Course Syllabus

Independent Study Project
ISPR-3000 (4 Credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Ecuador: Comparative Ecology and Conservation

Course Description
The Independent Study Project (ISP) is designed to be the culmination of the Environmental Field Studies course (ERME), the Comparative Tropical Ecology seminar, the Conservation and Sustainability Practices in Ecuador seminar, and the Intensive Language Study Spanish course. The ISP is a unique opportunity for undergraduate students to conduct original, independent research, studying in depth an aspect of particular academic interest relating to the program theme.

The Independent Study Project is based on the premise of the effectiveness of experiential learning as a tool for academic learning. It rests on the assumption that active engagement with the learning material facilitates students’ knowledge and acquisition of skills through research that is culturally and environmentally appropriate. It employs inductive and deductive approaches by which students learn and adjust their research based on experiences using primary resources in real-life rather than contrived settings. Furthermore, the approach asserts the importance of reciprocity in the subject/researcher relationship, whereby students’ interests are matched with community/individual needs insofar as is possible, thus facilitating the potential for research to be mutually empowering, beneficial, and sustainable. These partnerships call upon the students’ use of the Spanish language in both the field and written project, thus promoting an exchange of information with local Ecuadorian contacts.

Course Objectives
The main objectives of this course are:

- To study in greater depth an aspect of Ecuadorian ecology, environment, conservation, development or society.
- To develop motivation, curiosity, a sense of responsibility, ethics and self-direction in learning, and the capability to make and accept the consequences of independent decisions.
- To increase each student’s capacity to think critically and creatively, integrating and analyzing information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.

*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.

Copyright © SIT, a program of World Learning
Expected Outcomes
By the end of the course, students should have attained the following:
- A greater understanding of a dimension of Ecuadorian ecology, development, conservation, environment and/or society.
- An internalized and continual consideration for the awareness, development, and incorporation of a standard of ethics for appropriate field research, particularly in terms of reciprocity and sustainability.

Course Requirements
The Independent Study Project (ISP) provides an opportunity for students to study a topic of particular academic interest in greater depth. Project topics typically relate to the academic themes of the program, including but not limited to: ecology, conservation, field methodologies, environmental policy, grassroots initiatives, and Ecuadorian culture. Through class lectures, field exercises, group discussions students begin preparing for their Independent Study Project in the two months before the ISP begins. ISP topic and site selection options are carefully analyzed in individual meetings with the Academic Director, with priority on requests for desired student projects solicited from the program’s Ecuadorian contacts. Appropriate projects must adhere to the following:
- Can best be done in Ecuador (versus the United States).
- Does not require extensive library research.
- Can be completed in 120 hours.
- Provides extensive contact with host nationals, the scientific community, or Ecuadorian ecosystem.
- Yields a significant, specific insight into an aspect of Ecuadorian ecology or environment and a grasp on new learning skills.

Before the project period begins, under the guidance of the academic director, students are required to prepare a well-developed written proposal on the focus and design of their investigation. Each student works closely with a project advisor, as well as with the Academic Director, throughout the ISP process. The final product of the ISP consists of oral and written presentations in a form to be mutually agreed to by the student, project advisor, and Academic Director.

Readings
- Selections from the ERME Reading Packets covering both anthropological and ecological field methods and techniques applicable to the ISP
- Reference articles and books from program library and SIT’s electronic library database specifically related to student’s ISP topic.

Human Subject Review and Environmental Review
All ISP proposals must reflect a responsible, culturally-and environmentally-appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry upon the local environmental and the participants in the project. To this end, students are required to submit two applications for review of their research in accordance with standards developed for ethical study of human subjects and low impact on the natural setting. The minimal standards for these reviews reflect local academic practice with additional support and consultation if needed from the Local Review Board and SIT’s Institutional Review Board. ISPs that may be *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.
further disseminated after the program must confirm to the more stringent standards of the Office for Human Research Protections.

