

Field Methods and Ethics

ANTH 3500 (3 Credits)

Nepal: Borders, Identity, and Community Resilience

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

Course Description

Field Methods and Ethics is the common core course across SIT Study Abroad programs. This course provides the conceptual and methodological tools that enable students to learn from experience, to apply the knowledge and skills gained in language study and the thematic course, and to prepare to undertake field study in the specific cultural and ethical context of the program location. At the end of the *Field Methods and Ethics* course, the student should have the cultural understanding and the methodological skills to complete their Independent Study Project or internship successfully.

The course aims to give students adequate theoretical foundations for and guided practical experience in conducting research or an internship in Nepal. Through a series of field projects, short assignments, workshops, and in-depth Independent Study Project (ISP) proposal development sessions, students gain skills in both quantitative and qualitative techniques such as observation and note-taking, participant-observation, formal and informal interviewing, mapping, surveys, ethnography and other social research methods.

Initial methodology sessions conducted during orientation are continued during the homestay experience. Methodological and ethical issues are also raised in connection with the Thematic Seminar lectures and field projects and excursions during the semester. The result is the development of cross-cultural and observational skills that prepare the student to conduct a successful ISP or internship.

The *Field Methods and Ethics* course introduces students to basic concepts of qualitative research methods and provides students with the practical tools and technical know-how of conducting fieldwork in Nepal. The course enhances students' ability to understand ethical issues pertaining to fieldwork, especially in context of Nepal. The course is aligned with the ethical considerations established in US higher education that guides primary data collection, while enriching students with the tools and contextual knowledge of Nepal's culture, traditions and society. By the end of the coursework, the students are equipped with the technical skills that can be broadly applied to social science research methods on a global platform.

This course includes lectures on qualitative research methods and weekly fieldwork aligned with the lectures and readings so that students not only learn technical aspects of research methods, but also experience fieldwork that slowly builds to help them develop skills for their

independent research or internship. The ethical considerations introduced in the class are aligned with students' own experience in Nepal, which allows them to not only realize the ethical concerns for their fieldwork, but also gain a deeper understanding and perspective of Nepali society.

The field excursion to a location outside of the Kathmandu Valley is followed up with practical execution of the techniques and analysis of the fieldwork process. By considering place and space and issues of power and representation, the course includes in-depth coverage of the important ethical issues for the fieldworker or intern, and students are made fully aware of SIT's IRB/LRB policies and procedures along with the important topics of informed consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity. The course culminates in the development of an ethically sound proposal for the one-month ISP or internship, which is expected to combine primary and secondary sources (ISP) or provide an analytical reflection (internship) in a written and oral presentation. Critical reflection is stressed throughout the course, and students are encouraged to be self-reflective regarding their position as student researchers or interns in Nepal.

Throughout the course, students will participate in all aspects of field research. During this time, students will be able to design their own research or internship proposal, become familiar with the logistical and management aspects of conducting fieldwork, and understand the ethical considerations. The overall goal of this course is to help students hone their skills in designing competitive research (or internship) proposals, and conducting fieldwork, either as an independent research project (ISP) or an internship with a local organization.

Learning Outcomes

At the completion of the *Field Methods and Ethics* course, the student will be able to:

- Show an acute sense of positionality and perspective and operate independently, using cultural sensitivity, language skills, and local networks of trust built over the course of the semester;
- Assess the impact of a researcher on local cultures being studied, using sensitivity and awareness;
- Navigate the Nepali cultural, social, and bureaucratic landscapes and apply research and language skills;
- Utilize various approaches to social science research and fieldwork methods that may include note-taking and transcription, participant observation, kinship charting, mapping, collection of life histories, formal and informal interviewing, and other approaches to qualitative data collection;
- Integrate information gathered from primary sources with secondary source material to produce a sound research proposal that is in strict observance of ethical academic standards and local values OR develop an internship proposal that includes a description of the host organization, an outline of tasks that will be performed, ethical considerations of the internship, a proposed internship timetable, and projected outcomes in the form of a paper and presentation.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of economic change and development through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Course Requirements

The *Field Methods and Ethics* course is composed of a series of exercises, activities, and assignments to enable students to meet the above objectives. Essential in beginning cross-cultural study in South Asia is for students to understand the history of Orientalist approaches, and thus a theoretical background is developed through reading and discussion during the first week. Students are asked to reflect upon and critically examine their role within the complex histories of research in the subcontinent.

