Research Methods and Ethics in Banking and Finance
ETHC 3500 (3 credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Switzerland: Banking, Finance, and Social Responsibility

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.

Description
The Research Methods and Ethics in Banking and Finance (RME) introduces students to the conceptual and practical tools for gathering primary data and the knowledge and skills that are essential to forming constructive relationships with organizations and/or individuals, which are necessary for completing an academic project or an internship in the cultural context of Switzerland. In particular, the seminar enhances students’ skills in gathering, recording, and analyzing primary data and writing a scholarly academic project or internship proposal.

The seminar also covers the financial code of ethics and addresses sustainable financing, socially responsible investment (SRI) issues, ethical banking, and legal and practical aspects of integrating environment, social justice, and corporate governance (ESG) issues to institutional investment. The seminar gives a detailed overview of major institutional actors, key players in European and global networks in the field of banking and sustainable financing, and the international standards in the fight against tax avoidance and money-laundering. This seminar incorporates visits to corresponding local financial institutions and international organizations or NGOs.

Ethical considerations related to conducting field research or completing an internship will be discussed. The overall aim is to help students in their experience-based learning processes and prepare them for the development of an Independent Study Project in Finance (ISPF), which is largely based on the data gathered from primary sources, or an Internship in Finance at a local organization.

Learning Outcomes
Research Methods and Ethics of Banking and Finance course comprises 45 hours of instruction (3 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:
• Analyze and process primary data gathered in the field and draw valid and ethical interpretations and conclusions;
• Understand and apply econometric techniques to the analysis and modelling of financial data;
• Show understanding of the difference between the main sustainable financing instruments, like Socially Responsible Investment, micro-finance, impact investing, and philanthropy;
• Demonstrate knowledge of the business model of ethical and sustainable financing;
• Show awareness of anticipated ethical challenges and ways of addressing them including in the articulation of a research question, review of the relevant literature, and outline of the research methods OR for the case of an Internship in Finance, demonstrate awareness of anticipated ethical challenges and ways of addressing them including in the description of the host organization, an outline of tasks that will be performed, a proposed work timetable, and projected outcomes such as a paper or business plan.

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

Course Schedule

Module 1: Research Methods and Ethics in Banking and Finance in the Context of Switzerland
This introductory module is designed to introduce students to qualitative and quantitative field-based research in the context of Switzerland. While studying the French language and living with a local family, the qualitative field-research approach based on experiential learning helps students to pursue an Internship in Finance or complete an ISPF, learn and understand the Swiss culture and local business practices. Students learn about various econometric techniques used in the analysis and modelling of financial data and the ethics of data collection and analysis. The module addresses the analytical methods of exponential growth, calculations of interests and loans, and learn how to compare the calculation of loans in conventional banks and alternative banking such as Islamic financial institutions.

Session 1: Introduction to Research Methods and Ethics
This session highlights the characteristics of econometric techniques, as well as the main elements of conducting a qualitative research project. Attention will be given to the tentative ISPF proposal and the Internship in Finance. The focus will be on choosing and exploring and contextualizing the research topic. We will address effective ways to search for literature and the SIT guidelines for referencing. Brief attention will be given to formulating a tentative research question. Students reflect on conducting research and collecting data in an ethical way in Switzerland and discuss key ethical questions when doing research in banking and finance.
Assignment:
Choose an ISPF topic and identify the main theories/concepts/literature/debates regarding this topic. Also, formulate a tentative research question.

Required readings:

Session 2: Research Question, Literature, and Research Methods
The purpose of this session is two-fold. First, we will re-address the research topic (briefly) and research question, so as to prepare for the final ISPF proposal / Internship in Finance. Second, we will analyze the interconnectedness between the research question and the choice of the relevant literature, and appropriate qualitative research methods.

Assignment:
By the end of the week, you will have chosen the methods for conducting your research. This will be a first draft of your research design and the first step towards your ISPF or Internship in Finance proposal.

