



COURSE SYLLABUS

Field Methods and Ethics

ANTH-3500 (3 Credits/45 Hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Nepal: Development and Social Change

Course Description

Field Methods and Ethics (FME) is the common core course across SIT Study Abroad programs. This course provides the conceptual and methodological tools that enable students to learn from experience, to apply the knowledge and skills gained in language study and the Thematic Course, and to prepare to undertake field study in a foreign culture. At the end of the FME, the student should have the cultural understanding and the methodological skills to complete his/her Independent Study Project successfully.

The course aims to give students adequate theoretical foundations for and guided practical experience in conducting research in Nepal. Through a series of field projects, short assignments, workshops, and in-depth Independent Study Project (ISP) proposal development sessions, students gain skills in both quantitative and qualitative techniques such as observation and note-taking, participant-observation, formal and informal interviewing, mapping, surveys, and other ethnographic methods.

Initial methodology sessions conducted during orientation are continued during the homestay experience. Methodological and ethical issues are also raised in connection with the Thematic Seminar lectures and field projects and excursions during the semester. The result is the development of cross-cultural and observational skills that prepare the student to conduct a successful ISP.

A week-long FME excursion to either the Tarai or the Chitwan begins the process of familiarizing students with the practice of various fieldwork techniques in a cross-cultural setting and emphasizes discussion of the ethical and methodological issues confronting the fieldworker/student. A longer field excursion to a location outside of the Kathmandu Valley follows up with practical execution of the techniques and analysis of the fieldwork process. By considering place and space and issues of power and representation, the course includes in-depth coverage of the important ethical issues for the fieldworker, and students are made fully aware of SIT's IRB/LRB policies and procedures along with the important topics of informed consent, confidentiality, and reciprocity. The course culminates in the development of an ethically sound proposal for the one-month ISP, which is expected to combine primary and secondary courses in a written and oral presentation. Critical reflection is stressed throughout the course, and students are encouraged to be self-reflective regarding their position as student researchers in Nepal.

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Course Objectives:

1. Create awareness of experience-based learning processes outside an institutional structure, and to develop confidence and initiative in learning from experience;
2. Develop independent research skills, especially how to function, conduct research, and cope with logistical issues in Nepali context;;
3. Develop a basic research “toolbox” of basic skills in various methods of field study, including participant observation, ethnographic interviewing, note-taking and transcription, and keeping a field journal.
4. Assist in developing an ISP topic and methodology that are realistic within the constraints of time and resources, appropriate, and that will yield an interesting and academically rigorous project beneficial to the community and/or organization studied.
5. Develop ability to work with primary sources in the field, such as material gained through observation and interviews.
6. Form skill and understanding about the basic mechanics and politics involved in crafting competitive research proposals.

Expected Outcomes:

As a result of the FME course, the student will be able to

- utilize basic ethnographic and fieldwork methods that may include note-taking and transcription, participant observation, kinship charting, 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 as a material product
- navigate the Nepali cultural, social, and bureaucratic landscapes and apply research and language skills
- demonstrate and articulate critical insights and knowledge on a particular topic in an oral presentation

Course Overview:

The FME seminar is composed of a series of exercises, activities, and assignments to enable students to meet the above objectives. Essential in beginning cross-cultural study in South Asia is for students to understand the history of the Orientalist approaches, and thus a theoretical background is developed through reading and discussion during the first week. Students are asked to reflect upon and critically examine their role within the complex histories of research in the Subcontinent.

Starting in Orientation, students start identifying and refining potential ISP projects through a series of draft proposals. As students learn and understand more about Nepal’s development and social change, these draft proposals will evolve and become more refined. Students are required to meet with the Academic Director throughout the course to discuss their ideas, and it is expected that their final proposals will reflect overall academic sophistication and precise and clearly articulated methodology sections, as evidence of their FME learning

In addition, FME consists of at least three phases, organized around developing perceptions of local culture and topics.

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1. In the **orientation** phase (the first few weeks of the program) FME field exercises and seminars focus on getting students out into the "field" to engage in participatory field-based learning and to develop a sense of empowerment and confidence in their ability to learn from experience.
2. In the **acculturation** phase (usually lasting 4-5 weeks after orientation), when students are living in homestay families and have begun intensive language training and the Thematic Course(s), FME focuses on exercises and seminars to develop contexts for understanding, and to provide the tools for students to process accumulating perceptions of the local culture. Emphasis is also placed on practical field skills to combat common roadblocks to field research in Nepal. Students participate in field activities in data collection and triangulation in Nepal, tracking down sources and informants, and practical logistics.
3. In the **ISP Preparation** phase (in the 4-5 weeks preceding the ISP period), the FME focus shifts more specifically to the ISP. Field exercises and seminars (and individual conferences with AD and ISP advisor) teach students to search out and deal with primary sources in the field, and help them in making final ISP plans (study proposal, resource search, methodology, IRB Application). Students begin to take the lead role in developing plans and proposals.

