**Course Syllabus**

### Independent Study Project

**ISPR-3000 (4 Credits / 120 class hours)**

**SIT Study Abroad Program:**

**South Africa: Social and Political Transformation**

#### Course Description

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is an academic project that is designed to allow the student to further their understanding of a topic unique to the South African experience. A central aspect of the ISP is the collection and use of primary data; the ISP does not involve extensive library research that could be done in the United States, but rather takes advantage of the student’s presence in South Africa with access to materials and information sources available here. A local advisor, who specializes in the student’s particular field of interest, must be selected by the student, and approved by the Academic Director (AD). All topics must be finalized and approved by the AD, and advisors must be selected and confirmed before the project commences. Meetings will be held throughout the semester with the AD and other program staff to finalize the topic, select an appropriate advisor, identify potential sources of information, etc. Allowing for travel and time to write, edit, and print the final paper, this does not offer a great amount of time for actual field study. For this reason, the topic must be very specific and well focused. At the end of the independent study period, the student must submit a paper and make a presentation of their fieldwork. The ISP Advisor and an Academic Director then evaluate the project in writing. The AD will submit a grade and narrative evaluation of the project to SIT, and in turn these assessments are then forwarded to the student’s home university.

#### Course Objectives

The Independent Study Project encompasses 120 academic hours (4 credits). Its main objective:

- To select, design and implement an individual project that investigates a dimension of social and political transformation and/or reconciliation as it relates to South Africa;
- 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.

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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
- 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). You will spend a minimum of 120 hours on the ISP. This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, making field observations, writing, meeting with the Academic Director and Advisor, and actual hands-on work in the organization (if you choose to complete a practicum). The final product is a typed and spiral bound 30- to 40-page paper, double spaced, 12-pt standard font. A highlight of the assignment is a 20-minute presentation to fellow students, program staff, your advisor, and other invited guests.

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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* 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.

**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.

**What You Need to Do**

1. **Decide on a Topic**
   This can be easy sometimes, but more often it is difficult. This is where you ask yourself: “What do I want to study?” There are several ways to look at this question.

   What do you want to learn from the ISP? Is there a topic you have always wanted to investigate or learn more about? Think about the ISP as an opportunity for self-fulfillment and growth, or as a stepping-stone to your further studies in a particular area.

   What do you want to leave behind? Many students think of the ISP as an opportunity to work alongside and gain experience with a small community service project or organization. This does not mean, of course, that the project will not be educational or personally fulfilling, but the desire to do the project may spring from a desire to gain additional “hands-on” experience in the field. Whether you choose a social analysis or practicum-based ISP (to be explained below), you must be able to define a discrete, “doable” project. As such, this next sentence is the most important thing to keep in mind when deciding upon or refining your ISP topic. **If you cannot clearly and completely state your project in one sentence, then your project cannot be completed within the time frame of the ISP period.**

2. **Find an Advisor**
   You need an advisor for your project; here are a few things to keep in mind when choosing an advisor.

   Find an expert on the topic you would like to pursue. The advisor should be someone who has expertise in the field of interest and is able to work with you to design, implement, and evaluate the ISP. The person may or may not have a doctorate in the relevant field, but nonetheless should be able to give you the direction and support needed. Be sure to clear your advisor with your home-campus representative if they have specific requirements for credit.

   Find someone who can spend adequate time with you. Most potential advisors are very busy professionals who may not be able to give you as much time as needed - you may need to look elsewhere, to a generalist social scientist with experience supervising papers or a field-orientated professional with the ability to provide access, if you need a lot of coaching. It is suggested that the advisor meets with the student for at least four sessions, to define, discuss, and evaluate the student’s progress, i.e., discussing and defining the parameters of the research topic, determining research methods, suggesting resources and contacts, assistance in the organization of information, and reviewing the student’s final submission. It will be your
responsibility to find an advisor and to make (and keep) appointments with him or her. This is one of the key challenges and learning opportunities of the ISP.

**ISPs unsupported by the assistance and evaluation of an ISP advisor will not be accepted.**

3. **Decide on the appropriate mix of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods for your Project**
One of the decisions that you will make in defining your paradigm of field study is to find the appropriate mix of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. Never will a study be purely quantitative or purely qualitative, and finding the best combination along the quantitative-qualitative spectrum can be a challenging process.

