

Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 (4 credits / 120 hours)

Switzerland: International Studies and Multilateral Diplomacy

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

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 Research Methods and Ethics course and the thematic courses, while enabling students to further integrate their language skills and the contacts they have developed at the level of the international community in Geneva as well as the regional (Swiss, European) levels. Each student will plan, develop, and independently undertake a research project, with the advice and guidance of the academic director and the academic advisor or a local academic and/or expert or professional. 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, 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 including the complex of international agencies in Geneva. 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 be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to critically assess information relevant to their research topic;
- Identify and intergrate primary and secondary sources in a coherent interdisciplinary analytical framework;
- Apply a relevant research methodology and ethical guide lines learned in the program;
- Apply interactive research methods to complete the ISP;
- Identify and interact with expert networks in the international community of Geneva to gain different national, regional and civilizational perspectives about the subject of the ISP;
- Demonstrate the ability to carry out applied research on a relevant subject related to the core themes of the SZG program.

Guidelines for ISP Proposal

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

1. Your research question.
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 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.

Course Methods

Throughout the nine weeks of seminars, students identify primary and secondary sources related to the topic of their ISPs. Students meet with faculty members of SIT Switzerland on formal and informal bases to evaluate and discuss their progress of ISP research. Students contact experts working in fields related to their ISP topic and will meet such experts at various international organizations in Geneva. During the last month of the program, students work exclusively on their ISP project, which includes data collection, synthesis and analysis, interactive research, interviewing experts, writing the ISP paper, writing in their work journal and interactive log, and preparing for their oral presentation. Students may choose a project advisor and will continue to meet with the Academic Director throughout the ISP period.

Course Requirements

1. Students apply methods of interactive research (e.g. extensive interviews) towards completion of the project; the ISP work journal accounts for the design of the project, the time periods of research, the research locations, and the human resources/experts;
2. A 30-minute oral presentation and discussion of the ISP;

3. A 30-page (250 words/page) academic paper that includes: abstract, title page, acknowledgments, table of contents, theoretical framework of analysis, research methodology, conclusions, notes, and bibliography
4. The original ISP paper, Work Journal, and Interactive Research Log submitted to the Academic Director
5. Electronic version (disk or e-mail) of your fully formatted ISP

Potential List of Independent Study Projects

- Conflict resolution and multilateral diplomacy processes
- New threats to global security
- Roles of international agencies in developing countries
- Europe and the global power shift
- Peacebuilding and nation building
- New approaches to security
- Human rights and international law
- Migrations, refugees, and internally displaced persons
- Protection of humanitarian spaces in conflict zones
- Humanitarian aid in complex emergencies
- Non-state actors and international humanitarian diplomacy
- Geopolitics of natural resources
- Environmental diplomacy
- Security strategies of the European Union

ISP Mechanics

Getting Started

1. Decide on a topic

This can be easy sometimes, but more often it is difficult. This is where you 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 further your studies in a particular area. You must be able to define a distinct and do-able project. As such, the next sentence is critical to keep in mind when deciding upon or refining your ISP topic. 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. Define your research questions and research methods (ISP draft proposals)

In the process of submitting your ISP draft proposals and meeting with either the academic director or the academic advisor, 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.

3. 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.

4. Complete, sign, and hand in SIT forms: ethical guidelines, and Institutional Review Board (IRB).

In addition to completing the ISP Proposal, students are also required to submit and comply with ethical requirements, agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, and to comply with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in the Research Methods and Ethics course.

Important Dates & Deadlines

Week 3: Submit first draft of ISP proposal

Week 8: ISP final proposal due

Week 10: ISP period officially begins (you may start your research earlier)

Week 14: ISP due—NO EXTENSIONS

Week 14-15: ISP presentations due

ISP Written Format—Organization and Presentation

(IMPORTANT: Please note that a separate document will be distributed detailing more precisely all aspects of ISP formatting, as requested for the SZG program).

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?)

VI. 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).

VII. 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. Abbreviation list

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.

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.

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

The evaluation of the ISP will be completed by the Academic Director with critical comments and evaluation from the ISP advisor. Assessment of the written project and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of information conveyed, the student's methods and effectiveness of gathering information, organization, assimilation, the clarity of the presentation, the quality of analysis and argumentation, oral expression, clarity of answers to questions and civility of interaction. Special emphasis is put on the student's ability to integrate primary sources and methods of interactive research and to present the findings in a clear, organized and well-synthesized format. The Academic Director assigns the final grade.

During the process of planning, developing, executing and presenting the ISP, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Switzerland 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

Description of Assignments:

Independent Study Project (ISP) Paper (60%):

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

Independent Study Project Oral Presentation (25%):

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.

Work Journal and Interactive Research Log (15%):

The ISP Work Journal documents the ISP information-gathering process and records all information relevant to the evolution of the ISP. This journal can be helpful in the event that students have to demonstrate to their university advisor what your ISP involved. Before determining what categories to include student has to consider the objectives of their research and how you can best organize information in a coherent, convenient, and accessible manner.

Students have to submit an Interactive Log document together with the Work Journal. In this document, students have to indicate the name and title of the experts and the date and the time of interviews conducted with these experts to complete their Interactive Research requirements.

Assessment:

Independent Study Project Paper	60%
Independent Study Project Oral Presentation	25%
Work Journal is Interactive Research Log	15%

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

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.

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>.