Fieldwork Ethics and Comparative Research Methods  
ANTH 3500 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
Human Rights: Foundations, Challenges, and Advocacy

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Decolonizing Methodologies, p.1

Course Description

This course provides the theoretical, conceptual, and practical tools for conducting field research in the U.S., Chile, Jordan and Nepal. In particular, it provides the means to identify and carry out independent field-based research in each country, and then use data from at least two of those countries to produce a final comparative project. Emphasis is placed on conducting ethical research that acknowledges and respects cultural, historical, political, social, and economic processes. Students will be challenged to apply the concepts of decolonization in their research methodology. The ethical implications and consequences of observations, discussions, field exercises, interviews, and journal assignments are examined throughout.

Course Objectives

- To familiarize students with concepts and applications of qualitative methods used in social science research, especially in human rights, including interviews, documentation, observations and case studies.
- To present the ethical issues implicit in research on vulnerable individuals and groups, particularly in the sensitive area of human rights.

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• To prepare students to select, design, and conduct individual research projects using field-based learning to investigate aspects of human rights in three countries.
• To cultivate skills in analysis, assessment, and presentation of research findings in oral and written forms.

Course Methodology

The course will rely on a combination of pedagogical methods; lectures, field study, discussion, critical inquiry, presentation and reflection. The purpose is to create a community where students freely offer ideas, comments and questions and share the responsibility for learning. The course seeks to ground students in ethical research practices and fieldwork methods, observing principles of informed consent and appropriate documentation of results. Respectful interaction with local research participants will be emphasized as students conduct their research. Final projects should integrate readings, site visits, interview transcripts, and other data as appropriate in a comparative and cumulative manner to demonstrate common themes and comparative differences among countries visited.

Learning Outcomes

• Demonstrate familiarity with relevant qualitative research methods, and identify appropriate methods for specific project(s).
• Define, propose, and develop an appropriate final project topic that incorporates themes and experiences of the program.
• Conduct interviews, surveys, and other research methods as appropriate to gather data for the final project.
• Prepare a cumulative and comparative project that focuses on a key human rights issue across the target countries, including primary and secondary data, analysis, and policy recommendations or an action agenda.

Course Requirements

The seminar will begin with an introduction to qualitative research methods by program faculty during the program orientation and end with a presentation of the results of each student’s independent study project. It will provide the conceptual and theoretical background and practical tools for conducting research. In the context of human rights research, it will cover selecting an appropriate project and supporting strategies for fieldwork; designing and planning the study project; gathering and recording information through interviews, documents, observation and other techniques; analyzing and organizing research findings; structuring and preparing the essay and effectively presenting the findings.

Social science field research involving individuals raises ethical issues of consent, knowledge and participation. As these issues are especially imperative and sensitive for human rights, the seminar will examine them in some depth. Bearing in mind that student projects may

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involve minorities, victims of abuses and their perpetrators as well as public and private advocates, the seminar will probe ethical issues affecting research methods, protecting the safety and privacy of informants and the impact of government and NGO policies and actions on rights.

_Cumulative Field Research_

The final research project, called the _Comparative Analysis Project_ (CAP) enables students to study in depth an aspect of human rights common to the three countries visited outside the U.S. The final project need only compare two countries, although a comparison of three is encouraged. Students are encouraged to think about their topic before the start of the program. Early in the seminar the objectives, scope and implementation of research will be discussed. Each student will then decide upon an appropriate topic in consultation with the faculty. After the topic is approved, students will submit a proposal, describing the themes to be considered, the research design, probable sources and the plan for developing the project. In accordance with SIT standards, an application to do research on human subjects may also be required.

The program’s other courses will furnish the intellectual foundation for the project, while regular individual meetings with faculty provide the methodological and ethical basis to complete a research paper. Specifications for a research project are that it can be completed during the program; focus on primary sources through interviews, field work and contacts in the countries and produce useful and original insights into a comparative aspect of human rights. Faculty, country coordinators and local specialists will guide work on the project. Project progress and problems will be discussed in meetings with faculty and the results presented at its conclusion to the entire group.

