Course Description
The Research Methods and Ethics seminar (RME) provides the theoretical, conceptual, and practical tools for conducting field research in a new cultural environment. The main emphasis of the seminar is on the development of interactive research skills involving the collection of primary data. The theoretical part of the seminar includes lectures on qualitative methods of research in social sciences and in particular in international relations, interactive research techniques, and the development of a research proposal. The seminar also includes a number of practical exercises such as the organization and conduct of interviews with experts in Switzerland, France and Belgium, development of a research proposal, preparation of an application for review of research with Human Subjects, a local case study, and the integration of interviews into a research project. The ethical implications of field research will be examined throughout. The seminar helps develop the skills necessary to navigate both the local and international environments of Switzerland. Students undertake a number of field visits to learn the specificities of local and international culture and institutions. The overall aim is to enable students to master experience-based learning processes and prepare them for the development of an Independent Study Project (ISP), which is largely based on the data gathered from primary sources.

Learning Outcomes
The Research Methods and Ethics course comprises 45 class hours of instruction (3 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate awareness of the impact of researcher’s positionality on the research projects;
- Develop capability to formulate a clear research problem and question, carry out a literature review, and identify relevant experts for primary data collection;
- Develop networking and organizational skills for interactive research in the local and international environments in Geneva;
- Apply qualitative research techniques such as participant observation and advanced interviewing to collect data;
• Demonstrate capacity to synthesize information gathered from primary and secondary sources and integrate it into the research project;
• Demonstrate awareness of ethical issues in the context of field research in another culture;
• Produce an Independent Study Project proposal and an application for review of ISP research with human subjects to be approved by the Local Review Board/SIT Institutional Review Board.

Language of Instruction
The seminar is taught in English, but students will be simultaneously learning French. Students are expected to read the French press and academic articles in French related to the seminar.

Course Schedule

Module 1: Experiential Learning and Positionality | Discovering Swiss Culture and International Geneva
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. This module helps students become reflexive researchers who are attentive to their own positionality in relation to the local communities in which they engage for their research.

Session 1: A Historical Introduction to the “Geneva Spirit of Peace”: Field Visit
This field visit conducted by a professional historian who introduces students to the history of Geneva. It includes the visit of the heritage sites of national and international importance around the old town of Geneva. Students discover the history of the “Geneva Spirit of Peace” and learn about the city’s humanitarian tradition.

Required Reading:

Session 2: Studying in a New Environment: Swiss Culture
This session introduces students to the local culture context, Swiss etiquette, and customs. Students will learn about their new environment, most particularly their homestay neighborhood and homestay family.

Session 3: Switzerland: History, Culture, Society, and Identity: Field Visit
To learn more about Swiss culture, students visit the Museum of the Swiss Abroad. Dr. Zurfluh, a leading expert on Swiss history and culture and Director of the Museum, lectures on the historical, cultural, and political specificities of Switzerland. The session concludes with a discussion on the current Swiss issues such as bank secrecy, direct democracy, cultural diversity, and neutrality.

Required Reading:

**Recommended Reading:**

**Session 4: Field visit to the United Nations**
Students visit the site of the “Palace of Nations,” the European Headquarters of the United Nations. They learn about the origins of the UN system, the current structure of the organization, and the issue areas covered by it. Students will also meet the UN librarians to learn how to access the exceptional resources of the UN library.

**Required Reading:**

**Organization Drop-Off: Field Assignment**
The purpose of this assignment is to visit an organization based in Geneva to learn about its areas of focus and programs. The objectives of this assignment are:
- to become more familiar with Geneva and its international community;
- to learn about the NGOs, think tanks, and international organizations based in Geneva;
- to develop networking strategies in Geneva and get a first experience with interviewing techniques;
- to work effectively in a team;
- to learn to navigate in the city.

**Session 5: 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:**

**Session 6: Lausanne, Capital of Canton de Vaud: Field Visit**
This field visit to Lausanne, the capital of the Canton de Vaud, where students reside during the program, provides the opportunity to expand the understanding of the local Swiss culture. The city is home to the International Olympic Committee and the historical site of the interwar international peace conferences. The visit includes a tour of the Olympic Museum.

**Module 2: Methodology and Ethics**
This module focuses on the tools and methods required for conducting field research in observance of the ethics and value systems of the local community. The module will also walk the students through the preparation process of their ISP proposal, the LRB (Local Review Board) process, and the application for human subjects review (HSR application).

**Session 1: Introduction to Research Methods in Social Sciences and International Relations | Ethics and Research**
This session provides a comprehensive introduction to qualitative research methods in social sciences and international relations. The session covers criteria in social research, theoretical, epistemological and ontological considerations in research, and discusses values and positionality of the researcher. It provides an overview of the step by step process in developing a research project from the formulation of a research question, conducting a literature review, and the selection of appropriate research methods to the selection of approaches to data collection and analysis and the formulation of conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The session provides an in-depth introduction to ethical issues in research and obligations to human subjects.

