

Enrollment in Independent Study Courses Between Fall 2000 and Fall 2011

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Introduction:

At the September 13, 2011 meeting of the Provost's Council the issue of Independent Study courses was raised for discussion. Specifically, questions of the need for consistent policies for managing the enrollment into independent studies and compensation for faculty were brought forth. In order to further consider these issues, Dr. Holoman requested a study to determine how many Independent Study courses with suffixes of 399 and 499 ran during the past academic year.

Methodology:

In reviewing the data available from Student Records within the Access databases, it became apparent that it would be meaningful to expand both the definition of an Independent Study course and the time frame under review. Although a majority of Independent Study courses are listed with the suffixes of 399 and 499, over the past ten years there have been several other courses also listed as "Independent Study" either in the course catalogs or Student Records databases. Further, it was clear that the number of students enrolled in Independent Study courses varied across semesters and even academic years so that a longer time frame would give a more accurate picture of the overall use of Independent Studies as well as suggest whether any trends might be present.

The time frame for this study was expanded to include Independent Study courses enrolled from the Fall of 2000 to the present semester (Fall 2011). Before the Fall 2000 semester ART299, ART 399, and ART 499 were routinely available for students who wished to pursue art projects under the guidance of the art instructor. These courses were very popular and typically enrolled as many as 15 to 30 students each fall and spring semester, representing a large majority of all Independent Study enrollments prior to Fall 2000. With the departure of the art instructor these courses were no longer offered after the Spring 2000 semester. So, the numbers of students in Independent Study courses from Fall 2000 forward is considered to be more appropriate for the purposes of this study.

Results:

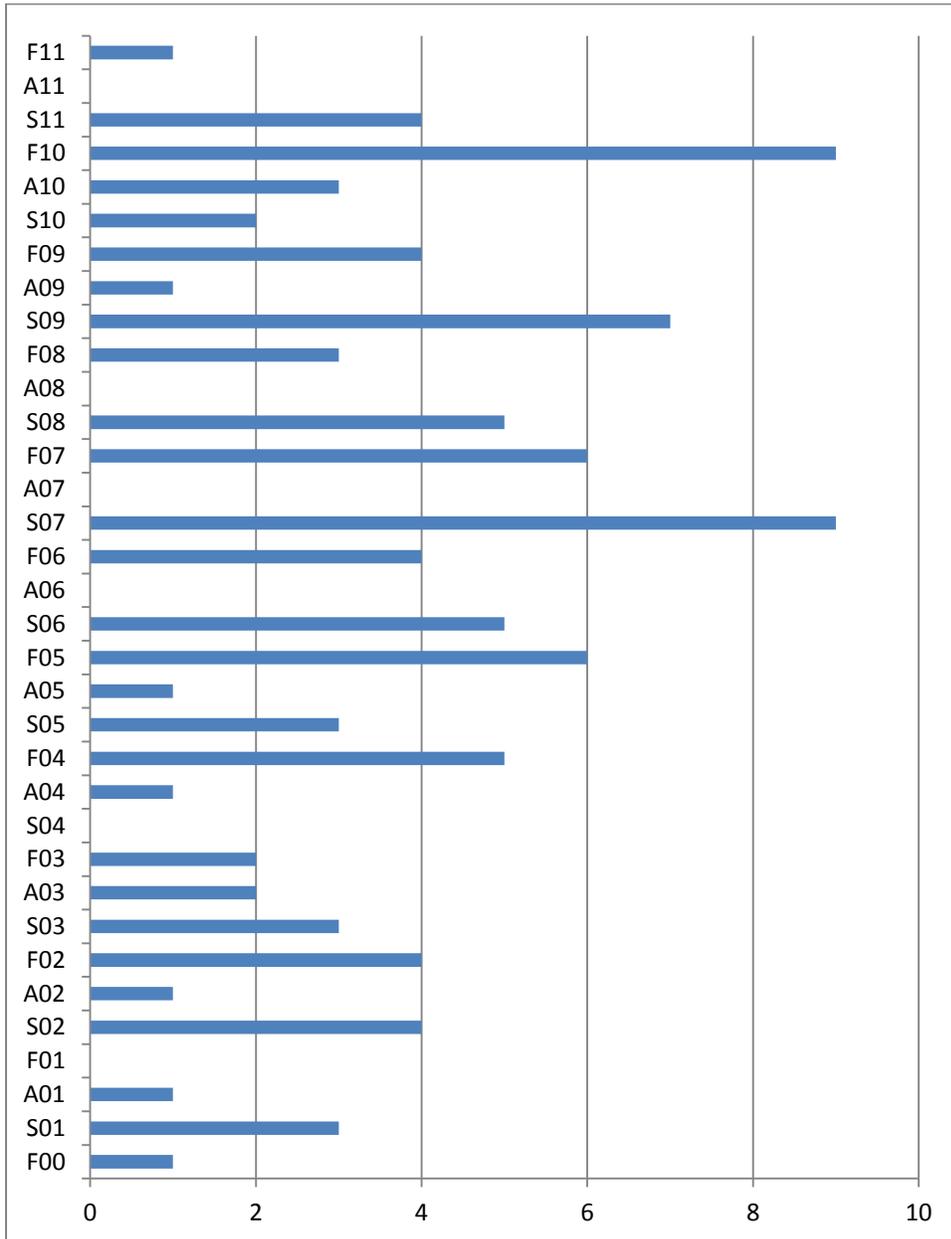
Since the Fall 2000 semester, 92 individual students have enrolled in 28 different courses for Independent Study credit. All courses provided 3 credit hours for completion with one exception. During the Summer of 2004, one student was listed as receiving 6 credits for a LW 399 Independent Study.

