A Guide to January IEX Semester at Gustavus Adolphus College

Gustavus is one of a small number of liberal arts colleges that has an interim January term. During January Interim Experience (IEX), students enroll in one course, which may take the form of an on-campus course, a career exploration, a study away course, or a course offered by any approved college also offering interim coursework. The primary focus of this guide is on-campus courses.

The mission of IEX, course approval process for IEX courses, and policies related to IEX are listed in Appendix C of the Faculty Handbook (a.k.a. Yellow Pages), available online. This guide is not intended to replace information contained in the Faculty Handbook, which remains the official record of policies related to the academic program. Rather it is offered as a supplement to the Handbook, providing an informal and logistical orientation to the January Interim Experience for faculty, particularly first time IEX instructors.

The Mission of the January Interim Experience (IEX)

The mission statement of the January Interim Experience provides a statement of the intended purpose of this element of our academic program:

> The mission of the Interim Experience (IEX) is to provide ways for faculty and students to take advantage of the January interim's unique qualities in developing courses and other learning opportunities that enrich and expand upon (but generally do not duplicate) the College's regular semester curricular offerings. The institutional mission of the College calls for balancing educational tradition with innovation; study within a general framework that is interdisciplinary and international in perspective; and preparation of students to lead lives of leadership and service. The goals of the IEX are consistent with this larger institutional mission. IEX will provide for experiential learning both on campus and off campus through:
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> 1. International and domestic study away courses
> 2. Career exploration and vocational reflection
> 3. Courses that are experimental and/or interdisciplinary
> 4. Independent studies and student/faculty collaborative research and creativity
> 5. Institutional exchanges with other 4-1-4 colleges
> 6. Special opportunities for first-year students to continue their transition to college life and the greater expectations placed on adult learners.

Parsing the mission statement: January IEX courses should offer faculty and students opportunities that take advantage of the unique qualities of an interim term. These include the opportunity to engage in an immersive experience and to engage in experiential learning (see below for further details).

Course Criteria for IEX Courses

The first two criteria for IEX course approval listed in the Faculty Handbook offer further indications of the intent for IEX courses:

1. Approved IEX courses will engage students in ways that specifically capitalize on the unique opportunities provided by the one-month interim schedule. The course proposal will describe activities that can be better accomplished when students have the opportunity to travel or to spend extended periods of time in the laboratory, the studio, the library, or in other places conducive to discovery and creativity.

2. Approved IEX courses will engage students (alone or collaboratively) in experiential learning activities. Examples include:

> a. Hands-on classroom activities (active learning)
> b. Laboratory or field research
> c. Library scholarship
> d. Creative / performance projects
> e. Composition
> f. Service-Learning / Community Service
> g. Debates and other presentations
> h. Day trips and speaker visits.
> i. Retreats
> j. Travel (domestic and international)
> k. Career Exploration
> l. Leadership development

The course proposal forms (https://gustavus.edu/committees/curriculum/on_campus.php)
for new and repeat on-campus IEX courses ask the instructor to describe the goals and objectives of the proposed course and how they reflect the mission of the IEX program, as well as to identify how the course structure, content, and/or learning goals are uniquely suited to the IEX term.

Parsing the course approval criteria: the nature of the IEX program is expressed in terms of both what it is and what it is not. Courses should capitalize on the unique opportunities offered by the immersive nature of a term in which faculty and students can focus on a single course. Thus the course proposal form requires courses to meet five days a week for a minimum of 10 hours, and to assign a course workload that totals at least 40 hours per week, including class time. IEX courses should engage students in experiential learning. IEX courses should not duplicate the course offerings of the regular semester nor use learning activities better suited to a regular semester course (i.e., an interim IEX course should *not* be primarily a lecture course, but engage students in experiential learning activities).

Opportunities and Challenges of the January Interim Experience

January IEX courses can offer a unique opportunity for instructors to teach outside their usual portfolio of courses. Indeed, the course need not be in the instructor's primary field of research or teaching. One physics professor regularly teaches a course on film noir, a religion professor teaches a course on ancient writing systems; these are topics of personal interest to the instructors. Some visiting faculty have found the opportunity to design a course entirely of their own choosing useful for their curriculum vita as they reenter the job market. Many students also enjoy the opportunity to engage in topics outside the regular course offerings and to explore interests outside of their major. The IEX immersive format is well suited to activities that don't easily fit into the typical 50-minute class period, such as Reacting to the Past historical simulations, rehearsals, film viewings, field-trips.

