Course Syllabus

Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 Credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Madagascar: Urbanization and Rural Development

Course Description
The culmination of the program, the four-week independent study period offers students the opportunity to pursue in-depth a particular aspect of Malagasy culture and/or society with a specific focus on issues related to urbanization and rural development. During the Independent Study Project (ISP), students directly apply the concepts and skills of experiential learning articulated in the Research Methods and Ethics Seminar and the Urbanization and Rural Development Seminar. Orientation, language training, the homestay, and other experiences establish additional skills necessary for the successful completion of the Independent Study Project. The final product provides the material evidence of their capacity to handle methodology and synthesize experiences in the host culture.

Course Objectives
The Independent Study Project has an interdisciplinary and critical focus encompassing 120 class hours (4 credits). Its main objectives:

- To select, design and implement an individual project that investigates a dimension of urbanization and rural development as it relates to Malagasy culture and/or society;
- To learn and effectively utilize field study techniques as outlined in the Research Methods and Ethics course;
- To coherently synthesize field data into both a written and an oral presentation; and
- To develop self-confidence and an understanding of experience-based education.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students should have attained the ability to:

- Apply in-depth knowledge and experience of their particular topic or field of study;
- Demonstrate understanding of the importance of ethics and human relations in field research;
- Exhibit skill in synthesizing and analyzing information gained from the field and secondary sources;
- Practice awareness of individual time and resource management in a cross-cultural setting; and

*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.

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- Demonstrate competence in the processes involved in independent research, from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies to final analysis, interpretation and written/oral delivery of research results.

Course Requirements
- Minimum of 120 hours of actual fieldwork* toward completion of the project;
- Culturally sensitive, well-documented and in-depth written presentation of findings; and
- Oral presentation to the group and invited guests upon completion of project.

* Fieldwork refers to hours of active data collection and analysis (i.e. interviews, observation, note transcription, reading supplementary materials, writing, etc.) and not merely time spent in the field. You should plan on a minimum of three weeks at your field site(s).

Students are also encouraged to be in contact with academic advisors in the U.S. with regard to any additional requirements or procedures in place at their home institutions.

Methods
- Conversations with the academic director and other staff members regarding choice of potential ISP topics will begin within the first week of the program and continue through the beginning of the ISP period;
- A minimum of 120 hours of independent fieldwork* will be conducted (during a four-week period) and recorded in the field journal or log;
- All data will be transcribed into a field journal or logged onto a student computer according to criteria presented and practiced in the Research Methods and Ethics seminar;
- Research design is to be ethically-sound and approved by the Local Review Board;
- Students will work in conjunction with an academic advisor (preferably a host country national);
- An oral summary will be presented to the group and invited guests upon completion of the project; and
- A well-documented, culturally sensitive, and in-depth presentation of field study findings will be written.

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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
Timely completion of the ISP is expected. Late work will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, the depth of understanding, argumentation and presentation of evidence.

Evaluation
ISP Proposal 10 %
Written Report and Field Journal 80 %
Oral Presentation 10 %

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Evaluation of the final Independent Study Project is based on the following criteria:

1. Development of topic and achievement of objectives.
2. Project definition and focus.
3. Methodology and ethics.
4. Accuracy of information.
5. Critical analysis and thought.
6. Use of information from participation, observations, interviews, and other techniques.
7. Use of cross-cultural communication skills.
8. Style and expression.
9. Grammar and documentation

Grading
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.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<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>
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<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-83%</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>74-76%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-73%</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<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>

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 information, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence. Those students who choose to do an alternative ISP are evaluated, among other things, on the basis of how well they articulate and achieve the objectives of their project. Specific requirements for alternative projects are covered in the Research Methods and Ethics Seminar.

All ISP documents and oral presentations must follow the appropriate guidelines as dictated by SIT academic policy and discussed in Research Methods and Ethics Seminar. Students are strongly encouraged to regularly back-up their ISP data and writing on a personal hard drive, USB memory stick, or on the internet. The SIT program office is not responsible for any loss or theft of computers, documents, or data.

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Student Expectations
Students are expected to maintain regular contact with SIT staff by communicating with the Academic Director at least two times per week during the ISP period. Students are encouraged to consult with staff throughout the period with questions and concerns. Students meet regularly with their designated advisor a minimum of 4 times during the study period.

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.