

Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 (4 credits / 120 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Serbia, Bosnia, and Kosovo: Peace and Conflict Studies in the Balkans

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. Please do not assume these are the exact lectures and readings for any subsequent semester.

Course Descriptions

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is an academic project that is designed to allow the student to further their understanding of a topic unique to the Balkans experience, and may be conducted in Serbia, Bosnia, or Kosovo, upon the student's choice. The project must relate to the academic theme(s) of the program. A central aspect of the ISP is the collection and use of primary data; the ISP does not involve extensive library research that could be done in the United States, but rather takes advantage of the student's presence in the Balkans with access to materials and information sources available on-site. A local advisor, who specializes in the student's particular field of interest, is designated for the student, by the academic director (AD). All topics must be finalized and approved by the AD, and advisors must be selected and confirmed before the project commences. Meetings will be held throughout the semester with the AD and academic tutors of the program to finalize the topic, select an appropriate advisor, define a clear topic and a research question, and identify potential sources of information, etc. Allowing for travel and time to write, edit, and print the final paper, this does not offer a great amount of time for actual field study. For this reason, the topic must be very specific and well-focused. At the end of the independent study period, the student must submit a paper and make a presentation of his/her fieldwork. The ISP advisor and academic director then evaluate the project in writing. The AD will submit a grade and narrative evaluation of the project to SIT, and in turn these assessments are then forwarded to the student's home university.

Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Implement an individual project that investigates a particular social or political issue;
 - Utilize effective field study methods and techniques to gather data;
 - Integrate and analyze data from a variety of primary and secondary sources;
 - Communicate the results of a study in both a written report and an oral presentation;
 - Apply relevant ethical concepts in undertaking field research.
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- Conduct a field-based project in peace and conflict studies following the academic and professional ethics discussed in methods class;

- Produce an ISP that demonstrates critical thinking, intellectual flexibility, and reflective analysis of peace and conflict systems;
- Provide an oral presentation in which the student presents the design of their field research, data collected, and result of analysis;
- Apply field-based study methods.

Course Requirements

Students will spend a minimum of 120 hours on the ISP. This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, collecting data (by interviewing, taking field observations), writing, meeting with the academic director and advisor. The final product is a typed and bound 30 page paper, double spaced, 12-pt standard font. A highlight of the assignment is a 15-minute presentation to fellow students, program staff, and other invited guests. Alternative forms of Independent Study Projects are a possibility students may explore in consultation with the academic director.

ISP To Do List

1. Decide on a topic

This stage can often be difficult in narrowing down topics of interest. This is where the student asks: "What do I want to study? What do I want to explore and learn from the ISP? Where do I want to spend my ISP month? Is there a topic I have always been interested in and want to learn more about?" Think about the ISP as an opportunity for self-fulfillment and both a personal and academic growth, or as a steppingstone for further research or studies in a particular area.

The student must be able to define a distinct and feasible project. By the time the final ISP proposal is submitted, students will be required to clearly state their overall research project in one short paragraph.

2. Define your research questions and research methods (draft research proposals)

In the process of submitting draft proposal and through regular consultations with the Academic staff of the program, students will have to clearly define their ISP topic and research questions. Focusing their interest on a clear and precise question will enable students to begin their ISP period with necessary clarity and focus and will help them complete the task successfully within a given period of time.

3. Complete a final research proposal

The final ISP research Proposal should provide a clear description of the topic, research question(s) and methodology and annotated bibliography. The proposal will help anticipate what the student is going to do during the research period and potential challenges that may arise. The proposal should also help students to clearly define the focus of the research at hand so that students end with a project that can be accomplished within the given period of time.

4. Contact an ISP advisor – share your ISP research proposal

In order to complete the project, each student is matched with an advisor. The AD will match students with appropriate advisors who can best support chosen topics and research question. All academic advisors are part of the SIT academic network in Serbia, Bosnia and Kosovo.

The following aspects are taken into consideration when choosing ISP advisor for each student:

- The advisor should be a person with an expertise in the field of interest, who is able to work with a student to create, plan and successfully complete their ISP, and subsequently evaluate it. The person should have an academic degree (MA or PhD) in relevant field, and should be able to give necessary guidance and support.
- Once students start their ISP, they are required to meet with ISP advisor at least three times, in order to define, discuss, and evaluate their progress, i.e., by discussing and defining parameters of the research, determining research methodology, suggesting sources and contacts, assisting in organization of collected information, and reviewing the student's final submission.
- It is **STUDENT'S** responsibility to initiate contact with ISP advisor and to make (and keep) appointments with them. It is student's responsibility to form respectful relationship and communication with their ISP advisor.
- A failure on the part of the student to regularly communicate and meet with the ISP advisor three times – as required – will be reflected in the final ISP grade.
- ISPs that are not supported by the assistance of ISP advisor will not be accepted.

