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
The Research Methods and Ethics course is designed to prepare students to undertake independent field-based research or an internship experience in a development organization within Uganda’s cultural setting. Readings and activities are designed to build skills in qualitative research methods, and participatory methods, as well as project selection and refinement in Uganda. Students consider the norms and expectations of ethical field engagement and reciprocity, while reflecting critically on their role as outsiders in the research process.

In addition, the course provides the theoretical and practical frameworks to facilitate successful adjustment to life in Uganda and to enhance student capacity to accomplish challenging tasks in new and unfamiliar settings while conducting independent field-based research or engaging in a practicum that is ethically, methodologically and analytically sound.

Students should use the assigned readings and scheduled processing sessions to discuss cultural adjustment and insights, and generate talking points that the course assignments raise while integrating these and illustrating them with their daily field experiences.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to function effectively and comfortably in a range of social, cultural and institutional contexts within Uganda;
• Apply knowledge of different research approaches and research tools needed for development studies in Uganda, with an emphasis on qualitative and participatory approaches;
• Exhibit awareness of the practical considerations and challenges inherent in development policy research work in the Ugandan context;
• Develop a culturally-appropriate and intellectually-rigorous ISP proposal grounded in current debates and relevant literature; and
• Engage in an Independent Study Project (ISP) in Uganda using appropriate methods in an ethical manner.

Course Requirements
The Research Methods and Ethics course integrates lectures, readings, and related discussions, including those associated with the Development Studies Seminar and Luganda language instruction. Discussions about aspects of daily life, including your reactions to the overall cultural environment and relevant program components, are included in the curriculum. The course includes a focus on the structures for community work, entry points and methods of entry, change agents, and community participation. Field visits to communities in western and/or eastern Uganda provide students with opportunities to practice skills in ethnographic research approaches.

Students have individual sessions with the academic director to brainstorm possibilities and to obtain guidance as their ISP ideas and plans evolve.

Modules and Readings
The readings will help students generate questions and will deepen your knowledge of particular aspects of Uganda’s culture and development. In addition to the readings listed below, additional materials on field research methodologies and cross-cultural adjustment are available in the resource center and will be assigned based on individual student ISP interests.

Module 1: Drop-offs: Coping with Life in Kampala

Each student pair is assigned one of the following topics regarding life and culture in Kampala: transport, banking, forex bureaus, markets, communications, restaurants/eating, the media (broadcast and print), clinics and hospitals, entertainment. This day-long assignment is intended to provide you with hands-on experience with data collection in Kampala, to help with the adjustment process and cross-cultural coping skills. You are expected to be creative (using a combination of data collection tools) in gathering all the necessary information. As you investigate your topics, pay close attention to behaviors, communication styles, and details about the environment. You will report the details of your observations to the rest of the group at the end of each exercise. Your grade will be based on the level of description, detailed information, evidence of engagement, and depth of cultural analysis with your topic as evidenced by the oral presentation.
Module 2: Cultural Adjustment: Challenges and Coping Strategies

What challenges have you encountered since arrival in Uganda and in your homestay? What strategies have you employed and might you employ to overcome these challenges?


Module 3: Exploring and Examining the Dominant Research Paradigms

These articles may be read as methodological critiques of the dominant research paradigm. We will begin the class by brainstorming the assumptions and nature of the dominant research paradigm and then follow this by examining the critiques that each of these readings makes about the dominant research paradigm. We will glean what implications they make for development policy research and for our own practicum/ISP projects.


Module 4: Participant Observation and Thick Description

This module picks up from the previous module to explore the ways in which ethnography and participant observation addresses some of the criticism of the dominant research paradigm. We will discuss some of the practical joys and challenges of conducting ethnography in a Ugandan cultural setting.


Module 5: Participant Observation and Thick Description II

This module continues the discussions on participant observation and ethnography from the previous week. We delve deeper into participant observation as a method, introduce Clifford Geertz’s thick description/taking ethnographic notes and brainstorm ideas regarding how to use this method effectively in a rural Ugandan setting in preparation for the rural homestay.

Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture in Geertz Clifford (1973) “The Interpretation of Cultures Selected Essays”. Basic Books Inc,


Module 6: Data Collection Methods: Focus Groups Interviewing in the Ugandan Cultural Context

This module will cover ways of conducting interviews effectively in a Uganda cultural setting. Topics to be covered include communicating and building rapport effectively and in culturally appropriate ways and employing research assistance.


