

Independent Study Project in Journalism

ISPJ 3000 (6 credits)

Morocco: Field Studies in Journalism and New Media

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 five-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. These professional journalists provide hands-on advice and mentoring, 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

Upon completion of the *Independent Study Project in Journalism* course, students will be able to:

- Conduct a field-based journalistic project (ISPJ) and carry out interviews in a cross-cultural setting, demonstrating understanding and commitment to professional and ethical norms;
- Engage in meaningful cross-cultural collaboration and exchange with student partners;
- Present different points of view and contextualize them through strong background research;
- Engage thoughtfully and productively with edits and feedback, demonstrating the ability to revise;
- Craft a clear, comprehensive narrative with strong characters and stakes;
- Summarize their ISPJ topic in a professional journalistic pitch, explaining why their story is compelling and relevant to an international audience;
- Produce a written report and oral presentation, reflect critically on the process, challenge and lessons learned from conducting the ISPJ.

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 a high standard of journalism ethics and methods especially as practiced in a cross-cultural setting.

Students are required to submit two field reports documenting what interviews and field work they have done so far, what issues they have encountered, and what further reporting they plan to do. They are also required to file an outline and a first draft, which they revise after feedback from advisors.

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 SIT student works together with a Moroccan student interested in journalism, to produce a story on the topic of their pitch (which was developed and accepted earlier in the program). The SIT students 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 receives feedback from the academic advisor and from a journalism advisor, specialized in the student's chosen medium. This is a rare opportunity to learn more about the reporter-editor relationship and the revision process.

The program considers pitching the most successful stories to top-tier news outlets. In this case, students continued working with their journalism advisor after the end of the program. (There is no guarantee that student stories will be pitched and/or accepted by a media outlet.) The Moroccan student partners are also encouraged to publish their own stories, either in student newspapers or in local news sites.

Required 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.

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.

ISPJ Guidelines and Requirements

The student will spend a minimum of 270 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 should include the following:

ISPJ Written Format – Organization and Presentation

The ISP article should be no more than 1200 words. The supporting documentation should be approximately 1500 words.

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** (800 – 1200 words); or a 2-minute video; a radio story; or photography portfolio of images and mock lay-outs of the images alongside text. Students working in photography are strongly encouraged to work with more than one student partners and photograph more than one story.
7. **Photos.** Every print 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. **Background reading.** What are the three best, most informative articles you read on the topic of your ISPJ, or related topics? What media articles, reports, and academic articles did you read as background to reporting your story? Include a full list with links.
9. **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?

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

At the end of the ISPJ period, students are expected to present their work to the group, the ISPJ Journalism Advisor and the Academic Director. Timely completion of all ISPJ assignments is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the quality of expression, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and adherence to the highest ethical standards. During the process of planning, developing, executing and presenting the ISPJ, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Morocco and in cooperation with institutions and advisors;
- Develop a logical and coherent framework for the journalism project, and clearly justify how the chosen topic lies within the scope of the program theme;
- Critically discuss and evaluate available and relevant theories, papers, and published materials on the proposed project;
- Clearly present the main objectives of the project, further developing them when needed;
- Present and justify a reasonable methodological framework for carrying out the ISPJ (in this case, a reporting plan)
- Be able to present all steps of the project clearly and coherently in a written and oral format for an independent audience.

In general, the criteria for ISPJ evaluation include the student's methods and effectiveness in gathering information, organization, assimilation, accuracy, analysis of the information, the effectiveness of expression and communication in the final form, and clarity and strength of project presentation and defense.

Description of Assignments:

Independent Study Project in Journalism Feature Story (60%)

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.

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.

Independent Study Project in Journalism Presentation (20%)

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 Academic Director, the project Journalists/Advisors, and other invited guests. This presentation must reveal the student's mastery of his/her story: accuracy, journalistic quality, and adherence to the highest journalistic and ethical standards. Timely completion of ISPJ deadlines is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Your ISPJ presentation 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.

Field Reports, Outline, and Revision (20%)

While carrying out their ISPJ, students complete two fields reports, detailing how their reporting has gone so far, what changes they have had to made to their reporting plan and any methodological or ethical issues they have encountered. Student also file an outline a draft which, after feedback from the AD and form advisors, they edit before submitting their final draft.

Assessment

Independent Study Project in Journalism Feature Story	60%
Field Reports, Outline and Revision	20%
Independent Study Project in Journalism 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 submission to editors 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, rewriting, or 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/res shooting 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 (-).

Expectations and Policies

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

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 the Academic Director BEFORE submitting your assignment.

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 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>.