Research Methods and Ethics

ANTH 3500 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Morocco: Multiculturalism and Human Rights

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description
This seminar is designed to provide firsthand and experiential knowledge about the richness and challenges of doing field study in Morocco. It provides the necessary conceptual and methodological thread that enables the student to learn from experience, to apply the knowledge and skills gained in language study and the thematic seminar, and to prepare to undertake field study in Morocco in strict observance of research procedure involving human subjects and the regulatory ethical norms defined by the Local Review Board (LRB) and SIT's Institutional Review Board (IRB). At the end of the course, the student should have the cultural understanding and the methodological tools to successfully complete their Independent Study Project. The course is also designed to answer specific concerns that research on human rights generally raises. Multiculturalism and human rights involve minority groups, former political prisoners, artists, activists involved in development projects, policy makers, and international human rights organizations. The lectures address issues that pertain to research methods, confidentiality and anonymity of informants, data gathering and interviewing, safety and the psychology of minority groups and victims of repressive systems. Throughout, individual meetings are scheduled to address research objectives and expectations of each participant.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of methods of qualitative research, in the context of multiculturalism and human rights in Morocco;
- Use research skills and techniques such as formation of research questions, reviewing relevant literature, identifying research population, and conducting interviews and observations in observance of local ethics and value systems;
- Define and deal with ethical questions that arise from conducting field research, particularly with minority groups or vulnerable populations;
- Self-reflect on their position, role, and experience in the field;
- Produce an Independent Study Project (ISP) proposal;
- Submit an application for review of ISP research with human subjects.
Language of Instruction
This seminar is conducted in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to seminar content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues.

Course Schedule

Module 1: Experiential Learning and Positionality in Field-Based Research
This introductory module is designed to introduce students to field-based research in a study abroad context. Students learn how to relate to local communities and individuals. Most particularly, this module allows students to discover the power of experiential learning, and use it as a tool to connect to local communities and individuals, and develop into reflexive researchers who are attentive to their own positionality in relation to the local communities in which they engage for their research.

Session 1: Homestay neighborhood exploration
In this field assignment, students are asked to explore their new cultural environment, most particularly their own homestay neighborhood, through the lenses of multiculturalism and human rights. The aim is to examine if and how the physical, social, and cultural aspects of the homestay neighborhood challenge any preconceptions the student might have held of Morocco.

Recommended reading:

Session 2: Doing Field-Based Research in a Study Abroad Context
This session provides an introduction to field-based research in a study abroad context. Students explore how experiential learning can be used as a tool to explore and interact with their new cultural environment and reflect on their own positionality in relation to the host community, most particularly Rabat NGOs working in the area of human rights.

Required readings:

Recommended reading:

Field assignment:
Join one of the following thematic groups:
Women, education, and literacy
Self-employment and start up enterprises
Cooperatives and income generation activities
Improving small farm production and income
Eradication of shanty towns
Environmental improvement

Find contact information for an NGO operating in Rabat; research it on the net; pay a visit to it to find about its location, easiness or difficulty of access, and its subject of operation; and give an account of the interview you had with one of its members if you managed to meet them. You will act as a resource for the rest of the group. You will need to meet as a group to plan your assignment. You will be asked to present your findings and assessment on these assignments orally in our class discussions

Session 3: Reflections on Positionality and Representation
This session builds on students’ field exercise experience. Students reflect on their own positionality and ways in which it can impact their representation of the host culture. Particular attention is given to ways in which positionality shapes the research question, relation with the research subjects, approach in data collection, data processing, and the representation of their research subjects in their final ISP.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:

Module 2: Research Methods and Ethics
Session 1: Selecting Topics, Formulating Research Questions & Literature Review
This session provides an overview of the module on research methods and ethics. It highlights the main elements of conducting a research project and walks students through the different steps of writing a research proposal. Special attention is given to choosing a research topic and formulating a research question.

Required readings:


In-class exercise:
Students choose a topic and rehearse how to develop a research question and interview questions for their ISP project.
Session 2: Data Collection: Interviewing & Observation

This session surveys interviewing as a method for data collection, types of interviews, and walks students through observation as a method in field-based study and the processes of developing interview questions (in accordance with the research question).

Required reading:

Field assignment:
In order to conduct this field research, students will divide themselves into women’s rights thematic groups. We will identify and select the themes for the groups from the different articles of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women at the end of Tuesday’s lecture.

Each group will conduct online research and brief interviews on their selected thematic topic:
1. Read the section related to your group’s specific theme in the four CEDAW documents cited below (the Convention, the Morocco State report, the NGO shadow report, and the CEDAW Committee concluding observations).
2. Ask a Moroccan colleague, friend, family member, or acquaintance (of either gender) to have a discussion and conversation with you around the following:
   - Explain the specific right that your thematic group is working on, and describe the relevant article from the CEDAW Convention. Depending on your discussion partner, you may want to read the entire article out loud, and/or give a simplified explanation of the article’s provisions, and/or use the French or Arabic language versions. Then have a conversation around the following questions:
     - What is their opinion about this article? Is it good? Necessary? Helpful? Sufficient? A priority?
     - In their view, is this right respected in Morocco? Why or why not? Can you give some examples?
     - In their view, what would an ideal community where this right is respected look like?
     - In their view, what needs to happen / what should be done so that women can fully enjoy this specific right?
3. As a group, prepare a brief presentation describing, analyzing and comparing the common points and the differences related to your specific thematic issue between:
   a. The Convention Standards
   b. The Moroccan government description of their respect of that right
   c. The NGO assessment of women’s enjoyment of that right
   d. The Committee recommendations to Morocco re: that right
   e. Your discussion partners’ assessments of that right’s importance, respect of in Morocco, and solutions for ensuring its enjoyment by all women. Were there any differences that you noticed among your discussion partners based on age, gender, etc.?

