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studyabroad@sit.edu | Tel 888 272-7881 | Fax 802 258-3296

Fieldwork Ethics and Comparative Research Methods

ANTH 3500 (4 Credits / 60 class hours)

International Honors Program (IHP)
Human Rights: Movements, Power, and Resistance

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 semester to semester.

Course Description

Research as part of scholarship and advocacy is a fundamental component of human rights movements, often leveraged to maximize recognition of specific human rights crises and justify the need for positive solidarity in order to guarantee human rights for all. It represents a practice of perpetual inquiry that can push greater self-reflection and raise awareness about injustice. However, research practice – embedded in a global system of imperialism and power – also forms part of the long history of scholarly and epistemic oppression that positions some peoples as ‘raw material’ and others as ‘experts’. To quote Linda Tuohwei Smith, for many peoples around the world, “‘research’ is probably one of the dirtiest words” (p.2). Today, research and advocacy continue to play a role in framing specific communities within stereotypes, limiting the nuance of their given context, taking over their exercise of voice and agency in self-representation and assuming ownership of their ways of knowing. Thus, the practice of knowledge making is rife with both possibilities and risks. With this backdrop, researcher-advocates must negotiate the ethical responsibility of the methods, use and impact of the knowledge they produce.

This course is designed to introduce students to the politics and practice of research. Students will engage in Comparative Analysis Projects, and through these projects explore the “actual doing” of research, while reflecting on its potential contributions and harmful impacts. Throughout the semester, we will engage two interconnected thematic strands: (1) the ethical dimensions of research – from its role in broader social systems to the daily dilemmas researchers must consider; and (2) the practice and techniques of qualitative research – tracing the research process from the practices of identifying a problem and developing a research question and design, to that of data collection, interpretation and writing. Issues related to access, consent, reflexivity, and representation will be of particular importance.

Course Aims

- Understand the politics of research and knowledge production in relation to human rights, power, and resistance.

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- Develop a beginning awareness of qualitative inquiry approaches and understand the ethical issues entailed in the practice of qualitative research.
- Design and carry out a Comparative Analysis Project.
- Engage in qualitative research activities, including: observations, informal interviews, analysis, and writing.
- Critically engage with positionality, identity and the politics of representation.
- Collaboratively co-construct a learning environment that embodies the praxis of human rights.

Course Materials

Required readings will be available at the beginning of the launch of the program and upon arrival to each country. All required work is listed in the syllabus. Students are expected to complete the required readings before each class session and to use them in fulfilling assignments.

Assignment Details

Class participation and contribution to learning environment (20%) *Ongoing*

This course will require your full attendance and active participation. We will conduct the course in a collaborative workshop format, which will necessitate that you come to our class-sessions prepared to critically engage with the readings, class discussion and activities, and to discuss your own on-going research experience. It also requires that you keep up with your individual Comparative Analysis Project, as this experience will be the primary material for our collective learning proves. You will also be expected to provide peer feedback at certain points throughout the semester, which will also form part of your class participation.

You will also be assigned a CAP working group and I will host discussion sessions with each working group periodically. These sessions are an opportunity to discuss how your CAP projects are going in a smaller group setting.

Preliminary Project Proposal and Researcher Identity Memo (10%)

During the first two weeks of the course, you will be asked to think of a theme or topic about human rights that you are interested in pursuing throughout the program. At the end of these two weeks, you will write an 600-800 words preliminary project proposal in which you will describe the topic that you have selected and how you aim to approach it. (I encourage you to reflect carefully on the feasibility of the project you are selecting.)

This proposal will be a product of your critical engagement with course materials, site visits, lectures, conversations with peers and others during our time in New York and your own past experiences. You should include at least three references to relevant course readings, site observations or materials and/or conversations from our visit in New York. It will also mark the beginning of an iterative process of learning and unlearning about your topic and the process of knowledge making. I will provide you with personal feedback and guidance on your proposal, as will your peers. You will see that your project may change over time, and that is fine, but it is important that you begin to reflect, write and receive feedback as early as possible, as well as throughout the semester.

To your Preliminary Project Proposal, you will also attach a 300-400 Researcher Identity Memo in which you describe your own identity and positionality in relation to your topic. This may include your motivation for choosing the topic as well as the ways that your own background may influence the assumptions you hold about the topic and how you enter into the exploration of it. What prior connection do you have to this topic? How do you think and feel about it? What assumptions are you holding about it? What do you hope to get out of the experience of exploring this topic comparatively? The purpose of this assignment is to begin to examine your goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings and values as they relate to your topic, and uncover resources and potential concerns your identity and experience may create for your project.

