



## Independent Study Project in Journalism

ISPJ 3000 (4 credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo: Peace and Conflict Studies in the Balkans

**PLEASE NOTE:** This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

### Course Description

In this Independent Study Project in Journalism seminar, students execute a full-length feature (in the media format of their choosing), which will be considered for publication or broadcast in an actual media outlet (in coordination with Round Earth Media). Students are supported by a team of professionals who provide hands-on advice and mentoring at every stage of story development, sharing expertise gathered from years in challenging global reporting situations. Story topics are assessed based on originality, richness, and appeal to a broad global audience. Students learn to organize a story; select sources; question deeply; work toward balance; be alert to bias (and clichés); respond to an editor's feedback; check facts; rework and rewrite; strive for clarity; and achieve accessible, flowing prose along with images and, in many cases, sound.

### Learning Outcomes

The Independent Study Project in Journalism course comprises 120 class hours of instruction (4 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Conduct a field based journalistic project (ISPJ) in respect of professional and ethical norms;
- Produce a feature story of about 800-1500 words and a report that documents the process of story production;
- Submit their project to Round Earth Media editors to be considered for publication, in selected cases.

### Course Requirements

All components of the program, including the *Field Ethics of Journalism in Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo* seminar, the thematic seminars, the homestay, the educational excursions, language study, and associated forms of cultural interaction within the host society, must be used diligently to refine and deepen the ISPJ project. Ultimately, the successful completion of the ISPJ depends, to no small degree, on the methodological rigor, originality, and sophistication with which a student has attended to prior coursework along with finding a

compelling and original story topic.

All ISPJ topics (story pitches) must receive advanced approval by the course instructor and program's academic director before submission for approval by the Local Review Board (LRB). The ISPJ must give evidence of the highest standards of journalism and journalism ethics especially as practiced in a cross-cultural setting.

Along with their final feature, students must submit an ISPJ substantive report documenting their methodology. This will cover such areas as journalistic ethics, issue analysis, data collection, 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 aspiring journalists, Round Earth Media has agreed to consider pitching the most successful stories (entirely at Round Earth's discretion) to top-tier news outlets. There is, however, no guarantee that student stories will in fact be pitched and/or accepted by a media outlet.

### **ISPJ Guidelines and Requirements**

The student will spend a minimum of 120 hours on the ISPJ 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, writing, and meeting/talking with the Journalist/Advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling and attending at least three individual advising meetings to review their ISPJ proposal and ISPJ planning.

Unless approved for an alternative ISPJ, the final product is a typed and bound 800-1500 word feature story with additional components including the following:

1. **The Pitch.** This is the story pitch to your editor.
2. **Development & evolution of the story idea.** Explain the process by which you arrived at this story idea. How did the idea evolve into the pitch? What is this story's relevance to your personal interests and course of study at your home institution? Why did you produce the story in the format you chose?
3. **Sources, interviews, scenes.** How did you find your sources, elements, interviews, and scenes? What/who are they? What problems/challenges did you encounter in reporting this story and how did you solve them (or not solve them)?
4. **Journalism ethics.** What ethical issues did you encounter in reporting this story and how did you resolve those ethical issues? Were there ethical issues unique to Serbia?
5. **Potential media outlet and audience.** Where do you think your story might be placed? Why do you think this media outlet would be interested in your story? Who is your audience? Why do you think this story will be attractive to that audience? How did you produce the story to keep it interesting?
6. **The Story.**
7. **Photos.** Your story must be accompanied by at least three photos with a caption for each.

8. **Balkans news.** What are the two best, most informative articles you read on the Balkans and why do you find each of them so informative? What do you think are the two best sources of information on Serbia/Bosnia/Kosovo—anything from Twitter feeds to NPR—and why?

7. **Conclusion.** What could have been done better? Is this a story that deserves a follow-up? If so, what might that be? What did you learn from doing this story?

In addition, a 20-minute oral presentation highlighting the story and the process of reporting will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the academic director, the project advisors, and other invited guests.