Required reading:

Session 3: Analyzing Data and Reporting Qualitative Research Findings
In this session we will look at various ways of coding and clustering your data and the various levels of data analysis, with particular attention to intersectionality as a tool for analysis. We walk through the ISPF / Internship in Finance rubric and and the structure of a research report, managment advice, or bussines plan.

Required reading:

Recommended readings:

Session 4: Econometrics and the Modelling of Financial Data
This session focuses on the application of statistical methods and models representing the performance of financial assets and portfolios in businesses. Students will discuss models of exponential growth and will help them to perform in ISPF / Internship in Finance assignments.

Required reading:

Session 5: Calculation of Loans in Conventional Banks
In this session students will learn to calculate loans and interest rates by using Excel. This is a practical session which consist of series of exercises and will help them to perform in ISPF / Internship in Finance assignments.

Required reading:

Session 6: Calculation of Loans in Islamic Financing Institutions
In this session students will learn to calculate loans in Islamic financial institutions by using Excel and compare them to the calculation of loans in conventional banks. This is a practical session which consist of series of exercises and will help them to perform in ISPF / Internship in Finance assignments.

Required reading:

Session 7: Introduction to the ISPF and Internship: Student Positionality and Ethics
This session describes the ISPF and Internship in Finance processes and help students brainstorm ideas and set goals for their ISPF or Internship. It emphasizes the element of student positionality and ethics during the ISPF / Internship activity. The session includes a review and critique of past ISPF and/or Internship papers. Under the guidance of Academic Director, students will identify an ISPF advisor and secure an internship placement; One-on-one meetings with the Academic Director to discuss preliminary ISPF or Internship questions and ideas.

Session 8: Research Ethics and the HSR/LRB Process
This session uses concrete examples of social science research to address and discuss the ethical dimensions of doing research. We will look into ways of protecting the rights of research participants, such as their right to give or refuse consent, and their right to remain anonymous. Special attention is given to the protection of vulnerable research groups, such as minors and marginalized groups. In a similar vein, we will also discuss the issue of unequal power relations between the researcher and the researched, both during the research process as well as in representing research subjects in a final research paper. The session will also cover SIT’s Human Subject Review Policy and the application for review of research with human subjects (the IRB form), the LRB process, the consent form, and the ethics form.

Required reading:

Recommended reading:
Module 2: Ethical Banking, Sustainable Finance and Social Responsibility

This introductory module to ethical banking and sustainable finance allows students to discover the historical dimension of the concept, main fields, terminology, and examples for financial institutions that are functioning in an ethical way. The module gives an introduction to sustainable finance often described as “ethical” or “sustainable”. The module explores the principles and strategies of Sustainable and Responsible Investments (SRI), Economic and Social Governance (ESG), Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), and Impact Investing.

Session 1: Banking and Ethics: What is Ethical Banking?
After an overview of the history of ethical banking, this session will provide students with a critical assessment of a sample of contemporary ethical banking practices which includes new bank, green bank, responsible bank, alternative bank, civil bank, and charity bank.

Required Reading:

Session 2: Finance and Ethics: What is Sustainable Finance?
The objective of this session is to give an introduction to the notion of what is often described as “ethical, sustainable, social, alternative, development, or solidarity” banking and financing. The lecture explores the principles of SRI, ESG issues, impact investing, charity, and philanthropy.

Required Reading:

Session 3: Corporate Social Responsibility
This session focuses on how the private sector integrates international norms and ethical standards through self-regulation into its business model with the aim to increase long-term benefits and shareholder trust and minimize risks by promoting socially responsible action within the corporate sector. CSR strategies encourage the company to make a positive impact on the environment and stakeholders including consumers, employees, investors, communities. The lecture explores the principles of SRI, ESG issues, impact investing, charity, and philanthropy.

