Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (5 Credits / 75 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action

Introduction

The Independent Study Project (ISP), the culmination of the program, provides the student with the opportunity to undertake an in-depth study of a particular environmental or sustainability issue in Australia. During ISP, students directly apply the concepts and skills developed in the RME course. The Sustainability and Environmental Action course provides the intellectual background necessary for the successful completion of the ISP. The ISP is a unique opportunity for undergraduate students to conduct original, independent research; undertake an internship; or produce a creative work related to sustainability.

ISP Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Select, design and implement an individual project that investigates a particular ecological, environmental or sustainability issue
2. Use effective field study methods and techniques to gather data
3. Integrate and analyze information from a variety of primary and secondary sources
4. Communicate the results of a study in both a written report and an oral presentation
5. Apply relevant ethical concepts in undertaking field research

The ISP Process

- Students need to start thinking about ISP topics from the start of the semester
- Early in the semester they will submit an initial topic idea to the Academic Director. Based on the nature of this topic an ISP advisor will be assigned. The advisor will typically help guide students in such things as the development of the topic, finding appropriate contacts and background materials, identifying appropriate methodologies and techniques, analyzing data and organizing the paper.
- During the first nine weeks of the program students will work with their advisors to develop an appropriate topic and to identify local resource people. It is not the role of

the advisor to develop the topic for students, but rather to act as a guide. Initial ideas could come from articles in the local media, seminar lectures or readings or discussions with visiting lecturers.

- Prior to the ISP period students will develop an ISP proposal as part of the Research Methods course. They must submit an acceptable proposal and get ethics approval prior to commencing fieldwork.
- Students have five weeks to first conduct background research, and then collect and analyze data, write the paper or produce an alternative product and prepare an oral presentation.
- Typically a student undertaking a research project will spend the first week doing background research and preparing for data collection. Weeks 2 & 3 are spent collecting data, week 4 analyzing data and organizing the paper, and week 5 writing the paper and preparing an oral presentation.

Academic and Ethical Integrity

Students must respect, protect and promote the rights and the welfare of all those affected by their work by doing everything in their power to protect the dignity and privacy of the people with whom they conduct field study. Likewise, respect, care and attention should be given to protecting, conserving and restoring the natural environment.

- In the course of field study, complex relationships, misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values are constantly generated. The fundamental responsibility of students is to anticipate such difficulties to the best of their ability and to resolve them in ways that are compatible with the principles stated here. If a student feels such a resolution is impossible, or is unsure how to proceed, s/he should consult as soon as possible with the Academic Director and Project Advisor and discontinue the field study until some resolution has been achieved.
- The rights, interest, safety, and sensitivities of those who entrust information to students must be safeguarded. The right of those providing information to students either to remain anonymous or to receive recognition is to be respected and defended. It is the responsibility of students to make every effort to determine the preferences of those providing information and to comply with their wishes.
- Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive. They must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in culturally and environmentally appropriate ways.
- To the best of their ability, students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. They should inform individuals and groups likely to be affected of any possible consequences relevant to them that they anticipate.
- Students must not represent as their own work, either in speaking or writing, materials or ideas, directly taken from other sources. They must give full credit in speaking or writing to all those who have contributed to their work.
- Students must read the policies and procedures for review of research with human subjects contained in the program handbook and if necessary apply for LRB or IRB approval.

Assessment

Students will be graded on the ISP paper (and in the case of internships, the internship performance; and in the case of creative projects, the creative piece) and their oral presentations. Grades for the paper are assigned by the AD in consultation with the ISP advisor, while the oral presentation is graded by the AD.

ISP Paper   75%
ISP Oral Presentation   25%

No incompletes are possible except for serious and substantiated medical reasons notified to the AD prior to the due date.