Six students enrolled in more than one Independent Study course while at Hilbert College, although only one student is listed as having taken more than two. That student had a total of four Independent Studies; two in the Fall 2008 semester (COM 399 and COM 491) and one each in spring semesters of 2009 (TH 499) and 2010 (COM 499).

The number of students enrolled in any course listed as Independent Study by semester is presented in Figure 1. below.

Figure 1.

Number of Independent Study enrollments by semester between Fall 2000 and Fall 2011.



The mean and median number of Independent Study enrollments per semester is 3.0 with a standard deviation of 2.5 and a range of 0 to 9. The numbers of enrollments are evenly split across Fall and Spring semesters (45 each during the period covered) and 10 enrollments occurred in Summer sessions.

There appears to be a slight trend toward more enrollments since Fall 2006. Forty-one percent (41%) of the enrollments occurred in the 17 terms between Fall 2000 and Spring 2006. In the 17 semesters from Summer 2006 to present, there were 59 of the 100 total enrollments (59%).

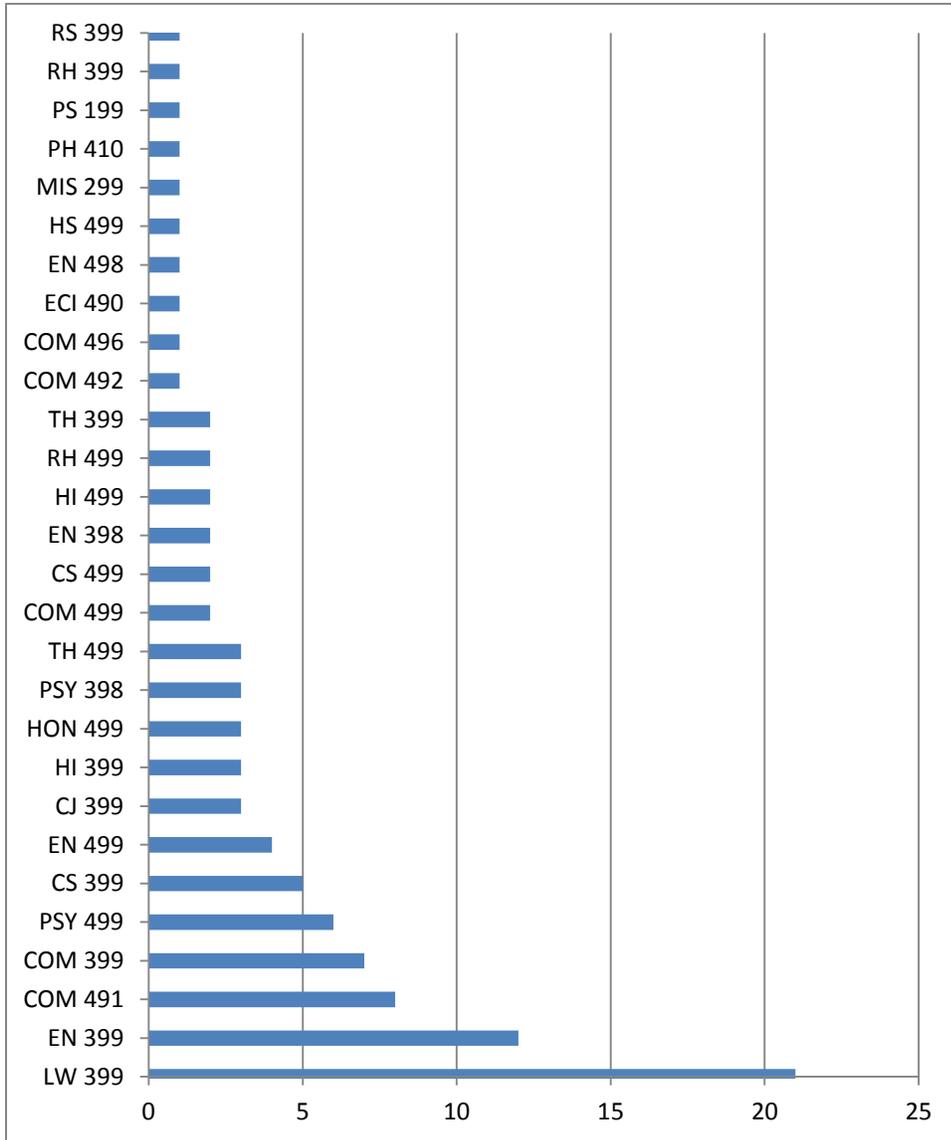
The two largest enrolled semesters were Spring of 2007 and Fall of 2010. Spring of 2007 was somewhat unusual in that 7 different Independent Study courses were run for 9 students (CS 399, EN 499, HON 499, PSY 499, RH 499, RS 399 and TH 499). More typical is for 3 or 4 different courses to be enrolled during a fall or spring semester.

The Fall 2010 semester was unusual due to the large number of students (5) who enrolled in one course (EN 399). It was in that academic year that a number of students needed a course to graduate which was not being offered in the Fall or Spring semesters (EN 351: Advanced Writing). A member of the English faculty offered to accommodate students with an Independent Study which was conducted as a distance learning course. As a result the numbers for that single Independent Study course were inflated.

