MDA 490/494 is an independent study on a project of your own devising that represents an intellectual culmination of what you have learned in the Narrative Studies program. This course is required for you to complete your major in Narrative Studies. Most often your study will result in a substantial research paper (MDA 490). Occasionally it will result in a creative project (MDA 494). The terms of your independent study are negotiated at the outset between you and the faculty member who has agreed to supervise your project. Students usually find that one of their previous instructors will supervise this independent study.

Your faculty supervisor for MDA 490 must be a regular research professor at USC. These faculty have the title Professor, Associate Professor, or Assistant Professor, and they are listed as such in the current USC Catalogue (online or print) under their department entry. Your supervisor for MDA 494 can be any full-time faculty member with any title in an appropriate discipline, and with the permission of the Director of Undergraduate Studies. You should start thinking about your independent study no later than your junior year, discussing possible topics and projects with possible faculty supervisors. These things take time to develop and mature. Keep in mind that faculty have research schedules of their own. You should find out very early if your proposed supervisor will be on campus during the semester you plan to complete your independent study.

You have seen a syllabus for every course you have taken at USC, and probably thought you could write a better one; now is your chance. You and your faculty supervisor together will construct a syllabus that is tailored exclusively for you. Our required form for MDA 490/494 can be found on the Narrative Studies website. Its several sections detail the kinds of information you have seen on every syllabus at USC. You and your supervisor both must agree to its terms, and then submit it to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the Department of English. Once that form is approved, you take that form with its three signatures (yours, your supervisor’s, and the director’s) to the Undergraduate Coordinator in the English Department who will give you official clearance to register for the course.

All further academic engagement for the semester will be between you and your supervisor. At the end of the semester your supervisor will assign a grade that is in accordance with the terms originally agreed upon for your MDA 490/494. Your supervisor should submit your grade to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in English (lgreen@usac.edu).

You should finish this final independent study feeling that you and USC together have done something memorable.