Excursions provide opportunities for FME practicums and experiential learning. Both formal and informal interviewing techniques are introduced before the first rural excursion, either to the tarai or to the Chitwan, and the focus of this excursion is on execution of these methods. Students are required to complete at least two interviews, both individually and as a group. Attention is paid to developing relevant, appropriate, and accessible questions within the specific setting, and developing sensitivity to the nuances of cross-cultural communication. *Process* rather than *product* is the theme of the excursion, and sessions include interviewing and ethnography.

The final rural village excursion is structured somewhat like a mini-ISP and requires students to work independently during the ten-day stay in the village. The assignment combines themes explored in the Seminar with a thorough analysis of the village as it is encountered in the present. Students are required to undertake three to four hours of self-directed fieldwork daily, and the final oral presentations are delivered before an audience consisting of village locals, teachers and the Academic Director. The Village Fieldwork Journals must show evidence of the use of a variety of techniques, including interviews conducted both with and without translation assistance.

The final phase of the FME course is the completion of a focused and detailed ISP proposal including an abstract, an introduction, a discussion, a literature review, a methodology section and all the accompanying materials for IRB review.

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Requirements and Assignments

Objectives:

- To begin to employ a “toolbox” of fieldwork techniques to gather information.
- To gain confidence in approaching Nepalese as informants.

Assignments Overview:

- 1) **Fieldwork Journal:** Students will keep a field journal, separate from a personal journal, with entries integrating experiential accounts of cultural events, lecture and reading notes, and reflection. This journal will be the methodological foundation for all your assignments and your separate ISP journal.
- 2) **ISP Proposals:** A progressively sophisticated series of 5-6 page (double spaced) ISP draft proposals, which will have been developed in part through three individual discussions over the first two months of the program with the Academic Directors.
- 3) **Village Study Methods:** These assignments, during excursions, will combine fieldwork that is part of the FME with exploration of issues as part of the TS seminar.
- 4) **Participation:** The depth and quality of students’ participation in all aspects of the course is considered for evaluation, including: participation in lectures, discussions, excursions, etc.

Fieldwork Journal:

This assignment requires you to keep a daily observation journal during your time in Kathmandu and especially during our excursions. Your fieldwork provides opportunities to examine some of the key issues of the Seminar first-hand, start developing potential ISP topics, and become adept at collecting field data.

The emphasis of our fieldwork during excursion is *process*: developing the cross-cultural skills necessary to conduct interviews with primary sources and being able to decipher various types of information gained through observations, interactions, reflection and analysis. The guidelines for your journals are as follows:

- Although you may be working in groups or individually on your field study topics, each student must keep an individual field note record in your FME field notebook that reflects your own efforts working in the field.
- These field notes will be the primary basis for your FME Fieldwork Journal grade.
- The field notes should be properly noted in a systematic fashion, with dates, locations of entries, and complete data entry.

All students must complete a half-page analysis of their fieldwork for each day. This must be included as a part of each day’s entry and must build upon the field notes collected that day. Students may structure this analysis in the way best suited for your notes, but it may include the DIE approach, and should include some subjective observations about your role as a fieldworker.

Fieldwork Journals will be collected periodically, **HOWEVER**, we expect students to be completing field notes on a daily basis and not to wait until due dates are specified.

For every week of journal entries, students must write an additional 1-page reflection on the effects of “development” observed in the area and how these relate to the adaptation of ethnic communities and economic growth.

ISP Proposals

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Objective:

To outline your course of action for the independent study period, as checked and approved by the Academic Director. This proposal functions as a guideline for what you do in the field, and, hopefully, serve as a springboard for other purposes (e.g. grad school, fellowships, etc.).

Assignment 1: Three to Five Sentences

Starting during orientation, develop three sentences that explain and encapsulate your research project in language that a generalist – or someone’s grandmother – can understand. Phrases such as “I’m interested in....” or “I’m thinking about...” are forbidden! This on-going assignment is designed to develop your ability to succinctly and concisely deliver a “pitch” for an ISP project and you will be expected to deliver revised and more sophisticated versions each time you meet with the AD or advisor to discuss your ISP proposal.

Generally, you should start off describing the general problem or issue (academic, practical, etc.) followed by the particulars in a specifically Nepali context (2nd sentence) and then a nice neat sentence that describes exactly what you’re going to do over the ISP period (e.g. methodological plan).

Assignment 2: 1st Draft Proposal – 2nd week of semester

This is the first shot at crafting a proposal that will be both competitive and which will serve you well during your ISP. Just because it is a draft, do not think you can whip it up just before it is due: this will serve as the basis for further revisions that will eventually become a proposal that could win you a fellowship.

Follow the outline of a proposal as described in the FME readings. All students must discuss their projects in depth with the AD before handing in the proposals. Below is a brief review to serve as a checklist. Remember that this assignment is also mostly about *process* – systematically thinking about and planning a fieldwork project of your own.

