



Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 (4 Credits / 120 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Samoa: Social and Environmental Change in Oceania

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus represents a recent semester. Because seminars develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is a self-designed research project offering students the opportunity to undertake a personally significant and independent investigation of a contemporary issue in Samoa in greater depth. The ISP is the academic component in which the student most directly applies the concepts, skills, tools, and techniques of experience-based learning articulated through the *Field Methods and Ethics* and thematic seminars. Students are encouraged to further integrate their language skills and the contacts they have developed in the homestay and in the broader community.

Each student will plan, develop, and independently undertake a research project, with the advice and guidance of the Academic Director and an ISP Advisor. The topic of study may be anything of interest to the student, within the scope of the program and is usually developed out of lectures, discussions, and educational excursions. The final project should provide evidence of student capability in utilizing appropriate methodologies and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. Students are expected to complete 120 hours of field-based (non-archival, non-library) research on their topic, submit a 20-30 page written paper, and deliver an accompanying oral presentation. It is not uncommon for ISPs to strongly contribute to the student's choice of subject for graduate studies or professional career.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students:

- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of Samoan culture, society or current issue;
- Understand and appreciate the challenges faced by field researchers;
- Handle with competence the processes of independent, primary field study, including the choice and implementation of a viable topic and of appropriate field methodologies;
- Demonstrate self-confidence, independence, initiative and originality in meeting the challenges of research involving fieldwork;
- Organize, analyze and interpret data acquired in the field in relation to the academic findings and analyses of others; and

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- Produce a final report with an average length of 25-30 pages in conformity with academic standards of scholarship and form, and in total observance of the norms of ethics shared by the host culture and the international academic community.

Course Requirements

As the ISP is the academic culmination of the learning experience, students are encouraged to start thinking actively about their research topic as early in the program as possible. All components of the program, beginning with orientation and including the *Field Methods and Ethics* course, thematic seminars, homestay, educational excursions, language study, and associated forms of cultural interaction within the host society, must be used diligently to refine and deepen this thinking.

Ongoing discussion with the Academic Director and staff will enable students to identify available resources, including an appropriate research supervisor from among local faculty or professionals. Ultimately, the successful completion of the independent study project depends on the methodological rigor, originality, and sophistication with which a student has attended to the research topic. Each student will be assisted by an advisor who helps them through the process of finalizing the research questions, determining field resources, collecting and processing data and writing a final paper that should be between 20 and 30 pages.

All ISP topics must receive advanced approval by the Academic Director and the Local Review Board (LRB), which considers research ethics with human subjects. Students are required to submit formal field study proposals outlining their ISP topic, methodologies, and the plan for implementation to ensure that the project is conducted in an ethical, responsible, and culturally appropriate manner. The ISP must give evidence that the student has mastered the methodological and critical tools, as well as culturally and ethically appropriate techniques, of data generation and analysis.

ISP BY WEEK

The formal ISP period lasts four weeks. Prior to the start of ISP, students must submit a research proposal and complete SIT's Human Subject Review Form. A research supervisor should also be identified.

Major activities of the four-week period include:

WEEK ONE: Begin research tasks and collection of data; organize surveys and interviews

WEEK TWO: Continue research tasks; work journal review with Academic Director

WEEK THREE: Continue research tasks, transcribe interviews, identify themes and begin writing

WEEK FOUR: Complete writing tasks and submit draft to advisor and/or Academic Director; submit final draft; prepare and present oral presentation.

ADVISORS

In order for the students to benefit more fully from local resources, the student, with guidance from the Academic Director, identifies an advisor with expertise in the student's chosen field. The advisors are often lecturers at the National University, staff of government ministries or others working directly with projects related to the students' areas of interest. The advisor helps the student to focus on a clearly defined topic (one which suits available resources and the length of time available for research), directs the student toward resources and contacts and helps with the organization of information. Finally, the Advisor reviews and evaluates the final ISP "product" and submits a written evaluation to the Academic Director. The Academic Director and Assistant are also resources for students in the ISP process.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

The ISP is evaluated on the basis of content, organization, and development of ideas, creativity, and depth of analysis in both oral and written presentations. Special emphasis is placed on students' abilities to use local resources in an appropriate manner. Comments and evaluations of the project advisors are taken into consideration when the Academic Director assigns final ISP grades.

