



## Independent Study Project in Journalism

ISPJ 3000 (6 Credits / 180 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Morocco: Field Studies in Journalism and New Media

**PLEASE NOTE:** This syllabus represents a recent 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 six-week course, 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. Students have the rare opportunity to work alongside journalists affiliated with Round Earth Media, whose bylined pieces regularly appear in media outlets around the world. Round Earth Media professionals 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 what it means 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

By the end of the course, students will be equipped to:

- Conduct a field-based journalistic project (ISPJ) with respect of professional and ethical norms.
- Demonstrate understanding of reporting in an international context.
- Produce a report that documents the process of producing their feature story (ISPJ).
- Submit their project to Round Earth Media editors to be considered for publication.

### Language of Instruction

Students will have the option of producing their stories in French, English, or Arabic, given adequate proficiency.

### Course Requirements

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 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 program's Academic Director. The

ISPJ must give evidence that the student has mastered 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 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.

During the ISPJ, each American student works together with a Moroccan journalism student to produce a story on the topic of their pitch (which was developed and accepted earlier in the program). The Americans write their story in English, with a reporting credit to their Moroccan partner. The draft of this story is due two weeks before the final deadline at which point each student is assigned a professional editor in the United States. This is a rare opportunity to learn more about the reporter-editor relationship and to work directly with an experienced editor who polishes and guides the student's reporting and writing. The stories undergo repeated revisions, often as many as five different edits.

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 no guarantee that student stories will in fact be pitched and/or accepted by a media outlet. The Moroccan student partners publish their stories in English in a magazine published by the journalism school, ISIC (L'Institut Supérieure de l'Information et de la Communication) and credit their American partner on the story.

### Readings

While the majority of the ISPJ work should be conducted in the field, readings in preparation for, and throughout the ISPJ period, are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study.

### ISPJ Guidelines and Requirements

The student will spend a minimum of 180 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 Program Director and Journalist/Advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least three to five individual advising meetings to review the ISPJ proposal and ISPJ planning. Periodic progress conferences will be held with the Academic Director, as needed.

Unless approved for an alternative ISPJ, the final product is a typed and bound 1000-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, your 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 Morocco?
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. In addition, you must submit three photos of you and your partner working in the field on your story.

8. **Morocco news.** What are the three best, most informative articles you read on Morocco and why do you find each of them so informative? What do you think are the three best sources of information on Morocco—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 20-30 minute oral presentation highlighting the story and the process of reporting will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the Program Director, the project Journalists/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 and the Journalist/Advisor. 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, journalistic quality, and adherence to the highest journalistic and ethical standards.

#### Assessment

ISPJ paper	80%
ISPJ presentation	20%

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.

#### 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

### ISPJ grading guidelines as follows

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 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 re-editing/reshooting or post production editing necessary. Missing crucial elements.

C-: Very weak effort.

D: Overhaul required. Poor organization, reporting, shooting, and/or 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 (-).

### **Policies and Procedures as they apply to the ISPJ:**

**Deadlines: Please make them. The grade you receive on your ISPJ will be affected if you miss your deadlines. There will be a draft deadline approximately two weeks before the final ISPJ is due and your editor/advisor may set further deadlines for you as well.**

**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 me BEFORE submitting your assignment.

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

**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 ISPJs 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 ISPJ for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives the ISPJ 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 ISPJ. Students retain all ownership rights of the ISPJ 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 ISPJ 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>.