The first draft will include the following:

- Title of project (even if it changes later, give your proposal a title)
- Introduction – hypothesis/expectations/theoretical models, definitions of key terms and ideas, advisor
- Literature review – analytical summary of previous work in your field (note: this is very different from an annotated bibliography)
- Methods – how you plan to carry out the study and analyze your findings
- Discussion – significance, limitations, relevance to others
- Logistics – budget, work plan/schedule, travel, room & board arrangements, translation, communication
- Bibliography
- **NO ABSTRACT**

Assignment 3: 2nd Draft Proposal – Two weeks later

Includes

- Same as 1st draft but more thoroughly worked out
- First attempt at an Informed Consent Statement/Script

Assignment 4: 3rd Draft Proposal – Before Village Excursion

Includes:

- Same sections as first draft plus SIT Application for IRB Review

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Assignment 4: Final Draft – One week before ISP start date

This is the FINAL proposal for your ISP and will be reviewed for approval. Think of this as an application package, as it includes not only the proposal but all supporting documentation. The following should be included:

Title of project

Abstract – 150 words max

Introduction

Literature review

Methods – be very detailed for IRB review

Discussion

Logistics – budget, workplan/schedule, travel, room & board arrangements, translation, communication

Bibliography

SIT Ethics Policy, Signed

ALL IRB application materials (IRB Application, IRB Action Form, informed consent statement)

ISP Logistics and SIT Site Information (in detail!)

Village Study Methods

This experience combines fieldwork lessons, which is part of the FME, with investigation of rural development issues, which is part of the thematic seminar.

Objectives:

- To conduct first-hand research in a village
- To participate in a team research effort
- To utilize and practice methods learned
- To utilize your growing ability to speak and understand the Nepali language
- To gain an understanding of the challenges facing a contemporary Nepali village

The village project integrates fieldwork techniques such as interviewing, participant observation, and possibly even participatory rural appraisal, as part of the process of understanding development in a rural context. It requires students to explore in-depth a specific rural community and one or more particular ethnic groups. Students are given the chance, through rural homestays, to participate directly in village life; this sometimes takes the form of helping with farm work or being part of a village festival.

The Village Study Methods assignment requires students to make first-hand observations and analysis of the issues of cultural identity and capacity building as they apply to village. Students deliver individual oral presentations as part of a group process of exploration and evaluation and turn in field notebooks at the end of the assignment. Grades are based on 1. group effort and organization as a whole, 2. individual oral presentations and 3. quality of the field notebook.

Grading

Students are expected to attend all classes and actively participate in class discussions, individual and group fieldwork activities and to complete all assigned readings and written work. Full alertness, active listening, engaged questioning, and full participation as well as demonstrated sensitivity to and

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respect for cultural practices of host communities are expected of all students. The grade percentages for all assignments is as follows:

Fieldwork Exercises 10%
Fieldwork Journal 10%
First Draft Proposal 5%
Second Draft Proposal 5%
Third Draft Proposal 10%
Final Proposal 30%
Village Study Methods 20%
Participation 10%

Grading Scale: Follows the criteria set out in the syllabus introduction.

Grading Criteria

All grades assigned will take into account the students' special circumstances and challenges they face as foreign students. 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.

Points to Remember – Note-taking

Whenever you make an entry in your notes always remember to include the following: date, time, location. When conducting an interview always record an informant's full name and their occupation, title. Other important data can establish your informant as a credible source: e.g., gender, approx. age, ethnicity, religion, political affiliation, phone/other contact info? Transcribe your rough notes **as soon as possible** after gathering your information and keep them in chronological order.

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.

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Regarding the **DIE format**:

Description – Describe the experience without attributing meaning. Try to be as objective as possible using purely descriptive techniques without adding anything about what you are seeing in terms of its meaning to participants (interpretation) or to yourself (evaluation).

Interpretation – Interpret what you see, using what you know from your own experience and cultural background or what you have learned about the cultural context you are now experiencing in Nepal. What you are looking for here are ideas of what the event you are witnessing means to the people you are observing.

Evaluation – To evaluate is to pass judgments using some assumed standard of comparison. It involves our opinions of and explanations for what has happened, what ought to happen or what we feel should or should not happen. Remember that it is always possible and very important in current thinking in the social sciences to be reflexive in making your own evaluations. This means we should take into account the cultural and personal reasons that may have an effect on how we make an evaluation. In current thinking there is no “objective” analysis outside of someone’s evaluative position.

Evaluation

Thoroughness of information collected and depth of reflection in analytical sections. Correct use of the DIE format in note transcription, and completion of all aspects of assignment.

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FME Readings:

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- Said, E. W. (1978). *Introduction. Orientalism Western Conceptions of The Orient*. New Delhi, Penguin Books in India: 1-28.

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- Subedi, B. 2009. Writing a Literature Review. In *Geographic Research Methods Handbook*, ed. P. K. Pradhan. Kathmandu: Central Department of Geography, Tribhuvan University and Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research North-South.
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- Wong, P. T. P. (1997). "How to Write a Research Proposal." from <http://www.twu.cpsy/faculty/wong/graded/proposal.html>.

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