

## Field Methods and Ethics in Social Science and Health

ANTH 3500 (3 Credits / 45 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:  
India: Public Health, Gender, and Community Action

**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

The *Field Methods and Ethics* course provides students with the concepts and methodological skills to conduct fieldwork in a cross-cultural setting. In particular, this course helps students negotiate additional barriers and boundaries faced while conducting research in a public health context, specifically in navigating power dynamics in conducting interviews and writing objective analysis. During this course, students learn how to consolidate and apply the knowledge imparted during other semester courses. The firsthand experience conducting fieldwork that each student gains during this course will prove valuable at the culmination of the semester during completion of the one-month Independent Study Project (ISP).

Concepts and skills introduced in *Field Methods and Ethics* unite and reinforce all other program components and are heavily utilized during the ISP period. This course will help students develop competence in orientating themselves amidst a new academic and social environment. It will also teach students how to assess and minimize ethical risks while engaging with human subjects in a public health context, including collaboration in the environments of NGOs, hospitals or clinics. This course will provide students with an overview of fieldwork methods, allowing students to gain familiarity with a variety of potential methodological approaches to choose from for their ISPs. The fieldwork skills and background in ethics gained from this course should prove particularly useful for students who plan to pursue a career in the medical field after the program.

### Learning Outcomes

The *Field Methods and Ethics in Social Science and Health* course comprises of 45 hours of instruction (3 credits). Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to do a cross-cultural study by using basic fieldwork methods and skills learnt during the class and field visits;
- Gain experience in compiling and analyzing information gathered from primary and secondary sources and in integrating them to produce a sound research paper as a material product;

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- Have produced a methodologically and ethically sound proposal for fieldwork on a specific topic related to public health in India;
- Apply skills in research ethics and assessment of the impact of a researcher/intern on local people and cultures being studied, using sensitivity and awareness;
- Demonstrate and articulate critical insights and knowledge on a particular topic/organization/public health module in an oral presentation.

## Course Requirements

### Required Readings

| Topic  | Required Readings (Additional readings may be given)  |
|--|---|
| Observations and Cross Cultural Learning: DIE Assignment     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ahuja, R (2001). "Observation" in <i>Research Methods</i>. Rawat Publications. Jaipur, pp 239-260</li> <li>• Said, Edward (1979). "Introduction," in <i>Orientalism</i>, Vintage Books, New York. pp 1-28.</li> </ul>  |
| Fieldwork Methods and Ethics                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ahuja, R (2001). "Questionnaire and Interview Schedule" in <i>Research Methods</i>. Rawat Publications. Jaipur. pp 193-220.</li> <li>• Ahuja, R (2001). "Observation" in <i>Research Methods</i>. Rawat Publications, Jaipur. pp 239-260</li> <li>• Desai, V &amp; Potter, R.B (2006). <i>Doing Development Research</i>. Sage Publications, London. Chapters 11, 13, 15, 16,</li> </ul>   |
| Conducting Interviews in India                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ahuja, R (2001). "Questionnaire and Interview Schedule" in <i>Research Methods</i>. Rawat Publications, Jaipur. pp 193-220</li> <li>• Ahuja, R (2001). "Interview" in <i>Research Methods</i>. Rawat Publications, Jaipur, pp 221-238</li> <li>• Desai, V &amp; Potter, R.B (2006). <i>Doing Development Research</i>. Sage Publications, London. Chapters 17, 18</li> </ul>   |
| ISP Mechanics  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ahuja, R (2001). "Research Design" in <i>Research Methods</i>. Rawat Publications, Jaipur. pp 125-130, 146-149</li> <li>• Glesne, Corrine (1992). "Pre-study Tasks: Doing what is good for you" in <i>Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An introduction</i>. Third edition. Pearson Education, Inc., pp 21-48</li> <li>• Workshop Report on <i>Qualitative Methods in Health Research: opportunities and considerations in application and review</i>, Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research, National Institutes of Health <a href="http://obssr.od.nih.gov/pdf/qualitative.pdf">http://obssr.od.nih.gov/pdf/qualitative.pdf</a></li> </ul> |
| Foreigner as Researcher/Intern: Opportunities and Challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desai, V &amp; Potter, R.B (2006). <i>Doing Development Research</i>. Sage Publications, London. Chapters 4 &amp; 5.</li> <li>• Winchatz, Michaela R., "Fieldworker or Foreigner? Ethnographic interviewing in nonnative languages", <i>Field Methods</i>, Vol 18, no.1, Feb 2006, pp 83-97.</li> </ul>  |

## Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Seminar activities encompass both excursions to field sites and classroom lectures on practices in the field. Reading materials will be assigned and discussed to prepare and enhance understanding of the course and assignments.

To complete this course, students are required to complete two written assignments: the Foundations of Fieldwork exercise and the Three Interviews Assignment. These assignments encompass students' own interviews and anthropological observations and drive students to hone their recording and writing

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skills. They also allow students to practice the observation and interviewing skills essential for conducting fieldwork, specifically in medical contexts that may parallel situations they'll encounter while completing their ISP's. Designed to help students develop orientation and observation skills in an experiential manner, the foundations of fieldwork exercise is based on the D-I-E (Description, Interpretation and Evaluation) method. "Drop-off," a unique SIT activity, forms the basis of the fieldwork exercise. For the Three Interviews assignment, each student selects a particular topic, prepares a questionnaire and conducts formal interviews, documenting the process in a final paper.