Starting in Orientation, students start identifying and refining potential ISP projects and internship interests through a series of draft proposals. As students learn and understand more about Nepal's development and social change, these draft proposals will evolve and become more refined, and it is expected that their final proposals will reflect overall academic sophistication and precision, and clearly articulated methodology sections, as evidence of their field methods and ethics learning.

Fieldwork in the Kathmandu Valley and excursions provide opportunities for field methods and ethics practicums and experiential learning. Students are required to complete all required fieldwork assignments. Attention is paid to developing relevant, appropriate, and accessible questions within the specific setting, and developing sensitivity to the nuances of cross-cultural communication.

The final rural village excursion is structured somewhat like a mini-ISP and requires students to work independently during the one week stay in the village. The assignment combines themes explored in the course with a thorough analysis of the village as it is encountered in the present. Students are required to undertake three to four hours of self-directed fieldwork daily, and the final oral presentations are delivered before an audience consisting of village locals, teachers and the Academic Director. The village fieldwork journals must show evidence of the use of a variety of techniques, including interviews conducted both with and without translation assistance.

The final phase of the *Field Methods and Ethics* course is the completion of a focused and detailed ISP proposal or an internship Learning Agreement and a human subjects review application. The ISP proposal includes an abstract, an introduction, a discussion, a literature review, a methodology section and all the accompanying materials for Local Review Board (LRB) review. The Internship Learning Agreement includes a literature review of the proposed internship field and background information about the internship host organization, as well as intended internship tasks and goals for LRB review. The LRB, chaired by the Academic Director, operates under the auspices of SIT's IRB Committee.

Course Schedule

Module I: Experiential learning and positionality in Field-based research:

This introductory module is designed to help students understand field-based research, in the Nepali context. Drop-off sessions, mapping assignments, participant observation, in conjunction with their homestay helps students relate to local communities and individuals. Most particularly, this module allows students to discover the power of experiential learning and use it as a tool to connect to local communities and individuals and develop into reflexive researchers who are attentive to their own positionality in relation to the local communities in which they engage for their research or internship.

Readings:

- Said, E. W. (1978). Introduction. *Orientalism Western Conceptions of The Orient*. New Delhi, Penguin Books in India: 1-28.
- Campbell, J. G., R. Shrestha, L. Stone, and L. Bennett. (2011). Foreword. *The use and misuse of social science research in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.

Module II: Participant observation, mapping, and reflexivity:

The fieldwork assignments are designed to help students gather data from participant observation and social mapping. Lectures will cover the importance of different forms of data: from participant observation, document analysis, social mapping to interviews. During this time, students will practice conducting participant observation and analyze their data using various themes covered in the *Development and Social Change* seminar. Students will also be exposed to different forms of secondary data and analysis, like document analysis, archival analysis, digital media analysis, etc. More importantly this module will also expose students to the aspects of approaching participants, requesting for consent and conducting field interviews which are essential for their ISP.

The lectures, discussions and reading assignments are designed to help student understand the importance of technique and reflexivity, which are two important pillars of *Field Methods and Ethics* course.

Readings:

- Pelto, P. J. (2016). *Applied ethnography: Guidelines for field research*. Routledge.
- Plemmons, D., & Barker, A. W. (2017). Chapter 1. *Anthropological ethics in context: an ongoing dialogue*. Routledge.
- Reinharz, S. (2017). *On Becoming a Social Scientist: from survey research and participant observation to Experimental Analysis*. Routledge.
- Subedi, B. (2009). Writing a Literature Review. In *Geographic Research Methods Handbook*, ed. P. K. Pradhan. Kathmandu: Central Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University and Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South.

Module III: Accessing research sites and conducting research

This module is designed to help students build on the knowhow of accessing research sites, approaching agencies and individuals, and getting comfortable in notetaking and conducting interviews. Fieldwork, in conjunction with the readings help students navigate Nepali cultural, social and bureaucratic landscape. The designed fieldwork is especially helpful for students to gain confidence in selecting research sites, understanding logistical management of getting to the site and finding accommodations, approaching research participants and developing understanding of ethical considerations in the context of Nepal.

During this time, students will also finalize their ISP or Internship proposal. To do so, students will be able to use their fieldwork assignments to establish relationships with individuals and/or organizations that they might network with for their independent research or internship work.

