



## Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 (4 credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo: Peace and Conflict Studies in the Balkans

### Course Descriptions

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is an academic project that is designed to allow the student to further their understanding of a topic unique to the Balkans experience, and may be conducted in Serbia, Bosnia, or Kosovo, upon the student's choice. The project must relate to the academic theme(s) of the program. A central aspect of the ISP is the collection and use of primary data; the ISP does not involve extensive library research that could be done in the United States, but rather takes advantage of the student's presence in the Balkans with access to materials and information sources available on-site. A local advisor, who specializes in the student's particular field of interest, must be selected by the student, and approved by the academic director (AD). All topics must be finalized and approved by the AD, and advisors must be selected and confirmed before the project commences. Meetings will be held throughout the semester with the AD to finalize the topic, select an appropriate advisor, define a clear topic and a research question, and identify potential sources of information, etc. Allowing for travel and time to write, edit, and print the final paper, this does not offer a great amount of time for actual field study. For this reason, the topic must be very specific and well focused. At the end of the independent study period, the student must submit a paper and make a presentation of his/her fieldwork. The ISP advisor and academic director then evaluate the project in writing. The AD will submit a grade and narrative evaluation of the project to SIT, and in turn these assessments are then forwarded to the student's home university.

### Course Objectives

The objectives of this course are for student to:

- select, design and implement an individual project which investigates a set of research questions as related to the issues explored in the thematic seminar;
- learn how to conduct and utilize a field-based research project;
- develop self-confidence and an understanding of experience-based learning.

### Expected Learning Outcomes

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

- implement an individual project that investigates a particular social or political issue;
- use effective field study methods and techniques to gather data;

- integrate and analyze data from a variety of primary and secondary sources;
- communicate the results of a study in both a written report and an oral presentation;
- apply relevant ethical concepts in undertaking field research.

## Course Requirements

Students will spend a minimum of 120 hours on the ISP. This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, collecting data (by interviewing, taking field observations), writing, meeting with the academic director and advisor. The final product is a typed and bound 30- to 40-page paper, double spaced, 12-pt standard font. A highlight of the assignment is a 15-minute presentation to fellow students, program staff, and other invited guests. Alternative forms of Independent Study Projects are a possibility students may explore in consultation with the academic director.

## ISP To Do List

### 1. Decide on a topic

This stage can often be difficult in narrowing topics of interest. This is where the student asks: “What do I want to study? What do I want to learn from the ISP? Where do I want to spend the month for my ISP? Is there a topic I have always wanted to investigate or learn more about?” Think about the ISP as an opportunity for self-fulfillment and growth, or as a steppingstone to further studies in a particular area.

The student must be able to define a distinct and doable project. By the time the final ISP proposal is submitted, students will be required to clearly state their project in one short paragraph.

### 2. Find an ISP advisor

Students need an advisor for their project. The AD will provide students with possible contacts, but it is their responsibility to make the initial contact and get the advisor’s consent. Here are a few things to consider when choosing an advisor:

- The advisor should be someone who has expertise in the field of interest and is able to work with the student to design, implement, and evaluate the ISP. The person should have a graduate school degree (MA or PhD) in the relevant field, and should be able to give the direction and support needed.
- Once students start their ISP, it is required that the advisor meets with them for at least three sessions, to define, discuss, and evaluate their progress, i.e., discussing and defining the parameters of the research topic, determining research methods, suggesting resources and contacts, assisting in the organization of information, and reviewing the student’s final submission.
- It is the **STUDENT’S** responsibility to initiate contact with an advisor and to make (and keep) appointments with him or her. This is one of the key challenges and learning opportunities of the ISP.
- ISPs unsupported by the assistance and evaluation of an ISP advisor will not be accepted.

### 3. Define your research questions and research methods (ISP draft proposals)

In the process of submitting the ISP draft proposals and meeting with academic director, students will have to clearly define their ISP topic and research questions. Focusing their interest on a clear and precise question will allow students to begin their ISP period with as much clarity as possible, and will help complete tasks in the given period of time.

