Research Methods and Ethics
ANTH-3500 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Cameroon: Development and Social Change

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
Research Methods and Ethics prepares students for mentored-independent study through an evolving series of field projects, workshops, and related lectures. Specifically, this course will engage students in the range of methodologies and procedures typical to development studies and social change research, including qualitative and quantitative approaches from both primary and secondary sources. A second core focus for this course is the development of a viable research proposal – including the ethical considerations necessary in the research process – topic development, selection and execution of methodologies, final write up, reciprocity or civic engagement issues, while sensitizing students to power asymmetries, the politics of subjectivity in field research, and devoting attention to local dynamics in pursuit of ethical research in Cameroon. Since students will conduct their research projects in Cameroonian communities in a variety of settings and spaces, emphasis will be placed on local context in the delivery of course materials, identifying potential cross-cultural issues, where appropriate.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will:

- Understand the core methods and procedures used in development studies and social change research;
- Articulate ethical concerns and challenges in development studies and social change fieldwork, discourses, and SIT’s Internal Review Board (IRB) policies;
- Identify a compelling research topic, and produce an intellectually-rigorous research proposal rooted in current debates and literature;
• Conduct primary research effectively in the Cameroonian context, displaying ethically and culturally appropriate behavior in the process, for the purposes of producing an academically compelling research document;
• Engage in ethnographic fieldwork methods that may include note-taking and transcription, participant observation, mapping, collection of life histories, formal and informal interviewing, and the use of simple surveys for both quantitative and qualitative data collection;
• Assess the impact of a researcher on local cultures being studied, using sensitivity and awareness;
• Integrate information gathered from primary sources with secondary source material to produce a sound research proposal;
• Navigate the Cameroonian cultural, social, and bureaucratic landscapes.

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to local vocabularies related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Course Schedule
Modules

Module 1: Learning Cameroon
Upon arrival in Cameroon, students are briefed on the politics, social norms, and the construction of Cameroon’s cultural identity through an introductory orientation. Students are also informed of their responsibilities as student scholars while honing the necessary research and analytical skills to achieve ISP success. Through their preliminary research, there will be a particular stress on students to sharpen their own quantitative analytical skills and cross-cultural analytical skills.

Session 1: Cultural adaptation

Session 2: Do's and Don'ts in Cameroon

Session 3: Cultural concepts

Readings:


Module 2: Methods and Procedures in Development and Social Change Research

This module critically examines the foundational procedures and methodologies used in development and social change research in anticipation of the Independent Study Project (ISP). This encompasses data derived from both primary and secondary sources. By the end of the module, students will have acquired the fundamental methodological tools and techniques to both carry out undergraduate level independent research in Cameroon as well as the capacity to assess their application to research currently in print. Session topics include:

**Session 1:** Drop off and debriefing – introduction to independent research
**Session 2:** Choosing a topic, writing research objectives and hypotheses
**Session 3:** Interviewing
**Session 4:** Observation
**Session 5:** Questionnaire design and implementation

Readings:


**Module 3: Ethical Issues in Development and Social Change Research in Cameroon**

This module interrogates and informs students of the ethical issues, considerations and challenges in ethically sound fieldwork in Cameroon.

**Session 1:** Reciprocity and action-based research  
**Session 2:** SIT’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and SIT’s Local Review Board (LRB)  
**Session 3:** Case-studies in ethical fieldwork  
**Session 4:** Reflexivity, positionality, and power  
**Session 5:** Privilege and carrying out research in Cameroon

**Readings**  


**Module 4: Data Analysis**

**Session 1:** Transcribing  
**Session 2:** Organizing your data  
**Session 3:** Coding

**Readings:**  


Copyright © SIT, a program of World Learning


Module 5: Writing and Presenting your paper
By this time, you are expected to have fully developed you research topic and a working thesis to be submitted for approval by the local review board. You initial findings will be edited, critiqued, and as a result, improved, before final data, analysis, and findings are submitted. We will provide information on the expectations to write an ISP proposal and paper.

