Course Syllabus

Research Methods and Ethics

ANTH-3500 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Kenya: Urbanization, Health, and Human Rights

Course Description
The Research Methods and Ethics course has three main, interrelated objectives. First, the course introduces students to the multidisciplinary tools and methods of ethnographic research with an emphasis on qualitative data-collection methods. Research ethics are a second focus of the course, with special attention devoted to the processes of Human Subjects Review. The course addresses the specifics of research ethics amongst vulnerable populations, the politics of subjectivity in field research, and the unique aspects of conducting ethical research in Kenya, particularly in health settings. The final focus of the course is the creation of a research proposal that serves as a precursor to the ISP. The proposal requires students to create viable and applicable research questions related to health and human rights in the Kenyan context, determine appropriate methods based on the research questions, and, finally, design an initial proposal to address a selected issue.

In addition, emphasis is placed on embracing cultural differences and on documenting, interpreting, and analyzing information directly from primary sources. Discussions, field exercises, and work journal assignments focus on observations, participation, and interviewing. Sessions provide students with opportunities to practice cross-cultural communication approaches and develop new skills in preparation for conducting their own original research during their Independent Study Project. In addition, this course helps students negotiate additional barriers and boundaries faced while conducting research in a medical context. The fieldwork skills, background in ethics, and cross-cultural methodological training gained from this course should prove particularly useful for students who plan to pursue a career in the medical field after the program.

Course Objectives
Research Methods and Ethics is an integrative, interdisciplinary course encompassing 45 academic hours (3 credits). Its main objectives are to:

- Identify and approach relevant primary sources in the field;
- Gain experience with research design and field methodologies for data collection including interviewing, participant observation, questionnaire writing, and basic surveys;
- Apply non-judgmental, non-comparative thinking and descriptive terminology to new cultural situations;
- Generate an awareness of, and dedication to, ethical research practices;

*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.*
• Introduce and reinforce strategies used to navigate and alleviate potential ethical dilemmas while conducting research amidst various healthcare organizations;
• Facilitate students’ ability to complete their ISP, including selecting a topic and methodology that are sensitive and feasible given time and resource constraints and capable of delivering new perspectives on health and human rights in the Kenyan context;
• Integrate knowledge of urbanization, health, and human rights from the program seminars and Kiswahili with the development of the ISP proposal.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of the Research Methods and Ethics course, students will:
• Demonstrate the ability to conduct a cross-cultural study by using fieldwork methods learned during the class and field visits;
• Produced a methodologically and ethically sound proposal for fieldwork on a specific topic related to health and/or human rights in Kenya;
• Apply skills in research ethics and assessment of the impact of a researcher on local people and cultures being studied, using sensitivity and awareness;
• Develop an awareness of the needs and challenges of conducting field research;
• Prepare a culturally-appropriate and intellectually-rigorous ISP grounded in current debates and relevant literature;
• Analyze data gathered in the field, and make valid interpretations and conclusions;
• Engage in Independent Study in Kenya using appropriate methods and in an ethical manner.

Course Requirements
Seminar activities encompass both excursions to field sites and classroom lectures on practices in the field. Reading materials will be assigned and discussed to prepare and enhance understanding of the course and assignments. Health and Human Rights classes will be held throughout the semester, prior to the ISP period. Students are expected to prepare for, attend, and participate in all classes, discussions, activities, and field visits. You are likewise expected to complete all assignments in a professional and timely manner.

Required Readings


Recommended Readings

*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.


PLEASE NOTE: COURSE CONTENTS, LECTURERS AND READINGS MAY BE MODIFIED AS NEEDED. SHOULD ANY CHANGE OF CLASS TOPICS OR LECTURERS BE NECESSARY, STUDENTS WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED.

**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**
Papers and presentations will be graded on style and form, content, depth of analysis, and understanding of readings and lectures as demonstrated by their appropriate incorporation into assignment. Participation will be graded by observing attendance, attitude, preparation, active involvement in class discussions and question and answer sessions with lecturers, and culturally appropriate behavior on excursions and with guest lecturers.

**Assignments**

*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
Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation and presentation of evidence. Your final grade will be determined as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fieldwork Foundations/D-I-E</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethics preparation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya Cultural Issue</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISP proposal</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These assignments (described further below) encompass students’ own observations, interviews, and ethical preparations and prompt students to hone their recording and writing skills, and sensitivity to the challenges of cross-cultural study in the health and human rights fields.

**Fieldwork Foundations/D-I-E:**
Designed to help students develop orientation and observation skills in an experiential manner, the fieldwork foundations exercise is based on the D-I-E (Description, Interpretation and Evaluation) method. A “drop-off” - a unique SIT activity - forms the basis of the fieldwork exercise.

**Ethics Preparation:**
Discussions and activities regarding research ethics and the local review board process are integral to the field research of the ISP. This component reflects attentiveness to issues of research ethics and timely and thorough completion of the “Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects.”

**Kenya Cultural Issue**
Beginning early in the semester, this assignment enables each student to pursue a topic of interest to Kenyan communities utilizing research in each of the program sites: Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, and during the rural excursion. Focusing on a Kenyan cultural issue of your choice (in discussion with the Academic Director), you will employ three appropriate field research methods (at minimum) to complete a short research project. One of the methods utilized must be an interview, and will include a brief (10-12 questions) survey prepared in English and Kiswahili.

