

Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 Credits/120 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Ghana: Africa in the 21st Century

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

This four week independent study project, scheduled in the final portion of the program, provides students a unique opportunity to study in-depth a key aspect of development in Ghana. The ISP draws upon the knowledge and various skills gained from the thematic, language, and research methods and ethics seminars. At this point students will have worked with the academic director and various other in-country experts to develop their ISP proposals and to schedule interviews, arrange for translators if they will be required and arrange other logistics that are essential to completing the ISP. They will also have developed the competence to act in culturally appropriate ways and to find resources in Ghana needed for ISP completion.

The ISP allows the students to practice and hone their primary data gathering skills and to practice various other skills learnt in the Research Methods and Ethics seminar such as navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, building rapport and navigating local bureaucracies. Further, students practice and hone their skills in gathering and analyzing data from primary sources, managing this data and making a coherent argument in a scholarly manner.

Each student finds or is assigned an ISP advisor with whom they work collaboratively to identify and schedule data collection appointments, review research tools for appropriateness and feasibility, and resolve any logistical and ethical issues that may arise during the course of their ISP. Students are also required submit an ISP itinerary to their academic director and to check in with program staff regarding the progress of their ISP.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Analyze and synthesize data gathered from primary sources into a well written scholarly report and to compose an oral presentation from this report;
- Understand the importance of ethics and human relations in field research;

- Demonstrate competence in the processes involved in independent research, from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies to final analysis, and interpretation; and
- Demonstrate awareness of contingencies and complexities of working across cultures.

Methods

- Conversations with the academic director (AD) regarding choice of potential ISP topics will begin during the first week of the program and continue until the beginning of the ISP period;
- From the second to the ninth week of the program, students will conduct a research project in preparation for the ISP. This project is conducted alongside the Research Methods and Ethics classes and will help them practice and refine their research skills prior to the ISP;
- A minimum of 120 hours of independent fieldwork will be conducted (during a four week period) - fieldwork refers to hours of active data collection and analysis (i.e. interviews, observation, participant observation, note transcription, reading supplementary materials, writing, etc.) and not merely time spent in the field;
- All data will be transcribed into a field journal according to criteria presented and practiced in Research Methods and Ethics (RME);
- Students will work in conjunction with a local academic advisor (preferably a host country national);
- An oral summary will be presented to the group and invited guests upon completion of project;
- A well-documented, culturally sensitive and in-depth presentation of field study findings will be written.

Course Requirements

Decisions regarding the topic of study are a primary responsibility of the student. However, students can count on the academic director (AD) to help focus their ISP and to guide them about how to translate their ISP ideas given practical realities of the local situation, and for assistance regarding potential advisor contacts. The Independent Study Project format allows the student flexibility and the ability to exercise personal initiative, while also promoting academic quality. In turn, the ISP paper provides the material evidence of capability in handling methodology and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. The final project should have a clear thesis, should be fieldwork-based, and should include a clear description of ethical considerations.

Students are required to complete the following:

- 1) Four interviews with the academic director (AD) prior to the beginning of ISP to discuss research topic and approach.
- 2) Submit ISP proposal and ISP itinerary for AD and LRB (Local Ethics Review Board) approval.
- 3) Complete a minimum of 120 hours of fieldwork towards completion of the project.
- 4) Have minimum of 10 articles from peer reviewed journals.
- 5) Submit two clean hard copies and an electronic copy (emailed to the AD) of the final paper. The ISP should be 30-40 pages, double spacing, 1" margins and font 12.

- 6) Make a twenty-minute oral presentation of the project to peers.
- 7) During ISP check in with the academic director or other designee twice.
- 8) Keep a field work journal.

Oral Presentation

Presentation length is 20 minutes with an additional 10 minutes for questions and answers.

Evaluation of presentations includes the following criteria:

- Organization, clarity, and accessibility of presentation (including use of audio/visual aids or demonstrations)
- Clear explanation of ISP objectives and research questions
- Clear explanation of field strategy and implementation
- Ability to field questions and comments from the audience

ISP: Fieldwork Journal

Objectives:

- To document progress on your Independent Study Project
- To practice effective note-taking and transcription techniques

During the ISP period, students will be expected to keep a specific journal devoted entirely to recording field experiences. Some uses of the ISP Work Journal are as follows:

- Recording names and locations of contacts persons, especially possible ISP advisors and other ISP resources
- Recording thoughts about how you want the ISP to develop, the progress of the ISP and changes or developments in plans
- Recording interviews conducted in the field relevant to the ISP
- Recording observations and inferences made relating to the ISP

PLEASE NOTE: COURSE CONTENTS, LECTURERS AND READINGS MAY BE MODIFIED AS NEEDED. SHOULD ANY CHANGE OF CLASS TOPICS OR LECTURERS BE NECESSARY, STUDENTS WILL BE PROMPTLY NOTIFIED.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Evaluation is based on content, organization and development of perspective, analytical quality, effective processing of data gathered from primary and secondary sources, achieved objectives, narrative quality and commitment to the learning process. The evaluation of the **written ISP paper** will be based on the following:

- Development of topic and achievement of objectives
- Project definition and focus
- Methodology
- Accuracy of information
- Critical analysis and thought
- Use of information from participation, observation, interviews and other techniques
- Use of cross-cultural communication skills
- Style and expression

- Grammar and documentation

Grading

- Written ISP paper 60%
- ISP field Journal 10%
- Oral presentation 10%
- Advisor evaluation 20%
- Total 100%

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

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.

***All written assignments should be typed.**

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Student research (the Independent Study Project and Field Study Project) is a product of field work and as such students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical field work, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore copies of ISP/FSPs are returned to the sponsoring institutions and the host communities, at the discretion

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