Crediting Policies for Bass Connections Project Teams

In general, undergraduate and graduate students on year-long Bass Connections project teams receive academic credit for their participation in the program during the academic year. Typically, students receive Research Independent Study credit for each semester of participation. However, team leaders do have options for how they set up credit for their project team. This guidance outlines the crediting policies and procedures for Bass Connections project teams and is meant to help team leaders understand and assess which crediting option makes the most sense for their team.

Crediting Policy FAQs

Who can participate on Bass Connections project teams for credit?
All students have the option to participate on their project team for credit during the academic year. This includes undergraduates and graduate/professional students. However, there are some students for whom credit will not make sense or be desirable. For example, advanced graduate or undergraduate students may no longer need additional credits; professional students may not be able count “elective” credits towards their degree; etc. In such instances, team leaders may choose to allow students to volunteer on the team or elect to pay them from their project team’s budget. (See below for more information about paid participation on project teams.)

How do I set up credit for my project team?
Team leaders should work with their theme administrator to decide how to set up credit for their project team. Typical crediting options include Research Independent Study courses and Special Topics courses. Depending on your preferences and goals, there may be advantages to choosing one option over the other.

Can I offer more than one form of credit for my team?
You should not offer more than one crediting option for the same student population in the same semester, as this can create a situation where students are receiving different curriculum codes for the same activity. For example, you should not have some undergraduates on your team enrolled in a Research Independent Study while others are enrolled in a Special Topics course. You should choose one crediting option per semester.

How many credits do students normally receive for working on project teams?
Typically, undergraduates receive one (1) credit for each semester of participation; graduate/professional students receive three (3). For each group, this is equivalent to one course per semester.

Do students have the option to participate on their project team for half credit or as a volunteer?
Team leaders may offer students half-credit or no-credit (i.e. “volunteer”) options. This is typically discouraged as it can lead to frustrations around student commitment, accountability and motivation.

Can students apply credits earned on their project team to their major or program requirements?
It depends. Undergraduate students who wish to apply project team credits towards their major (or minor or certificate) should talk to the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) in the relevant
Can students participate on a project team for pay?
Yes, students can participate on a project team for pay, assuming that your team has sufficient funds to support this expense.

- During the academic year, paid opportunities on project teams should be reserved for students with differentiated roles, such as graduate students in leadership, teaching, mentorship and/or project management positions. Students may also receive pay if they are not eligible for credit based on their level or program structure (e.g., advanced doctoral students). Paid roles may also be appropriate for advanced undergraduates who are longtime members of a team and take on extra responsibilities.

- During the summer, all students who are conducting research with their project team should be paid or receive travel financing (if applicable).

Can a student receive academic credit and be paid at the same time?
No, students cannot simultaneously receive academic credit and pay for their work on a project team. In rare circumstances, a student may be paid if they take on work that is above and beyond the standard expectations of team members and is sufficiently distinct from credited work. If you plan to do this, please reach out to your theme administrator to discuss the situation first.

Crediting Options for Project Teams

Research Independent Study Courses
Most Bass Connections project teams are listed as Research Independent Study courses in both the fall and spring semesters. Research Independent Studies can be set up at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (e.g., 395/396 and 795/796), and team leaders can choose whether to list their Research Independent Study courses within a team leader’s department or within their theme’s subject designation. All Bass Connections Research Independent Studies carry a Research (R) curriculum code but do not carry any additional codes. For undergraduates in Trinity, this means the course will satisfy general education requirements in research and small group learning. (Please note that students enrolled in a Research Independent Study should have a significant role in conducting research on your team.)

Setting up a Research Independent Study using your theme’s subject designation:
- All themes (except Bass Connections Open) have the option to automatically set up undergraduate and graduate-level Research Independent Study courses using their theme’s subject designation. Your theme administrator will initiate this process and give you permission numbers to distribute to your students prior to both fall and spring enrollment. These unique permission numbers will enable each student on your team to register for the Research Independent Study course affiliated with your team.

- Theme subject designations include:
  - Brain & Society: BRAINSOC
  - Education & Human Development: EHD
  - Energy & Environment: ENERGY
- Global Health: GLHLTH
- Information, Society & Culture: ISS

- For example, an undergraduate student on an Education & Human Development team in the fall semester might be enrolled in EHD 395-07, while a graduate student on a Global Health team in the spring semester might be enrolled in GLHLTH 796-01.

Setting up a Research Independent Study in a team leader’s department:

- Some team leaders may want to set up their Research Independent Study courses in their home department so they can receive departmental recognition or so students on their team can earn credit in a particular subject area. In such a case, you should reach out to the academic coordinator in that department to initiate this process. It is important to specify that you will need Research Independent Study listings at both the undergraduate and graduate levels so all your students will be able to enroll for credit.

- All Bass Connections Open teams must list their Research Independent Studies through a team leader’s department.

Special Topics Courses

Some team leaders may want to set up a Special Topics course affiliated with their project team. Special Topics courses are courses that are offered on a one-time basis and are not part of a department’s or program’s normal curricular offerings. They must be proposed through Trinity’s online course request process and should be listed in a team leader’s home department. Special Topics courses may carry curricular codes upon request.

