Course Description

The Research Methods and Ethics (RME) seminar provides theoretical, conceptual, and practical tools for conducting field research in the Balkans. In particular, it provides the means to identify and carry out an independent four-week field-based research project, while developing an understanding of contextual opportunities and limitations. Emphasis is placed on grappling with methodological and ethical challenges in learning and researching issues related to peace and conflict studies in this part of the world. The seminar prepares students to record, interpret, and analyze information and data obtained from primary sources by developing students’ awareness to cultural differences and their own positionality.

The course will deepen students’ cultural and ethical awareness towards the themes discussed during the semester, enhancing students’ understanding and respect, and thus their ability to act sensitively, ethically, and responsibly while studying abroad and conducting their Independent Study Project. Students learn through a combination of lectures, in-class exercises, field-based activities, and individual meetings with the Academic Director and Academic Assistant. Concepts presented and skills developed in the seminar underlie and reinforce all other program components.

Learning Outcomes

The RME Seminar enables students to understand and take advantage of their experience-based learning processes. It provides students with skills in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting information from a range of sources, maximizing the knowledge provided by the local context. This knowledge and/or skills should assist students in assessing their own culture and in dealing with people from different cultures in later life. All aspects of the course link directly to the Independent Study Project.

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

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of methods of qualitative research, in the context of peace research conducted in post-conflict societies;
• Use research skills and techniques such as formation of research questions, reviewing relevant literature, identifying research population, and conducting interviews and observations strictly in line with local ethics and value systems;
• Define and deal with ethical questions that arise from conducting field research, particularly in post-conflict societies;
• Self-reflect on the student's (as a researcher) position, role, and experience in the field;
• Produce an Independent Study Project proposal;
• Submit an application for review for review of ISP research with human subjects.

Language of Instruction
This course is conducted in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of peace and conflict studies through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Course Schedule

*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Week 1: Orientation
Topics include:
• Course Introduction: Conducting undergraduate research in the context of post-war societies, with the focus on post-Yugoslav dynamics and post-socialism.

Week 2: Conducting undergraduate qualitative research based on fieldwork
Topics include:
• Conceptual methodological understanding of field-based learning and field-based research;
• Understanding the difference between a final paper you write on campus and an ISP;
• Discussing the difference between qualitative and quantitative research;
• The stages of a research project: choose an ISP topic, form a research question, literature review, data collection methods, data analysis, discuss your positionality;
• Understand the difference between writing an academic paper and other writings (journalism, reports): citation/reference, use of secondary and primary sources, field-based sources;
• Homestay as a cultural experience and source of knowledge.

Required reading:

Recommended:

Week 3 (I): Balkanism & Orientalism: Standpoint & Positionality
Topics include:
• Discuss contemporary research about the break-up of YU and the wars of the 1990s: top down vs. bottom up approaches;
• Develop your standpoint (positionality): outsider/insider positions and the ways
positionality shapes research topics/research questions and data analysis;
• Definitions and terms: Southeast Europe, Balkans, Western Balkans.

Required reading:

Recommended:

Week 3 (II): Choosing and Forming a Research Question
Topics include:
• Discuss the importance of correct/clear articulation of a research question;
• Understand the formulation of research question(s) as an ongoing process in each stage of research;
• Ethical/cultural awareness of limitations in asking certain questions in post-war societies.

In-class handout and exercise:
Students choose a topic and practice how to develop their research question.

Required reading:

Week 4: Data Collection I: Interviewing & Observation
Topics include:
• Interviewing as a method for data collection in field-based study;
• Types of interviews;
• Developing interview questions (in accordance with the research question);
• Ethical dilemmas and challenges – my positionality as a student conducting interviews;
• Observation as a method in field-based study;
• Human Subjects Policy (SIT and your sending school).

In-class exercise:
Students choose a topic and practice how to develop a research question and interview questions.

Required Readings:

Field assignment: monuments of the 1990s in Belgrade
This session invites students for a walking tour in the city, exploring and observing monuments erected in the city during the 1990s and after. Led by Dr. Nenad Lajbenšperger, from the Belgrade Heritage Office, this session allows students to learn and practice the use of observation as a data collection method. At the same time, students reflect on the following questions: how are the 1990s remembered in Belgrade? Which monuments were erected in memory of the 1999 NATO bombing in the city? What are the controversies about those
monuments? Which monuments were built by Slobodan Milošević? How are the wars in neighboring Croatia, Bosnia, and Kosovo remembered in Belgrade?