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Other assessment tools include:

Work Journal **15%**

The work journal contains the information gathered in the course of the ISP process.. It should include a copy of the ISP proposal and information about the advisor. The work journal should be organized in five distinct sections:

Events

This section is a diary account of on-going events related to the project. It record the date, time, place, and setting of key events and briefly describes what happened. It also provides information about meetings with the advisor and include any concerns, problems and leads as they occur.

Observations

This section should be a chronological account of the students' field observations. Note the date, time, place and setting of each. Be precise. Not all ISPs will have an observation section.

Interviews

Again note the date, time, place and setting. This section should include transcriptions of recorded interviews or carefully written up notes. Student comments on the interview may also be included.

Themes

This section is essentially a place for students to begin to sort data. Once some central themes have been identified students can begin formulating how these themes fit together to bring about a greater understanding of the topic. As thinking progresses, this thematic section should provide the framework (outline) for the ISP.

Secondary Sources

This section will contain notes and comments on readings or other secondary sources.

Written Paper **60%**

Submit a 20-30 page paper that is typed neatly and double-spaced. Follow the format outlined under ISP GUIDELINES.

Oral Presentation **25%**

Present an engaging oral presentation approximately 30 minutes in length including time for questions. Points will be deducted for presentations less than 20 minutes. Presentations should convey the important aspects of the study and may include material not presented in the written paper or exclude material presented. Presentations styles should be as creative as possible.

Final grades will be assigned as follows:

Work journal	15%
Written Paper	60%
Oral presentation	25%

ISP Mechanics

Getting Started

1. Decide on a topic

Ask yourself: "What do I want to study?" What do I want to learn from the ISP? Is there a topic I have always wanted to investigate or learn more about?" Think about the ISP as an opportunity for self-fulfillment and growth, or as a stepping-stone to your further studies in a particular area. You must be able to define a distinct and do-able project. If you cannot clearly and completely state your project in one sentence, then your project cannot be completed within the time frame of the ISP period.

2. Find an ISP advisor

You need an advisor for your project. The Academic Director will provide you with possible contacts, but it is YOUR responsibility to make the initial contact and obtain the advisor's consent.

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Here are a few things to keep in mind when choosing an advisor:

- The advisor should be someone who has expertise in your field of interest and who is able to work with you to design, implement, and evaluate the ISP. The person may or may not have a doctorate in the relevant field but, nevertheless, should be able to give you the direction and support necessary.
- Find someone who can spend adequate time with you. Most potential advisors are very busy professionals who may not be able to give you as much time as needed - you may need to look elsewhere.
- Once you start your ISP, it is required that the Advisor meets with the student for at least three sessions to define, discuss, and evaluate the student's progress, i.e., discussing and defining the parameters of the research topic, determining research methods, suggesting resources and contacts, assistance in the organization of information, and reviewing the student's final submission.
- It is YOUR responsibility to find an Advisor and to make (and keep) appointments with him or her. This is one of the key challenges and learning opportunities of the ISP.
- ISPs unsupported by the assistance and evaluation of an ISP advisor will not be accepted.

3. Define your research questions and research methods (ISP draft proposals)

In the process of submitting your ISP draft proposals and meeting with the Academic Director, you will have to clearly define your ISP topic and research questions. Focusing your interest on a clear and precise question will allow you to begin your ISP period with as much clarity as possible, and will help you complete your task in the given period of time.

4. Complete a final ISP proposal

The ISP Proposal should provide a clear description of your topic, research questions and intentions, and expectations of the ISP you have chosen to pursue. The proposal will help you anticipate what you are going to do and what possible problems may arise. The proposal should help you to clearly define and refine your project ideas and focus so that your resulting work is a discrete project that can be accomplished in the given period of time.