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Journal and Country Memos (30%)

Throughout the semester you will be writing down your observations and reflections in your notebook. This will become the primary place to document your CAP process, including the logging, jotting, and analyzing of your field experiences. It will include:

1. **Observations:**
 - a. General observations and jottings: Throughout the semester you will have the opportunity to attend site-visits and lectures that may pertain directly or indirectly to your topic. You will take notes on these when possible (or after if that is more appropriate). You will also find yourself making observations during your daily experiences - remember that your topic may come up in unexpected moments and forms: a poster on the street, a passing conversation, a moment of culture clash – make sure to capture these as well.
 - b. Field-notes: You are expected to carry out at least one day of observation on your topic. For this you will write field-notes in which you (a) describe what you observed; (b) interpret and analyze what you observed and how this relates to your topic; and (c) reflect on the process of observation and how it relates to your emergent awareness of research practice.
2. **Conversations and interviews**: You will carry out at least 3 conversations and/or interviews about your topic in each country. You will log these in your notebook, including: description of when and where the conversation took place, the people with whom you spoke, the questions you asked, the notes you took during the conversation, any interpretations/analysis you have of the information that was shared, and reflections on the process itself.
3. **Reflections**: While both of the above encompass reflection, you may also opt to use your notebook as a space to capture how your understanding of your topic is changing over time. Your reflections may include reactions to readings, guest lectures, site-visits, faculty sessions, other activities, or afterthoughts on your observations and conversations – as they respectively relate to your topic.
4. **Country Memo**: Toward the end of our stay in each country, you will read through the entries you have made in your journal in that country and write up a country memo (800-1000 words), addressing the following:
 - a. *Log* of your activities and information you gathered related to your topic.
 - b. Reflection on your *process* of gathering information (including any changes to your approach that you may wish to integrate).
 - c. *Analysis* of the emergent themes as pertain to your topic.
 - d. Any lingering questions and/or steps you aim to take up in the next country or phase of the project.

Final Comparative Analysis Paper and Presentation (40%)

At the end of the semester you will present the culmination of your semester-long exploration of your topic in two formats: (1) a 8-12 page Final Comparative Analysis Paper, and (2) a 10-minute presentation to the learning community. This will be your opportunity to present your critical and comparative analysis of your topic. As the assignment is comparative in nature, you are expected to use information and draw comparative reflections from at least two of the countries we visit. You will receive further details regarding these assignments mid-way through the semester.

A few comments on topic selection, support from country teams and DIY time

During the launch you will receive a list of feasible topics. This will help to guide you on your selection of topic. Ideally you will choose a topic that you are particularly interested in, perhaps due to prior experience and study of it. Your selected topics will then need to be vetted by your professor and the country teams, as we need to be pragmatic regarding what is feasible in our given locations.

Alongside the process of selecting your topic, you will also begin to identify possible resources and approaches for learning about it. The country teams, as well as the local faculty, will be key resources for you in this step. In each country, you will be briefed on opportunities for conversations, interviews and observations. However, it is important to remember that the country coordinators and their teams are resource persons for you, not your research assistants. So please be mindful and respectful of their time, and be aware that it is your responsibility to coordinate any visits or meetings external to the established program activities. Gaining access to participants and sites is a part of research, so this is also a part of your learning process.

Finally, there are designated DIY times throughout the semester. You will have many expectations from each of your respective courses, so it is important that you manage your time wisely so that you can make the most of these DIY time slots.

Course Evaluation

Points Distribution

Class participation	20%
Preliminary Project Proposal (& Identity Memo)	10%
Country Memo - Nepal	15%
Country Memo – Jordan	15%
Final Comparative Analysis Paper	30%
Final Comparative Analysis Presentation	10%

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

As the learning process of this course is dependent on your continuous and reflective engagement with your project, the course materials, and your learning community, grading will serve as an accountability mechanism for these elements by using the above assignments as a means through which to hold you accountable to your own learning. The grading will function on a basis of points distributed as reflected in the list above. At the end of the term, your cumulative point score will be calculated to determine your final letter grade for the course.

It is useful for faculty and students to view final grades in this way. An “A” represents truly outstanding work, exemplifying rigorous analysis, superior insights, and precise presentation. A “B” signifies highly competent work that completes the assignment very well, with considerable thought, reasonable analytical results and an effective presentation. A “C” represents acceptable, work, satisfying the basic requirements, but lacking distinction, original analytical insights or organization. A “D” grade indicates poorly or partially completed work, reflecting a lack of initiative, inconsistent analytical conclusions and/or a disorganized presentation. Pluses and minuses for the four letter grades indicate better or poorer work. There is no “A+” grade.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	Excellent
90-93%	A-	
87-89%	B+	
84-86%	B	Above Average
80-83%	B-	
77-79%	C+	
74-76%	C	Average
70-73%	C-	
67-69%	D+	
64-66%	D	Below Average
below 64	F	Fail

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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).
- 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 Student Handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

Course Organization and Required Reading

*The assigned readings below are subject to change. In the event of a change, you will be informed in advance via email.

New York City, USA

Session 1 Introduction: the politics and practice of knowledge production

What is qualitative research? What role does research play in human rights? What do we aim to learn through this course?

Required reading:

- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Introduction. (pp 1-19).
- Diversi, M. & Moreira, C. (2010). *Betweener Talk*. Chapter 1. The beginnings of a critical postcolonial duo. (pp.13-29).