Readings:

- Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Juggling Roles: Daughter, Development Worker, and Anthropologist.
- Invitations to love: Literacy, love letters, and social change in Nepal, Univ of Michigan Press.
- Wolf, D. L. (2018). Chapter 1. *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork*. Routledge.
- Siwale, J. (2015). Why did I not prepare for this? The politics of negotiating fieldwork access, identity, and methodology in researching microfinance institutions. *SAGE Open*, 5(2), 2158244015587560.

Module IV: ISP or Internship

This module focuses on helping students hone their research skills and design a competitive research OR internship proposal. As a preparation for their ISP or internship, students will conduct a “mini ISP” during their rural excursion (major excursion), where they will have a chance to understand the process of research and also have an opportunity to reflect upon this process. This learning platform will enable the students gain experiential knowledge about ethical considerations, their position as researchers and interns, while applying the technical knowhow of conducting fieldwork. Additionally, students will have an opportunity to use their Nepali language skills to conduct interviews, which will help them understand their own potential and limitations that could arise during the ISP or internship.

Readings:

- Pels, P. (2005). "Where there aren't no ten commandments": Redefining Ethics during the *Darkness In El Dorado* Scandal. Embedding Ethics. M. Lynn and P. Pels. New York, Wenner-Gren Foundation: 69-99.
- Pigg, S. L. (1996). The credible and the credulous: the question of “villagers' beliefs” in Nepal. *Cultural Anthropology*, 11(2), 160-201.

Module IVa: ISP Development and Implementation Process (for ISP students only)

Topic I: Identification of research design, and methods development

This introductory module helps students gain a wide range of ideas about different aspects in Nepal and feasible research topics that they might want to pursue. Field methods and ethics lectures and fieldwork, along with individual discussions with the academic advisor are designed to help students formulate research questions, identify methodology and develop a basic research design.

- Identification of topics of interest in relation to the student's major, interest and language capabilities;
- Assessment of the geographical location, political sensitivity, and feasibility of the proposed project;
- Conduct background investigation and research on proposed topic using both primary and secondary sources during the study period in Kathmandu;
- Identification of potential project advisors and/or translators and guides as necessary;
- Development of a basic research proposal under the guidance of AD and/or advisor.

Topic II: Proposal design, ethics review and access to research site

The completed field exercises and lectures are designed to allow students an opportunity to refine their research proposal, understand and experience the potential of fieldwork and evaluate the ethical concerns. Individual discussions with the academic advisor, along with the field methods and ethics fieldwork and lectures help students navigate research sites, build necessary information/data about their specific research and develop a research proposal that ensures that all ethical aspects are implemented in the field.

- Re-evaluation of initial project proposal based upon field research experience gained during the field excursion;
- Final ISP meeting to evaluate the ISP proposal, resolve outstanding questions regarding research methodology and the work plan in order to determine whether adequate background preparation has been performed to ensure the implementation of a successful project;
- Ensure all the ethical aspects are understood and implemented in the field.

Topic III: Pre-ISP paperwork, Fieldwork, and Research presentation

Topic III is designed to ensure that all required paperwork and preparation are completed before the students leave for their fieldwork. Students are required to complete their fieldwork, while writing their ISP paper in the meantime. After the completion of their ISP period, students are expected to complete their ISP paper and prepare for their ISP presentation.

- Student signs the ISP site information form, the ISP ethics form, and the ISP copyright form;
- Student travels to project site and conducts ISP fieldwork;
- Student makes oral presentation (20-30 minutes) on major project findings;

Student submits final written ISP academic paper (25- 45 pages), both hard copy and electronic format.

Module IVb: Making the Most of Your Internship (for internship students only)

This module occurs prior to the start of the internship and will prepare students for the demands and expectations of an internship, strategies for success, and academic requirements.

Topic I: Setting the Stage

This session reviews objectives for the internship. Students meet with the academic director following confirmation of their internship placement and discuss expectations, timeframes and other logistics, structural components of the final internship paper, content, layout, and general guidelines.

Topic II: Positionality and Internship Ethics/Awareness

1. Stereotypes and preconceptions about interning in Nepal
2. What are your motivations? How do you imagine your role?
3. Introduction to Work Culture in Nepal
4. Introduction to Internship – visit and develop understanding of context and position in field/country

5. Ethics in Internships: This is an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the ethics of engaging in internships in an international context in general and in (country) in particular.
6. Local Review Board (LRB) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and the Ethics Review Application.

