



## Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 (4 Credits / 120 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Tunisia and Italy: Politics and Religious Integration in the Mediterranean

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 Independent Study Project (ISP) is a self-designed research project offering students the opportunity to undertake a personally significant and independent investigation. The ISP is the academic component in which the student most directly applies the concepts, skills, tools, and techniques of experience-based learning articulated through the courses on Research Methods and Ethics, Immigration, Politics, and Religion in the Euro-Mediterranean Space, as well as Rethinking Politics and Religion in the Mediterranean, and intensive Arabic, while enabling students to further integrate the skills and contacts developed in the homestay and in the broader community. Each student will plan, develop, and independently undertake a research project, with the advice and guidance of the academic director and an ISP advisor—a local academic and/or experienced field professional. The topic of study may be anything of interest to the student, within the scope of the program and the immediate region, and is usually developed out of lectures, discussions, and educational excursions. Although the last four weeks of the program are set aside for the major effort on the ISP, considerable planning and preparation is spent on it from the very beginning. The final ISP paper should provide material evidence of student capability in utilizing appropriate methodologies and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. Students are expected to complete 120 hours of field-based (non-archival, non-library) research on their topic, submit a substantial written paper, and deliver an accompanying oral presentation. It is not uncommon for ISPs to strongly contribute to the student's choice of subject for graduate studies or professional career.

### Course Objectives

The Independent Study Project encompasses 120 academic hours (4 credits). The main objectives of the ISP are:

- To provide students with the opportunity to study in-depth the impact, challenges, and benefits of Western modernity and its latest manifestation, globalization, in Tunisia;
- To provoke creative and critical thinking in students, while allowing them to integrate information from different sources into a coherent work;
- To stimulate independent thought and academic responsibility among participants; encourage intellectual curiosity and motivation;

- To promote opportunities for continual awareness of the ethics of field research and cultural learning, particularly in terms of interaction and reciprocity.

## **Expected Outcomes**

Upon completion of the Independent Study Project, students will:

- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of modernity and/or tradition in Tunisia;
- Gain competence in the processes of independent, primary, research—from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies, to final analyses and interpretations of data;
- Develop a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by field researchers;
- Demonstrate independence and self-confidence while functioning in Tunisian daily life;
- Produce an ISP paper with an average length of 25-45 pages in total observance of the norms of ethics shared by the host culture and the international academic community.

## **Course Requirements**

As the ISP is the academic culmination of the learning experience, students are encouraged to start thinking actively about their research topic as early in the program as possible. All components of the program, beginning with orientation and including the research methods an ethics, thematic courses, homestay, educational excursions, intensive Arabic, and associated forms of cultural interaction within the host society, must be used diligently to refine and deepen this thinking.

Ongoing discussion with the academic director, while primarily concerning the research topic, must also enable students to identify available resources, including an appropriate research supervisor from among local faculty. Ultimately, the successful completion of the independent study project depends, to no small degree, on the methodological rigor, originality, and sophistication with which a student has attended to the research topic. For their ISP, students may write an essay or express their ideas through other media such as photography, creative writing, visual performance, or any other form approved by the academic director.

All ISP topics must receive advanced approval by the academic director. Students are required to submit formal research proposals outlining their ISP topic, methodologies, and the plan for implementation to ensure that the project is conducted in an ethical, responsible, and culturally appropriate manner. The ISP must give evidence that the student has mastered the methodological and critical tools, as well as culturally and ethically appropriate techniques, of data generation and analysis.

## **Readings**

While the majority of the ISP work should be conducted in the field, readings in preparation for, and throughout the ISP period, are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study.

## **ISP Guidelines and Requirements**

The student will spend a minimum of 120 hours on the ISP with a majority of this work conducted in the field (as opposed to library research, for example). This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, participating, making field observations, writing, and meeting with the academic director and advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least 3-5 individual advising meetings to review their ISP proposal and ISP planning. Periodic progress conferences will be held with the academic director, as needed. Unless approved for an alternative ISP, the final product is a typed and bound 30-40 page academic paper, double-spaced, with 12-point standard font. In addition, a 20-30 minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analyses will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the academic director, the project advisors, and other invited guests.

## **Guidelines for ISP Proposal**

Before embarking on your ISP project, you need to submit a one-page proposal in which you explain:

- I. Your thesis.

2. The methodology you will use to collect information and analyze it.
3. Where and/or from whom you will collect information.
4. What secondary sources you have consulted or will consult.
5. The kind of ethical issues you face or will face while doing your research.
6. What resource persons (including a possible advisor) you have contacted or will contact.

### **Human Subjects Review**

All ISP proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, students are required to submit an “Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects,” to include a discussion of any potential harm that might come from the study, and to provide appendices including interview and survey protocols. If the academic director or Local review Board believes that the proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, the student will be asked to revise their proposal. Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic practice.

If the research has been funded by a US government agency, or if the student plans to take this research back to the home school or community for further dissemination, then the student must follow more stringent standards, i.e., not only those of the host community, but also those of the Office for Human Research Protections, with which SIT is registered. Any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the Local Review Board) are forwarded to SIT’s Institutional Review Board for review.