_Grading of the course_

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Research proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation exercise</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journal Reviews (once during each country, 10% each)</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAP Presentation</td>
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<td>CAP Essay</td>
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_Readings and References_

_New York City_

_Session 1: Introduction to Qualitative Methodology_


American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics.

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Recommended:


IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Interviewing, see description p.9

Chile

Session 2: Research Design


Discussion questions: How do Chamaz and Breuer deal with: (1) the relationship of "theory," "method," and "research"? (2) the epistemolgy issues of what can be known and how it can be known? (3) the nature of inference, argument, and explanation?

ASSIGNMENTS: Research Proposal, see description p.10

Session 3: Doing Fieldwork: Observations and Interviewing


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Wang, T. "Writing Live Fieldnotes: Towards a More Open Ethnography": http://ethnographymatters.net/blog/2012/08/02/writing-live-fieldnotes-towards-a-more-open-ethnography/

Recommended:


IN-CLASS DISCUSSION of interview exercise and reflexivity in research.

ASSIGNMENT: Observation exercise, see description p. 11

Jordan

Session 4: The ethics of research

Revisit:


IN-CLASS DISCUSSION: What challenges and ethical dilemmas did you face during your observation and interview exercises? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each kind of data?

IN-CLASS EXERCISE: Ethical Dilemmas in the field, details TBA

Session 5: Debriefing Workshop


Recommended:

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IN-CLASS Discussion:

1. How has your positionality (race, class, gender, nationality etc.) influenced aspects of your study (e.g. interviews, observations, data interpretation)? Are there any strategies you can use for addressing this issue?
2. What did you learn from conducting the interviewing and observation exercises? What did you find frustrating or satisfying when you were conducting the exercises?
3. What do you think about the prescriptive advice offered in the readings?
4. What is missing? What does your own experience suggest?
5. What flaws are you likely to encounter? How can you anticipate/correct/learn from them?
6. How would you refine your techniques? What would you now do differently?
7. Which method are you more likely to use? Why?

**Nepal**

**Session 6: Data Analysis & Interpretation Workshop**


Ryan, G. & Bernard, RH. R. “Techniques to Identify Themes in Qualitative Data.” Available at:  http://www.analytictech.com/mb870/readings/ryan-bernard_techniques_to_identify_themes_in.htm

IN-CLASS Discussion: We will focus on data analysis and analytical memo writing - thoughts about how the data are coming together in clusters or patterns or themes you see as the data is accumulating, including keeping notes about "what works" (or not) in your method. Bring the analytical memo to the next session for debriefing.

**Session 7: Report, Research Writing and Reflection Workshop**


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Recommended:


IN-CLASS Discussion:

1) In pairs and groups, we will reflect on analytical memos written during data analysis. Students should be able to discuss their analysis and if possible, tentative conclusions. I will discuss the work with you, test out the rigor of your analysis and suggest strategies for strengthening the analysis and conclusions.
2) We will discuss/review writing approach and style.

Session 8: Final presentations

No reading. Final essays and presentations due. See description p.13

Evaluation and Grading Criteria
The faculty will grade you on the basis of points and will return written assignments with comments. The range of points will indicate how your work compares with the rest of the class. At the end of the term, your cumulative point score will be calculated to determine your final letter grade for the course. Point grades for individual assignments are not directly correlated to final letter grades, which will reflect your work on assignments in all countries.

It is useful for faculty and students to view final grades in this way. An “A” represents truly outstanding work, exemplifying rigorous analysis, superior insights, and precise presentation. A “B” signifies highly competent work that completes the assignment very well, with considerable thought, reasonable analytical results and an effective presentation. A “C” represents acceptable work, satisfying the basic requirements, but lacking distinction, original analytical insights or organization. A “D” grade indicates poorly or partially completed work, reflecting a lack of initiative, inconsistent analytical conclusions and/or a disorganized presentation. Pluses and minuses for the four letter grades indicate better or poorer work. There is no “A+” grade.