4. **Complete an ISP Proposal**
The ISP Proposal should provide a clear description of your intentions and expectations of the ISP you have chosen to pursue. A proposal helps you anticipate what you are going to do and what possible problems may arise. A proposal also helps you to clearly define and refine your project ideas so that you end up with a discrete project that can be accomplished in the given period of time. You must also read, sign, and agree to comply with the SIT Study Abroad Human Subjects Review policy.

5. **Complete the ISP Site Approval, Ethical Guidelines, and Institutional Review Board Forms**
In addition to completing the ISP Proposal, students are also required to submit a Site Approval form that clearly states the whereabouts of the student on each and every day of the ISP; the AD and program staff must be able to reach you during the ISP period in case of an emergency (global or local). Ethical guidelines include completion of both reading/agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, but also successful completion of our Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in class. Please note that until items 4 and 5 above (ISP Proposal, Site Approval, and Ethical Guidelines Forms) are satisfactorily completed, students will not be allowed to embark on their ISP. Funds for ISP accommodation and food will not be released to a student until all pre-ISP requirements are successfully met.

**Social Analysis or Practicum: Two Possible Types of ISP Projects**
You may choose to complete one of two “types” of ISPs for the program, as follows:

**Social Analysis:** Most students choose to complete a “social analysis” ISP on a particular topic. For example, a student interested in traditional African music may focus her or his study on understanding the social context of African music in a particular community. Depending on the specific focus of the project, data may be sought from interviews and observations of musicians, music-industry workers, a group of music-listeners in a specific community, government officials, academics, etc. Where informants are difficult to access, students may seek out current opinions and statements in the media to complement the data. Methods are to be expressly stated so as to make obvious how the primary data gained is reflective of biases inherent in the process and the extent to which that data is truly reflective of specific or general communities. Documenting the process is extremely important, especially in cases where students find themselves unable to access much data.

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Practicum: On the other side of the spectrum, students may also choose to complete a “practicum-based” ISP, where one engages with an organization, to the extent possible, as an “intern” or member of the “support staff”. In this model of ISP, the student is first and foremost attempting to gain hands-on experience within the particular organization (hence, the mention of the word “internship”) and engage in the concomitant analysis of that experience utilizing various primary field study techniques. Due to the short nature of the ISP, however, students cannot necessarily expect to be working with particular organizations as fully-fledged “interns” in the classic sense. The goal is to try to engage to the extent possible with a willing organization in the time allowed, and to proceed both as an intern as well as a keen participant observer. If completing a practicum-based ISP, it can be useful to focus within the organization on one particular project or initiative. For example, a student may develop an ISP working with a literacy promotion educational NGO (Non-Government Organization), and observe/assist in the development, implementation, and/or monitoring/evaluation of a new educational program. In this model of ISP, crucial dialog and analysis within the narrative is needed to contextualize the experience and place it in the broader discussion and context of the NGO interventions. In this way, the practicum-based ISP may also be appropriately labeled a “case study” in that the goal is to investigate some particular issue while utilizing work within the organization or project as the key case under investigation. You will be expected to spend at least 75 hours working in your capacity as an intern (this must be documented in a daily log, which forms a chapter in the product). Your final product will be documentation of the work itself (daily log including things like lesson plans, project reports, or the project the organization wants you to do) and a participant observation paper (approximately 20 typed pages) describing the background of your organization, the work it does, and your impressions about the organization and its role in context. The participant observation section must contain all the elements of a social analysis paper, but in less detail allowing for less triangulation and analysis of data. This project must be defined and approved in writing by both your Academic Director and your advisor before you start the work.

Both types of ISPs utilize the same ISP Proposal form, although of course the focus of the responses will be somewhat different. In either case, however, you need to have a clear objective/purpose for undertaking the study. The overall purpose or objective should be specific, realistic, and achievable, given the resources and time available to you. In the case of a practicum, for example, what are you hoping to get out of the experience or work with the agency? In the case of a social analysis ISP, what specific issue do you wish to investigate? Attempt as much as possible, and as early in the program as possible, to focus your ISP as an achievable project given the limited time and resources you have in the program. Do not attempt to solve South Africa’s problems with your undergraduate ISP (come back and do that later when you have more time, skill and knowledge of context). Rather, the goal is to fully engage with the ISP process as an early field-based experience in your upcoming academic and professional careers. In this way, successfully completing your ISP will assist in your future field-based endeavors, be they in graduate school or other organizations.

The ISP Proposal
Discussion of and around the ISP Proposal process will be conducted in the context of the Research Methods and Ethics course, including one-on-one interviews. Please note that the ISP Proposal “counts” toward your Research Methods and Ethics course, and not your ISP.

