

Pros and Cons of the Program

In order for College Connection students to have maximum freedom in their day to select college courses and organize their time, and at the same time assure that school districts will receive state money to fund the program, College Connection uses an independent study model for three of its high school classes per semester. There are definitely pros and cons to this method of learning, and students should be aware of those to better make a decision about its effectiveness for them.

Under independent study guidelines, students will do an hour of work per day, per class. With three high school classes, we would expect the student to do three hours of independent work per day, or 15 hours per week. Sometimes this will be less, and sometimes more.

What are the negatives? Unlike a traditional seat-time class, students must show a "product" to essentially demonstrate that they have covered the assigned work (California State auditors get very unhappy without it!). Thus, when a student is assigned readings or research in general, there must be some written work, artifact, or performance presentation to accompany it. In a traditional class a discussion of the reading might suffice; not so in independent study. Some students feel then that they are "working harder" or doing "busy work." From a time standpoint, the observation is probably not accurate. Where a student's "body" must be present in a traditional class, the "body" must be actively doing something under independent study. For some students who are definitely auditory learners, not having a teacher lecture or discuss may be a disadvantage. Though this can be overcome with study groups, it is something to consider. Finally, students who significantly procrastinate sometimes feel overwhelmed. If, for example, students did not do the three hours of work per day per class, but "saved" it until the end of the week, they would then have the equivalent of 45 hours of work to do. No sleep that week! There is no late work in independent study!

What are the positives? First of all, students have complete control and freedom as to how they use their days. Where a traditional program puts students on a conveyer belt of classes, independent study allows students to create their own schedule. Moreover, students basically create their own pace. As soon as students complete the assignment, they are finished. In a traditional classroom students may often finish an assignment and have to wait for others to finish or get bored with repetition. Not so in independent study. Also, when independent study teachers create assignments, they make an educated guess as to how much time this will take the students. Students who work more rapidly may actually finish in less time. Also, because research is a major component of independent study, students usually have lessons that can more easily be tailored to their interests. Finally, independent study is an excellent preparation for further college study. To be successful in college, students must learn how to be self-disciplined, how to manage their time, how to take notes from texts, how to research, and how to study independently. This is essentially what independent study demands.

As a final note, remember that independent study is only a part of the College Connection program. Students will still have one traditional high school class as well as three or four college classes that will have lectures and discussions. Successful students will be busy!