### **Human Subjects Review**

All ISPJ proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project, with an eye to the highest standards of journalism and journalism ethics. Any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the Local Review Board) are forwarded to SIT's Institutional Review Board for review.

### **Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

At the end of the ISPJ period, students are expected to present their work to the group, SIT staff, and the project advisors. This presentation must reveal the student's mastery of his/her story. Timely completion of ISPJ deadlines is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on accuracy and journalistic quality and adherence to the highest journalistic and ethical standards.

#### Assessment:

Your ISPJ is evaluated on the basis of the SIT Assessment Rubric, a copy of which will be shared with you at the beginning of the program. The rubric assesses the produced feature story (whether print, broadcast, photo, or video) and ISPJ presentation. SIT Study Abroad awards letter grades to all students in order to give standard values to an assessment of work. Pass/Fail and Credit/No Credit are not options.

The following breakdown will be used to determine your final grade for the course:

ISPJ paper – 80%  
ISPJ presentation – 20%

#### Grading Scale:

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

I = Incomplete

W = Withdrawal (student initiated)

AW = Administrative withdrawal

Note: SIT does not award A+ grades

ISPI grading guidelines:

A: Ready for publication or broadcast. Shows mastery of facts and elements. Story is compelling and original.

A-/B+: Accurate, contains all relevant material but may lack maximum precision and clarity in storytelling. May have spelling or grammar errors in text and/or lighting and sound problems in images and footage. The difference between an A- and B+ is the degree to which these occur.

B: Needs some editing, some minor rewriting, and minor production editing. All the elements are included.

B-/C+: A significant problem or two somewhere in the analysis, focus, organization, shooting, and/or production. The difference between a B- and C+ is the degree to which these problems appear.

C: Missing facts and key information. Major reediting/reshooting or post production editing necessary. Missing crucial elements.

C-: Very weak effort

D: Overhaul required. Poor organization, reporting, shooting, production. Major storytelling issues (including sourcing, imaging) and absence of critical thinking.

F: Failure to meet assignment requirements and standards. Missed deadline.

Final grades will reflect plus (+) or minus (-).

## **Expectations and Policies**

Deadlines:

Please note that **late submissions** will have an effect on the **final grade**.

All assignments must be completed on the due date by a specified time. Any assignments received after the specified time will be considered late. Late assignments will be docked 5% (of the total possible grade, i.e., a 95% becomes a 90%), for each day, or portion of a day, late.

Students should notify the AD, and the person to whom you are handing the assignment, at or before the time of collection, that the assignment will be late; otherwise a grade of '0' may be given. All assignments must be satisfactorily completed in order to receive credit for the class.

Exceptions to this policy will only be made for serious and substantiated medical reasons brought to the attention of the AD BEFORE the due date/time. This policy applies to ALL academic components of the program.

Academic Honesty Policy:

This program has zero tolerance for plagiarism. Academic honesty is expected of all students. All quotes and source material must be properly attributed and verified. Your reporting must be original, truthful, accurate, and free of fabrication. Any work you present as your own must be your own. Violations of this policy include plagiarism, fabrication, and any other form of cheating.

Definitions and Examples:

**CHEATING:** The conscious use of unauthorized, prohibited, or unacknowledged materials or methods, including, but not limited to, checking mobile devices, computers, or notes during online courses or copying others' work.

**FABRICATING:** The conscious falsification or invention of information, quotes, sources, or any other material presented as non-fiction.

**PLAGIARIZING:** The conscious representation of someone else's work as your own. Please note that ANY failure to accurately and completely document ALL uses of source material constitutes academic dishonesty. You may use a quote from another source, but it must be attributed in journalistic style. Background and contextual information may NOT be taken from Wikipedia or many other online sites. When in doubt, discuss appropriate sourcing with your advisor BEFORE submitting your assignment.

**THIS IS JOURNALISM: DO NOT MAKE UP ANYTHING** in work submitted in our program.

**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.