Required Reading:

Session 2: Designing a Research Project
This session provides a practical introduction on how to design and develop a research project. It involves the formulation and refinement of the research question(s), the description of the problem, preparation of a literature review with the use of critical and analytical methods, and the integration of interview quotes into the research project. The session also covers the project management basics and the preparation of a work journal and an HSR application. Students choose a topic and rehearse how to develop research questions for their ISP projects.

Required Reading:

Session 3: ISP Applied Methodology
This session, which takes place at the beginning of the ISP period, provides an overview of the requirements of an ISP. It explains the rationale and the sequence of the theoretical and practical sessions which help develop the skills necessary for a successful design and delivery of the ISP. The session also covers the effective strategies of time management, networking strategies, and the ISP evaluation criteria. It also explains the core requirements in relation to the ISP presentations, which take place at the end of the semester.

Required Reading:

Session 4: Individual ISP Advising Sessions
The objective of the individual advising sessions is to allow students to discuss the ISP topic, the research question, and the interactive research strategies with the academic director and advisor, and to guide them in the process of preparation of a coherent ISP final proposal. Further meetings are organized during the ISP period to discuss the research progress.

ISP Final Proposal with Application of Review of ISP Research with Human Subjects
Applying different skills developed throughout this second module, students write an Independent Study Project final proposal (five pages), which includes a title, research question(s), description of research
methodology, field research design (including possible interviews), and bibliography (with a minimum of eight sources for the final proposal). Final ISP proposals must be submitted with the application of review of ISP research with human subjects.

Module 3: Doing Field Research on International Relations in Geneva/Paris/Brussels
This module provides a comprehensive overview of field research techniques with a particular focus on interviewing techniques and looks at the practical application of international relations theories in research. It focuses on the case of research in Geneva and the challenges of connecting with diplomats and professionals at international organizations. The module also includes two case studies: Islam in Europe and small states in International Relations.

Session 1: Field Research Techniques
This session provides an overview of the different field research techniques, such as interviews, networking strategies, and the best practices of how to contact experts in the international environment of Geneva as well as in Paris and Brussels. Students are also briefed on the “Short Research Project with the Integration of an Interview” carried out in Brussels or Paris.

Required Reading:

Session 2: LCS Individual Meeting
An individual meeting is organized with students to discuss their Local Case Study (LCS) proposal and to identify targeted research settings for this exercise.

Required Reading:

Session 3: Practical Approaches to the Study of International Relations (Including Interdisciplinary Approaches)
This session first provides a brief overview of the core theories of international relations and theoretical debates. Then it discusses practical ways of applying IR theories in research.

Required Reading:

Session 4: Religion and Politics: Islam in Europe
The objective of this session is to discuss the influence of religion on politics with a focus on Islam in the evolving political context of Europe.

Required Reading:

Recommended Reading:
Session 5: Small States in the International System: The Case of Belgium
This session seeks to examine the role of small states in the international system with a focus on Belgium. It also introduces the political system of the country.

Required Reading:

Session 6: Workshop “Conducting Field Research: Sharing Best Practices”
The objective of this workshop is to allow students to share best practices and to debrief on their individual experiences in field research after the Paris/Brussels interview exercise.

Short Research Project with the Integration of an Interview in Brussels/Paris | Study Trip
Students develop a five-page research project on a topic related to their ISP (or another theme related to the SPS or IRMD seminars) with the integration of at least one interview carried out in Paris or Brussels. Special attention is paid to the identification of the research question, the selection of interview questions, and the integration of quotes in the research paper.

Local Case Study (LCS)
The purpose of this exercise is to document students’ observations, interpretations, and evaluations of a local cultural phenomenon in its sociopolitical context. This final assignment requires students to apply different skills developed in this seminar to write a ten-page research report which includes a minimum of five face-to-face interviews.

Student Evaluation and Grading Criteria
Description of Assignments:

Short Research Project with Integration of an Interview in Brussels/Paris: Students develop a short research project (five pages) on a topic related to their ISP (or another theme related to the SPS or IRMD seminars) with the integration of at least one interview carried out in Paris or Brussels.

ISP final proposal: Applying different skills developed throughout this second module, students write a five-page Independent Study Project final proposal, which includes a title, research question(s), description of research methodology, field research design (possible interviews), and bibliography (with a minimum of eight sources for the final proposal). Final ISP proposals must be submitted with the application of review of ISP research with human subjects.

Local Case Study Research Report: The purpose of this exercise is to document students’ observations, interpretations, and evaluations of a local cultural phenomenon in its sociopolitical context. This final
assignment requires students to apply all the different skills developed in this seminar to develop a ten-page research report which includes a minimum of five face-to-face interviews.

Assessment:
- Participation 10%
- ISP Final Proposal with Application of Review of ISP Research with Human Subjects 30%
- Short Research Project with Integration of an Interview in Brussels/Paris 30%
- Local Case Study Research Report 30%

Grading Scale
94-100% A Excellent
90-93% A-
87-89% B+
84-86% B Above Average
80-83% B-
77-79% C+
74-76% C Average
70-73% C-
67-69% D+
64-66% D Below Average
below 64% F Fail

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 done 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.