

Brief 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; they must complete at least two IEX course credits for graduation. This guide is offered as an orientation for faculty, particularly first time IEX instructors, teaching an on-campus IEX course.

The Mission of the January Interim Experience (IEX)

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. IEX will provide for experiential learning both on campus and off campus through: 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.

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/>) 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. 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).

Challenges and Opportunities 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.

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 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. 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.

Practical Information Related to IEX Courses

1. Funding to support IEX courses (e.g., van rental for field trips) may be available through departments and/or the Office of the Provost. See Department Chairs Handbook (section 4:7) for details:

<https://gustavus.edu/provost/deptchairs/section4.php>

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

2. Any travel that is part of an on-campus IEX course requires the trip leader 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/>

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

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

5. For a more comprehensive guide to IEX, including examples of courses, course proposals, and suggested goals and learning outcomes, see <https://gustavus.edu/committees/curriculum/>

6. For the mission of IEX, course approval process for IEX courses, and policies related to IEX, see Appendix C of the [Faculty Handbook](#) (a.k.a. Yellow Pages), available online.