Student Expectations

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

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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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ANTH 3500: Research Methods for IHP Human Rights
In-class Exercise #1, Session 1: Interviewing

The purpose of this exercise is to get you started in interviewing and note-taking, and to give you the experience of being a participant observer.

1) Partner with someone and, alternating your roles, interview each other. Spend approximately 20 minutes doing each other’s interview (if you need more time, certainly use it, per the permission of the interviewee).

2) Focus your interview around a research question of your choosing. What do you want to know about someone you are about to spend the next three months traveling with?

3) Consider your main question, and how best to access the information. Also consider your follow-up and probe questions (as the interview unfolds), that naturally evolve out of the interview. Also consider that the information you are soliciting is a part of someone’s larger life-history story of themselves, and try to gather that information that would contextualize and place this specific information in its larger meaningful story. And finally, try to elicit specific events and stories that illustrate the significance ingrained in the main question.

4) You can write down your questions (including follow-up questions) as well as a terse outline of the responses your interviewee provides, e.g., key words or phrases. After you have each interviewed each other, take a few minutes to go back over your notes and develop them more fully in a written format, adding detail and the remembered words and stories actually used by your interviewee.

5) Conclude by recording your reflections on the interview: the interactions and dynamics between yourself and the person interviewed, your analysis of topics explored, any other observations you have. We will share these in class.

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ANTH 3500: Research Methods for IHP Human Rights Assignment: Research Proposal (10%)

The comparative analysis project (CAP) on IHP Human Rights is an independent research assignment that requires you to formulate a specific question within the broad scope of human rights discourse and then posit an answer. You will learn directly from primary sources, i.e. observations and interviews that you collect in multiple sites, and you will integrate that research with what you have learned or can learn from secondary sources listed under thematic readings in your other courses.

Select a topic that inspires or intrigues you because you will examine it in each country we visit. Figure out why it matters. After selecting a topic, you will have to articulate a researchable question. Researchable questions would be, for example, “How are women’s rights refracted by international human rights law in Nepal and Jordan?” or “What strategies are used to pursue the right to education in Nepal, Jordan, and Chile?” or maybe “How does the right to education vary across urban and rural populations? A comparison of Nepal and Chile.” You might have more than one point of inquiry, so feel free to articulate these, but stay focused. The final paper should compare at least two of the four countries studied, but you should gather data in all four.

It is important that the topic is feasible. Some of the questions to ask include: Is it observable? Are my observation sites accessible by public transportation or walking? Have I considered language barriers and how to overcome them? Attention to feasibility will ensure that your project is realistic and achievable within the constraints of the semester’s schedule. You should also utilize the opportunities presented by the program’s activities (site visits and lectures) to assemble data for your project. Consult closely with country coordinators, the program director, and faculty to insure feasibility.

For your proposal (10% of your grade for the course), submit an essay addressing the following as best you can:

1) **Topic selection and research question**: What is the topic? What is/are your preliminary research question(s) that you will investigate over the semester? What human rights issue(s) are you addressing through the comparative analysis project? Why are you interested in the topic?
2) **Observation**: In every country, you will need to do a sustained observation of the topic you have chosen. Where will you observe this topic in every country? Is there evidence of public campaigns/consciousness about your selected issue -- on the streets, in local media, on the internet, in schools/churches/etc? Does the language of human rights match up with the way your topic/issue is observable?
3) **Conversation/Interview**: In every country, you will need to have at least three conversations with people about the topic. Who might you speak with? What are three questions you will ask?
4) **Other research methods**: Different topics may require different research methods and tools. What additional methods or tools will you use (if any)?
5) **Ethics of research design**: Consider the epistemological issues discussed in the Chamaz and Breuer readings, and in class discussion. Engage these questions in your proposal.