5. Complete, sign and hand in SIT forms: site approval form, ethical guidelines, and Institutional Review Board (IRB)

In addition to completing their ISP Research Proposal, students are also required to submit a Site Approval form that clearly states their whereabouts on each and every day of the ISP; the AD and program staff must be able to reach the students during the ISP period in case of any emergency (global or local). Ethical guidelines include completion of both reading/agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, but also successful completion of our Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in FSS classes. Please note that until items 4 and 5 above (ISP Proposal, Site Approval, and Ethical Guidelines Forms) are satisfactorily completed, students will not be allowed to embark on their ISP. Funds for ISP accommodation and food will not be released to a student until all pre-ISP requirements are successfully met.

6. Arrange accommodation for the period of your ISP (4 weeks)

It is STUDENT'S responsibility to arrange accommodation for four weeks of the ISP period (week 11-14 of the semester). The Program Assistant will be available to assist with and advise students in this process. Depending on the choice of the ISP location, students may be able to reside with a homestay family or find an alternative accommodation approved by the Academic Director in accordance with SIT guidelines of safety and security.

Human Subjects Review

All ISP proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the student's inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, you are required to submit an "Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects," which includes questions about any potential harm that might come from your study; appendices include interview and survey protocols. If the Academic Director believes that you have not sufficiently addressed the concerns of this policy, he/she may ask you to revise your proposal. Standards for this review are developed in country and reflect local academic practice.

If a student's research has been funded by a US government agency or if she/he plans to take this research back to his/her 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 Resource Protections, with which SIT is registered. Any questions or concerns are forwarded to SIT's Institutional Review Board for review.

ISP Written Format—Organization and Presentation

I. Title page

II. Table of Contents

Your table of contents should contain heading of chapters or sections into which your ISP is divided, and the main headings and subdivisions in each section, noting all page numbers. *The table of contents falls into technical aspects that are also subject to evaluation.*

III. Abstract

A tightly written (no more than 200 words) summary of your paper. In one paragraph only summarize the introductory and conceptual aspects of your study, your main research question, methods used and the main final conclusion/analysis of your study.

IV. Introduction

Length can vary considerably depending on the topic and your style of writing. Aspects of your ISP that might be covered should include:

- A. Objectives of the study: discuss your motivation and academic interest in chosen topic, and in your research question (RQ), articulate the relevance of your chosen topic. This should come first – make sure your reader gets to know your RQ in very early stages of your paper.
- B. Clarification of research question(s) and topic of study.
- C. Definition of major terms (if necessary). If you use a large number of non-English terms, include them in a Glossary or Appendix ONLY at the END of the ISP.

Please note: In the evaluation rubric, Introduction falls into the category of Context (i.e. background information) and Literature Review.

V. Literature Review

A brief overview of existing literature and work available on your topic of inquiry forming a background and entry discussion prior to your analysis. The literature review is extremely important as it reveals the extent of your overall research and reflects your ability to identify theoretical underpinning fitting a given contextual background, necessary to inform yourself sufficiently and develop greater understanding of the topic of your research.

VI. Methods & Ethics

- A. Field study methods employed
 - i. When conducting semi-structured interviews, you are expected to complete minimum 4 interviews. When discussing your methods, you should specify the following:
 - a. Explain the choice of selected participants in your study
 - b. Specify the number of interviews you conducted (include a chart in Appendix)
- B. To protect the identity of your interviewees, you should refer to them as Interviewee or Participant, and when designating more of them, use either numbers (Interviewee/Participant 1, etc.), or letters (Interviewee/Participant A, etc.).
- C. Discussion of your positionality and how it may affect the ethics of your paper.

D. Reflect on broader ethical dimension of the research and of the entire project.

VII. Findings

You will want to use section headings, and most likely, sub-headings, to maintain a strong sense of organization of your paper. This section will form the bulk of your ISP, and must specifically include sections containing findings, your own reflection, discussion and analysis. Quotations and references to other works should be accurately cited. Any diagrams, figures or tables should be labeled properly.

VIII. Conclusions

Your conclusions should demonstrate how your ISP fulfilled the objectives outlined in your introduction, and summarize the main outcomes of your study. This section is not always given the attention it deserves – it is common to find only a half-page of discussion of conclusions – as if the writer has run out of petrol! This section should bring out the best in you as a researcher. You need to make powerful arguments at this point, relate your findings to larger public issues, and derive implications. Please, also include Recommendations for further study in this section: this should consist of a short list of recommendations on how your study might be expanded upon, or be used as the basis for future ISPs & Limitations of the study: though optional, this section is highly recommended. Legitimize your study by pro-actively pointing out its shortcomings and biases (all studies have them, of course).

IX. Bibliography

This should include all literature and documents used and cited from using APA style (follow research methods in-class instructions).

X. Appendix

- A. Interview Questions
- B. A chart of the interviews conducted [see below the format you should follow].
- C. Relevant (and cited) statistical information, charts, maps, photographs or any additional relevant material.

