Frequently Asked Questions About Student Inquiry and Research (SIR)

Q. Are IMSA students required to participate in SIR?
A. No.

Q. What are the benefits of participating in SIR?
A. Skills Building
   Deep Content Exploration
   Unique Letters of Recommendation
   Competitions, Fairs, Scholarships
   Early Opportunities for College Research
   Publications

Q. Do students get course credit for SIR?
A. Yes. SIR is a year-long course and is credited on the transcript. There is also a brief description included on the transcript that includes advisor name, location, and topic.

Q. Is SIR graded?
A. It is a pass/fail course. There is the possibility for a grade of “pass with distinction” for students who produce exemplary work and have exemplary attendance.

Q. When can students enroll in SIR?
A. During the junior and/or senior years; summer credit is also available.

Q. What topics can a student research in SIR?
A. Topics from all academic disciplines (business, economics, English, engineering, fine arts, history, math, science, and so forth) are researched in SIR. The investigation must meet the SIR program standards of plan, investigate, analyze, and communicate.

Q. How does a student obtain the skills necessary for SIR?
A. All IMSA sophomores take the class “Methods in Scientific Inquiry” (MSI). This course provides training in statistical techniques often needed for data analysis, as well as taking the students through a mini-research-project, which entails the same process as SIR.

Q. How is time set aside to do research?
A. Most Wednesdays at IMSA (referred to as “I-days”) are set aside for SIR. No other classes are held on those days. Students may also need to find additional time to complete program requirements, as with any academically challenging endeavor.

Q. Where is the research investigation conducted?
A. Students conduct research at IMSA, virtually, and at many additional sites in the Chicago-land area. This includes major universities (Northwestern University, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois at Chicago, Loyola University, Illinois Institute of Technology), as well other sites like Argonne National Laboratory, Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory, Adler Planetarium, the Federal Reserve Bank,
architectural firms, law firms, and other locations where individuals are willing to advise students in academically grounded investigations.

Q. How does an IMSA student go about finding an SIR advisor?
A. We take a multi-faceted approach to helping students find SIR advisors, but students must initiate the process and the SIR staff will provide guidance and assistance. IMSA staff members are very willing to advisor SIR students, so students should make an appointment to talk with those who share common interests. Some off-campus advisors continue to work with IMSA students each year, and prefer that the SIR office facilitate that match. Some SIR advisors join the program because an IMSA student has contacted them and impressed them. Please be aware that Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory and Argonne National Laboratory have a unique application process, which is handled by the SIR office which forwards applications to the Education Offices at each of these locations. More complete details and advice about finding an advisor is in the “Finding an SIR Advisor” document.

Q. How is an advisor confirmed and monitored?
A. Email contact and program information sent from the SIR office;
   Phone conversation with the advisor;
   Criminal background check completed on the advisor;
   Site visits as time permits;
   SIR staff members monitor all aspects of student investigations and SIR requirements.

Q. What happens if the advisor-student match isn’t a good fit?
A. The SIR staff monitors all investigations and works with students and advisors to try and work out any problems that arise. Key to this is good communication between student, advisor, and SIR staff. Students should seek advice and guidance before concerns become serious problems.

Q. How do SIR students get to off-campus sites on I-days?
A. IMSA provides bus transportation to these sites on I-days. Buses leave early in the morning (7AM), and return around dinner time, about 6:30PM. Students are responsible for knowing the pickup time and being at the bus stop on time in the afternoon. Students will have to walk short distances between the bus drop and the physical site of the investigation.

Note: We can’t provide transportation to all institutions in the Chicago-area. Students should check with the SIR office about whether an institution that is new to participating in the SIR program is on one of our bus routes.

Q. What happens if a bus runs late or another issue comes up during the day on an I-day?
A. The student is responsible for having his/her cell phone with him/her, and for checking email periodically during the day, in the event that the SIR staff needs to relay important information. We take use multiple means to contact students as quickly and efficiently as possible – student emails, advisor emails, student phone calls, advisor phone calls.

Q. What do SIR students do for meals on I-days?
A. Sodexo opens at 6:30AM, and students can have breakfast and prepare a bagged-lunch. If returning buses are running late, Sodexo will stay open late for SIR students.

Q. How long does a student get for lunch?
A. Students should take no longer than 30 minutes for a lunch break. The specific timing should be worked out with the advisor’s approval.

Q. How should students dress for SIR?
A. Students are representing not only themselves, but IMSA and the SIR program. They need to dress appropriately for the site, keeping in mind that some business or hospital sites may require business attire, such as a tie for males. Some institutions may be a bit more causal, depending on the nature of the investigation. Students should “dress to impress” on the first visit, and assess the normal dress code at the institution. The SIR dress code requires minimally: long pants (no shorts) or skirt/dress - blue jeans are acceptable if permitted at the SIR site, but must be neat with no holes; shirt with a collar (no t-shirts); closed-toed shoes (no sandals).

