Research Methods and Ethics
ANTH-3500 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)
SIT Study Abroad Program:
South Africa: Social and Political Transformation

Course Description
*Research Methods and Ethics* is a 3-credit course (45 hours) aimed at enabling students to learn effectively from their intercultural experience, to learn and practice core research methodologies, and to critically assess the ethical dimension of field-based research in the context of South Africa. This course underlies and reinforces all other program components. In particular, this course facilitates the development and realization of an in-depth Independent Study Project (ISP) based substantially on information obtained from primary sources. The course introduces students to resources and deals with the cultural and logistical considerations involved in doing an Independent Study Project in South Africa.

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

- To cultivate the ability to reflect upon one’s experience, home, and host culture;
- To become aware of experience-based learning processes outside an institutional structure, and to develop confidence and initiative in learning from experience;
- To learn and apply ethical norms of field-based research methods and to critically examine the ways in which ethics, power, politics, position, and inequality shape one’s approach to working in the context of South Africa;
- To learn the necessity of cross-cultural sensitivity and the need for culturally appropriate research;
- To become familiar with basic research methodologies used in the social sciences, including in-depth interviewing, oral histories, participant and non-participant observation, administering surveys and questionnaires in an ethical manner;
- To develop an understanding of appropriate methodologies and attitudes needed to carry out an independent study project utilizing the unique resources available in South Africa.
- To select an ISP topic and investigation methodology that is realistic within the constraints of time and resources, ethical in terms of local relationships, and capable of yielding interesting, fresh perspectives on South Africa.

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

- Identify the foundational research methods typical of social science research;
- Apply reflexive thinking throughout the research process;
- Demonstrate the capacity to carry out mentored independent research with cross-cultural understanding and sensitivity, and the ability to assess the cultural appropriateness of particular research topics, methods, interpersonal relationships and fieldwork orientations in South Africa;
- Deliver a completed document and organized presentation of one’s findings based on the culmination of the program components and one month of fieldwork.

Course Requirements

Readings
You are responsible for all the readings, and should be prepared to bring them to bear on discussions in class. The readings will help you place the classes in their context, to challenge and engage lecturers, to generate questions for class discussions and to deepen your knowledge of particular aspects discussed in class. They are not necessary tailor-made for each and every class. Supplementary reading materials, not mentioned on the list, may be assigned and made available to you.

Selected Readings


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
Students participate in discussions and exercises intended to break down stereotypes and sensitize students to the values they assign to behaviors or customs based on their cultural heritage. Emphasis is placed on grappling with cultural differences and on recording, interpreting, and analyzing information from primary sources. Student performance will be evaluated in the following way:

- Critical Incident 30%
- Rural Study 50%
- Participation 20%

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Critical Incident Paper

Objectives

• To deliberately and thoughtfully analyze a real-life situation that challenged your cross-cultural skills and understanding.
• To provide practice in documenting an important learning experience by separating out your description, interpretation, and evaluation of it.
• To notice one’s learned cultural biases.
• To begin to understand the sometimes subtle differences between South African and American culture.
• To examine a particular experience and apply lessons learned to your learning in the future.

Assignment

A critical incident is a situation in which you are personally affected by what has occurred. Closely examine an event or incident you have experienced thus far in South Africa that caused a shift in your understanding of the culture or of yourself in relation to the culture. The incident may be a positive experience, a traumatic experience, a misunderstanding, or any moment when you made a “breakthrough” in your learning or understanding of South African culture. It may be something that didn’t seem very important at the time, but later you realized it was significant in some way. There is no maximum or minimum length, but please be descriptive. Please make sure that your description is about one specific incident and not a general condition. Use the D-I-E methodology (explained below) to describe and analyze the situation.

Requirements

Describe the event or incident as objectively as possible. What happened? Who was involved? Mention the people involved, including their ages, sex, occupation, attitudes, nature of involvement in the incident, relationships to you, to each other, etc. Provide any background information necessary for fully understanding the incident. This may include place, occasion, social contexts, time of day, weather, etc. Please limit description to the facts - what you heard, saw, smelled, tasted or touched. Also, describe as specifically as possible what you did in the situation. Describe how you reacted; your role in the situation in terms of what you felt and how you behaved. List your emotions or reactions chronologically.