**ISP Proposal:**
The Independent Study Project is an important part of the Research Methods and Ethics course, so you will receive credit for the work you do in creating your ISP proposal.

**Assignment Requirements**

1. **Fieldwork Foundations requirements:**
This assignment takes place over the course of two excursions and requires students to compile field notes and transcribe these in the D-I-E format described below.

1a. **Field notes:** Students must bring a notebook to all excursions and record observations about the location, local residents, key development issues and questions that are both observed and, if appropriate, articulated in group interactions. Students should record all sensory information in a stream-of-consciousness form and in as much detail as possible. Field notes are not expected to be polished and need not employ complete sentences or proper grammatical constructions. These notes are a tool for polishing observation skills and enabling a focus on the small and subtle details that may lead to important theoretical insights and revelations. Field notes for all visits should be written in the same notebook and
clearly labeled. Evaluation criteria include: comprehensiveness of notes; level of detail and proper identification; and observational variety.

1b. D-I-E transcription: D-I-E is a tool or system for discerning among facts, interpretation of such facts within specific socio-cultural contexts, and subjective evaluations of such information from passionate and opinionated positions. Correctly used, the D-I-E system can be a useful aid for fieldworkers to organize data, distinguish facts from personal ideas, interpret possible meanings of events and situations, and critically examine the bias implicit in their own reactions. For this assignment, students must chose one significant event, incident or observation from each excursion and transcribe it in the D-I-E format, as follows:

**Description:** Students should describe the experience without attributing meaning. In this phase of D-I-E, students should try to be as objective as possible by relying solely on descriptive techniques. At this stage, do not embellish or offer analysis by describing events’ meaning to participants (interpretation) or to themselves (evaluation).

**Interpretation:** In this phase of D-I-E, students interpret what they see, using both what they know from their own experiences and cultural backgrounds, as well as what they’ve learned about the cultural context of Kenya. Students should be searching for ideas of the event’s significance to the people they are observing.

**Evaluation:** To evaluate is to pass judgment using some assumed standard of comparison. It involves opinions and explanations of what has happened, what ought to happen or what we feel should or should not happen. Students should remember that it is always possible – and pertinent to the latest social science approaches to fieldwork - to be reflexive in making their own evaluations. This means students should take into account the cultural and personal reasons that may have an effect on how they make an evaluation, i.e., there is no “objective” analysis outside of someone’s evaluative or subject-position.

Each section of the D-I-E should be approximately one paragraph. This assignment will be assessed based on the following criteria: correct use of the D-I-E format (students who don’t understand this should not hesitate to raise questions or ask for more clarity); depth of cultural insights expressed in the interpretation section; evidence of self-reflexivity in the evaluation section.

2. **Ethics preparation:** Students complete the Application for Research with Human Subjects form, including all pertinent questionnaires and appendices required for review by the Local Review Board.

3. **Kenya Cultural Issue:** Students should select a topical focus related to their proposed ISP or other interests related to health and human rights in Kenya and compose two sets of 10-12 questions – one in English and one in Kiswahili. Using these two distinct sets of questions, students will conduct a minimum of two interviews about their topic, one in each language. To complement the interviews, students will use a minimum of one additional field research method to engage their Kenya Cultural Issue. Students will write up their results in a 750-1000 word summary, focusing on a description and analysis of the interview process and additional methodological approach. At least one of the two interviews must be conducted outside of the homestay. Students should include transcripts of both sets of interview questions as appendices to the paper. Each student should keep in mind the limitations and possibilities of language when composing Kiswahili questions. English questions should be rethought and rephrased in a manner appropriate to Kiswahili language levels.

*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.*
Working on this assignment will be a cumulative process ending with a written summary on a topic of each student’s interest which should include a description of the topic, interviewees, interview location and the process and lessons learned from the interview. The goal of this assignment is to orient students to the field use of research methods in a cross-cultural and multi-linguistic setting in preparation for the ISP.

4. ISP proposal: An 8-10 page ISP proposal, comprising a literature review and incorporating initial discussions with both the AD and a possible ISP advisor will be due during week 7 of the program, to enable further refinement and revisions, as needed, prior to the ISP period.

Grading Scale: The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score 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>

Late papers will marked down one step (B- to C+, e.g.) for each day they are late.

Grading Criteria
An “A” grade for an assignment entails superior (not just “very good”) performance in terms of structure and organization of assignments, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence. In terms of class participation, an “A” grade refers to full attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, field trips and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. The level, frequency, and quality of student participation will be monitored and taken into account.

With the exception of journals and field notebooks, all assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Careful proofreading and editing are essential parts of the writing process; spelling and grammar will be graded. Compliance with a standard format of citation is expected for both primary and secondary sources. Most importantly, concise and logical argument should be clear throughout assignments.

Please note: description is not analysis. While there is a place for description of people, events or organizations in assignments, be aware that extensive description is not a substitute for critical analysis based on independent thinking and understanding. The more writing reflects a creative synthesis of theory, observation and reflection, the more successful it will be.

Student Expectations

Class Participation
Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, educational excursions and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior.

*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
Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.

*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