You will need to meet as a group to plan your assignment and divide up tasks, role and responsibilities. Each thematic group will present their findings and assessments on these assignments in our class discussions.

Session 3: Analyzing Data & Writing the ISP Research Paper

The purpose of this session is twofold. Firstly, we look at data analysis, with particular attention to theories of multiculturalism and human rights as tools for analysis. Secondly, we analyze the different elements of writing the ISP paper, with particular attention to literature review and theoretical framework.

Required reading:

Session 4: Mixed Methods

This session addresses the benefits (and challenges) of combining different methods and approaches. The discussion is based on the outcomes of an assignment that requires textual interpretations and analysis of data collected through structured and unstructured interviewing.

Recommended reading:

Assignment:
Choose a concept in the Qur’an – it could be Jihad, or Death, or Virginity or Homosexuality, or Punishment or Women, or Water, or Body or Sin…- and see how it evolves in the religious major references using Qur’an, Hadith, and Tafsir. You can either look at the texts in their historical context or choose to analyze the practice versus the texts on the basis of informal discussions with Moroccans, observations of Moroccan daily life, and interviews you might be able to conduct for the presentation day.

Session 5: Doing Research on Human Rights

This session focuses on the specificities of conducting field-based research in Morocco on topics of human rights and multiculturalism. The session covers field resources and the ethical challenges of methodological tools such as testimony and personal narratives. The session also addresses the legal and ethical questions that research on human rights and multiculturalism in Morocco generally involves.

Required readings:


Recommended reading:

Module 3: ISP Design & Evaluation
Session 1: ISP Rubric & ISP Matters
This session is devoted to the discussion of SIT’s ISP assessment rubric. Students are acquainted with the categories for each rubric and the general design of ISP project and presentation. The session also addresses other ISP matters including filling out the IRB forms, ISP codes, ISP outlines, ISP format, and ISP presentation.

Session 2: Reviewing past ISPs
Join one of the thematic groups. You will be given past ISPs. Each group is invited to work on a specific ISP of their choice. The ISPs are posted on your Moodle page. After selecting the ISP, each group will have to meet in order to see how each member would contribute to the assignment implementation. You will be invited to present your findings orally.

These are some suggestions:
- Discuss ISP structure; introduction of research question; did the author manage to relate to the research question throughout the text in their data analysis discussion? How does the literature review support the main research question and data presented? Comment on the author’s discussion about positionality;
- Use an alternative investigation tool to verify the validity of the study results;
- Try the same method with different profiles;
- Think about new theoretical questions;
- Use in-depth investigation of an issue or aspect of the data that was only partly covered in the original research;
- Collect data to find an answer to new questions about the ISP;
- Re-analyze the collected data from different theoretical perspectives;
- Compare the ISP’s collected data with data collected on other profiles;
- Try other modes of approach that you might think about.

Session 3: Doing fieldwork in rural Morocco
This session addresses the specific context of fieldwork in a rural setting. Building on the students’ experience with rural homestay, this session focuses on access to participants in rural settings, the perception of ‘researchers’ by villagers, and the methods most appropriate for fieldwork in rural Morocco. The session includes:
- Intercultural dynamics in field research
- Visit to Rural NGOs
- Discussions with villagers
- Debriefing the rural stay.

Required reading:

Session 4: ISP Group Discussions
In this session, students will share and discuss their final ISP proposal in the presence of the Academic Directors and a few advisors. Feedback provided in this session is used to enhance the final ISP proposal.

Course Requirements
Each student is recommended to keep a Field Study journal. This journal should include field notes, maps, interviews, contacts, descriptions and interpretations of visits, participation, and other processes of the ISP project. The students are expected to complete weekly assignments based on field research, to present their findings orally, and to submit a written paper. The course includes individual sessions between the students and the academic directors. These sessions serve as preparation for the ISP. The students are expected to submit the final ISP proposal as a component of the Research Methods and Ethics Seminar.

Readings
You are responsible for all the required readings, and should be prepared to bring them to bear during 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. Other required readings for each class are assigned at the beginning of the semester.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments
For the RME (Research Methods and Ethics) assessment, the program requires that you submit each week a paragraph where you address three questions bearing on the fieldwork assignment discussion of the week: What were the questions raised? Were the answers provided convincing? What questions remain to be asked? The program also requires that you submit a 5-page paper based on the oral presentation you gave in class and on field observation and interviews. While the paper may include some library sources, the library should not be your main source for the RME paper. The ISP proposal is also a requirement in the RME. The overall grade for RME will be based on the submitted paragraphs, the 5-page paper, the ISP proposal, and class participation.

Class Participation: Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening, and active engagement in all lectures, discussions, educational excursions, assignments, and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. An absent student is responsible for contacting the instructor, the tutor, and/or fellow students to be prepared for the assignments s/he missed and the ones scheduled for the next class.

Assessment
- Weekly paragraphs: 25%
- Short paper: 25%
- ISP proposal: 40%
- Class participation 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
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.

Student Expectations

Class Participation
Participation in class refers to attendance, punctuality, attentive listening and active engagement in all academic course 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.