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A template for the ISP Proposal can be found below. As with the ISP itself, the proposal must be typed and formatted along the lines of a professional, academic document. Please list each question/issue in bold and then provide your answer.

1. Title.
You need to give your research project a title (even if it changes later, give your proposal a title).

2. Statement of Intent.
This is a concise explanation of what you propose to study, where you propose to study (be specific), the objectives of the study, and under whose guidance (please give full advisor information).

3. Abstract.
This is a one-paragraph statement of what your project is and what activities will be undertaken. A reader should be able to read the abstract alone and have a good idea of what your project is. If you are proposing a social analysis ISP, you should provide a rationale for further study or investigation. What can be gained from this study? Why is your project relevant? Will it be of use to South Africa and South African people? How? If you’re completing a practicum ISP, describe the nature of your proposed work and the contact you have had so far with the organization. Also, briefly describe the project or particular department, with which you will be working.

4. Problem Statement.
This is a two- to four-paragraph discussion of the history, context, and other background information that led you to decide that this project needed to be done, or in the case of a practicum, what you see as the role and importance of the work of this organization/project. Begin with a broad explanation of the situation, and by the end of the statement focus on the specific problem that your project will address. This should introduce the main question behind the study, and it should also discuss some of the sub-themes and questions that you expect to investigate in the course of exploring the main question. The format of this portion of the proposal should be academically oriented, including a thesis statement and a clear development of your thinking on your ISP up to this point. One way to visualize this part of the proposal is to think of it as you would the introduction to the final paper you will eventually submit.

5. Goals, Objectives, and Hypothesis.
You should be able to list one overall goal for your project that will help to address the issues identified in your problem statement. The objectives are specified things that will be accomplished in order to achieve your goal. You should be able to choose five to ten objectives, and they should be stated in proactive language (e.g. by the end of the project I will…).

6. Design and methods.
This is where you should discuss how you are going to carry out the project, and what methods you are going to use. Try to describe your project in as much methodological detail as possible. It may help to write up a time-line so that you can begin to map out in your mind exactly what you are going to do.

What types of questions will you be attempting to answer? What are your anticipated research methodologies – participant observation, observation, guided conversations, life history

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interviews, questionnaires? What human resources will be working with you – translators, guides, research assistants?

7. Budget.
You will be given a per diem for accommodation, food, and printing/binding of your ISP. If your project is going to include extra expenses such as travel, hiring translators, material purchases, etc., it will be particularly helpful to make out a budget to help you think about how you will spend your available funds.

8. Literature review.
The literature review is a narrative summary and synthesis of the literature relevant to your project. A good literature review will help to define and limit the problem, and place your project in historical and relational context as well as help you to avoid replicating someone else’s work. Basically, a literature review is a narrative, which discusses the literature that you have read in formulating your project, and how that literature influenced your thinking. More than an annotated bibliography, a literature review helps to map out the progression of thinking that led to the formulation of your project. The literature review for the ISP Proposal does not need to be long – just offer some insight into the intellectual progression of the project.

Provide a list of the books and articles that form your literature review. What other secondary sources will you consult, if any?

10. Logistics.
Provide an itinerary for the field study period. Remember that no travel will be approved unless it is central to your research. This section should be as specific as possible, including dates and places where you plan to conduct your field study. If at any time we cannot contact you because you have failed to give us accurate and up-to-date information on your whereabouts, you will be subject to penalties ranging from probation to dismissal from the program, depending on the severity of the situation. Though some of the information will overlap, please note that you also need to complete the Site Approval Form (Appendix 3, page 14) before embarking on your ISP.

Format for Writing the ISP

Your written product must include the following:

1. Title page: include your ISP title, in capital letters (centered, and located just above the middle of the page), and in a neat column to the lower left-hand side of the page, write:

   Your Name
   Project Advisor's Name and Institution (or description)

2. Table of Contents: your table of contents should contain the chapter or section headings into which your ISP is divided, and the main headings and subdivisions in each section, noting all page numbers. It should provide the reader with an analytical view of the material covered by the study, together with the order of discussion.
3. **Acknowledgements:** thank your ISP Advisor and others who helped you with the study, as appropriate.

4. **Abstract:** a tightly written (no more than one page) summary of your paper. The first paragraph summarizes the introductory and conceptual aspects of your study (including the organization/project with which you worked, if applicable), the second notes the methods used, and the third paragraph summarizes the findings/discussion and conclusions.