### **Some recent ISP topic areas include:**

- How to Sever the Arms of the Octopus: Tunisia’s Ongoing Revolution
- Past, Present and Future State of Reproductive Health in Tunisia
- Tourism Carthage: The Revolutionary Art: Street Art before and after the Tunisian Revolution
- A Mysterious Voyage: Illegal Immigration from Tunisia after the Jasmine Revolution
- Women’s Organizations in Tunisia: Transforming Feminist Discourse in a Transitioning State
- Political Islam in Tunisia: The Public Point of View

### **Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

At the end of the ISP period, students are expected to present their work to the group and the academic advisor. Timely completion of all ISP assignments is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the quality of expression, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and adherence to the highest ethical standards. During the process of planning, developing, executing and presenting the ISP, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Tunisia and in cooperation with institutions and advisors;
- Develop a logical and coherent framework for the study project, and clearly justify how the chosen topic lies within the scope of the program and region;
- Critically discuss and evaluate available and relevant theories, papers, and published materials on the proposed project;
- Clearly present the main objectives of the project, further developing them when needed;
- Present and justify a reasonable methodological framework to achieve the proposed objectives;
- Critically describe the data collected, analysis performed, and results;
- Present and discuss problems, findings and conclusions based on the methods used, data and information collected, and/or analysis performed;
- Be able to present all steps of the project clearly and coherently in a written and oral format for an independent audience.

In general, the criteria for ISP evaluation include the student's methods and effectiveness in gathering information, organization, assimilation, accuracy, analysis of the information, the effectiveness of expression and communication in the final form, and clarity and strength of project presentation and defense. The paper is graded as follows:

ISP Final Paper	60%
ISP Project Oral Presentation	20%
ISP Paper Defense	20%

**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

I	=	Incomplete
W	=	Withdrawal (Student initiated)
AW	=	Administrative withdrawal

### Grading Criteria

An "A" grade for an assignment entails superior (not just "very good") performance—in terms of structure and organization—of both the written paper and oral presentation, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence.

### Role of Academic Director and ISP Advisor

The two individuals who work most closely with each student on the project are the academic director and the ISP advisor. The AD advises students on methodology, background reading, and in-country contacts which the students will be encouraged to pursue. The academic director, in consultation with the in-country advisor, evaluates the completed project and assigns the grade.

The ISP advisor's precise role may vary according to particular circumstances. In general, the individual selected for this role should be a host national or long-time foreign resident in the country, who has expertise in the student's field of interest and works with the student (and, to some extent, the academic director) on design, implementation, and evaluation of the ISP. The project advisor may be a host-country academician, field professional, artisan, or topical informant. The role may be more or less directive or consultative, depending on the student and the need. Finding an advisor is the responsibility of the student, but the AD will assist and must approve the advisor. Occasionally, a student may have more than one advisor/consultant, one of whom may be from outside the host country. The main purpose of an advisor, beyond providing needed expertise, is to provide students with the experience of working closely with **local** professionals.

Students will generally meet with the ISP advisor several times throughout the semester. The first session is likely to be devoted to an exploration of the student's background in the subject area, his or her topic of study, the preliminary project proposal, and how the project fits into the student's undergraduate curriculum and broader interests. Various methodologies introduced during the Research Methods and Ethics course should also be discussed. Advisor and student will agree on specific requirements (to be

submitted to the academic director for approval) and on an initial plan of action. The following sessions (which can be conducted in person, over the phone, or by email) should be devoted to a discussion of student progress and resolution of any difficulties. The final session, at the conclusion of the program, will be an evaluation of the final product, which will have been submitted to the advisor beforehand. It is the student's responsibility to secure and keep appointments with the project advisor.

## **Student Expectations**

### **Responsibilities when conducting fieldwork:**

- Students must respect, protect, and promote the rights and welfare of all those contributing to, and affected by, their work by protecting the privacy and dignity of the people and communities with whom they conduct field study.
- The right of those providing information to students to either remain anonymous, or to receive recognition, must be scrupulously defended and respected.
- Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive and must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in culturally appropriate ways.
- Students must record and represent accurately all aspects of the field study. This includes not representing as their own work—either in spoken or written form—materials and ideas directly obtained from other sources.

**Student research** is a product of fieldwork and, as such, students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical fieldwork, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore, copies of ISPs are returned to the sponsoring institutions and the host communities, at the discretion of the institution(s) and/or community involved. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad may archive, copy, or convert the ISP for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives the ISP in the permanent collection at the SIT Study Abroad local country program office and/or at any World Learning office. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad has a non-exclusive, perpetual right to store and make available, including electronic online open access, to the ISP. Students retain all ownership rights of the ISP product and retain the right to use all, or part, of the project in future works. Please refer to the Student Handbook or the Access, Use, and Publication of ISP form.

**Academic Policies:** SIT prides itself on providing students with an experientially based program; we hold ourselves, and our students, to the highest of academic standards. Students are asked to refer to the **SIT Study Abroad Handbook** for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process.

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto:disabilityservices@sit.edu) for information and support in facilitating an accessible educational experience. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services, including a link to the online request form, can be found on the Disability Services website at <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices>.