

## Fieldwork Ethics and Comparative Research Methods

### ANTH 3500 (4 Credits)

#### International Honors Program (IHP)

#### Human Rights: Movements, Power, and Resistance

*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 *We Make the Road by Walking*, Paulo Freire insists: “(...) without practice there’s no knowledge; at least it’s difficult to know without practice. We have to have a certain theoretical kind of practice in order to know” (p. 98). The concept of *praxis* that Freire further defines in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* refers to action based on reflection, and includes a commitment to human wellbeing and the search for truth. Moreover, it is always context-dependent, calling on the individual or community to selectively and reflexively engage the specific realities of their immediate surroundings. It is in the spirit of praxis that this course invites students to engage in Comparative Analysis Projects. By undertaking comparative analysis, we will explore the “actual doing” of research, while reflecting on its potential contributions and harmful impact.

Research as part of scholarship and advocacy is a fundamental component of human rights movements, often leveraged to maximize the recognition of specific human rights crises and justify the need for positive solidarity in order to guarantee human rights for all. It represents a practice of perpetual inquiry that can push greater self-reflection and raise awareness about injustice. However, the institution of research – embedded in a global system of imperialism and power – also forms part of the long history of scholarly and epistemic oppression that positioned some peoples as ‘raw material’ and others as ‘experts’. To quote Linda Tuhawei Smith, for many peoples around the world, “‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words” (p.2). Today, research continues to play a role in framing specific communities within stereotypes, limiting the nuance of their given context, taking over their exercise of voice and agency in self-representation and assuming ownership of their ways of knowing. Thus, the practice of knowledge making is rife with both possibilities and risks. With this backdrop, research practitioners must negotiate the ethical responsibility of the methods, use and impact of the knowledge they produce.

This course is designed to introduce students to the politics and practice of research. Throughout the semester, we will engage two interconnected thematic strands: (1) the ethical dimensions of research – from its role in broader social systems to the daily dilemmas researchers must consider; and (2) the practice and techniques of research – tracing the research process from the practices of identifying a problem and developing a research question and design to that of data collection, interpretation and writing. The course focuses on the methods and applications of qualitative research approaches. Issues related to access, consent, reflexivity, and representation will be of particular importance.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the politics of research and knowledge production in relation to human rights, power, and resistance.
- Develop a beginning awareness of qualitative inquiry approaches and understand the ethical issues entailed in the practice of qualitative research.
- Design and carry out a Comparative Analysis Project.
- Engage in qualitative research activities, including: observations, informal interviews, analysis, and writing.
- Critically engage with positionality, identity, and the politics of representation.
- Collaboratively co-construct a learning environment that embodies the praxis of human rights.

## **Course Materials**

Required readings will be available at the beginning of the program and upon arrival to each country. All required work is listed in the syllabus. Students are expected to complete the required readings before each class session and to use them in fulfilling assignments.

## **Assignment Details Class participation and contribution to learning environment (20%) Ongoing**

This course will require your full attendance and active participation. We will conduct the course in a collaborative workshop format, which will necessitate that you come to our class-sessions prepared to critically engage with the readings, class discussion and activities, and to discuss your own on-going research experience. It also requires that you keep up with your individual Comparative Analysis Project, as this experience will be the primary material for our collective learning. You will also be expected to provide peer feedback at certain points throughout the semester, which will also form part of your class participation.

## **Preliminary Project Proposal and Researcher Identity Memo (10%)**

During the first two weeks of the course, you will be asked to think of a theme or topic about human rights that you are interested in pursuing throughout the program. At the end of these two weeks, you will write a preliminary project proposal in which you will describe the topic that you have selected, how you aim to approach it, and your reflections on the feasibility of the project (400-500 words).

This proposal will be a product of your critical engagement with course materials, site visits, lectures, conversations with peers and others during our time at the start of the semester and your own past experiences. You should include at least three references to relevant course readings, site observations or materials and/or conversations. It will also mark the beginning of an iterative process of learning and unlearning about your topic and the process of knowledge making. I will provide you with personal feedback and guidance on your proposal, as will your peers. You will see that your project may change over time, and that is fine, but it is important that you begin to reflect, write and receive feedback as early as possible, as well as throughout the semester.