Required Reading:

Module 3: Tax Avoidance, Money Laundering, and Ethics
This module tackles the challenges of authorities and governments facing tax avoidance, money-laundering, and ethical financing and introduces its global and European institutional regulations. While engaging in critical discussion around ethics in banking and finance, the students discuss the methodology of criminal investigation in Swiss financial institutions, in the prosecutor office and in court.
Session 1: Tax Avoidance and Global Financial Processes
The session introduces the global and European financial processes which monitor tax avoidance and discusses The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and World-Check.

Required Reading:

Recommended Readings:
List of Internet resources from the OECD directory:

Session 2: Money Laundering and Investigation of Criminal Funds
This session focuses on Switzerland as a case study for established rules and regulations to address anti-money laundering. The lecture discusses the legal procedure and cases to trace criminal activities in financial institutions.

Required Reading:

Session 3: From Financial to Integrated Reporting
The session introduces the financial processes which monitor tax avoidance and money laundering practices.

Required Reading:

Recommended Readings:
List of Internet resources from the OECD directory:
Session 3: Review and Wrap-up of the Seminar
This session provides an overview of the main issues addressed in this course, including international financial institutions, financial crises and social responsibility. The discussion will be framed around key reflection questions that have been approached either through guest speakers’ presentations, field visits, or assigned readings.

After completing Modules 1-3, students split into groups by ISPF or Internship, ISPF students will take Module 4a and Internship students will take Module 4b.

Module 4a: ISPF in the Context of Switzerland
These sessions prepare the student for the ISPF experience. They examine work-based norms and practices related to conducting research in Switzerland. Attention is also given to the importance of applied methodology in the ISPF experience and the expectations and responsibilities of the student.

Session 1: ISPF Proposal Presentation
This session takes place after the students have decided upon their ISPF topic and formulated a tentative research question. Students are asked to pitch their research for their fellow students and our guests. The aim is to improve the proposal and to explore resources (literature, relevant networks, organizations, and key individuals).

Session 2: Writing your ISPF - Workshop
In this session we will look into the various elements of a research paper and go over the ISPF Rubric. The workshop focuses on the complex relationship between the process of conducting research and the writing process.

Required Reading:
Session 3: Project Proposal Development: Guidelines and Requirements
Based on learning and engagement in the preceding course modules, this session focuses on ISPF proposal development. The focus is on structure and requirements, the research question, introduction, and the approval process. Students also learn about the roles and responsibilities of ISPF advisors, documentation of data, and review ISPF proposals from past semesters.

Required Reading:
Please come to class prepared having read the ISPF proposal three stages requirements.

Recommended reading:

Session 4: Libraries in Great Leman Region: Collections, Services, and Facilities
Information on resources and databases of university and city libraries; Visit and guided tours to main libraries in Geneva.

Module 4b: Internship in Finance in the Context of Switzerland
These sessions prepare the student for the internship experience. They examine work-based norms and practices related to internships in Switzerland. Attention is given to the importance of ethics in the internship experience and the expectations and responsibilities of the student, the host institution, and the program.

Session 1: Preparing for the Internship
This introductory session prepares the students for their internship in Switzerland. The session covers a range of areas that include résumé and cover letter preparation, appropriate dress, student objectives for the internship, and stages of student growth in the internship. Students will review the internship rubric.

Required Reading:

Session 2: Work-based Norms and Practices in Switzerland
This session explores work-based norms and practices related to internships and work in Switzerland, exploring such issues as how best to describe the internship experience and purpose to potential internship hosts and others, gender norms, issues of language, and workplace expectations.

Required Reading:
**Recommended Reading:**
Expat Focus. “Switzerland - Business and Workplace Culture”

**Session 3: The Ethics of Participating in an Internship in Switzerland**
Ongoing: One-on-one Meetings with the Academic Director or Internship Coordinator.
The first session outlines the responsibilities of the student and the host organization for a productive and significant experience that can serve the objectives of both. The session also reviews best practices for a successful internship and exposes the student’s positionality in relation to the organization.

**Required Reading:**
McDonald, F. (2011). “Ethical Use of Interns”. Retrieved from:

**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**
Papers will be graded on style and structure, depth of analysis, and synthesis of secondary and primary sources.