5. **Introduction:** length can vary considerably according to the topic and your style of writing. Aspects of your ISP that might be covered would include:
   - Objectives of the study.
   - Personal/professional rationale for working with the organization/project (if practicum).
   - Field study methods employed (consider adding a separate section on methodology).
   - Definition of major terms (if necessary). If you use a large number of non-English terms include them in a Glossary or Appendix at the end of the ISP.
   - Background and description of the organization with which you worked, including mission, funding sources, key challenges, etc. (if practicum). This section may be expanded if desired, offered as a separate section after the “Introduction” and before the “Literature Review”.
   - Brief statement of findings.

6. **Literature review:** A brief list of works consulted and a short note on each book's relevance to the study.

7. **Body of paper:** You will want to use section headings, and most likely, sub-headings, to maintain a strong sense of organization in your paper. This section will form the bulk of your ISP, and must specifically include a section on methodologies, with sections containing findings that are clearly separated from your own reflections and analyses.

8. **Conclusions:** your conclusions should demonstrate how your ISP fulfilled the objectives you outlined in your introduction, and summarize the main outcomes of your study. This section is not always given the attention it deserves – it is common to find only a half page of discussion of conclusions – it is as if the writer has run out of petrol! This section should bring out the best in you as a researcher. You need to make powerful arguments at this point, relate your findings to larger public issues, and derive implications. If the ISP is practicum-based, this section should discuss not only the work of the specific project and its relation to the larger discussion of social work in South Africa, but should also contain two or three paragraphs (minimum) discussing lessons learnt during this time as a participant observer within the organization.

9. **Limitations of the study:** though optional, this section is highly recommended. Legitimize your study by pro-actively pointing out its shortcomings and biases (all studies have them, of course).

10. **Recommendations for further study:** this should consist of a short list of recommendations on how your study might be expanded upon, or be used as the basis for future ISPs. Please include contact information where possible and appropriate within the ethical guidelines set by SIT.

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11. Endnotes (unless you have used page-by-page footnotes).

12. Bibliography and List of Sources: this should include all primary and secondary resources used. Primary resources (usually consisting of personal communications) and secondary (textual) resources should be listed under separate headings. You may use APA or Chicago style formatting; the important thing is to utilize a professional style and to be consistent. Style writing guides are available for reference purposes in the SIT program office.

13. Appendices: for relevant (and cited) statistical information, genealogical charts, maps, photographs, or other such material. One required Appendix is that of your interview questions.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Evaluation

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

Please note that a special late submission policy applies to the ISP, whereby ISPs submitted a day late (as defined in other program components) will be penalized ten percentage points. ISPs submitted more than a day late will not be accepted. It is a good idea to “assume” that you are going to have problems in the final formatting, printing, binding, and e-mailing of the ISP, and thus to complete the entire product at least one day early. Back-up your work frequently on disk and email servers. This has the added advantage of giving you additional time to prepare for your oral presentation.

In conjunction with the academic advisor, the Academic Director evaluates student performance on the ISP. Assessment of the written work and oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed; the breadth and appropriateness; the depth of analysis and insight; the level of cultural sensitivity displayed; and the quality of expression. Special emphasis will be placed on the student’s ability to integrate primary and secondary sources, to present the findings in a clear, organized and well-synthesized format, with attention to the ethical context of field study. The following breakdown will be used to determine your final grade for the course.

Written ISP 80%
Oral Presentation 20%

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To be accepted for credit, you will need to submit:

1. **Two hard copies of the ISP to the Office Manager.** One copy will be used for marking and the other copy will be placed into the program library.
2. **One electronic copy e-mailed to the Office Manager as a Microsoft Word attachment.** Note in the e-mail subject line and title the ISP file with your name, semester, and the first few words of your ISP.
3. **One copy to your ISP Advisor** – ask if he or she would prefer an electronic or hard copy.

Please note that if you would like to make additional copies for yourself, your home campus, etc., you need to do this before handing it in. To backup the process, it is recommended that you e-mail a copy of the ISP to yourself at the same time that you submit it to SIT.

Assessment of the written work and oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed; the breadth and appropriateness; the depth of analysis and insight; the level of cultural sensitivity displayed; and the quality of expression. Special emphasis will be placed on the student's ability to integrate primary and secondary sources and to present the findings in a clear, organized and well-synthesized format.

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.

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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<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>
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</tbody>
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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 information, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence.

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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 course.

All ISP documents and oral presentations must follow the appropriate guidelines as dictated by SIT academic policy and discussed in Research Methods and Ethics. 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.

**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.

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