

To: Economics Department Faculty  
From: The Undergraduate Program Director  
Subject: Econ 93a (Independent Research)  
Date: August 2024

The University has several types of courses (with numbers 89-99) that provide undergraduates with the opportunity to get credit for work that falls outside traditional course structures. It is up to each department to determine which of these to offer and how to implement them. The current University options and those the Economics Department has chosen to implement are described in the Appendix.

Though the purpose of each type of course differs, all the 89-99 courses allow the course content to be customized for each student. For example, each independent study (98) has topics and assignments agreed upon by the instructor and student. Each student in an internship course will have a different internship even if the course assignments are the same.

Econ 93a was developed in 2022-2023 and first offered in the 2023-2024 academic year. The purpose of this memo is to provide information about Econ 93a and assist faculty who want to offer an Econ 93a course to interested students. The two main sections of this memo lay out (1) the nature and goals of Econ 93a and expectations of the faculty sponsor and student and (2) the logistics of how an Econ 93a course is initiated and how students enroll in the course. It concludes with a brief note on grading Econ 93a courses.

## **Econ 93a**

The Department's goal in developing Econ 93a was to expand student research opportunities in a way that would appeal to students. The traditional way for a student to participate in faculty research is to work as a research assistant (RA). Many students express an interest in working as an RA, but the number of RA positions is small and faculty mostly recruit juniors and seniors as RAs. The existing Econ 89-99 course options did not offer research opportunities comparable to working as an RA. Collaborative research falls outside of the scope of Econ 98a/b (Independent Study) and 99a/b (Senior Research).<sup>1</sup>

Econ 93a involves collaborative work with the supervising faculty member on a project related to the supervisor's research. The course description is as follows:

Provides students with an opportunity to work with a faculty member on an aspect of the faculty supervisor's research. The student and faculty member

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<sup>1</sup> The Department no longer offers Econ 194a (Econometrics Research Practicum), which provided another opportunity for students to pursue their own research projects.

mutually design a one-semester project that contributes to ongoing research. Students must meet regularly with their faculty supervisor and present their findings in oral and written form at the end of the semester. Projects typically involve background reading to provide context and data collection and analysis.

*Subject to the availability of research positions and requires the signature of the instructor. Does not count toward the major or minor in Economics. May only be taken once.*

The Econ 93a course description was based on existing 93a offerings in other departments and the description on the [Division of Social Sciences / Undergraduate Research for Credit](#) page:

Courses numbered 93 [4-credit] or 95 [2-credit] are for research or internship work, typically conducted on-campus in collaboration with a Brandeis faculty member. The course requires independent research, regular meetings with a faculty supervisor, and written work. Oral presentations may also be included, either through a symposium on-campus, conference off-campus, or a research team meeting. The nature of this work can vary from project to project, and the student and mentor should develop a plan before the beginning of the semester. Projects often involve skill building, perhaps in conjunction with library workshops (e.g., learning new software).

An Econ 93a course for a student can be designed for wherever the student is in the major, e.g., whether or not the student has had econometrics. The project just needs to focus on an interesting and useful question that contributes to the faculty member's research project. Students can take Econ 93a to explore what it is like to do economic research, and faculty can use the course to help attract students to the major.

## **Registration procedures**

Multiple faculty members may decide to sponsor Econ 93a research projects in a given semester. Two registration procedures for Econ 93a are included below.

### **Open registration procedure**

Prior to the registration period for the semester during which a faculty member would like to sponsor a student (or students) for Econ 93a research, the faculty member prepares a description of the research project on which the student would work, the required skill set of the

student, and the course requirements. The faculty member could also specify the number of students to be accepted that semester.

The faculty member then posts the Econ 93a research description on [ForagerOne](#), the platform Brandeis uses for matching faculty with research opportunities with interested undergraduate students. (More information about ForagerOne is available [here](#). Volunteer RA opportunities can also be posted in ForagerOne.) You can see other 93a offerings in ForagerOne, which may be useful to refer to when writing the description of your Econ 93a course.

The research description should also be submitted to Leslie ([lesliey@brandeis.edu](mailto:lesliey@brandeis.edu)) so the Department can track Econ 93a offerings.

### **Closed registration procedure**

A student contacts a faculty member regarding the possibility of participating in the faculty member's research. (This is how students currently find RA positions.) The faculty member and the student could then make a joint decision regarding whether the student's research activity would rise to the level required for an Econ 93a course. This research description would not be posted in ForagerOne.

In either case, the faculty member and each accepted student would need to complete a [Form to Add a "93" Internship Course](#). The form provides space to describe the student's research project, how the faculty sponsor will supervise the student, and how the student's work will be evaluated. (Each student project can be different, even if two or more students are working with the same faculty member in the same area of the faculty supervisor's research.) The completed forms are then submitted to the Department and the Registrar's Office.

The process of selecting students and submitting the forms should be completed one week before the last day to add classes that semester so students who are not accepted for Econ 93a can still enroll in other classes.

### **Evaluation**

As noted above, Econ 93a students will submit a research paper at the end of the semester, which will be the primary basis for assigning the course grade. Structuring your Econ 93a course so that work is submitted for feedback and discussion throughout the semester will reduce the likelihood students will have difficulty with the end-of-semester deadline.

## Appendix

| Description  | Econ course, if offered  |
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| <p>89 Internship course (2 or 4 credits)</p> <p>Supports an internship either during the same semester or a preceding semester or summer. (International students can only undertake internships directly related to one of their majors and must get academic credit for the internship by taking the corresponding internship course in that major.)</p> | <p>Int 89 supports Economics students with a semester internship.</p> <p>Int 92g supports Economics students with a summer internship.</p> |
| <p>92 Internship</p> <p>Supports international students taking an internship class in an interdepartmental minor, e.g., Legal Studies. The internship must be related to the major offering the 92 course, e.g., Economics.</p>  | <p>Econ 92 supports internships for Legal Studies and Environmental Studies minors who are also Econ majors.</p>                           |
| <p>93 Independent research (4 credits)</p>   | <p>Econ 93 – as described in this memo.</p>  |
| <p>94 Peer assistantship</p>   | <p>Econ has paid TAs and does not offer a 94 option.</p>   |
| <p>95 Independent research (2 credits)</p>   | <p>Econ only offers the 4-credit Econ 93.</p>  |
| <p>98a/b Independent study</p>   | <p>Econ 98a/b supports a one-semester independent study that can include readings and research.</p>  |
| <p>99a/b Senior thesis</p>   | <p>Econ 99a/b allows eligible students to pursue a senior research project over two semesters.</p>   |

*Note:* Economics does not give major/minor credit for these courses and the grades earned do not figure in departmental GPA calculations.