Policy Name: iStudy (Correspondence Courses)

Purpose: This document contains the Office of Financial Aid’s current policies and procedures for iStudy coursework.

Disclaimer: This policy is subject to change, without notice, in order to comply with administrative and regulatory requirements.

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Definitions and Terms:

COA Cost of Attendance (also known as the student budget)
FSEOG Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant
iStudy Independent Study
OFA Office of Financial Aid
TEACH Federal Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grant
UM University of Mississippi
Part 10.0  iStudy (Correspondence Courses) Overview

UM offers iStudy—correspondence (or “home study”) courses—for which the university provides instructional materials and exams for students who are studying independently and do not physically attend classes. These courses are different from traditional semester seat courses and online courses in that iStudy courses are self-paced, making them more flexible. Classes are provided primarily at the undergraduate level, but there are certain graduate level courses offered as well. Please reference www.outreach.olemiss.edu/istudy/ for full listings.

UM students may be able to use some types of financial aid to pay for iStudy courses. However, there are restrictions and requirements placed on these students, and they must work with the OFA to determine their eligibility – see below. Also note that iStudy enrollment will not count in the full-time enrollment calculation for most institutional aid eligibility.

Students have the option of taking iStudy courses as either year-long or semester based (also referred to as term-based). Year-long classes allow students to have up to 12 months to finish their coursework. Semester-based classes follow the university’s academic calendar and are available for either fall, spring, or the full summer term.

For students who are otherwise full-time, adding semester-based iStudy courses that bring them up to 19 hours would not yield additional tuition charges. They would pay the standard fixed "flat rate" for full-time students (taking 12-19 hours).

There is an additional tuition charge for full year iStudy courses regardless of semester enrollment. The nonresident fee is not applied to full-year iStudy courses.

Part 10.1  Requirements for Federal Title IV Financial Aid

Students who wish to receive Federal Title IV financial aid (such as Direct Loans, Pell Grants, Perkins Loans, or FSEOG) during a period of enrollment that includes correspondence courses must meet the following requirements that would not otherwise apply to iStudy students:

- The student must be admitted as a degree-seeking student at UM.
- The iStudy course(s) must apply toward the student’s academic program or be allowable remedial work (as confirmed by the appropriate dean’s office).
- The student must enroll and complete the correspondence course within the semester (or the combined summer term) for which the hours are being used for aid purposes. (Although traditional iStudy enrollment is flexible and self-paced, courses being considered for federal aid purposes must be term-based in order to ensure proper monitoring.)
• Reach the midpoint (determined by iStudy Department) of the course(s) by the 60% point of the semester, which is also the date used for Return of Title IV Funds Calculations as required by the U.S. Department of Education. (This date represents the threshold at which all federal aid is considered to be "earned" for the semester and the aid would not be paid back even if the student withdraws.)

For any students enrolling only in iStudy courses, the OFA will verify with the iStudy Office that the student is not incarcerated because awarding restrictions apply to incarcerated students. A student is considered to be incarcerated if he/she is serving a criminal sentence in a federal, state, or local penitentiary, prison, jail, reformatory, work farm, or similar correction institution (whether it is operated by the government or a contractor).

Incarcerated students may be eligible for FSEOG (depending on available funding). They are eligible for Pell Grants if not incarcerated in a federal or state penal institution. They are not eligible for federal student loans. Similarly, a parent is not eligible for a Direct PLUS loan if he/she is incarcerated.

Part 10.2  Registration for Students Using iStudy Hours for Financial Aid

Registration for semester-based iStudy courses opens at the same time as registration for on-campus courses. Registration in all applicable terms (Fall/Spring/Summer) closes on the last day to add an on-campus course for that term. Semester-based iStudy courses follow all regular semester deadlines per the UM academic calendar. Registration for full-year iStudy courses may occur at any time throughout the year, regardless of the semester calendar, and they do not count towards enrollment for federal or state financial aid eligibility purposes (and most institutional aid).

Students using correspondence courses for financial aid purposes will have their iStudy application reviewed by OFA and will receive the Financial Aid Fact Sheet by email. This is to ensure that the student is fully aware of and has agreed to the financial aid stipulations. Online applications for iStudy courses are available at http://www.outreach.olemiss.edu/istudy/.