Module 7: Constructing Data Collection Tools and Data Management

This module explores the processes of constructing quantitative and qualitative data collection tools and preliminary steps of managing and analyzing your primary data.

Module 8: Research Ethics and Ethical Challenges in Research/Practicum Sites

We explore Uganda and SIT research ethics policy and discuss some practical field based ethical dilemmas


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Module 9: Writing Your Thesis

Each student should select two practicum papers from the SIT resource and do a comparative critique

Assign 1 article on writing your thesis (TBA)

Assignments (see program schedule for due dates):

- Family Tree: 10%
- Village Map: 10%
- Participant Observation and Thick Description Paper (methods section): 30%
- Practicum Proposal: 30%
- Processing Sessions: 10%
- Participation: 10%

Family Tree:
Initiate a conversation with adult family members about their family tree. Through this conversation you will get introduced to your homestay family and you will explore Uganda’s family structure. Beyond this however you begin to gain insights into social relations and how they both shape and are shaped by non-capitalist relations of production. In addition you begin to practice and gain insights into cultural norms regarding communication: breaking the ice, use of silence and pauses, vocabulary and other communication barriers. The experience of this assignment will inform conversation in the thematic seminar and in the RME seminar. Your paper should be written in two sections. Section one describes the family structure; section two you will reflect on the process of conducting this assignment: what worked well and what did not; strategies that you employed to ensure you were successful.

Village Map:
Find a village leader in your homestay area and explore with them the important social and economic infrastructure in their village; when it was established, what purposes it serves, who owns/manages it and how it is financed and maintained. This assignment helps students to practice further interviewing skills, and the process of collecting data in a semi urban setting. It builds upon some of the principles and methods of data collection that we cover in the RME seminar. In addition it helps students to explore the social infrastructure and physical surrounding of their homestay setting. Your paper should have a map of the area and a two-page typed reflection of the process through which you gathered your data. Consider what worked and what did not work and why. Font 12, double spaced.

Participant Observation and Thick Description paper (methods section):
Compose an analytical reflection of participant observation and thick description as methods of data collection in a rural setting such as Uganda. What potential does participant observation and thick description have over and above conventional/dominant
research methods? What challenges did you encounter and how did you mitigate/overcome them? Typed, five pages, double spaced, font 12, one-inch margins.

**Practicum proposal:**
Finding a topic for your research-based ISP or a site for your practicum-based ISP may be a very challenging and a very enriching, learning experience. Students are encouraged to begin thinking through their ISP ideas from the beginning of the semester and to utilize all available resources: homestay family members, lecturers, development practitioners, and program staff. Time slots will be available for one-on-one meetings with the academic director to discuss the possibilities and the process of finalizing your topic or placement. Students will keep an ISP planning journal for this purpose to record ideas, leads, contacts, and details of developing their practicum. This is to help you, and will not be for submission. The outcome of this journal will be a detailed 3-5 page ISP proposal. For practicum-based ISPs, the proposal indicates the organization you will work with, their mission, what your role will be throughout the ISP, information about your practicum advisor, what you hope to accomplish, why, and your proposed itinerary.

**Processing sessions:**
These are student-led discussion sessions, about 1 ½ hours long. Students gauge the key issues in the group since the previous processing session and facilitate a discussion around these issues. Examples include group dynamics, cultural adjustment, homestay issues, health and safety, site visits, readings, lectures etc. It may even be a single issue, if it should be one of much importance within the group. You could use games, activities of the like that you have used before in summer camp or in school. You could break up into smaller groups to facilitate discussion. The choice of what and how you do it is entirely yours. The processing session is a safe, open space for students to do what they think is important to the group. 10%, see below for the detailed due dates.

**Attendance & Participation**
This class draws heavily upon student participation. Students are expected to be well prepared to share with colleagues and the instructor! At a minimum, you are expected to be on time for attendance at all classes, be prepared to discuss readings, actively engage in field assignments, and meet all deadlines. You are also expected to show initiative in meeting with the academic director to discuss your practicum and any concerns you may have (be prepared in advance for these meetings), establish and keep meetings with your ISP advisor and/or members of the organization with which you will work, and be professional, culturally appropriate, and respectful in your work.