Course Description
The Research Methods and Ethics (RME) seminar prepares students for independent study through an evolving series of field projects, exercises and related lectures. Initial sessions focus on the development of cross-cultural and observational skills, self-awareness and on providing a conceptual foundation for later analysis of Malagasy culture and society. A series of RME classes, conducted prior to the Independent Study Project (ISP), introduce field techniques, project and proposal development, ethical issues regarding research with human subjects, data analysis, and final project written and oral presentation. Student experiences are integrated into subsequent preparations for independent study. RME sessions address some of the unique problems and difficulties faced in the process of information gathering and field study in Madagascar.

Course Objectives
Research Methods and Ethics has an interdisciplinary and critical focus encompassing 45 academic hours (3 credits). Its main objectives:

- To become aware of experience-based learning processes outside an institutional structure, and to develop confidence and initiative in learning from experience;
- To discover how to function in Madagascar and cope with logistics of day-to-day life;
- To be able to apply language skills and knowledge from the Urbanization and Rural Development Seminar and other sources to extend and deepen interest, knowledge and integration in Madagascar;
- To gain experience in designing and developing original field studies, and to practice specific and ethically sound social science field methodologies;
- To select an ISP topic and methodology which are realistic within the constraints of time, resources, and appropriateness, as well as yield an interesting, fresh perspective in Madagascar; and

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• To learn to deal with primary sources in the field, such as material gained through observation and interviews, and to learn to work in a foreign language with interpreters and informants.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students should have attained the ability to:
• Exhibit sharpened observation and note-taking skills with regard to cultural and personal similarities and differences;
• Practice specific techniques (such as the DIE) that affect cultural learning, adjustment and analysis;
• Apply knowledge of field journals, interviewing and other field methodologies in the Malagasy context;
• Demonstrate increased awareness of one’s own impact on the research community and process;
• Apply greater awareness of the ethical issues involved in doing research with human subjects; and
• Develop a research topic and design a project that corresponds to the particularities of the ISP as well as future academic and professional endeavors.

Course Requirements

Readings
Throughout the semester, various additional readings will be assigned to complement the material covered in class and on field visits. You are responsible for all the required readings, and should be prepared to bring them to bear on discussions in class. They are not necessarily tailor-made for each and every class. Students are expected to refer to these readings to add substance to their own academic work. Please include proper citations in the MLA or Turabian style for any specific information from readings included in the write-up of your assignments.

Experiential Learning and Culture

The Cross-Cultural Adaptation Process


Intercultural Adjustment Cycle


Being Observant

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**Keeping a Field Journal**


**Interviewing (structured vs. unstructured interviews, surveys)**


**Mapping, Kinship Charting**


**Ethics in Field Research**


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**ISP Preparation Part I: Project Selection and Refinement**


**Writing a Proposal**


**ISP Preparation Part II – Logistics (finding an advisor, informants, translators, a place to live, etc.)**


**ISP Preparation Part III – How to Write a Research Paper**


**Lessons Learned During the ISP – Sharing the Experience**


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Re-Entry – Reverse Culture Shock, Retaining the Connection


* Readings, Lectures and Excursions are subject to change according to availability and with regard to student needs, interests and current events in the field.

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

Research Methods and Ethics Assignments
Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, and depth of understanding, argumentation and presentation of evidence.

Overall Grade:
Interview Assignment 20%
Village Study 20%
Field Journal 20%
Field Study Methods Presentation 20%
Homework 10%
Participation 10%

Grading Criteria
All grades assigned will take into account the students’ special circumstances and challenges they face as foreign students. 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 the students’ participation will be monitored and taken into account.

General: Student’s name, date, name of the assignment, and the title of the paper (if applicable), are required. All assignments should be typed (double spaced, 12 point font) when possible. Handwritten papers in dark blue or black ink will be accepted for certain assignments under special circumstances. Remember to proofread all assignments for clarity, organization, spelling, grammar, etc. as these are taken into account for the final grade. Assignments can be written in French or English, unless specified. Grammatical errors in French will not affect student’s grades as long as ideas can be clearly understood.

Grading Criteria and Procedures: Each individual sets different learning goals for herself or himself, therefore students should personalize their learning experience to the greatest extent possible. Objectives for each assignment are clearly stated at the beginning of each
assignment’s description in the syllabus. Students may further personalize these objectives if students wish, but students should state their goals very clearly at the outset of their write-up.

Grades will be based on the extent to which students realize these objectives and are able to communicate their learning in a clear and concise manner. Concise means that students have communicated all relevant information without being verbose or adding irrelevant details; it does not mean that students are to be brief at the expense of providing full context for their comments. Individual assignments will be evaluated, in general, according to student choice and definition of topic, methodologies practiced, quantity and accuracy of information gathered, analysis of information gathered, and overall presentation style (written and oral).

In the Research Methods and Ethics Seminar, the students’ methodology (techniques with which they experimented, variety of sources, creativity and use of resources) and their evaluation thereof are weighted more heavily than the substance of information gathered. Students will receive written comments from the instructor on each assignment. They are always invited to revise assignments or add comments of their own based on this written feedback. Rewrites must be submitted no later than one week after work is returned with comments. If students re-submit work for evaluation after receiving feedback, their grade will also be re-evaluated. Grades can be improved by a maximum of 10 points or one full letter grade.

*All written assignments should be typed hardcopies unless otherwise stated. Make sure you have a laptop or computer available and keep back up files so nothing gets accidentally lost or erased.

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

- 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

Program Calendar
The overall calendar program reflects coordination within the various components. For example, lectures and field-based activities in the thematic seminar are accompanied by French and Malagasy classes that focus on specific vocabulary and expressions pertinent to those activities. Similarly, when students learn interview techniques in the Research Methods and Ethics Seminar, French classes work on question formulation and follow up. Excursions and homestays are prefaced with specific linguistic and cultural preparation.

Course Content
Various research methods will be discussed and applied during the semester. The applicability of certain methods for particular kinds of studies will be examined, along with the ethical and cultural appropriateness of different methods. Students will have the opportunity to practice
methods in many different settings, with the goal of preparing students to utilize appropriate methods in independent study. Assignments and discussions will provide the opportunity for feedback.

Topics include:
- Qualitative Research
- Participant Observation
- Interviewing: structuring interviews, developing questions, cultural considerations
- Developing a study question
- Recording information: developing a work journal, taking field notes, organizing information
- Developing contacts, selecting a study site
- Analyzing information
- Evaluation of field study projects
- Research Ethics
- Presentation of findings

Student Expectations

Class Participation
Students are expected to participate fully in all program components. Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all, discussions, field trips and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. Much of class discussion examines students’ experiences outside of class, in the urban and rural homestays or in other seminars. Students are encouraged to take the initiative to bring their questions and own learning to the larger group.

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.

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