### 4. Complete a final ISP proposal

The ISP Proposal should provide a clear description of the topic, research questions and intentions, and expectations of the ISP that the student has chosen to pursue. The proposal will help anticipate what the student is going to do and what possible problems may arise. The proposal should help clearly define

and refine project ideas and focus so that students end with a discrete project that can be accomplished in the given period of time.

### **5. Complete, sign and hand in SIT forms: site approval form, ethical guidelines, and Institutional Review Board (IRB)**

In addition to completing the ISP Proposal, students are also required to submit a Site Approval form that clearly states the whereabouts of the student on each and every day of the ISP; the AD and program staff must be able to reach you during the ISP period in case of an emergency (global or local). Ethical guidelines include completion of both reading/agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, but also successful completion of our Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in FSS classes. Please note that until items 4 and 5 above (ISP Proposal, Site Approval, and Ethical Guidelines Forms) are satisfactorily completed, students will not be allowed to embark on their ISP. Funds for ISP accommodation and food will not be released to a student until all pre-ISP requirements are successfully met.

### **6. Arrange accommodation for the period of your ISP (4 weeks)**

It is the STUDENT'S responsibility to arrange accommodation for the four weeks of the ISP (week 11-14 of the semester). The program assistant will be available to assist and advise students in this process. Depending on the choice of the ISP location, students may choose to reside with a homestay family or find an alternative accommodation approved by the academic director in accordance with SIT guidelines of safety and security.

### **Student Assessment**

In conjunction with the project advisor, the academic director evaluates student performance on the ISP. Assessment of the written work and oral presentation is based on the formulation of the research question, accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and the quality of expression. Special emphasis will be placed on the student's ability to integrate primary and secondary sources and to present the findings in a clear, organized, and well-synthesized format, with attention to the ethical context of field study. The following breakdown will be used to determine your final grade for the course:

ISP	80%
ISP Oral Presentation	10%
Photo Essay	10%

Evaluation criteria for ISP may include:

- Project definition and focus
- Development of project in relation to your objectives
- Critical analysis of topic and clarity of presentation
- Use of primary resources and cross-cultural communication skills
- Use of appropriate secondary resources in support of the more important aspect of information gained from primary (field study) sources
- Utilization of appropriate examples and personal experiences
- Methodology and positionality discussion
- Style, spelling, and punctuation

Evaluation criteria for oral reports may include:

- Organization of presentation, with effectively holding audience interest
- Use of appropriate examples and personal experiences

- Clear explanation of ISP strategy and implementation.

### **Grading Scales and Criteria**

Grades are given both fairly and rigorously and in accordance with the system below. They will reflect a combination of absolute quality of performance, progress made, and the ability to take into account and assimilate the academic director's and the teachers' advice in assessing the work done. An "A" letter grade reflects exceptional work and a perfect combination of academic competences and personal research and analysis. It shows great ability to integrate field-based investigation and personal reflection into a structured and well-argued paper. A "B" letter grade reflects serious and methodical work as well as a substantial effort at analyzing and understanding cross-cultural issues. A "C" letter grade shows the work meets the requirements but needs more in-depth reflection and personal involvement. A "D" letter grade is insufficient and clearly reflects lack of work or serious deficiencies.

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

**Please note: the syllabus, course content, lecturers, and readings may modified by the academic director in order to better suit the needs of the course and its participants.** Should any change of class topics or lecturers may be necessary, student will be promptly notified.

Student research is a product of fieldwork and, as such, students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical fieldwork, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore, copies of ISPs are returned to the sponsoring institutions and the host communities, at the discretion of the institution(s) and/or community involved. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad may archive, copy, or convert the ISP for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives the ISP in the permanent collection at the SIT Study Abroad local country program office and/or at any World Learning office. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad has a non-exclusive, perpetual right to store and make available, including electronic online open access, to the ISP. Students retain all ownership rights of the ISP product and retain the right to use all, or part, of the project in future works. Please refer to the Student Handbook or the Access, Use, and Publication of ISP form.

**Academic Policies:** SIT prides itself on providing students with an experientially based program; we hold ourselves, and our students, to the highest of academic standards. Students are asked to refer to the **SIT Study Abroad Handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational

experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.