Supplementary:

- Luttrell, W. (2010). “Reflexive Writing Exercises.” In Luttrell, W. (Ed.) *Qualitative Educational Research: Readings in Reflexive Methodology and Transformative Practice*. (p.470-480).

Kathmandu, Nepal

Session 2 Embarking on qualitative research and fieldwork

What is a research question? What is research design? Why do ethics and reflexivity matter in doing research? What is informed consent?

Required reading:

- Luttrell, W. (2010). “Interactive and Reflexive Models of Qualitative Research Design”. In Luttrell, W. (Ed.) *Qualitative Educational Research*. (p.159-163).
- Horvat, E. (2013). *The Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research*. Chapter 1. Thoughts for the uninitiated on starting a qualitative project. pp.3-35 & Chapter 6. Three times blind: The wandering, wondering path to asking the right question. pp.127-151.
- Thorne, B. (1980). “You still takin’ notes?” Fieldwork and problems of informed consent. *Social Problems*, Vol 27, No.3, pp. 284-297.

Supplementary:

- IHP Guiding principles for storytelling and community engagement.
- Luker, K. (2010). Reviewing the Literature. In *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences* (pp. 76–98). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Session 3 Preparing for interviews and observations (Workshop)

What is an interview? What types of questions can be used in interviewing and in conversation? What are some strategies for effective interviewing? What are field-notes? What are some strategies for effective note-taking?

Supplementary reading:

- Horvat, E. (2013). *The Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research*. Excerpts. pp.49-60; pp.61-75; pp.82-101.

- Emerson, R., Fretz, R. & Shaw, L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1: Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research. pp.1-16.

Session 4 Project workshop session.

In this session, we will continue to explore techniques for research design, observation, and interviewing.

* Come to the session with an up-to-date project workshop (distributed in session 3), a sample of your field-notes and a list of interview questions that you might ask related to your topic.

Session 5 Ethical questions in the role of witness

What ethical questions does the role of witness generate? How do we ethically engage with the suffering of others?

Required reading:

- Sontag, S. (2003) *Regarding the pain of others*. New York: Picador. Chapter 2 & 3.
- Theidon, K. (2014). "How was your trip?" Self-care for researchers working and writing on violence. Drugs, Security and Democracy Program DSD Working Papers on Research Security: No. 2.

Supplementary:

- Mahrouse, G. (2014). *Conflicted Commitments: Race, Privilege, and Power in Solidarity Activism*. Chapter 3: The Compelling Story of the First World Activist in the War Zone. (p.63-78)

Amman, Jordan

Session 5 Speaking for? Speaking with?

What are the politics of representation? What are the ethical and practical ramifications of representation in research design and practice?

Required reading:

- Alcoff, L. (1992). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique*, No. 20 (Winter, 1991-1992), pp. 5-32.
- Fine, M. (1998). "Working the Hyphens: Reinventing Self and Other in Qualitative Research." In Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). *The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage. pp. 130-155.

Supplementary:

- Henry, M. G. (2010). "Where are you really from? Representation, Identity and Power in the Fieldwork Experiences of a South Asian Diasporic". In Luttrell, W. (Ed.) *Qualitative Educational Research*. (p. 363-373)
- Villenas, S. (2010). "The Colonizer/Colonized Chicana Ethnographer: Identity, Marginalization and Co-optation in the field." In Luttrell, W. (Ed.) *Qualitative Educational Research*. (p. 345-362)
- Gallagher, C.A. (2010). "White Like Me: Methods, Meaning and Manipulation in the Field of White Studies." In Luttrell, W. (Ed.) *Qualitative Educational Research*. (p. 374-383)

Session 6 Analyzing qualitative data (Workshop)

How do we process and make sense of the information we gather? What is interpretation and analysis? What are some strategies for making sense of qualitative data? What are some of the ethical dilemmas relevant to data analysis?

Required reading:

- Horvat, E. (2013). *The Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research*. Ch.5. Making sense of what you are seeing: Analysis and writing. pp.105-124.

Session 7 From data to advocacy/activism

How does research contribute to advocacy? How does research contribute to theory? What is a literature review? How is it useful?

Required reading:

- Choudry, A. (2013). Activist research practice: Exploring research and knowledge production for social action. *Socialist Studies*. 9(1). pp.128-151.
- Sample reports distributed in Session 6.

Santiago, Chile

Session 8 Principles for human rights research

What ethical dilemmas emerge in conducting human rights-related research? How have we experienced these and other critical issues during our comparative analysis projects? What are some of the possibilities for collaborative and participatory knowledge making?

Required reading:

- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Ch. 6: The Indigenous People's Project: Setting a New Agenda. (pp.111-126). & Ch. 10: Towards Developing Indigenous Methodologies: Kaupapa Maori Research. (pp.185-197).

Session 9 Conclusions: The role of scholarship, research and publishing in human rights praxis

What role does research play in human rights? What have we learned through this course? What are the next steps for our Comparative Analysis Projects?

*Chile Country Memo should be completed by Session 9 – however you will not be expected to submit this.

Session 10 Final Presentations