Interpret the incident; put it in context. Why do you think it happened? Why did you feel or act in such a way (what triggered these emotions or reactions)? Hypothesize how and why your cultural understanding is different from a South African's. What assumptions did you make and/or what differing values may have been involved? What were the cultural norms under which you or others operated? (The emotions are used as a tool for acknowledging a cultural difference.) Try to explain the event based on what you believe transpired.

Then: Share your hypothesis with at least two different South African people to gather their perspectives on their own culture. It is often easiest to ask someone who was not directly involved in the situation. They may laugh, become angry, click their tongue – this is what you want!!!! Then listen to their interpretation of the event/interaction. Take notes and direct quotes from conversations and use them in your written assignment.

Evaluate your experience. What intercultural skills did you use and/or learn? What would you do differently if you could? Why? How will you apply your learning in the future, for your stay in South Africa and/or when you return to the U.S.? Consider those questions that have been raised for you as you have written this assignment and reflected on the incident, including any...
insights you may now have concerning cross-cultural skills you may need or want to develop. Do not limit yourself to those skills listed here, but below are some ideas:

**Important Skills for Cross Cultural Learning and Adaptation**

Successfully adjusting to life in a foreign culture requires that you develop and use a variety of cross-cultural skills. Some of these may be skills you have already developed in other situations; some of them may be new to you. They include the following:

- **Information source development** - the ability to use many information-gathering skills such as observation, questioning associates and chance acquaintances, and listening with care.
- **Cultural understanding** - awareness and understanding of the structure and the values, feelings, and attitudes of people and the ways these influence behavior.
- **Interpersonal communication** - in addition to listening well and speaking clearly, one must also be sensitive to non-verbal communication, i.e. the messages available from physical movements and gestures, facial expressions and the quality of face-to-face contact.
- **Commitment to persons and relationships** - the ability to become deeply involved with people, to be able to give and inspire confidence, to care and take action with and for them in accordance with one's concerns.
- **Decision-making** - the ability to come to conclusions and take action in spite of inadequate, unreliable and/or conflicting information. In making decisions in a cross-cultural setting a person must learn to trust feelings, searching for the best possible course of action or most valuable alternative.
- **Self-understanding** - awareness of and insight into one's own learning processes, strengths, weaknesses, failures, prejudices, values, emotions, and goals.
- **Self-reliance** - independence, autonomy, resiliency, willingness to accept responsibility for one's own actions and education; receptiveness to new experiences and ideas, confidence in one's self and the ability to function independently and interdependently.

**Assessment**
The paper will be assessed in relation to:

1. Selection of appropriate cross-cultural incident.
2. Content and depth of Description (with emphasis on objectivity).
3. Content and depth of Interpretation/Analysis.
4. Content and depth of Evaluation/Reflection.
5. Cross-check with two South Africans (use of direct quotes).
6. Quality of writing (grammar, syntax, spelling and a clear, concise, and engaging writing style).

**Rural Study:**
Participatory techniques are "a growing family of approaches, methods, attitudes, and behaviors to enable and empower people to share, analyze and enhance their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect". While in Amacambini we will use a number of these techniques, including kinship charts, life histories, and seasonal calendars to gain hands-on experience in and knowledge of a community. We will pay specific attention to people, activities, resources, environmental features, etc.
Objectives

- To deliberately and thoughtfully analyze a real life situation that challenged your cross-cultural skills and understanding.
- To encourage an appreciation for the realities of rural life, and how this differs from urban life.
- To provide more situations to practice language and communication skills.
- To practice a research method of your choice (mapmaking, interviewing, kinship charting, participant observation, etc.).
- To enable you to tailor an assignment to suit your own interests and learning style.
- To gain insight into obstacles encountered when doing fieldwork.
- To practice objective note-taking and data analysis.

Assignment

The rural excursion is your first extended experience in the field. Among other things it is an opportunity for you to put into practice all that you have learned, so far, about primary research. This assignment has been designed to focus your efforts on one aspect of this work: methodology. You need only choose one method to practice. Although you may gather some supplementary information by other means, try to focus on practicing one.

Once in Amacambini you will determine a question to be answered using your chosen technique. Try to use many different sources and consider not only “facts”, but also people’s viewpoints and attitudes.

Suggestions for exploration

1. Physical Environment -
   - Layout of the area, relationship of buildings and housing, significance of this
   - Vegetation
   - Geography – principal physical features: rivers, roads, fields, sacred sites, tombs, etc.