Teaching a January Interim course also presents a number of potential challenges. Instructors, especially non tenure track faculty, are often teaching the course on top of a full course load during the fall and spring semesters. Furthermore, the immersive and experiential dimensions of the interim experience call for a course that is designed differently from the traditional course, both in terms of content and methods; many have not had past experience with this type of course since it is not offered at most institutions. Student expectations can also present a challenge. IEX courses vary in their rigor and the demands they place on students. Some students may shy away from a course that is truly immersive, while others may relish the opportunity to be fully immersed within the course topic. Attending a Teachers Talking lunch focused on teaching IEX courses, and comparing notes and syllabi with other faculty who have taught IEX courses can be useful ways to prepare for teaching an IEX course.

Experiential Learning and Examples of Interim Courses

Experiential learning has been defined by David Kolb[1] as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience."[1] It is learning by reflection on doing. In experiential learning, students apply prior knowledge to the learning experience, and integrate the experience into their knowledge base. Experiential learning encompasses a broad variety of activities. Below are a few examples of January IEX courses taught in 2017. Browsing the list of IEX courses in Gustavus' WebAdvisor portal will allow you to see all course offerings and see examples of past courses in your discipline.

Creative/performance:
ART-116   *Bronze Casting*: hands-on projects learning the techniques of bronze casting
ART-210   *Media and Installation:* designing and producing a gallery-scale artwork
MCS-125   *Tilings and Tessellations:* students construct tessellations both physically and mathematically.
MUS-154   *Contemporary Vocal Ensemble*: this ensemble will learn a wide variety of contemporary vocal literature and perform in area schools.
T/D-237   *Costume Construction*: hands-on costume building and alterations for the January production.

Community engagement:
NDL-113   *Building Communities*: explores strategies in community building, including 10 hours/week community engagement.

Project-based learning and field-trips:
BIO-115   *Human Migration*: exploring migration through personal history, field trips etc.
BIO-131   *MN Aquatic Stewardship:* developing a stewardship project, field trips etc.

Lab research:
CHE-215   *Chem Research Methods*: experience developing and executing a synthesis of molecules as part of a medicinal project.

Simulations:
E/M-250   *Financial Trading*: students apply concepts of financial trading in real-world situations using an online trading platform.
NDL-110   *Game Show Theory*: students learn and practice techniques designed to maximize winning chances.

Career and vocational exploration:
HES-225   *Opportunities in Allied Health:* students investigate opportunities in a variety of health related fields.
NDL-108   *Life Transitions*: helps students research, discover and discern their future life course.

Digital humanities:
COM-208   *Media Literacy 2.0*: examination of media directed toward adolescent girls; final project incorporating digital humanities.
HIS-217   *Digital History:* how technology influences the research and presentation of history, culminating in group projects related to Gustavus history.
IDS-212   *Korean Drama*: students use digital media to research the cultural dissemination and impact of K-drama.

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[1] Kolb, D. 1984. Experiential Learning. Prentice Hall. Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Study away:

BIO-150   *Conservation in Bolivia*: students develop an understanding of the political and conservation challenges in Bolivia.

E/M-206   *Seattle Innovation*: explore innovative thinking skills in a variety of organizational contexts, accessed through Gustavus alums working in the Seattle area.

IDS-219   *Fantasy & Folklore UK*: examining examples of the fantastic in literature, folklore, art, live theatre, etc. while engaging with the cultural context of the U.K.

Other types of experiential learning:

EDU-268   *Orientation to Teaching*: students serve as a teaching assistant in a school.

HES-210   *Physical Wellbeing*: students develop a personal understanding of improved nutrition, physical activity, and sleep patterns through experiential learning.

NDL-243   *Forensics*: study and practice of speech and debate.

Potential Goals and Learning Outcomes for an IEX Course

The list below includes a set of goals and accompanying student learning outcomes related to experiential learning developed by a working group of Gustavus faculty. These goals and outcomes have been written primarily with on-campus IEX courses in mind. Each learning outcome is accompanied by possible assessment methods. These learning outcomes are included as an optional resource for possible incorporation into the design and syllabus of an IEX course. The intent is to provide a menu of options from which the instructor may choose outcomes that are most appropriate to the course. They are not intended to be prescriptive.