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|--|------------|
| <b>(1) Foundations of Fieldwork-D.I.E Exercise</b>                       | <b>40%</b> |
| <b>(2) Three Interviews Assignment</b>                                   | <b>50%</b> |
| <b>(3) Attendance, Participation and Completion of Assigned Readings</b> | <b>10%</b> |

## Evaluation Components

### 1. Foundations of Fieldwork:

This assignment takes place over the course of two excursions and requires students to compile field notes and transcribe these in the D-I-E format described below.

#### Assignment Requirements:

1. **Rough notes:** Students must bring a notebook to all excursions and record observations about the location, local residents, key development issues and questions that are both subjectively observed and, if appropriate, articulated in group interactions. Students should record all sensory information in a stream-of-consciousness form and in as much detail as possible. Rough notes are not expected to be polished and need not employ complete sentences or proper grammatical constructions. These notes are a tool for polishing each researcher's observation skills and enabling her to focus on the small and subtle details that may lead to important theoretical insights and revelations. The rough notes for all visits should be written in the same notebook and clearly labeled. Evaluation criteria includes: comprehensiveness of notes; level of detail and proper identification; and a variety in observation.

2. **D-I-E transcription:** D-I-E is a tool or system for discerning among facts, interpretation of such facts within specific socio-cultural contexts, and subjective evaluations of such information from passionate and opinionated positions. Correctly used, the D-I-E system can be a useful aid for fieldworkers to organize data, distinguish facts from personal ideas, interpret possible meanings of events and situations, and critically examine the bias implicit in their own reactions. For this assignment, students must chose **one** significant event, incident or observation from each excursion and transcribe it in the D-I-E format as follows:

**Description:** Students should describe the experience without attributing meaning. In this phase of D-I-E, students should try to be as objective as possible by relying solely on descriptive techniques. They shouldn't embellish this by describing events' meaning to participants (interpretation) or to themselves (evaluation).

**Interpretation:** In this phase of D-I-E, students interpret what they see, using both what they know from their own experiences and cultural backgrounds as well as what they've learned about in the cultural context they're currently experiencing in India. Students should be searching for ideas of the event's significance to the people they are observing.

**Evaluation:** To evaluate is to pass judgments using some assumed standard of comparison. It involves opinions and explanations of what has happened, what ought to happen or what we feel should or should not happen. Students should remember that it is always possible – and

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pertinent to the latest social science approaches to fieldwork - to be reflexive in making their own evaluations. This means students should take into account the cultural and personal reasons that may have an effect on how they make an evaluation. In current thinking there is no “objective” analysis outside of someone’s evaluative position.

Each section of the D-I-E should be approximately one paragraph. This assignment will be assessed based on the following criteria: correct use of the D-I-E format (students who don’t understand this should not hesitate to raise questions or ask for more clarity); depth of cultural insights expressed in the interpretation section; evidence of self-reflexivity in the evaluation section.

**2. Three Interviews Assignment:** Students should select a topic related to their proposed ISP or other interests related to health and human rights and compose two sets of 10-12 questions – one in English and one in Hindi (translated with the help of the Hindi Instructors). Using these two distinct sets of questions, students will conduct one Hindi and two English interviews about their topic and write up their results in a 750-1000 word summary, focusing on a description and analysis of the interview process. Two interviews must be conducted outside of each student’s homestay. Students should include transcripts of both sets of interview *questions* as appendices to the paper. Each student should keep in mind the limitations and possibilities of language when composing Hindi questions. English questions should be rethought and rephrased in a manner appropriate to Hindi language levels.

Working on this assignment will be a cumulative process ending with a written summary on a topic of each student’s interest which should include a description of the topic, interviewees, interview location and the process and lessons learned from the interview. The goal of this assignment is to orient students to the interview process and prepare them for ISP.

**3. Attendance, Participation and Completion of Assigned Readings:** Students are expected to fully participate in all course activities, complete all required readings and enthusiastically participate in classroom discussions and field activities.

**Participation is not the same as attendance.** Full participation means asking pertinent questions to the course’s guest lecturers, engaging in discussion and analysis during the question-answer section of lectures, group discussions and while on excursion. Students are expected to read the assigned readings, complete and submit assignments on given deadlines and demonstrate their knowledge through reflection, writing, and discussion.

Participation includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, entertaining contradictory perspectives, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language) and taking notes.
- Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge and information. Students should challenge themselves to step outside their comfort zones to ensure the best discussion possible: speaking up if they’re usually quiet or allowing other classmates a chance to speak if they tend to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability - participate positively as a part of a group during field excursions and classes.
- Respect – students should engage in culturally appropriate interactions with their host families, SIT

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program staff, SIT lecturers and local communities. This includes appropriately greeting people when entering offices and classrooms and saying thank you.

***Late papers will marked down one step (B- to C+, e.g.) for each day they are late.***

### **Evaluation and Assessment**

With the exception of journals and field notebooks, all assignments should be typed and double-spaced. Careful proofreading and editing are essential parts of the writing process; spelling and grammar will be graded. Compliance with a standard format of citation is expected for both primary and secondary sources. Most importantly, concise and logical argument should be clear throughout assignments.

Please note: *description is not analysis*. While there is a place for description of people, events or organizations in assignments, be aware that extensive description is not a substitute for critical analysis based on independent thinking and understanding. The more writing reflects a creative synthesis of theory, observation and reflection, the more successful it will be.

### **Grading Criteria**

All grades assigned will take into account the special circumstances and challenges of students in a foreign country. 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 seminar lectures, discussions, field trips, workshops 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.

### **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  |

### **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 accordingly 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).

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Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the 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.

**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.

**Disability Services:** Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services at [disabilityservices@sit.edu](mailto: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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