



Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 Credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
South Africa: Community Health and Social Policy

Course Description

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is an academic project that is designed to allow students 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, four weeks 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 AD then evaluate the project in writing, and the AD submits a grade and narrative evaluation of the project to SIT. In turn, these assessments are then forwarded to the student's home university. The ISP carries a total of four credits.

Course Objectives

- Design, refine, and carry out an individual project in the South African context;
- Practice field study methods, in particular those associated with the ethical context of field study; and
- If an internship/practicum, gain "hands-on" experience in an organization.

Expected Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should have attained the following:

- Country-specific knowledge about a selected topic or the acquisition of country-specific artistic skills;
- Greater understanding of the process of designing and implementing a primary research project.

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Course Requirements

Students 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-point standard font. A highlight of the assignment is a 20-minute presentation to fellow students, program staff, your advisor and other invited guests.

Three Possible Types of ISP Projects: Social Analysis; Practicum; Creative.
You may choose to complete one of three “types” of ISPs in 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 healing may focus her or his study on understanding the social context of traditional healing in a particular community. Depending on the specific focus of the project, data may be sought from interviews and observations of *Isangomas* (healers), nurses at the local clinic, families who use the healers, 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 useful data.

Practicum: On the other side of the spectrum, students may 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 and 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-Governmental Organization), and observe/assist in the development, implementation, and/or monitoring/evaluation of a new educational program. In this model of ISP, crucial dialogue 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. Thus, it should be noted that a practicum-based ISP indeed carries out “social analysis.” 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 (a Daily Log including things like lesson plans, project reports, or the project the organization wants you to do) and a short 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.

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Creative: Students who wish to take advantage of the opportunity to gain creative skills so as to express themselves artistically in response to their South African experience can do so. In the same way that we insist that analytical ISPs be grounded in primary data, we insist that **creative ISPs** be grounded in South African context. We encourage a collaborative approach with other South African creative artists/writers, so that students gain skills specific to this context. This ISP follows the practicum format somewhat, with students devoting themselves to a considerable period of time during which they create in response to South African stimuli, in collaboration with South African artists/writers/poets. The skills acquired need to be documented on media that can be kept in our library with other ISPs, on disks, photographs, or cassettes. The work must be complemented by a written description of the social context, and all works must be described so as to make plain the links between the ISP experience and the works produced. Excellent projects will explain the methodologies of collaboration, and provide self-critical analysis of the artistic merit of the productions, thereby including many aspects of the social analysis paper, but in less detail.

The Written Product

All ISPs should follow the format below:

1. Title page: Including 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:

Student Name

Project Advisor's Name and Institution (or description)

2. Table of Contents: The 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 the ISP Advisor and others who helped with the study, as appropriate.

4. Abstract: A tightly-written (no more than one page) summary of the paper. The first paragraph summarizes the introductory and conceptual aspects, (including the organization/project with/on 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 style of writing. Aspects of an ISP that might be covered would include:

- Objectives of the study
- Personal/professional rationale for working with/on the organization/project (if a practicum)
- Field study methods employed (consider adding a separate section on methodology)
- Definition of major terms (if necessary). If one uses 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 one worked, including mission, funding sources, key challenges, etc. (if practicum). This section may be expanded if desired, offered as a separate section after "Introduction" and before the "Literature Review."
- Brief statement of findings.

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

7. Body of Paper: Students must use section headings, and most likely, sub-headings, to maintain a strong sense of organization in the paper. This section forms the bulk of the ISP, and must specifically include a section on methodologies, with sections containing findings that are clearly separated from personal reflections and analyses.

8. Conclusions: The conclusions should demonstrate how the ISP fulfilled the objectives outlined in the introduction, and summarize the main outcomes of the study. Students need to drive home powerful arguments at this point, relate their 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 the study by proactively 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 the 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.

11. Endnotes (unless one has 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. One 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, and your template consent form.

Basic Requirements for Site Approval

ISPs may be conducted in any area of South Africa that meets with the approval of the Academic Director, and for which the program has existing affiliate relations and reliable contacts who can provide a liaison between students, the program base, and local communities. ISPs may also be completed in other areas of South Africa, but such cases are rare and require a stricter site approval process. Any travel away from the ISP site during the ISP period must be directly relevant to your project, i.e., independent travel during the ISP is not allowed.

Students must be able to return to the program base if directed to do so within any 24-hour period. It is therefore important that students are familiar with transportation routes to and from the ISP location and have at least two options for travel plans. SIT must have reliable phone numbers through which you can be easily contacted throughout the ISP period; during periods in which you may be outside of areas with easy access to a phone, SIT must have a phone contact with a trustworthy local contact who can locate the student within any 12-hour period and assist in your evacuation from the field, when and if a situation requiring evacuation of the program arises.

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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

Assignments

Assessment of the written work and oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed; 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, with attention to the ethical context of field study. The following breakdown will be used to determine the final grade for the course.

Written ISP	90%
Oral Presentation	10%

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

Grading Criteria

Evaluation criteria for written reports include:

- Project definition and focus;
- Development of project in relationship to your objectives;
- Critical analysis of topic and clarity of presentation;
- Use of primary resources and cross-cultural communication skills;
- Use of appropriate secondary resources in support of the more important aspect of information gained from primary (field study) sources;
- Utilization of appropriate examples and personal experiences;
- Effective use of personal writing style; and
- Grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Evaluation criteria for oral reports include:

- Organization of presentation, with a view to holding audience interest;
- Use of appropriate examples and personal experiences;
- Clear explanation of ISP strategy and implementation; and
- Ability to field comments and questions.

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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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