Over the eleven years covered in this study, most Independent Study courses appear from one to three times, each time with a single student enrolled. On the other hand there are some Independent Study courses which appear more frequently and often with multiple enrollments. One example is LW 399, which over the period covered has enrolled almost twice as many students as the next largest enrolled Independent Study course (EN 399). Figure 2. below shows the number of enrollments by course for the period between Fall 2000 and Fall 2011.

Figure 2.

Number of enrollments by Independent Study course over the period Fall 2000 to Fall 2011.



Conclusions:

1. With some exceptions as noted in the Results above, it is typical for 2 to 5 Independent Study courses to run each fall and spring semester with each course enrolling a single student.
2. There has been a slight trend toward a greater use of Independent Study courses during the past 5 academic years (Fall 2006 to present) compared to the five years previous (Fall 2000 to Spring 2006).
3. It is not possible to tell from the data in this study the extent to which Independent Study at Hilbert College conforms to the traditional definition of a student and a professor agreeing upon a topic for the student to further research outside of school with loose guidance from the instructor for an agreed upon amount of credits, or to what extent they represent a mechanism by which students are provided with the opportunity to earn credits toward graduation for courses not available when needed. At present this level of detailed information is not routinely kept.
4. Some programs may use Independent Study in different ways. It does appear, for example, that Independent Study is more routinely used by the Paralegal Studies program and the Digital media & Communications program than by other programs. This may reflect different needs of students within those programs or could represent gaps in the curricula that need to be addressed. Again, the data in this study are not sufficient as a basis for any specific recommendations other than that this may warrant further discussion with Division chairs and faculty of those programs.

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