2. Cultural Environment
   - Name of the community and meaning of the name
   - Important people
   - Places of interest
   - Taboos, rituals, spirituality, religion

3. People
   - Family structure
   - Population: age breakdown, gender representations, ethnic groups, etc.
   - Gender roles
   - Migration patterns
   - Traditional and modern values

4. Economy
   - Primary occupations
   - Economic indicators (expressions of wealth)
   - Organization of economic system: types of markets, goods available, external trade
   - Unpaid jobs/labor; sources of labor
   - Available technologies

5. Ecology
   - Waste disposal (water, household trash, sewage)

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• Natural resources of the area
• Water sources and value
• Relationship of villagers to the environment

6. Communication and transportation
• Information dissemination in the community
• Access to outside information
• Primary transportation means, frequency of use, value placed on transportation means

7. Social
• Community groups and organizations
• Special events or activities - what, when, who, where, why
• Leisure activities, sports, concept of “fun”
• Children’s activities

Requirements
You will present a short (10-minute) oral report to a small group of your classmates so that we can all learn something about the topic you chose to study. In this forum you will present your methodology, your data and your conclusions (albeit after a brief and cursory analysis.) However, only your methodology section (2 pages) will be turned in for a grade. Remember, your goal is to experiment with a technique that you have learned in class. In your write-up, answer the following questions:

1. What methodology/methodologies did you use to conduct your research?
2. Why did you want to practice this particular methodology?
3. Briefly explain how you carried out your method.
4. What questions were you attempting to answer?
5. Who were your primary informants?
6. What ethical challenges did you encounter? How did you address them?
7. Did you use a translator? How did that work? What challenges did you encounter?
8. What were the principal problems you encountered while doing this project? Were you able to resolve these, and if so, how?
9. Given what you know now, would you undertake the same project again, or a different one?
10. If you were to do this same study again, how would you do it differently?
11. Did you learn anything else about doing field study?

Finally, using your answers to the above questions, evaluate your overall learning. Give yourself a letter grade. Think primarily about your efficiency in practicing the technique (Appropriate? Ethical? Effective? Did you do it right? Did you get good results?). But also factor in the possibility that even if you were a failure at carrying out that particular technique, in this particular instance, perhaps you learned a great deal from the experience.

Assessment
The methodology paper will be assessed in relation to: content and depth of answers to the above questions; your self-evaluation; and your quality of writing (grammar, syntax, spelling and a clear, concise, and engaging writing style).

Participation:
Criteria for assessment of participation is as follows:
• Attendance: promptness to class, and positive presence in class.
• Active listening: paying attention in class/during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm, entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
• Involvement in class discussions: either in small or large groups sharing knowledge and information, asking questions.
• Group accountability: participates as part of a group during field excursions and classes.
• Respect: culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers, and communities.

Attendance at all seminars and field activities is mandatory unless indicated as optional on the schedule. Failure to attend, or repeated late arrival, will lower your grade substantially, if not jeopardize your standing in the program.

Please note that while strong participation on all the above matters will get you close to the full twenty points for this component of your grade, a failure to fully participate in any program activity, as determined by the Academic Director, is grounds not only for failure of the Research Methods and Ethics course, but also for academic and/or behavioral probation and other disciplinary action, up to and possibly including dismissal from the program.

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

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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>80-83%</td>
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<td>77-79%</td>
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<td>70-73%</td>
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<td>64-66%</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>below 64%</td>
<td>F</td>
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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 Academic Seminar 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.

Program Calendar
The Research Methods and Ethics course will be delivered through the following components:

Research Methods and Ethics Seminars
Research Methods and Ethics seminars will be held throughout the semester. The format will include presentations and discussions on cultural adjustment, intercultural awareness, and techniques used in gathering, interpreting and presenting information. The seminars will provide for opportunities to practice and refine field study techniques with an emphasis
Field Based Activities
Field-based activities will be planned throughout the semester. Based on the philosophy of experiential learning, there will be opportunities to engage directly with South African culture and its available resources through excursions, interviews, observations, and visits to information centers.

Individual Meetings with Academic Director and Other Staff
Individual meetings will take place with the Academic Director over the course of the semester. These meetings are designed to give specific guidance on the formation, development and execution of the Independent Study Project.

Student Expectations

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

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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