Session 1: Writing the ISP proposal
Session 2: Writing the ISP paper
Session 3: Presenting a paper

Readings:

Orwell, George. (1946) “Politics and the English Language”
https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/orwell46.htm

Evaluation and Grading Criteria
Course Requirements
Research Methods and Ethics classes will be held throughout the semester and include field-based activities during orientation week, and the rest of the semester. Students will carry out a research project - Integrated Development Issue (IDI) - throughout the course in order to practice different theories and methods learned in class. Individual meetings will take place throughout the semester with the academic director (AD) to give specific guidance on the formation, development, and execution of the Independent Study Project. Each student will also be assigned an advisor who will be an additional resource to guide you through the articulation of your research question and help you identify important in-country resources.

Readings
Assigned readings are listed in the Course Schedule section, above. Students are responsible for all the required readings and should be prepared to bring them to bear in class discussions. The readings will help to place the classes in their context, challenge and engage lecturers, generate questions for class discussions, and deepen student knowledge of particular aspects discussed in class.

Copyright © SIT, a program of World Learning
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.

Research Methods and Ethics Assignments
Timely completion of all assignments is expected, and students can submit assignments in either English or French. Late assignments will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, presentation of evidence, proper citation and clear formatting.

Evaluation
Interview and observation 20%
Case studies in methods and ethics 20%
IDI Methodology paper 30%
ISP Final Proposal 20%
Participation 10%
Total 100%

Interview and Observation:
You are to conduct participant observation in your homestay. You could observe meal times, children involved in household chores, general family interactions or watch TV. Report on what you observed following specific guidelines outlined in the methods class. The goal of the assignment is to get you to acquire practical experience on a topic that was discussed in class and, more importantly, to solidify your understanding of the different steps involved in conducting and reporting your observations in research settings.

For the same purpose of providing structured research experiences, you will conduct two interviews designed to gather information about ethnic identity (from two different groups) in Cameroon with informants with whom you are not familiar prior to the interview. The goal is to help you apply and refine the interview techniques discussed in class. This will also add additional data to your knowledge of the cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. You must transcribe both interviews and submit the report for grading. Additionally, you must also discuss the challenges and triumphs of the entire interview process and how you might approach this method for gathering information differently for your final ISP.

Case Studies in Methods and Ethics:
Case studies assignments will be held in class. Groups of students will be given case studies that involve ethical issues to analyze and discuss. Students will then present their case study and discuss the ways in which these issues could be addressed and/or avoided.

IDI methodology paper:
Students write a 5-7 page method paper for the development studies assignment on integrated development issues, describing and explaining the process of topic formation, selection, data collection, data analysis, and ethical concerns. This assignment helps students prepare effectively for their Independent Study Project by helping them refine their research skills.

ISP Final Proposal:
The ISP proposal consists of three documents. First is the formal proposal outlining your research methodology, objectives, target and sample population as well as a preliminary bibliography.
Secondly, you must include your ISP site location which is where you provide information (after validation by the AD) about all research-related trips and contact numbers of your hosts. The last document will review all ethical issues rooted in your topic and location, as well as how you will ensure that you will respect and protect all “informants”.

**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.

**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. In terms of Class Participation, an “A” grade refers to full 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. The level, frequency, and quality of the students’ participation will be monitored and taken into account.

Your name, date, name of the assignment, and the title of the paper (if applicable) are required always. All assignments should be submitted on standard size paper (A4 or US letter size), free from fraying or tears, and typed or written neatly in ink (when applicable for the latter). Remember to proofread all assignments for clarity, organization, spelling, grammar, etc., as these are taken into account for the final grade. Assignments can be written in French or English, unless specified. Grammatical errors in French will not affect students’ grades as long as ideas can be clearly understood.

**Student Expectations**

**Class Participation**
Students are expected to participate fully in all program components. This includes participating in classroom discussions, all outside of class activities, and all group assignments.

**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.