**Week 5: Kosovo Excursion**

**Field Assignment: Mapping Prishtina**

Upon arrival in Prishtina, students go on a mapping tour of the city. During this field session, students are introduced to the different layers of today’s Prishtina, from its Ottoman past, to the remains (and erasure) of Socialist Yugoslavia, to the present day with the erection of new monuments as the Ibrahim Rugova monument to the Newborn one. The session allows students to learn and practice the use of observation as a data collection method.

**Week 6: Data Collection II and Ethics**

**Topics include:**
- Reflect and learn from Data Collection I assignments;
- Ethical dilemmas and challenges;
- My positionality as an interviewer and a student from the US;
- Ethics and privacy of the subjects/interviewees;
- Documentation of data: field notes, research diary.

**In-class exercise:**

Based on the first data collection assignments, students discuss challenges and lessons learned.

**Required reading:**

**Weeks 7: Preparation for the Educational Excursion to Bosnia Herzegovina: Ethical Concerns in Researching Post-War Societies**

**Topics include:**
- Outsider/Insider position in the context of post-war societies;
- Ethics – conducting research in post-war communities;
- Discussing the “Expertee syndrome” and the “Zoo effect”.

**Required reading:**

**Recommended:**

**Weeks 8: Excursion to Bosnia Herzegovina (Republika Srpska and Federation)**

**Field Assignment: Mapping Banja Luka**

Upon arrival to Banja Luka, students go on a mapping tour of the city. During this field session, students are introduced to the changes that took place in the city after the war: from the construction of the Orthodox Church in the city center, to the removal of the old Yugoslav monuments. Students are also introduced to the demographic changes that took place in the city (that used to be a rather mixed city turning into a homogenous Serbian city) and visit the Ferhadija mosque currently under construction (after its full destruction during the war). The session allows students to learn and practice the use of observation as a data collection method.
**Field Assignment: Mapping Sarajevo**

Upon arrival to Sarajevo, students go on a mapping tour of the city. During this field session, students are introduced to the consequences of life under siege that lasted more than 3 years and paralyzed the city and the life of its citizens. Students visit the war tunnel museum and walk through the old town of Sarajevo. They also visit the historical museum and the exhibition, Sarajevo under Siege. The session allows students to learn and practice the use of observation as a data collection method.

**Week 9: Data Analysis and Literature Review**

**Topics include:**
- How to approach and analyze the data collected; a review of Data Collection II assignment
- Making use of literature in your ISP: understand the relevance of the existing literature for planning your own research;
- Learn how to use literature.
- How to organize your ISP: structure;
- Reference and bibliography of data collected in field-based research.

**In-class hand out and exercise:**

Students review past ISPs to 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 author’s discussion about positionality.

**Week 10 (I): Remaining Questions for ISP**

**Topics include:**
- Submission of ISP proposal;
- Submission of the application for review of ISP research with human participants;
- Remaining questions.

**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

**Description of Assignments:**

**Data collection:** Students conduct one formal interview followed by at least two additional informal conversations on a given topic related to the thematic seminar themes. Students then analyze the data they collected in a 4-page paper providing background, data collection comments, interpretive comments, and methodology.

**ISP proposal:** In this 3-part assignment, students synthesize knowledge gained from the various program components (thematic coursework, research methods and ethics, excursions, language study, and homestay interactions) to define their ISP topic and a research question, a bibliography and a literature review, a methodology, interview questions, and a list of human resources. This proposal will inform students’ Independent Study Projects.

**Class Participation:** Students are expected to prepare for, attend, and participate positively in lectures, in-class assignments, discussions, and field visits.

**Assessment:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ISP Proposal (stage I, II)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISP Final Proposal</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grading Scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83%</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-76%</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-73%</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64-66%</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Below Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 64</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Fail</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expectations and Policies

- **Show up prepared.** Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- **Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and completed accordingly to the specified requirements.** This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- **Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer.** These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- **Comply with academic integrity policies** (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Respect differences of opinion** (classmates, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.

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.