To your Preliminary Project Proposal, you will also attach an additional Researcher Identity Memo in which you describe your own identity and positionality in relation to your topic (200-250 words). This may include your motivation for choosing the topic as well as the ways that your own background may influence the assumptions you hold about the topic and how you enter into the exploration of it. What prior connection do you have to this topic? How do you think and feel about it? What assumptions are you holding about it? What do you hope to get out of the experience of exploring this topic comparatively? The purpose of this assignment is to begin to examine your goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings and values as they relate to your topic, and uncover resources and potential concerns your identity and experience may create for your project.

### Journal Entries and Country Memos (20%)

Throughout the semester you will be writing down your observations and reflections in your notebook. This will become the primary place to document your research process, including the logging, jotting, and analyzing of your field experiences. It will include:

- **Observations:** General observations and jottings: Throughout the semester you will have the opportunity to attend site-visits and lectures that may pertain directly or indirectly to your topic. You will take notes on these when possible (or after if that is more appropriate). You will also find yourself making observations during your daily experiences - remember that your topic may come up in unexpected moments and forms: a poster on the street, a passing conversation, a moment of culture clash – make sure to capture these as well.

Field-notes: You are expected to carry out at least one day of observation on your topic (depending on your topic). For this you will write 1-2 page field-notes in which you (a) describe what you observed; (b) interpret and analyze what you observed and how this relates to your topic; and (c) reflect on the process of observation and how it relates to your emergent awareness of research practice.

- **Conversations/Informal interviews:** You will carry out at least 3 conversations about your topic in each program location. You will log these in your notebook, including: description of when and where the conversation took place, the people with whom you spoke, the questions you asked, the notes you took during the conversation, any interpretations/analysis you have of the information that was shared, and reflections on the process itself. These conversations need not be very formal or technical. Local individuals you will be meeting on the way, are considered all experts on the local reflections of your research topic. Of course, always pay attention to the relevance of your topic for the conversant and ask help from your faculty and local coordinators to determine what's appropriate.
- **Reflections:** While both of the above encompass reflection, you may also opt to use your notebook as a space to capture how your understanding of your topic is changing over time. Your reflections may include reactions to readings, guest lectures, site-visits, faculty sessions, other activities, or afterthoughts on your observations and conversations – as they respectively relate to your topic.
- **Research Memo:** Toward the end of our stay in each location, you will hand in digitally the photos of the entries you have made in that country. Photos will need to be pasted on a word document and at the end of the document you are expected to write a (700- 800 words) analysis/reflection, addressing the following:
  - Log of your activities and information you gathered related to your topic.
  - Analysis of the emergent themes as pertain to your topic.
  - Reflection on your *process* of gathering information (including any changes to your approach that you may wish to integrate).
  - Any lingering questions and/or steps you aim to take up in the next location or phase of the project.(Be aware that the memos will be read by your professor.)

### Final Comparative Analysis Paper and Presentation (50%)

At the end of the semester you will present the culmination of your semester-long exploration of your topic in two formats: (1) a 8-12 page Final Comparative Analysis Paper, and (2) a 10-minute presentation to the learning community. This will be your opportunity to present your critical and comparative analysis of your topic. As the assignment is comparative in nature, you are expected to use information and draw

comparative reflections from at least three of the locations we visit. You will receive further details on the formatting for both of these mid-way through the semester.

### ***A few comments on topic selection, support from country teams and DIY time***

During the start of the program you will receive a list of feasible topics. This will help to guide you on your selection of topic. Ideally you will choose a topic that you are particularly interested in, perhaps due to prior experience and study of it. Your selected topics will then need to be vetted by your professor and the local teams, as we need to be pragmatic regarding what is feasible in our given locations.

Alongside the process of selecting your topic, you will also begin to identify possible resources and approaches for learning about it. The local teams, as well as the local faculty, will be key resources for you in this step. In each location you will be briefed on opportunities for conversations, interviews and observations. However, it is important to remember that the coordinators and their teams are resource persons for you, not your research assistants. So please be mindful and respectful of their time, and be aware that it is your responsibility to coordinate any visits or meetings external to the established program activities. Gaining access to participants and sites is a part of research, so this is also a part of your learning process.

Finally, there are designated DIY times throughout the semester. You will have many expectations from each of your respective courses, so it is important that you manage your time wisely so that you can make the most of these DIY time slots.

### **Course Evaluation**

#### **Points Distribution and Due Dates**

Class participation (Ongoing)	20%
Preliminary Project Proposal (& Identity Memo)	10%
Research Memo -	10%
Research Memo -	10%
Comparative Analysis Presentation	15%
Final Comparative Analysis Paper	35%

### **Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

As the learning process of this course is dependent on your continuous and reflective engagement with your project, the course materials, and your learning community, grading will serve as an accountability mechanism for these elements. The grading will function on a basis of points distributed as reflected in the list above. At the end of the term, your cumulative point score will be calculated to determine your final letter grade for the course.