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**ANTH 3500: Research Methods for IHP Human Rights**  
**Assignment: Observation Exercise (10%)**

1. Identify a setting and/or event to observe in Chile.  
2. Make a checklist of what you will want to pay attention to. In light of those choices and in relation to your research project, how would you go about taking notes, writing up notes, and possibly coding your data?  
3. Observe the scene or event for not less than 30 minutes.  
4. Take notes and write them up.  
5. Reflect on your actual process of taking field notes and of writing them up. What choices did you make and why? How did you address the challenges of converting experience into textual form?  
6. Identify themes in your field notes. Reflect on this process. What did you find challenging? What did you find useful? How might this approach serve your research project?

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ANTH 3500: Research Methods for IHP Human Rights
Journal Review (10% in Chile, 10% in Jordan, 10% in Nepal)

The CAP notebook is an important part of the experiential learning process as well as the Comparative Analysis project. Notebooks are the primary place to document your research process, which includes tracking, analyzing, and synthesizing your experiences in the field. Take note of images and observations, reflect on articles/site visits/lectures, and record conversations you have pertaining to your Comparative Analysis project. Your notebook will be the bridge between you and the faculty during the sixteen weeks of the program.

In the Santiago CAP Notebook Review, you will be assessed on these four components:

i. Observations: Observe your topic for at least one day. Write the following: a) description of your observation; b) interpretation of what you have observed; and c) reflection on the process and topic. Also note the date, time and place of the observation.

ii. Conversation: Have at least three conversations about your CAP topic. Write a description of the people with whom you conversed, your questions, notes from the conversation, direct quotations when possible, and your reflection on the conversation.

iii. Reflection: Reflect on your topic in context by relating it to readings/guest lecturers/site visits/faculty sessions.

iv. Analysis: Begin analyzing what you have learned in thinking about your topic through observation, conversation, comparison, and contextualization.

In the Amman CAP Notebook Review, restate your research question, or state the new version if it has evolved over the last eight weeks. Continue to follow steps i-iv outlined above to form the backbone of your research method. Be able to present and discuss your CAP notebook with the professor, and possibly your peers, by highlighting observations, conversations, reflections, and analysis on your topic. Be sure to include analysis that compares your experiences across Santiago and Amman (& New York City), and that clearly demonstrates reflexivity in your research (i.e. a critique of your own positionality, whatever that may be).

In the Kathmandu CAP Notebook Review, continue to follow steps i-iv outlined above to form the backbone of your research method. Start tying together the threads of your analysis in preparation for creating your final paper and presentation. This might take the form of a rough outline of your 12-15 page final paper written into your journal.

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ANTH 3500: Research Methods for IHP Human Rights

**CAP Essay (40%)**: Develop an essay that presents your major findings by comparing and analyzing your topic in each country we have visited. You will also need to present an argument for your analysis that addresses your research question and is based on the insights you have gained over the semester. Include the following: cover page, introduction, research question and methodology, presentation of evidence and findings, analysis, conclusion, and references. (12-15 pages, or 3000-3,750 words)

**CAP Presentation (10%)**: The CAP final presentation is a space for you to present the findings of your research to the IHP learning community broadly speaking. This includes your fellow students and program staff, as well as country hosts, and organizational allies of the program when possible. We encourage you to be creative and ambitious with your presentation format, design, and intent. Is there a way for your presentation to be relevant to program allies, activists, or other human rights practitioners? Is there a way for you to synthesize what you learned from the comparative analysis project and submit a journalistic article, photo essay, or blog post to a journal or website to be published? Will you incorporate photographs, video clips, sketches, creative writing, or other creative formats to present your findings? This is your opportunity to present what you’ve researched over the course of the semester to the wider world. We encourage you to take ownership and pride in that experience as much as possible. You should also discuss your research questions and how these were modified in the course of your research. You will want to practice or refine your presentation before you share it with the class in order to make sure that you are within the allotted time limit, and that your presentation is tightly organized with a coherent flow.

Criteria used for evaluation of comparative analysis essay:
- Clear research question/focus and the effectiveness of the paper in answering this question/focus
- Effective use of program materials and a range of primary sources
- Thorough and pertinent comparisons
- Well-supported analysis and argument
- Well-constructed text, using clear, concise prose
- Appropriate academic tone and referencing

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