Technical Aspects

Quotations & Paraphrasing

Every use of quotes, reference and bibliography should follow the format discussed in class. You will never quote an entire interview in the paper, nor should you copy and paste entire interviews. Should you use a quote that is *more than 3 lines long*, indent and single space it.

In-text citations and Bibliography

Whether you provide a direct quotation, or merely express another's idea in your own words, you should (by both academic and personal ethical standards) give the individual credit for that idea. You should do this by including in-text citation that, in conjunction with Bibliography list, provides proper information about your sources. Many of your citations will come from interviews conducted. All interviews should be cited respecting the anonymity of interviewees' identities and their names. You also need to cite all information taken from secondary sources.

You should follow the standard APA style. *Please note, when quoting from any text, page numbers are required in your in-text citation!*

Page Limit

The final paper is a 30-page paper, double spaced, 12-pt standard font (not including Bibliography and Appendix).

Page Layout

- The body of the text should be in font size 12
- The footnotes should be in font size 10
- All text should be in the same font you choose to use
- Your text alignment needs to be justified

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

In conjunction with the ISP advisor, the academic director evaluates student performance on the ISP. Assessment of the written work and oral presentation is based on the formulation of the research question, accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and the quality of expression. Special emphasis will be placed on the student's ability to integrate primary and secondary sources and to present the findings in a clear, organized, and well-synthesized format, with attention to the ethical context of field study. Students will be evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Serbia / Bosnia / Kosovo 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.

Independent Study Project (ISP) (90%)

Assessment of the ISP is done on the basis of SIT's assessment rubric for the Independent Study Project with the grading evaluation and criteria listed below.

Evaluation criteria for ISPs include:

Title/Acknowledgements/Abstract

- The title is succinct, interesting, and engaging, and it clearly explains the project
- The acknowledgments are complete and professionally written
- The abstract clearly summarizes the project

Research Question/Objectives/Justification

- The study/research question is relevant, thought-provoking, and original
- The project aims to contribute information on a topic relevant to local community and/or other researchers
- The objectives of the study are clearly presented and appropriate
- The justification of the project is clear and contextualized

Context and Literature Review

- The content is relevant. Important themes and background information is provided
- The paper includes appropriate, high-quality relevant background sources, including several from peer-reviewed journals

Methods

- The explanation of methodology is clear and accurate and supporting materials are included
- Implementation of methods through the research process is thoughtful and handed with care
- The methods are appropriate

Ethics

- Human subject policies and ethical research guidelines are adhered to and thoroughly discussed
- Appropriate consideration is given to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of research participants, in keeping with human subjects protocols and the LRB-approved ISP proposal
- The ISP is responsive to host community needs, as applicable

Presentation of results/findings

- The findings are complete and are logically and convincingly presented
- The prose discussion of findings is clear, succinct, and logical
- Tables, graphs, photos, and direct quotes are relevant and support the argument

Depth of analysis/Conclusions

- Important implications raised by the findings are included
- The argument is well-structured and different sources of information are well-integrated
- Patterns in the findings (or lack of a pattern) are identified and discussed
- The author gives logical explanations of what findings mean
- The author clearly and specifically related his/her findings to the study/research question and to previous research in the field

Technical aspects/Effort

- The paper is organized into major sections and/or follows the guidelines in accordance with the orientation of the program
- Table of contents, in-text citations, and reference list or bibliography are done correctly and completely
- There are no mistakes in writing, grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Evaluation criteria for oral reports include:

- Organization of presentation, with a view to holding audience interest
- Use of appropriate examples and personal experiences
- Clear explanation of ISP strategy and implementation

Oral Presentation (10%)

Assessment of the ISP Oral Presentation is done on the basis of SIT's assessment rubric for the Independent Study Project Presentation with the grading evaluation and criteria listed above.

Assessment:

ISP	90%
ISP Oral Presentation	10%

Grading Scales and Criteria

Grades are given both fairly and rigorously and in accordance with the system below. They will reflect a combination of absolute quality of performance, progress made, and the ability to take into account and assimilate the academic director's and the teachers' advice in assessing the work done. An "A" letter grade reflects exceptional work and a perfect combination of academic competences and personal research and analysis. It shows great ability to integrate field-based investigation and personal reflection into a structured and well-argued paper. A "B" letter grade reflects serious and methodical work as well as a substantial effort at analyzing and understanding cross-cultural issues. A "C" letter grade shows the work meets the requirements but needs more in-depth reflection and personal involvement. A "D" letter grade is insufficient and clearly reflects lack of work or serious deficiencies.

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

Please note: the syllabus, course content, lecturers, and readings may modified by the academic director in order to better suit the needs of the course and its participants.

Should any change of class topics or lecturers may be necessary, student will be promptly notified.

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 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>.