Goal 1. In an IEX course, students expand and challenge their understanding of a topic through direct experiential engagement.

Specific learning outcomes	Possible assessment methods
1. Students will describe connections between experience and academic knowledge.	Class discussion; essay/paper; reflective journal; assessment by external evaluators (e.g. community members, alumni) who evaluate student discussions or presentations.
2. Students will analyze factors that contribute to real-world issues or situations.	Class discussion or presentation; research paper; reflective journal or paper; assessment by external evaluators (see above).
3. Students will articulate how they learn through experience and the impact that experiential learning activities have had on their relationship to the world in which they live.	Essay; reflective journal or paper; oral interview, presentation, or question and answer.
4. Students will describe how experiential learning impacted their understanding of a topic.	Assessment of knowledge, skills, and attitudes in relation to a topic (e.g. homelessness) before and after a learning experience using the same instrument. For experiential learning, growth rather than attainment is usually the focus of assessment; knowledge survey.

Goal 2. In an IEX course, students engage with learning experiences in a way such that they encounter ambiguity, practice curiosity, experiment, and assume responsibility for their own learning

Specific learning outcomes	Possible assessment methods
5. Students will successfully manage uncertainty by developing and testing hypotheses.	Coursework; portfolio; work log documenting multiple iterations of work; direct observation by instructor of student work.
6. Students will identify and independently research topics of interest to them and related to the learning experience.	Brainstorming chart; research activity log; concept map.
7. Students will define a problem and identify strategies for solving the problem.	Written or oral proposal; discussion with faculty, peers, or community partners. Project outcomes, such as written summaries, demonstrated success at working with community partners, or tangible solutions produced.
8. Students will articulate weaknesses and strengths of approaches they have used in problem-solving and identify evidence-based next steps to modify the process.	Structured checkpoint self-assessment; work log documenting experimental design, results, and changes made in subsequent stage of project.
9. Students will describe the ways in which ambiguity and the capacity to work within it contributed to their evolving understanding of an issue or topic.	Budner's Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale. Interview; journal; essay.

Goal 3: Students will take prior knowledge and synthesize and apply it to the IEX experience, and likewise integrate their IEX experience into their overall understanding of a particular topic.

Specific learning outcomes	Possible assessment methods
10. Students will demonstrate synthesis and application of prior knowledge.	Self-assessment of what prior knowledge was called into service, and in what ways it was applied.
11. Students will demonstrate an ability to apply theory to describe an environment.	Reflective journal; field journal (e.g., ethnographic, scientific); interview, class discussion.
12. Students will demonstrate knowledge and skills to work in diverse populations as well as cultural self-awareness and empathy gained through their experiential learning.	Reflective journal; field journal; observation of student interaction with community partners or assessment by community partner.

Practical Information Related to IEX Courses

Course proposal forms and submission deadlines for new and repeat IEX courses can be found at
https://gustavus.edu/committees/curriculum/.

IEX courses must meet 5 days a week for a total of 10 hours or more of formal instruction. Instructors can choose the class meeting time(s), but must avoid scheduling class during daily Sabbath (10:00-10:20am) and the common meeting time (Friday, 2:30-4:30pm).

Funding to support IEX courses (e.g., for van rental for field trips) may be available through academic departments and/or through the Office of the Provost. See the Department Chairs Handbook (section 4:7) for full details: https://gustavus.edu/provost/deptchairs/section4.php.

Application for funds (up to $250) from the Office of the Provost should be included in the IEX course proposal. Instructors may also charge a course fee.

Any travel that is part of an on-campus IEX course requires the trip leader (in this case the faculty member) to submit a trip itinerary and master contact travel form prior to the trip. For details and link to form, see the Provost Office website at: https://gustavus.edu/provost/.

Faculty interested in leading a domestic or international January IEX study away course can find out about relevant policies, proposal deadlines and study-away specific learning outcomes at: https://gustavus.edu/cice/facultyinfo/iex.php.

For details of January Career Exploration, see https://gustavus.edu/jterm/contents/career/.