**Description of Assignments:**
The Practice Interview Assignment, Independent Study Project in Finance (ISPF) or Internship Proposal, and Participation constitute the course requirements. In all exercises, students are asked to reflect analytically and to integrate the briefings, lectures, readings, and field visits.

**Practice Interview Assignment (30%)**
The Interview assignment (1,000-1,200 words) consists of four parts:

**Part 1:**
During their study trip to Greece, students conduct interviews with Greek citizens on their views of the recent financial crisis. Students use the qualitative research techniques learnt in class to explore firsthand the effects of the financial crisis on the lives of ordinary citizens. Based on this exploration, students reflect on what could be a possible research question.

**Part II:**
Students define a tentative research topic and formulate their research question(s). They decide what further sub-questions need to be discussed and what methods are most appropriate to deal with the questions raised (qualitative and quantitative). They draft a working hypothesis of their project in the form of statement, series of questions, or combination of both. This represents the foundation of their research assignment.

**Part III:**
Students reflect about their positionality to Greek citizens experiencing the financial crisis, as American students enrolled in the study abroad program in Switzerland studying the Greek society on the ground.
Part IV:
In their bibliography, students reference primary sources, secondary sources and media sources.

Independent Study Project in Finance (ISPF) or Internship Proposal (60%)
Students write an ISPF or Internship proposal (max. 2,000 words) in preparation for their research project/internship project. In the initial proposal, students practice their skills in explaining their field of inquiry, formulating an initial research question, and explaining their initial research/internship set up. Their ISPF or Internship Proposal each consists of four parts.

**ISPF**
Part I:
Students doing the ISPF use the information offered during class to first explore the research topic: What are the main issues of the topic? What is the relevant literature? What relevant theory, concept, model can be found? And based on this exploration: What could be a possible research question/ questions?

Part II:
Students formulate their research questions in the form of a working hypothesis. They decide what sub-questions need to be answered and what methods are most effective to answer the sub-questions. They test their working hypothesis by using data and arguments. This represents the foundation of their future ISPF.

Part III:
In their bibliography, students reference and discuss primary sources, secondary sources and media sources. They describe and analyze their selected sources and explain which other sources they will consider including in their ISPF. The bibliography should contain at least 10 references (a combination of primary and secondary sources, and media documents). The reading materials and documents should reflect their field of research and/or theoretical framework.

Part IV:
The final ISPF proposals must be submitted with the application for review of ISPF research with human subjects.

**Internship in Finance**
Part I:
Students who opt for an Internship in finance need to explore the field in which they are interested to work in: What are the main institutions? What are their objectives and/or activities? And based on this exploration: What can I possibly contribute to this organization? Students further develop their Internship proposal by working on a first draft introduction, choosing a focal point, and describing their research design, qualitative and methodology. Students start to make a connection with an institution they would like to work with.

Part II:
What is the relevant literature? What relevant theory, concept, model can be used to analyze the institution and its core activity in the Swiss and international
context? And based on this exploration: What could be a possible research question/questions?

Part III:
Students include a theoretical framework for assessing the organization and its activities. They can use various tools to assess the success of that institution (such as SWOT). Students who do the Internship in finance, must include at least 10 reading materials (combination of primary and secondary sources, and media documents) reflecting the broader context in which their research is situated.

Part IV:
Final internship proposals must be submitted with the application for Human Subjects Review. The proposal also needs to include an agreement that states the tasks and goals of the internship, signed by the organization, the student and the AD. If the student is to conduct research for the organization, then the AD must approve the research question/working hypothesis.

Participation (10%):
Attendance, punctuality, active involvement in discussions, and completion of reading assignments are essential for passing this seminar.

Assessment:
Practice Interview Assignment 30%
ISPF or Internship Proposal 60%
Participation 10%

Grading Scale:
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

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 according 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 we engage with on site 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.

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 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.