



Independent Study in Journalism

ISPJ 3000 (6 Credits / 180 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Morocco: Field Studies in Journalism and New Media

Course Description

The five-week Independent Study in Journalism provides students with a rare opportunity to work alongside journalists from Round Earth Media, whose bylined pieces they have admired in global media. Topics will be chosen in consultation with these journalists. Ideas will be judged for originality, unexpected richness, and appeal to a broad global audience. In the process of conducting their reporting project, students will learn what it means to organize a story, select sources, question deeply, work toward balance, be alert to bias (and clichés!), respond to editing, check facts, rework and rewrite, strive for clarity and achieve accessible, flowing prose, along with, in many cases, images and sound. At every step, veteran Round Earth Media reporters will educate and illuminate, sharing expertise gathered from years in challenging global reporting situations.

Students will have the option of producing their story in French or English [or Arabic]. Along with their final feature, students must submit an ISJ substantive report documenting their methodology. This will cover such areas as journalistic ethics, issue analysis, data collection, and accessibility of sources, interview dynamics and the general story development process. Students will present their project at the end of the program to an audience of their peers, program staff, professional journalists and advisors. As part of its commitment to mentoring early-career journalists, Round Earth Media has agreed to consider pitching the most successful final projects to a top-tier media outlet in the United States, or in Morocco. Students who produce their stories in French [or Arabic] may be able to submit their projects to Moroccan print or online media.

Course Objectives

The Independent Study in Journalism project encompasses 180 academic hours (6 credits). The main objectives of the ISJ project are:

- To provide the students with the opportunity to conduct field-based journalistic project of their choice;
- To enable the students to gain a journalistic experience in an international context;
- To provide the students with the possibility of having their journalistic work recognized by a local or U.S.-based media outlet;
- Promote opportunities for continual awareness of the ethics of doing journalism in the field along with along with field research and cultural learning, particularly in terms of interaction and reciprocity;

Expected Outcomes

Upon completion of the Independent Study in Journalism project, students will be able to:

- Develop a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by field researchers and journalists working in a global context;
- Produce an Independent Study in Journalism in total respect of local professional and cultural norms of ethics;
- Produce a report that documents the process of their journalistic research project;
- Submit their project for consideration for publication by top-tier media outlets in the United States, on the Round Earth Media website, or by local Moroccan media outlets.

Course Requirements

As the ISJ is the academic culmination of the learning experience, students are encouraged to start thinking actively about their feature story topic (or photo essay if they are photo-journalism students) as early in the program as possible. All components of the program, beginning with orientation and including the *Field Ethics of Journalism in Morocco* course, the *Contextual Studies in Journalism: Morocco and North Africa* course, the homestay, the educational excursions, the intensive Arabic or French language study, and associated forms of cultural interaction within the host society, must be used diligently to refine and deepen this thinking and ultimately the production of an original story topic of potential interest to both a broad audience and to editors at journalism outlets that adhere to the highest standards of the profession.

Ongoing discussion with the Academic Directors (ADs), while primarily concerning the research topic of the ISJ feature story, must also enable students to identify available resources, including an appropriate research supervisor from among local, veteran journalists/advisors. Ultimately, the successful completion of the independent study in journalism depends, to no small degree, on the methodological rigor, originality, and sophistication with which a student has attended to his or her research topic. For their ISJ, students may write a feature story, either print or broadcast, or a significant photo project if their specialty and interest is photojournalism, or any other form approved by the ADs.

All ISJ topics must receive advanced approval by the ADs. Students are required to submit formal research proposals outlining their ISJ topic, methodologies, and the plan for implementation to ensure that the project is conducted in an ethical, responsible, and culturally appropriate manner. The ISJ must give evidence that the student has mastered the methodological and critical tools, as well as culturally and ethically appropriate techniques, including the highest standards of journalism ethics.

Readings

While the majority of the ISJ work should be conducted in the field, readings in preparation for, and throughout the ISJ period, are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study. Reference articles and books from local libraries are available mostly in Arabic and French but students have access to SIT's electronic library database. Students are also expected to consult appropriate course readings applicable to the ISJ, which will include a daily survey of media reports (print, broadcast, online and via social media) from and about Morocco.

ISJ Guidelines and Requirements

The student will spend a minimum of 180 hours on the ISJ with a majority of this work conducted in the field (as opposed to library research, for example). This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, participating, making field observations, writing, and meeting with their ADs and Journalist/Advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least 3-5 individual advising meetings to review their ISJ proposal and ISJ planning. Periodic progress conferences will be held with the ADs, as

needed. Unless approved for an alternative ISJ, the final product is a typed and bound feature story along with an academic paper documenting their methodology. This will cover such areas as journalistic ethics, issue analysis, data collection, accessibility of sources, interview dynamics, challenges encountered and the general story development process. In addition, a 20 minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analyses will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the Academic Directors, the project journalists/advisors, and other invited guests.