Topic III: The Internship Learning Agreement

Central to the successful internship experience is the development of the Internship Learning Agreement. The academic director will work with students individually and as a group to review the purpose of the Internship Learning Agreement. He or she will discuss student strategies for collaborating with the internship supervisor to design the contents of the Internship Learning Agreement in adherence to internship learning objectives and in collaboration with the internship supervisor at the host organization. The Agreement also helps to ensure a clear understanding of the objectives of the internship among the student, academic director, and internship supervisor.

Once internship placements are confirmed, the students, together with the academic director will review objectives for the internship and discuss expectations, learning agreements, timeframes and other logistics, structural components of the final internship paper, content, layout, and general guidelines.

Required Readings:

Readings specific to the context and field will be assigned.

Recommended Readings:

Sweitzer, Frederick and King, Mary (2013). *The Successful Internship: Personal, Professional and Civic Development in Experiential Learning* (4th Edition). Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole

- Chapters 1-5

Grading and Evaluation Criteria

Description of assignments

Students are encouraged to treat the assignments as a learning “toolbox”, which is designed to enable them to conduct their ISPs and internships. The main objective of the assignments is to help students gain confidence in approaching Nepali informants and to become skilled in the techniques of qualitative research methods. The assignments for the *Field Methods and Ethics* course are divided into two kinds- fieldwork and written assignments.

Students will be required to conduct fieldwork for their *Field Methods and Ethics* course, which include but are not limited to observations, participant selection and approach, and interviewing. Students will be required to conduct their fieldwork (ISPs & internships) in both Nepali/Tibetan and English, and will be communicating with local neighbors, government officials, and non-government officials. During the fieldwork, the students will also get an opportunity to understand logistics of traveling within and out of Kathmandu.

Assignments:

- Fieldwork Journal: Students will keep a field journal, separate from a personal journal, with entries integrating experiential accounts of cultural events, lecture and reading notes, and reflection. This Journal will be especially helpful in reflexivity and understanding positionality.
- Assignment1: Drop-offs, participant observations, and social mapping
 - Drop-offs and participant observations are designed to help students' confidence in navigating the geographical space in the city and experience fieldwork in Nepal. The first few assignments are the "beginning steps" to research, where students will be required to conduct fieldwork without any extensive data collection.
- Assignment2: Structured Ethnography and basic interviews
 - As a next step, students will be required to conduct simple interviews with the participants that they have become comfortable with, for example, someone from their neighborhood and other participants brought in by the program. In conjunction to their language classes, these fieldworks are designed to help students build some confidence in Nepali/Tibetan, and practice simple ethnography.
- Assignment3: Conducting interviews
 - As students build confidence and have a better knowledge of the technical knowhow of fieldwork, they will be required to conduct interviews with various organizations, professionals within Kathmandu city, and in some cases, in the outskirts of Kathmandu. This kind of fieldwork also allows students an important opportunity to explore the research topic they are interested in or start building networks for the internship.
- Assignment4: ISP Proposal / Internship Learning Agreement
 - A progressively sophisticated series of draft ISP proposals, which will have been developed in part through three individual discussions over the first two months of the program with the Academic Director. Final ISP proposal will be equivalent to a fellowship proposal in length and quality.
 - Internship Learning Agreement, which will have been developed in part through three individual discussions over the first two months of the program with the Academic Director. The final Internship Learning Agreement will show thoughtful consideration of the links between the program's key academic themes and the learning goals of the internship experience.
- Assignment 5: Village Study Methods
 - These assignments, during excursions, will combine fieldwork that is part of the *Field Methods and Ethics* course with exploration of issues as part of the thematic seminar.
- Participation:
 - The depth and quality of students' participation in all aspects of the course is considered for evaluation, including: participation in lectures, discussions, excursions, etc. Participation constitutes 10% of the total grade.

Assessment:

Assignment1: Drop-offs, participant observations, and social mapping: 10%

Assignment2: Structured Ethnography and basic interviews: 10%

Assignment3: Conducting interviews: 15%

Assignment4: ISP Proposal / Internship Learning Agreement: 45%

Assignment5: Village Study Methods: 10%

Participation: 10%

Grading Scale:

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

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 according 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 (those of classmates, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits, etc.). 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, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 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.