Independent Study Project
ISPR 3000 (4 credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Malaysia and China: International Relations and New Economies

> **PLEASE NOTE:** This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from term to term.

Course Description
The Independent Study Project (ISP) offers the students the opportunity to undertake significant, specific, and individualized independent field study in which they most directly apply the concepts and skills of experience-based learning articulated and learned in all the program components including homestay, language study, educational excursions and the courses on Field Methods and Ethics, Islamic banking and finance, trade, and the economic integration. Although the last four weeks of the program are set aside for the major effort on the ISP, considerable planning and preparation begins shortly after orientation week. The Field Methods and Ethics sessions on concepts and rationale, methods and techniques, and evaluation of field study are designed to facilitate the student's engagement with an independent study on a specific aspect that pertains to the student's academic interests or personal inclination. The actual fieldwork for the ISP begins with the ISP preparation sessions and individual conferences to identify appropriate contacts and resources.

Individual meetings with the Academic Director are scheduled throughout the semester to help the student develop a workable research question and method to pursue their ISP project.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of the Independent Study Project, students will:
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of economic integration and the New Silk Road in Malaysia of interest to the student;
- Exhibit competence in the processes of independent, primary research – from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies, to final analyses and interpretations of data;
- Explain a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by field researchers;
- Demonstrate independence, self-confidence, and critical thinking while conducting field research in Malaysia;
- Produce an ISP paper with an average length of 25-45 pages in total observance of the norms of ethics shared by the host country and the international academic community;

Course Requirements
Students are expected to complete 120 hours of field-based research on their topic, submit a substantial written paper (or practicum report), and deliver an accompanying oral presentation. It is

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not uncommon for ISPs to strongly contribute to the student's choice of subject for graduate studies or professional career. While the students can count on their Academic Director (AD) to help them focus their study, advise them about practical realities of the local situation, and assist with advisors and contacts, it is incumbent upon the student to come up with their ISP topic themselves. The Independent Study Project format allows the student flexibility and the ability to exercise individual initiative, while also promoting academic quality. In turn, the ISP paper provides the material evidence of capability in handling of methodology and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. The final project should have a clear study question, should be fieldwork-based, should include a clear description of ethical considerations, and should look at the research site as it is, not as it should be.

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. Reference articles and books from local libraries are available mostly in Malaysian and English languages. Students also have access to SIT's electronic library database. Students are also expected to consult appropriate course readings applicable to the ISP.

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) (or a combination of field study and practicum training). This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, participating, making field observations, writing, and meeting with the Academic Director, Academic Advisor and ISP Advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least 3-5 individual advising meetings with their AD 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 25-45 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:
1. The study question.
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
Research related to the Malaysia and China: International Relations and New Economies program theme possibly involves interaction with vulnerable groups such as ethnicity, religious affiliation, current social-change issues in Malaysia, or others. This is why all ISP proposals must reflect thoughtful and contextually appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, students are required to submit, along with their ISP proposal, 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 the Local Review Board believes that the proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, the student will be asked to revise their proposal.

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Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic practice and cultural values.

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 local 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.

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 Malaysia 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 theme;
- 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:

For a non-practicum ISP:

- Written report   **75%**
- Oral report   **25%**

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

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70-73%   C-
67-69%   D+
64-66%   D
Below 64   F

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 Field 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.

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 program handbook given to you at Orientation, particularly the code of conduct, the policy on blogging and taking photographs, and the grading policy.

Disability Services: For information about and support from Disability Services (DS) to facilitate an accessible educational experience, please contact disabilityservices@sit.edu or +1-802-258-3390. Additional information regarding SIT Disability Services can be found on the DS website at: http://studyabroad.sit.edu/disabilityservices.