Part 10.3  iStudy Enrollment Status

Most iStudy courses are 3 credit hours, similar to regular classes, and are treated the same for enrollment purposes except for the following situations:

• For purposes of Federal Pell Grant (or the Iraq & Afghanistan Service Grant), students enrolled only in iStudy courses will be considered to be no more than half-time students, even if they are enrolled in 12 hours of iStudy courses.

• For purposes of Federal Pell Grant (or the Iraq & Afghanistan Service Grant), enrollment that combines iStudy and regular coursework generally cannot count iStudy hours as more than the number of credit hours of regular coursework in which the student is enrolled. The exception is if the student is enrolled at least half-time in correspondence
courses, then the student would be paid as at least half-time student, regardless of regular credit hour enrollment. Also, a student will be paid as a less-than-half-time student for any combination of regular and correspondence hours that is less than 6 credit hours or the appropriate equivalent of half-time. Refer to the chart below regarding the enrollment status for students enrolled in both iStudy and regular coursework:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular Work</th>
<th>Correspondence Work</th>
<th>Adjusted Total Coursework</th>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Half-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Half-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Half-time</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Three-quarter time</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Half-time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 10.4  
**iStudy Cost of Attendance**

The COA for a student who is taking only iStudy classes will be limited to required tuition and fees, with an allowance for books and supplies if needed for the classes. Students taking a combination of both term-based iStudy and regular courses (on-campus and/or distance education courses) will have their budgets adjusted to reflect that iStudy charges do not include Capital Improvement fees.

The housing allowance in the COA will be zeroed for individuals identified as being in the follow categories:

- Independent students who receive, or whose spouses receive, a military housing allowance (Basic Allowance for Housing, or “BAH”) or who live on a military base.
- Dependent students who are living with parents who are receive BAH, or who live on a military base.

Part 10.5  
**Disbursement of Title IV Financial Aid**

For students who are not otherwise enrolled in at least 12 regular hours and whose iStudy course(s) count towards enrollment for federal aid eligibility purposes, no Title IV financial aid will be released until the student reaches the midpoint. The midpoint is defined by the completion of the course’s midterm exam, or upon completion of 50% of the coursework if there is not a midterm exam.

The midpoint is determined by the iStudy department. The OFA will release funds to the student’s bursar account once confirmation is received. To be valid for federal financial aid, the midpoint must be reached by no later than the 60% point of the semester. Please see part 10.1.
Part 10.6  Failure to Complete Coursework

Semester-based iStudy courses should be completed by the last class day of the enrollment term. Not completing, or failing a correspondence course, may cause changes in the amount of financial aid that was awarded and students may have to return funds to the University. These scenarios may also impact future financial aid awards.

Semester-based iStudy students using financial aid to pay their tuition may have the option of approaching their instructor for an Incomplete (I) mark. If an “I” mark for an undergraduate student has not been changed to a regular grade before the course withdrawal deadline (the 30th day of classes) of the next regular semester (excluding summer terms), the “I” automatically changes to an “F” and is computed in the GPA.

For year-long iStudy courses, students must complete correspondence coursework within one calendar year (but may purchase 1 three-month extension). Not completing, or failing the correspondence course may impact future financial aid awards.

Part 10.7  Requirements for Institutional Financial Aid

In general, enrollment in iStudy courses will not count in the full-time enrollment calculation for full-time scholarship eligibility (for awards such as Academic Excellence, community college recruitment scholarships, and Ole Miss Opportunity).

There are limited forms of aid that are available for students taking iStudy courses, including Faculty/Staff Scholarship, Child of Faculty/Staff Scholarship, and Agency Banked Hours. Either year-long or semester-based iStudy courses can qualify for these awards. Therefore, students may enroll in the correspondence courses at any time. Typically, students are admitted to an academic program, but can sometimes qualify as a result of their participation in the UM Independent Study program in a non-degree-seeking status.

Part 10.8  Requirements for State of MS Financial Aid

Full-time enrollment for State Aid is 15 credit-hours per semester. Students must be enrolled in 15 credit hours at the time of disbursement. In order for iStudy courses to be counted towards the full-time requirement for state aid, the courses must be term-based.

Part 10.9  Requirements for Other Aid

iStudy may also qualify students for outside aid such as veterans education benefits or AmeriCorps. For VA Benefits, students should contact the Office of Veteran & Military Services. For AmeriCorps, they should contact AmeriCorps directly about using their benefits at UM. If students are receiving any other funding, they should contact OFA.