It is useful for faculty and students to view final grades in this way. An “A” represents truly outstanding work, exemplifying rigorous analysis, superior insights, and precise presentation. A “B” signifies highly competent work that completes the assignment very well, with considerable thought, reasonable analytical results and an effective presentation. A “C” represents acceptable, work, satisfying the basic requirements, but lacking distinction, original analytical insights or organization. A “D” grade indicates poorly or partially completed work, reflecting a lack of initiative, inconsistent analytical conclusions and/or a disorganized presentation. Pluses and minuses for the four letter grades indicate better or poorer work. There is no “A+” grade.

### **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  
64% F Fail

### **Expectations and Policies**

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).

Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

### **SIT Policies and Resources**

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

### **Course Organization and Required Reading**

*\*Please be aware that topics and site visits may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.*

#### ***I. Atlanta & Tennessee, USA***

#### **Session 1. Producing knowledge (and considering politics & practices)**

Tuhiwai Smith, L. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, pp 1-19.

Choudry, Aziz. 2014. "Activist Research for Education and Social Movement Mobilization." *Postcolonial Directions in Education*, 3(1), pp. 88-121.

#### **Session 2. Initiating research (and decolonizing fieldwork methodologies)**

Tuhiwai Smith, L. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Chapter 6 (pp.111-125) and Chapter 10 (pp.185-196)

Thorne, B. 1980. "You still takin' notes?" Fieldwork and problems of informed consent. *Social Problems*, Vol 27, No.3, pp. 284-297.

Booth, W. C. Colomb, G.G. and Williams, J.M. 2008. *The craft of research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 3 "From Topics to Questions". pp35-48.

### **Session 3. Speaking for? Speaking with? (and thinking of collaboration and participation)**

Alcoff, L. 1992. The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, No. 20, pp. 5-32.

Sangtin Writers Collective and Nagar, R. 2006. *Playing with fire: Feminist thought and activism through seven lives in India*. University of Minnesota Press. Introduction. Pp. XXI - XLVII

#### *II. NYC, USA*

### **Session 4. Conversing and asking meaningful questions (and preparing efficiently for interviews)**

Schostak, J.F. 2005. *Interviewing and representation in qualitative research projects*. McGraw-Hill Education, pp.1-8.

Fontana, A. and Frey, J. 2007. *The Interview: From formal to postmodern*. Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, pp. 61-106.

Spradley, J. 1979. "Asking descriptive questions". In *The Ethnographic Interview*. Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, New York, pp. 44-53.

### **Session 5. Observing & witnessing (and the art of note-taking and analysis)**

Sontag, S. 2003. *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Picador. Chapter 5-9, pp.59-98.

Theidon, K. 2014. "How was your trip?" Self-care for researchers working and writing on violence. Drugs, Security and Democracy Program DSD Working Papers on Research Security: No. 2, pp.1-14.

Emerson, R., Fretz, R. & Shaw, L. 1995. Fieldnotes in ethnographic research. Chapter in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press, pp. 1-16.

### **Session 6: Being witness (and why research matters)**

Baxi, U. 2009. Epilogue: Whom May We Speak For, With and After?: Re-silencing Human Rights. In Bhabra, G.K. and Shilliam, R. *Silencing human rights: critical engagements with a contested project*. pp. 251-263. UK & US: Palgrave Macmillan.

Weinert, M. 2008. "Being" Witness to Human Rights Abuse. *Peace Review* 20:1. pp.84-91.

#### *IV. Chile*

### **Session 7. Managing data (interpreting and analyzing)**

Krog, A. 2010. In the name of human rights: I say (how) you (should) speak (before I listen). In Denzin, N.K. and Giardina, M.D. (eds). (2010). *Qualitative inquiry and human rights*. California: Left Coast Press, pp.125-135

Palmberger M. and Gingrich A. 2014. "Qualitative Comparative Practices: Dimensions, Cases and Strategies" *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* U.Flick (ed.), pp.94- 107.

### **Session 8. Connecting data to theory (and why research matters)**

Luker, K. 2010. Reviewing the Literature. In *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. pp. 76–98.

### **Session 9. Preparing to write**

Richardson, L. & St. Pierre, E.A. 2005. Writing: A Method of Inquiry. In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, pp. 959-978.

### **Session 10. Presentations**