Description of Mertens' Arranged Independent Study System

I regularly work with students on arranged independent studies covering a variety of topics. The first independent study course I generally have students work on is:

**TA Critical Thinking**

I. Objective: To expose the student to a variety of areas related to critical thinking. The student is exposed to a critical analysis of many facets of life, from the more exciting development of topics of possible interest to the student, such as critical analysis of issues of:

- daily life,
- psychology,
- learning,
- topics found in the traditional introductory psychology text,
- extra ordinary claims,
- hard look at traditional abstract concepts,

Developing a critical analysis of the topics of teaching. This critical analysis of teaching is accomplished by working with the instructor doing the things a teacher does. And various other topics (Topics the student and I agree upon.)

II. Topics: The topics the student may work on during the course are various topics the student and the instructor agree upon. Some possible topics are listed below. This is not an all inclusive list. The student and I will work to accomplish a good repertoire in areas like:

Achievement Place Model- (St. Cloud Children's Home Project)
Advertising
Aggression
Awareness
Behavior Analysis/Principles
Behaviorism-Criticism
Bermuda Triangle
Bribery
Careers in Psychology
Classical Conditions
Clever Hans and Critical Analysis
Course Evaluation
Creativity
Critical Thinking/Analysis
Cults
Debunking/Inquiry/Doing a Skeptical and/or Critical Analysis
Defense Mechanism
Depth Perception
Dignity
Dissonance and Negative Reinforcement
Emotions - A Behavioral Look
Equity Issues (Gender/Race)
Establishing Operation
Ethics
Facilitated Communication - A Critical Look
Faith Healing
Fear As a Learned Behavior
Fire Walking
Freedom
Gender Issues
Genetics/Heredity
Graduate Record Exam Preparation
Graduate School Selection
Helping Services (learning approaches in various areas)
History of Psychology
Humor in such areas as: Healthy Living/Psych./Skeptical Areas/Stat
Hypnotism
Imitation
Imprinting
Irrationality
Learning
Love
Magic, the Psychology of
Magic - as being defined as a set of scientific principles that makes it look like a science principle is not at work in another situation.
Meaning - the meaning of meaning
Medicine Show Deception
Mentalism
Near Death Experiences
Negative Reinforcement, related to
  addiction
  autobiographical examples
  cognitive dissonance
  daily life (church, school, government, etc.)
  rule governed behavior
  threats
  etc.
Proverbs or Common Sense
Psychic Areas of Interest
Psychological Abstracts/Literature Searching
Practicuum
Punishment
Racial issues
Randi
Reinforcement
Religion/Science
Repressed Memory
Research Design
Scams
Science and Psychology
Self-Control/Self-Management
Sensitivity Training
Single Subject Design
Skeptical Issues
Skeptical Oriented Students (SOS)
Social Action
Statistics
Teaching By Doing
Thinking
Tricky Husky [complex chains of behavior in lower organisms]
UFO
Values
Walden Two - "Utopian Thinking"
Water Witching
III. Means to Learn: My major means to accomplish the objectives of this independent study is for the student to work to produce academic products. Generally, I try to get products which can be used by other students, or other students can continue to develop the existing product. For example, the student and I might agree on a topic for a paper, or continue to work on developing an existing paper, or to work on a set of questions already started in a given area, etc. The means to work on these topics might include having the student:

1. Write questions on a reading is a prime way. I have students report on readings by developing good questions on the reading material.
2. Improving existing sets of materials, papers, etc.
3. Reading psychology related articles, and taking notes on the reading.
4. Library work.
5. Computer work.
6. Work on demonstrations of various psychology related activities.
7. Work on other agreed upon tasks

IV. Mechanical Aspects of Developing a Critical Analysis of the Area of Teaching: The more mundane/mechanical aspect of a critical analysis of what teaching involves is accomplished by doing. I have the students daily help with teaching tasks, as much as ethically possible. All of these teaching related tasks are done with close supervision.

V. Amount of Work In Course Is Measured In Hours of Quality Work: There are no tests, so hours of quality work become the grading criteria. Generally 6 hours a week is the amount need for an A, much, 3 hours work is done on your own, and 3 separate hours scheduled meeting times. We do set up daily meeting times to hand in work and to talk about the tasks. Six hours a week is less than the general rule for amount of work, "2 hours out for every class hour," which usually amounts to 9 hours for a 3 credit course. The student gets credit for time to learn any skills needed to do the tasks.

VI. Why should a student do independent study courses or get similar "extra" learning experiences?

1. LEARNING: The general objective of this independent study is to learn something. It is not read and test type learning. You need to learn things as you read, or learn as you do other type activities during this independent study.
2. YOUR CREDENTIALS: "Extra" course work or experiences can show graduate schools or a potential employer you care enough to do more than the minimum to get by. You did activities to get an excellent or better repertoire.
3. POSSIBLE TOPICS OF INTEREST: Possibly study topics you have a special interest in.
4. OPPORTUNITIES FOR MATERIAL FOR LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION: This type course hopefully can provide an opportunity to give the instructor so material for writing of a letter of recommendations for graduate school and/or work application, etc.: Do something worthwhile for the writer of your letter of recommendation to write about.
5. MY SPECIFIC PERSONAL LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION REQUIREMENT: Part of my requirement for any letters of recommendation is that the student has worked with me on an independent study. I want something for us to write about when we write your letter of recommendation. I require 3 other extensive contacts (e.g. 3 courses, work, etc.) in addition to this independent study course. Hopefully in this more extended contact, you will demonstrate I have something worthwhile to say when helping you to write a letter of recommendation.
6. LEARN THE SYSTEM – HELP THE SYSTEM: If you like the system that is used in the courses taken from Mertens, you can learn more about the system’s mechanics. You learn about it as you help make it happen.
7. GRE (GRADUATE RECORD EXAMAINATION) OPTION: I will allow students to do their out of class work for the independent study on trying to improve their GRE repertoire. We can talk about this option as you get into the independent study, or before if you wish. I do have a good collection of prep material you could use.