Environmental Research Methods and Ethics

ENVI 3500 (4 credits / 60 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Tanzania: Zanzibar - Coastal Ecology and Natural Resource Management

Course Description
The Environmental Research Methods and Ethics Seminar (ERME) prepares students to learn effectively in a nontraditional, cross-cultural environment and provides experience with specific field study techniques, both ecological and anthropological, facilitating students’ development of an in-depth Independent Study Project. Emphasis is placed on understanding cultural differences and human context as a fundamental element of an ecosystem, as well as ecosystem appropriate technology, and ethics in the context of fieldwork. The course integrates field exercises, activities, assignments, observations, and interviews, with a focus on recording, interpreting, and analyzing data from primary sources and the natural environment.

Course Objectives
The Environmental Research Methods and Ethics Seminar (ERME) encompasses 60 academic hours (4 credits) and its main objectives are as follows:

- To become aware of approaches to field methodology and to develop a sense of what can be learned and how it can be learned outside the classroom;
- To offer insight into culturally appropriate, ethically-sound and environmentally sustainable field methodologies;
- To begin to integrate knowledge gleaned from the Coastal Ecology and Natural Resource Management Seminar into Independent Study Project (ISP) ideas; and
- To develop an understanding of the practical aspects and challenges of arranging a research project, utilizing the unique human and physical resources available within Zanzibar.

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

- Demonstrate greater understanding of ethical, sustainable and effective field methods needed to assess ecological and social environmental studies in Zanzibar;

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• Develop a continual consideration for the awareness, development, and incorporation of a standard of ethics for appropriate field research, particularly in terms of reciprocity and sustainability;
• Illustrate knowledge of the processes involved with developing a research project and seeing it to fruition;
• Articulate the value in accepting diversity, a systemic approach, social sensitivity, flexible thinking, capacity for analysis and synthesis as well as being able to determine trends and contradictions in the reality studied;
• Achieve a deeper understanding of Zanzibar, through the practice of applying research methods on the ground in a variety of contexts; and
• Exhibit increased capacity for self-guidance and establishment of priorities in a complex reality.

Course Requirements

Readings
You are responsible for all the required 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 necessarily tailor-made for each and every class.

General Required Readings


Other Readings about Related Topics

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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

Environmental Research Methods and Ethics Assignments
Students are expected to prepare for, attend, and participate fully in all lectures, discussions, activities, and excursions—including individual meetings with the Academic Director. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, and presentation of evidence. Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. The Academic Director assigns all grades.

Evaluation
2 D-I-E journal entries and museum assignment 40%
Portfolio/Mini ISP assignment 50%
Culturally appropriate behavior and class participation 10%

D-I-E (Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation) and Museum Assignments
The D-I-E and museum assignments are tools to develop students’ analytical skills through observation and interview techniques which are then written up in the students’ journals and assessed by the Academic Director.

Portfolio/Mini ISP Assignment
The Portfolio/Mini ISP assignment gives the students the opportunity to complete a substantial piece of work before Independent Study Project period. Students choose from a variety of topics and produce a written body of work with supporting documents, photos and evidence of the subject chosen. Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. The Academic Director assigns all grades.

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

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All grades assigned will take into account the students’ special circumstances and challenges they face as foreign students. An “A” grade for any 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.

Program Calendar

Week 1: Village visit and interviews in Swahili
Orientation with AD includes ethics in research

Week 2-3: DIE 1
Museum Project
IMS lectures including methodologies

Week 4: Field trips and snorkeling
Pemba oral history interviews
DIE 2

Week 5: Forestry practicals and methodologies

Week 6: Portfolios and presentations
AD ISP meetings
Practical coral reef methodologies

Week 8: USDM lectures (including methodology)
Practical coral reef methodologies

Student Expectations

Class Participation
Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all ERME 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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