Independent Study Project
ISPR 3000 (4 Credits / 120 hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Portugal: Sustainability and Environmental Justice

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 term to term.

Description

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is a self-designed research project offering students the opportunity to undertake a personally significant and independent investigation, which highlights the regional and cultural reality that can only be encountered during a study abroad experience. 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 Environmental Research Methods and Ethics course and the thematic courses, while enabling students 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—a local academic and/or sustainability or environmental professional. The topic of study may be anything of interest to the student, within the scope of the program and the immediate region, and is usually developed out of lectures, discussions, field visits, and educational excursions. The final project should provide material 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 substantial 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 will:
- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of sustainability, environmental justice, and urban regeneration in the context of Portugal;
- Gain competence in the processes of independent, primary, research—from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies to final analyses and interpretations of data;
- Demonstrate independence and self-confidence while functioning in Portuguese daily life;
- Demonstrate awareness of the ethical issues in environmental justice;
- Integrate the learning acquired in all program components to write a research paper or white policy paper with an average length of 25-45 pages 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 Environmental Research Methods and Ethics course, the two thematic courses, homestay, educational excursions, Portuguese 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, while primarily concerning the research topic, must also enable students to identify available resources, including an appropriate research supervisor from among local faculty or sustainability and environmental justice professionals. Ultimately, the successful completion of the ISP depends, to no small degree, 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 the student through the process of finalizing the research questions, determining field resources, collecting and processing data, and writing a final paper that should be between 25-45 pages.

All ISP topics must receive advanced approval by the academic director. Students are required to submit formal research 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.

Readings

While the majority of the ISP work should be conducted in the field, readings for the ISP are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study. Reference articles and books are available from local libraries, the program library, and SIT's electronic library databases specifically related to student ISP topics. Students are also expected to consult appropriate course readings applicable to the ISP.

ISP Guidelines and Requirements

The student will spend a minimum of 120 hours on the ISP, with a majority of this work conducted in the field (as opposed to library research, for example). This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, participating, making field observations, writing, and meeting with the academic director and ISP advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least 3-5 individual advising meetings to review their ISP proposal and ISP planning. Periodic progress conferences will be held with the academic director, as needed. Unless approved for an alternative ISP, the final product is a typed and bound 25-45-page academic paper, double-spaced, with 12-point standard font. In addition, a 20-30-minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analyses will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the academic director, the ISP advisors, and other invited guests.

Guidelines for ISP Proposal

Before embarking on your ISP project, you need to submit a proposal in which you explain:

1. Your thesis.
2. The methodology you will use to collect information and analyze it.
3. Where and/or from whom you will collect information.
4. What secondary sources you have consulted or will consult.
5. The kind of ethical issues you face or will face while doing your research.
6. What resource persons (including a possible advisor) you have contacted or will contact.

Human Subjects Review

All ISP proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, students are required to submit an "Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects," to include a discussion of any potential harm that might come from the study, and to provide appendices including interview and survey protocols. If the academic director or Local Review Board believes that the proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, the student will be asked to revise their proposal. Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic practice.

If the research has been funded by a U.S. government agency, or if the student plans to take this research back to the home school or community for further dissemination, then the student may be required to follow standards from their home institutions in addition to the Local Review Board and those of the Office for Human Research Protections, with which SIT is registered. For applications that require a full review, the academic director will forward any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the Local Review Board) to SIT's Institutional Review Board.

ISP To Do List
1. Decide on a topic
This stage can often be difficult in narrowing topics of interest. This is where the student asks: "What do I want to study? What do I want to learn from the ISP? Where do I want to spend the month for my 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 steppingstone to further studies in a particular area.

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

2. Find an ISP advisor
Students need an advisor for their project. The AD will provide students with possible contacts, but it is their responsibility to make the initial contact and get the advisor's consent. Here are a few things to consider when choosing an advisor:
- The advisor should be someone who has expertise in the field of interest and is able to work with the student to design, implement, and evaluate the ISP. The person should have a graduate school degree (MA or PhD) in the relevant field, and should be able to give the direction and support needed.
- Once students start their ISP, it is required that the advisor meets with them for at least three sessions, to define, discuss, and evaluate their progress, i.e., discussing and defining the parameters of the research topic, determining research methods, suggesting resources and contacts, assisting in the organization of information, and reviewing the student's final submission.
- It is the **STUDENT'S** responsibility to initiate contact with 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 the ISP draft proposals and meeting with academic director, students will have to clearly define their ISP topic and research questions. Focusing their interest on a clear and precise question will allow students to begin their ISP period with as much clarity as possible and will help them complete tasks in the given period of time.

4. Complete a final ISP proposal

The ISP Proposal should provide a clear description of the topic, research questions and intentions, and expectations of the ISP that the student has chosen to pursue. The proposal will help anticipate what the student is going to do and what possible problems may arise. The proposal should help clearly define and refine project ideas and focus so that students end with 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 AD and program staff must be able to reach you during the ISP period in case of an 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 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.

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).
      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 okay 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?)

V.   Limitations of the Study

Though optional, this section is highly recommended. Legitimize your study by proactively pointing out its shortcomings and biases (all studies have them, of course).

VI.   Recommendations for Further Study

This should consist of a short list of recommendations on how your study might be expanded upon or used as the basis for future ISPs.

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. APA style/formatting required.

X.   Appendices

      a. Include a copy of your questionnaire, survey questions, etc. if applicable

      b. Include a copy of your written consent form (not the ones signed by participants—those you keep in a safe place), if applicable.

Important Dates & Deadlines

Week 10, _____   Confirm local ISP Advisor and submit first draft of ISP Proposal
Week 11, _____   ISP final proposal due
Week 11, _____   ISP period officially begins (you may start your research earlier)
Week 14, _____   ISP due – NO EXTENSIONS
Week 15, _____   ISP presentations due

Role of Academic Director and Academic Advisor

The academic director and the academic advisor advise students on methodology, background reading, and in-country contacts which the students will be encouraged to pursue. The academic director, in consultation with the academic advisor, and in some cases with the help of the ISP advisor (if applicable) evaluates the completed project and assigns the grade.

They receive further support and training by professional researchers for developing their research projects and ISP proposals.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria
At the end of the ISP period, students are expected to present their work to the group and the academic director. Timely completion of all ISP assignments is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the quality of expression, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and adherence to the highest ethical standards. During the process of planning, developing, executing, and presenting the ISP, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Portugal 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.

In general, the criteria for ISP evaluation include the student's methods and effectiveness in gathering information, organization, assimilation, accuracy, analysis of the information, the effectiveness of expression and communication in the final form, and clarity and strength of project presentation and defense.

Independent Study Project (ISP) (80%)
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 (20%)
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 Final Paper	80%
ISP Project Oral Presentation	20%

Grading Scale
The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

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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
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I    =    Incomplete
W    =    Withdrawal (Student initiated)
AW   =    Administrative withdrawal
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Grading Criteria
An "A" grade for an assignment entails superior (not just "very good") performance—in terms of structure and organization—of both the written paper and oral presentation, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical, and/or historical evidence.

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.
- Students must respect the ethical considerations and guidelines of environmental research.
- 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.
- 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.

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.

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 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.