See below for further details on the academic and ethical integrity standards expected of all

ISP Calendar
FINAL ISP PREPARATION DAYS
Plan activities/research as needed & make final decision on your ISP topic and site
1. Write ISP proposal
2. Complete other forms
   - Complete Human Subject Review & Environmental Review Forms
   - Submit your Final ISP proposal
   - All reading packets should be completed

ISP PERIOD
1. Maintain work journal
2. Create final ISP document
3. Mandatory: correct Spanish in ISP paper (option: contact Luis Alfonso at EIL to arrange time and your cost)

Student Evaluation and Grading Criteria
Assignments
- Final Report/Product/Paper. Point values will be given based on numerous criteria including thorough and accurate treatment of the defined topic, development of perspective and understanding of site-specific information through the incorporation of primary and secondary sources, and depth of analysis. Two bound copies and one electronic copy on diskette must be submitted. Students are encouraged to write the final paper in Spanish in order to leave the information in Ecuador in an accessible manner.
- Final Oral Presentation. The oral presentation must identify persuasive points and highlights from their learnings during the ISP period, in a concise and lucid explanation, followed by a question and answer period. Students are encouraged to prepare the oral presentation using PowerPoint.
- Self-evaluation. Students will provide a narrative evaluation of both their fieldwork and final product upon completion of the ISP.

See the Italic listing in the Program Calendar below.

Grading Criteria
ISP evaluation is based on quality of content, organization, and development of ideas; creativity, insight, and depth of analysis; and effectiveness of use of primary sources; clarity and coherence of presentation, as shown in both the oral and written presentations. Emphasis is placed on the student’s ability to use resources in an appropriate manner, realize his or her own set objectives, and present the findings in a clear, original, synthesized format. The academic director assigns final grades, taking into account the recommendations of the project advisor. The oral presentation

*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.

Copyright © SIT, a program of World Learning
In addition, successful completion of the course includes the fulfillment of the following expectations:

- During the ISP period students are expected to invest a minimum of 120 hours of work for a four-credit project.
- Students are expected to spend at least ten hours with the project advisor in formal sessions designed to provide guidance and ongoing evaluation of their work.
- Students must maintain an ISP work journal (evaluated as part of ERME) using a specified format in order to document their data collection.
- Students must produce a final written presentation or product as mutually agreed by the student, project advisor, and Academic Director.
- Students must give a thorough oral presentation on their ISP learnings, findings and/or highlights.
- Students must distribute copies of their study to SIT for the program library, their project advisor and to any helpful contacts with vested interest, other sponsoring institution, and/or host community.
- The student is responsible for insuring that their ISP work strictly adheres to the ethical and academic standards detailed below.

Student Expectations, Academic and Ethical Integrity

Students must respect, protect and promote the rights and the welfare of all those affected by their work by doing everything in their power to protect the dignity and privacy of the people with whom they conduct field study. Likewise, respect, care and attention should be given to protecting, conserving and restoring the natural environment.

In the course of field study, complex relationships, misunderstandings, conflicts, and the need to make choices among apparently incompatible values are constantly generated. The fundamental responsibility of students is to anticipate such difficulties to the best of their ability and to resolve them in ways that are compatible with the principles stated here. If a student feels such a resolution is impossible, or is unsure how to proceed, s/he should consult as immediately as possible with the Academic Director and/or Project Advisor and discontinue the field study until some resolution has been achieved.

The rights, interest, safety, and sensitivities of those who entrust information to students must be safeguarded. The right of those providing information to students either to remain anonymous or to receive recognition is to be respected and defended. It is the responsibility of students to make every effort to determine the preferences of those providing information and to comply with their wishes. It should be made clear to anyone providing information that despite the students’ best intentions and efforts anonymity may be compromised or recognition fail to materialize. Students should not reveal the identity of groups or persons whose anonymity is protected through the use of pseudonyms.

Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive. They must recognize

*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.
their obligation to reciprocate in culturally and environmentally appropriate ways. Students must take into account and, where relevant and to the best of their ability, make explicit the extent to which their own personal, environmental, and cultural values affect their field study.

To the best of their ability, students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. They should inform individuals and groups likely to be affected of any possible consequences relevant to them that they anticipate.

Students must not represent as their own work, either in speaking or writing, materials or ideas directly taken from other sources. They must give full credit in speaking or writing to all those who have contributed to their work.

Students must recognize an over-riding responsibility to conservation, and inform others, when culturally appropriate, of this responsibility. Students doing an ecology ISP should acknowledge the limitations of their research design, data, and interpretation of results.

**Grading Scale**

The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83%</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-76%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-73%</td>
<td>C-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-66%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 64</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please see the SIT Study Abroad student handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

**Please Note:** Course contents, lecturers, and readings may be modified as needed. Should any change of class topics or lecturers may be necessary, student will be promptly notified.