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

In addition to completing the ISP Proposal, students are also required to submit a Site Approval form that clearly states the whereabouts of the student on each and every day of the ISP - the Academic Director and program staff must be able to reach you during the ISP period in case of an emergency (global or local). Ethical requirements include not only reading and 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 *Field Methods and Ethics* 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.

ISP Written Format – Organization and Presentation

I. Introduction

- a. Explain why you chose this topic
 - i. Points of interest (i.e., Thematic Courses, personal observations, previous research interests, future research interests, personal interests, etc.).
- b. Describe why this topic is relevant to the region/country/culture and program theme.
- c. Define the general parameters of your study, including the scope, depth and expected outcomes (hypothesis).

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- d. Define your terms, including the overall theory on which you are basing your work, while situating your work in a scholarly context.

II. Literature review

- a. This segment is usually a general introduction into the literature and theories relevant to your topic.
- b. Link your topic to the literature currently available on the subject - cite authors, book titles, theories or general perceptions that you may or may not agree with.
- c. Explain why you feel these authors were right or wrong, argue with or against their theories using your own observations or those of other theorists.

III. Body of Paper/ Methodology

- a. This should be the fun part of the paper, as it allows you the opportunity to describe your overall research experience.
- b. Describe the way you decided to set out on your research (i.e. how you chose the participants that you interviewed or worked with, the locations where you conducted your research, etc.).
- c. Describe the methods you used while planning your strategy to obtain the data for your research (i.e. protecting the identity and integrity of your participants, maintaining the integrity of your data, how you planned to avoid any misunderstanding/misinterpretation of your data).
- d. Describe the obstacles and problems that arose during the course of your research.
- e. If necessary, explain how and why you had to change your original plans (basically a cause/effect section) and how that affected the quality, depth and scope of your data.

IV. Findings

- a. The really fun part! This is where you get to explain what you found out during the research process.
- b. It's better to focus on the important points of your hypothesis in this section. Highlight the most important aspects of your data and cite responses or observations that either prove or disprove your original hypothesis (it's ok to be wrong here) using the data you generated during the study.
- c. You can include your analysis of the data/interpretation of findings in this section or you can include this discussion in the "Conclusions" section.

V. Conclusions

- a. This is where you get to tie up all the loose ends and bring things together, while proving or disproving your original hypothesis.
- b. You can include your analysis/interpretation of findings in this section as the proof you need to argue for or against your original theory.
- c. Describe what the implications of your study are (i.e. Why your findings are important. How can this information enhance the existing body of knowledge already available on the topic? What new questions arose out of your findings? How will these findings inform your future research interests?)

VI. 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).

VII. Recommendations for further study:

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.

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VIII. Endnotes (unless you have used page-by-page footnotes).

IX. Bibliography and List of Sources:

This should include all primary and secondary resources used. Primary resources (usually consisting of personal communications) and secondary (textual) resources should be listed under separate headings. Whatever style you choose to use, be accurate and consistent.

X. Appendices

- a. Include a copy of your questionnaire, survey questions, etc.
- b. Include a copy of your written consent form (not the ones signed by participants - those you keep in a safe place). If you do not have written consent, you can state that you have a record of the verbal consent given by the participant.
- c. Any documentation you may have picked up along the way from the organizations/institutions that you visited and met with.

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 Academic Director 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 or health professional. 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 Academic Director 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.

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- 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.
- Students are expected to work independently on their projects, document activities in their work journal, produce a quality written paper and an engaging oral presentation. They will coordinate their research with the Academic Director and Project Advisor.

Student research (Independent Study Project, 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 of the institution(s) and/or community involved. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad may archive, copy, or convert the ISP/FSP for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives my ISP/FSP 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/FSP. Students retain all ownership rights of the ISP/FSP product and retain the right to use all, or part, of my project in future works. Please refer to the Student Handbook or the Access, Use, and Publication of ISP and FSP form.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Student Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, 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>.

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