Q. Can a parent/guardian pick up their student from his/her research site and give him/her a ride back to IMSA?
A. We prefer that this does not occur. I-days are set aside for student research, so the goal is for the student to use the whole time at the research site as productively as possible. If an emergency situation arises, please contact the SIR office.

Q. What are the attendance requirements for SIR?
A. Students are expected to attend SIR each I-day and to participate fully in the investigation each day. Since the number of contact days with the advisor is limited to about 3 to 4 days per month, attendance is extremely important to success in SIR. Excessive absences (excused or unexcused) can lead to a failing grade or mandated withdrawal from SIR with a failing grade.

Note: Advisors make a significant commitment to working with IMSA students, and the numbers of I-days are limited. Students need to take full advantage of the time available. Students may not contact their advisors about absences. Rather, they should contact the SIR office, which will contact the advisor about student absences. This helps ensure that all IMSA students are held equally to IMSA policies and standards.

Q. How does a student obtain an excused absence?
A. For non-health related absences (such as college visits or official school activities), the student should contact the SIR office preferably a week prior to, but no later than the Friday before, the I-day that they would like to be excused from. If airline tickets are being purchased, a college visit organized, or other arrangements made, then the student should contact the SIR office before that arrangement is made and confirmed. Students have many opportunities and SIR is the top priority for I-days. Students who do not contact the SIR office to request an excused absence the Friday prior to the absence, will be given an unexcused absence. Determination of whether an absence is excused or unexcused is made by the SIR office, and not the SIR advisor.
Q. Can students have an excused absence in case of an emergency?
A. Yes. In the event of illness, the student must visit and be excused by IMSA’s Health Office. The Health Office opens at 7AM, so students who are ill on I-days are expected to be in the Health Office right away at 7AM. In the case of other emergencies, the SIR office should be contacted as soon as possible.

Note: If a student is home ill, IMSA policy states that the student must be symptom-free for 24 hours before returning to school. IMSA polices regarding flu state that students must be fever-free for 24 hours, and then see the IMSA nurse, before returning to IMSA. On I-days, the Health Office is open 7AM - 3:30 PM. If students intend to return to IMSA on an I-day from illness, we ask that you recuperate at home, and return to see the nurse after 2PM. If a student is at IMSA and doesn't feel well enough to attend SIR, they must see the IMSA nurse as soon as the Health Care Services Office opens at 7AM. They will make a determination as to whether the student may stay in his/her room for the day, or whether the student needs to go home.

Note: If you have contacted the IMSA Attendance Office about an emergency, we ask that you also contact the SIR Office; we are unable to generate SIR attendance out of PowerSchool.

Q. What are the major program requirements for a student in SIR?
A. The primary goal is for the student to have a rewarding and productive research experience, and to learn about research and about the topic being researched. To guide the student in this endeavor, as well as to monitor their progress, the following requirements must be satisfied:

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<td>Early September</td>
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<td>Research Proposal</td>
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<td>Progress Report</td>
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<td>Research Journal/Notebook Check</td>
<td>Early December, February, April</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
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Q. Is there a summer SIR program?
A. Yes, students can obtain credit for summer SIR investigations, providing they meet the program requirements. Requirements are basically the same as the academic year SIR program. However students must provide for their own transportation to the advisor’s location. The time commitment is 5 days per week for at least 5-6 weeks. Students must have approval prior to starting a summer SIR investigation; retroactive credit is not granted.

Note: Students are encouraged to interview and visit with a prospective advisor in the summer prior to starting an academic year SIR investigation. Spending a week during the summer volunteering full-time can help students grasp procedures that may take several days to complete. These same procedures can be confusing when seen and performed one day at a time, over the course of several weeks.
Q. If a student participates in SIR for two years, can he/she continue with the same advisor and research area?
A. Yes. However it is not required. Some students choose to continue their research from their junior to their senior year, whereas others will choose a completely different topic. Students who continue the same investigation, however, are able to delve very deeply into a topic and to potentially make a lot of progress in their learning, as well as to contribute significantly to the research being conducted.

Q. How is an SIR student chaperoned and safeguarded on I-days?
A. Students have a lot of freedom and autonomy on I-days, especially if they are off-campus. They work under the supervision of their advisor and sometimes other individuals that the advisor designates. Students are expected to act responsibly and to be aware of their surroundings when walking to and from SIR sites. Students and advisors must complete a safety assessment at the beginning of the investigation. They are expected to work in a safe, courteous, and responsible manner while pursing their SIR investigations.