to first determine what type of projects you want to do before you find a suitable supervisor.
- As a student in the Life Sciences program, you already have a diverse set of skills:
  - students in Year 3 are already equipped to research a wide variety of topics in the life sciences.
Finding a suitable supervisor for an experiential placement

- Your placement may be an experience as a volunteer in a community/clinical or professional environment.
- Use the following questions to guide you in finding a suitable topic:
  1. What work environment is of interest to you?
     - For example, students interested in Psychology and Neuroscience should contact an organization such as the Brain Injury Services.
  2. What career plan do you have?
     - For example, students interested in working as a field biologist should contact a government agency or a consulting firm.
  3. What skills is of interest to you?
     - For example, students interested in operating lab equipment should contact a hospital or clinic.
What to include in initial email

Send an individual email to each of your potential supervisors. For best results:

- Clearly indicate in the subject line:
  “Supervisor for independent study” not “Space in your lab?”
- Use the formal salutation:
  “Dear Dr. ……” rather than “Hey Dr. ……” or “Hello Dr…..”
- Personalize the email:
  Explain how much you enjoyed the course/guest lecture s/he gave or how you are very interested in his/her research area
- Briefly introduce yourself, telling them:
  What program you are in, listing the course you’ve taken, previous work experience, skills you have gained; refrain from bragging but indicate something to distinguish yourself from other students
- Ask for an appointment to speak in person:
  Be enthusiastic, interested and courteous
**What to attach to initial email**

1. **An appropriate resumé saved as **one** PDF (not docx)**
   - Book an appointment with Science Career and Cooperative Education (SCCE) to learn how to prepare an appropriate resumé
     [http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/scce/contact-us](http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/scce/contact-us)
   - Attach this resumé with your introductory email. Note that your professor may use “curriculum vitae” or CV when referring to your resumé.

2. **Scanned official transcript from the Office of the Registrar or an unofficial transcript from your MUGSI account**
   - This is not always necessary but is very helpful, especially if you have a good academic record.
Contacting potential supervisors

- Keep the email brief, concise and professional
  - Check your spelling and make sure the name and email addresses match—you are sending several emails!

- Not all professors will reply to your email
  - Sometimes the professors are too busy and they forget to email back, and sometimes emails just get lost/buried
  - *Do not take it personally!*
  - Wait at least 2 weeks before you send another email if you really want to work with this professor
  - If you still do not hear back, then you should cross this person off your list.
  - Refrain from stalking the professor. First, it is illegal, and secondly, such behaviour is not conducive to making the professor want to talk to you, let alone take you on.
Preparing for first meeting with potential supervisor

- If you are seeking an experiential placement (3EP3 or 4EP6):
  - Spend time learning about the organization and the role of your future placement supervisor
- If you are seeking a 3RP3/4A03/4B06/4C09 supervisor
  - Spend time on the lab website (if there is one)
  - Spend time reading the lab’s publications
  - Seek out previous students who have been supervised or graduate students in the lab and find out what it is like to work with this professor
Questions to ask during initial meeting with supervisor

- What is the nature of the project(s) available?
  - Who will supervise day-to-day activities in the lab or field—post-doc, graduate student or research technician?
  - What type of training is expected beforehand?
    - Should a Life Sci 3RP3 be completed first—should this be done during the summer before Level 4?
    - Should certain Level 3 or 4 courses be completed first?
    - Do you need to know certain techniques or statistics?
- Which of the courses (Life Sci 4A03/4B06/4C09) is appropriate?
  - Do you qualify for 4B06 (minimum CA of 7.0) or 4C09 (minimum CA or 8.5) or 4A03 ONLY?
- What time commitment is expected?
  - How many hours each week is expected on average?
  - Are students expected to work during evenings, weekends, and holidays?
Once you have agreement from a professor to supervise you:

- Visit the website: [www.science.mcmaster.ca/lifesciences](http://www.science.mcmaster.ca/lifesciences). Download the appropriate form, print it off, and fill it out with your supervisor.

Check that the application is complete:

- All signatures and appropriate documentation is attached (e.g., title and short proposal of research or learning contract).

Submit the form by the appropriate deadline:

- **Bring it to Life Sciences Academic Advisor** in BSB-110.

Your application will be reviewed by the Director:

- If amendments are required before it can be approved, the Academic Advisor will contact you.