Setting up a Special Topics course:

- Team leaders who want to set up a Special Topics course must consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) in the relevant department and complete Trinity’s online course request forms by the appropriate deadlines. Please note that these deadlines are early (early February for Fall courses and late August for Spring courses), so you will need to act quickly if you decide a Special Topics course is the right crediting option for your team. When setting up the course, you will need to limit enrollment to instructor consent (so that only students who have been accepted onto your team will be able to enroll in the course), and ensure that the course name and description clarify that the course is a Bass Connections project team. During this process, you should consider the following:

1. Course level: To accommodate graduate and undergraduate students, you can either list the course at the Graduate/Advanced Undergraduate level (500-699), or propose two courses meeting at the same time, with one listed at the undergraduate (1-499) and one at the graduate (700-999) level. In this case, the graduate section must have clearly differentiated, advanced assignments and expectations.

2. Curricular codes: Faculty may request that their course carry specific curricular codes (including areas of knowledge and modes of inquiry) that satisfy general education requirements for undergraduates in Trinity (see the Trinity curriculum for an overview and list of codes). Each requested code will require clear justification. Please note that unlike Research Independent Study courses, Special Topics courses do not automatically carry a Research (R) curriculum code. Team leaders must request and provide justification for the “R” code as they would other curricular codes.
3. **Semester outlay:** Consider whether you will propose a Special Topics course for both semesters, or whether you will provide a Research Independent Study course for the other semester. Please note that if you intend to use a Special Topics course for both semesters, you will need to complete the course request form in advance of each semester.

**Choosing Between a Special Topics Course and Research Independent Study**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Topics Course</th>
<th>Research Independent Study</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pros</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pros</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Easier to track student enrollment</td>
<td>• More flexibility to set meeting patterns (although you must still meet weekly and meeting times can be challenging to coordinate)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Eligible for a fuller range of curricular codes, a benefit to Trinity undergraduates</td>
<td>• Easier to set up enrollment</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Depending on team size and the needs of a faculty member’s department/school, this may make it possible to request teaching credit from your department/school</td>
<td>• Students will automatically receive the Research (R) code</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cons</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must be scheduled during regular course meeting patterns</td>
<td>• More difficult to track student enrollment</td>
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<td>• Must satisfy course expectations for contact hours</td>
<td>• Students may petition their department/school for credit towards their program, which can require additional paperwork</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must satisfy departmental requirements to distribute course offering times</td>
<td>• Does not accurately represent the nature of the program, which is collaborative (i.e., not independent)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must complete the course request forms well in advance</td>
<td>• Must complete the course request form for each semester, if applicable</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Must complete the course request form for each semester, if applicable</td>
<td>• Must justify requested curricular codes</td>
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**Student Expectations and Grading**

**Student Commitment**

While Bass Connections project teams are not standard courses and have unique requirements, you should expect students to commit about the same amount of time to your project team per week as they would a course – roughly 10 hours/week. You should also expect students to commit to your project team for the entire academic year (i.e., both the fall and spring semesters). On occasion, however, there are legitimate reasons why students may need to leave the team after the fall semester (e.g., scheduling conflicts).

When students are thinking about joining a project team, we advise that they:

- Plan to commit two semesters and approximately 10 hours/week to their project team
- Talk with their advisor(s) to understand how participating aligns with their degree requirements
- Understand the requirements and expectations of a project before applying
- Are prepared to actively participate in all team meetings and activities over the course of the project
- Are prepared to grapple with ambiguity and a dynamic research landscape
**Grading Options**

Because most students participate on project teams for credit, *they must receive a grade at the end of each semester of participation*. Team leaders should be clear and transparent about how they plan to assess and provide feedback to students. Lack of clarity around expectations can frustrate students and may lead to issues around motivation, accountability and performance (see *additional guidance* on grading for your project team).

**Letter Grades**

Typically, team leaders give students letter grades for their work on project teams. Team leaders should use the following *grading standards* when issuing letter grades.

**Passing Grades**
- A (Exceptional)
- B (Superior)
- C (Satisfactory)
- D (Low pass)

**Failing Grades**
- F (Failing)

**Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory**

While it is not the norm, team leaders may allow students to participate on their project team on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory (S/U) basis. We generally discourage this practice because we believe it can lead to lower student engagement and it can also have negative implications for students. We encourage team leaders who are considering this option to first discuss the trade-offs with their theme leader or administrator. If there is good cause for using this option, S/U grades can be established in one of two ways:

1. **Team leaders can opt to set up the course as S/U for all participating students.** Please note that you must do this when proposing the course, and you must make sure students are aware of this during enrollment as it does have limitations. For example, S/U courses are not eligible for curricular codes and students in S/U courses are not eligible for the Dean’s list if they are participating on the team as part of their normal, four-credit course load.

2. **Individual students** on the team can enroll for credit using the S/U option. In order to do this, the student must get consent from a team leader *and* their academic dean prior to the end of the drop/add period. Please note that there are *restrictions and considerations* that students should be made aware of before choosing this option.

When grading students on an S/U basis:

- S (Satisfactory) is equivalent to a grade of C- or higher
- U (Unsatisfactory) is equivalent to a grade of D+, D, D-, or F (Note: Within Trinity’s standards, U is a failing grade)