Human Subjects Review

All ISJ proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, students are required to submit an “Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects,” to include a discussion of any potential harm that might come from their ISJ project, and to provide appendices including interview and survey protocols. If the Academic Directors or Local Review Board believes that the proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, the student will be asked to revise their proposal. Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic and journalistic practice.

Some recent ISJ topic areas include

- Morocco’s Marathon Through the Sahara Desert, Called the Toughest Footrace on Earth.
- The Land Rights Movement, Lead by Women in Morocco
- Rappers in Morocco and Their Connection to the Country’s Democracy Movements
- The Economy in Morocco: Too Closed and Corrupt to Allow for Democracy?
- A Moroccan Fisherman: His Life and the Impact of International Treaties and Environmental Issues on His Livelihood and Future.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

At the end of the ISJ period, students are expected to present their work to the group and the journalist/advisor. Timely completion of all ISJ assignments is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the quality of expression, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and adherence to the highest ethical standards. During the process of planning, developing, executing and presenting the ISJ, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Morocco and in cooperation with institutions and advisors;
- Develop a logical and coherent framework for the study project, and clearly justify how the chosen topic lies within the scope of the program and region;
- Critically discuss and evaluate available and relevant theories, papers, and published materials on the proposed project;
- Clearly present the main objectives of the project, further developing them when needed;
- Present and justify a reasonable methodological framework to achieve the proposed objectives;
- Critically describe the data collected, analysis performed, interviews conducted and results;
- Present and discuss problems, findings and conclusions based on the methods used, data and information collected, and/or analysis performed;
- Be able to present all steps of the project clearly and coherently in a written and oral format for an independent audience.

In general, the criteria for ISJ evaluation include the student’s methods and effectiveness in gathering information, organization, assimilation, accuracy, analysis of the information, the effectiveness of expression and communication in the final form, and clarity and strength of project presentation and defense. The ISJ project is graded as follows:

ISJ Final Feature Story & Paper	60%
ISJ Project Oral Presentation	20%
ISJ Project Defense	20%

Grading Scale: The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

I	=	Incomplete
W	=	Withdrawal (Student initiated)
AW	=	Administrative withdrawal

Grading Criteria

All grades assigned will take into account the students' special circumstances and challenges they face as foreign students. An "A" grade for an assignment entails superior (not just "very good") performance in terms of structure and organization of assignments, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence.

Role of Academic Director and ISJ Advisor

The two individuals who work most closely with each student on the project are the Academic Director and the ISJ Advisor. The AD advises students on methodology, background reading, and in-country contacts which the students will be encouraged to pursue. The Academic Director, in consultation with the in-country advisor, evaluates the completed project and assigns the grade.

The ISJ Advisor's precise role may vary according to particular circumstances. In general, the individual selected for this role should be a host national or long-time foreign resident in the country, who has expertise in the student's field of interest and works with the student (and, to some extent, the Academic Director) on design, implementation, and evaluation of the ISJ. The project advisor may be a host-country academician, field professional, artisan, or topical informant. The role may be more or less directive or consultative, depending on the student and the need. Finding an advisor is the responsibility of the student, but the AD will assist and must approve the advisor. Occasionally, a student may have more than one advisor/consultant, one of whom may be from outside the host country. The main purpose of an advisor, beyond providing needed expertise, is to provide students with the experience of working closely with *local* professionals.

Students will generally meet with the ISJ advisor several times throughout the semester. The first session is likely to be devoted to an exploration of the student's background in the subject area, his or her topic of study, the preliminary project proposal, and how the project fits into the student's undergraduate curriculum and broader interests. Various methodologies introduced during the Field Ethics of Journalism in Morocco course should also be discussed. Advisor and student will agree on specific requirements (to be submitted to the Academic Director for approval) and on an initial plan of action. The following sessions (which can be conducted in person, over the phone, or by email) should be devoted to a discussion of student progress and resolution of any difficulties. The final session, at the conclusion of the program, will be an evaluation of the final product, which will have been submitted to

the advisor beforehand. It is the student's responsibility to secure and keep appointments with the project advisor.

Student Expectations

Responsibilities when conducting fieldwork:

- Students must respect, protect, and promote the rights and welfare of all those contributing to, and affected by, their work by protecting the privacy and dignity of the people and communities with whom they conduct field study.
- The right of those providing information to students to either remain anonymous, or to receive recognition, must be scrupulously defended and respected.
- Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive and must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in culturally appropriate ways.
- Students must record and represent accurately all aspects of the field study. This includes not representing as their own work - either in spoken or written form - materials and ideas directly obtained from other sources.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.