The criteria for grading a research ISP paper will be:-
    1. Content   (80%)
        a. quality of title, abstract and acknowledgements (5%)
        b. quality of study question & degree of usefulness / justification for study (5%)
        c. quality of background/introduction (10%)
        d. methods (5%)
        e. quality of presentation of results (10%)
        f. depth of analysis (15%)
        g. appropriate conclusions (10%)
        h. evidence of appropriate effort in data collection (20%)
    2. Technical   (20%)
        a. organization, writing, spelling, punctuation, referencing, maps & diagrams

The criteria for grading an internship paper will be:-
    1. Content   (80%)
        a. quality of title, abstract and acknowledgements (5%)
        b. description of the work undertaken (including dates and hours) (15%)
        c. background (History of the organization, the work it does and how it fits in the context of similar organizations both in Australia and internationally, how it advances sustainability) (20%)
        d. observations and impressions of the organization and its role (20%)
        e. -What students learnt from the experience and how they could apply what they learnt upon their return to the United States (20%)
    2. Technical   (20%)
        a. organization, writing, spelling, punctuation, referencing, maps & diagrams

The internship paper will be graded by the advisor and will count for half the ISP grade, with the other half being assigned by the AD based on feedback on the student's performance in the internship organization.

The criteria for grading a creative ISP paper will be:
    1. Content   (80%)
        a. quality of title, abstract and acknowledgements (5%)
        b. goals and justification of the study (including how it relates to sustainability) (5%)
        c. introduction and background (including how the work fits into the body of Australian work in this field) (10%)
        d. methods (5%)
        e. -description and explanation of creative piece and how it relates to sustainability (10%)
        f. critical analysis and evaluation of the creative work (20%)
        g. conclusion (5%)
        h. evidence of effort (20%)
    2. Technical   (20%)
        a. organization, writing, spelling, punctuation, referencing, photos & diagrams

For creative ISPs, half the grade is based on the quality of the creative work itself and the other half on the quality of the accompanying paper. Both grades are assigned by the advisor.

The criteria for grading creative ISPs (including an accompanying statement and title) will be:
1. Concepts (understanding / adoption / relevance) – To what extent were relevant sustainability concepts used as a basis for the creative work? Are these concepts well expressed and embodied in the work? Does the work show a good understanding of these issues and concepts? (30%)
2. Aesthetics/Technical Quality (engagement / beauty / artistic technique) - How skillfully has the student used the particular medium chosen? How technically good is it? How well will it engage audiences? (30%)
3. Educational value (understandability / motivation / call to action) – How effective could the creative work be in effecting social change? Does it have a clear message? How understandable would this message be to its intended audience? How motivating or transforming is it likely to be? (30%)
4. Potential for Use (acceptance by gallery / publisher / client) – To what use is the creative work being put? Has it been accepted by a client/organization/gallery and used in some way? Is it on public display or in use? If not, is there potential for it to be published or could there be a practical use for this creative piece? (10%)

Oral Presentations

The criteria for grading all oral presentations will be:-
1. Presentation (20%)
   a. clear voice/wording: concise or rambling? (5%)
   b. effective use of visual aids (10%)
   c. level of enthusiasm (5%)
2. Organization (20%)
   a. clear logic (10%)
   b. good ordering (5%)
   c. effective use of time (5%)
3. Content (see below) (50%)
4. Q&A, peer evaluations (10%)
   a. quality of answers given to questions following the presentation (5%)
   b. quality of questions asked (5%)

Criteria for grading Content (#3 above)

For a research project:
- quality of study question & degree of usefulness / justification for study (5%)
- quality of background/introduction (10%)
- methods (5%)
- quality of presentation of results (10%)
- depth of analysis (15%)
- appropriate conclusions (5%)

For an internship:
- description of the work undertaken (10%)
- background (History of the organization, the work it does and how it fits in the context of similar organizations both in Australia and internationally, how it advances sustainability) (15%)
- observations and impressions of the organization and its role (15%)

- What students learnt from the experience and how they could apply these lessons upon return to the United States (10%)

For a creative project the content grade will be made up of:-
- goals and justification of the study (including how it relates to sustainability) (5%)
- introduction and background (including how the work fits into the body of Australian work in this field) (10%)
- methods (5%)
- description and explanation of creative piece and how it relates to sustainability (15%)
- critical analysis and evaluation of the creative work (15%)