Development, Gender, and Community Resilience in the Himalaya

DVST 3000 (3 Credits)

Nepal: Borders, Identity, and Community Resilience

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.

Course Description

This nine-week course employs a variety of approaches to introduce the aspects of development and community resilience, focusing on gender issues and the discourse and efforts surrounding gender equality, local development, and community resilience. Gender equality has emerged as a critical global issue, and in Nepal, the efforts to achieve gender equality are most pronounced today than ever in the past. Students will be able to use Nepal’s example to understand how development and social change occur, the obstacles and challenges, and efforts to pave a path for equality.

Through both classroom and field-oriented activities, students will investigate the role of development in bringing gender issues to the forefront, and its impact on societal change. The course covers aspects of gender equality, improvement in livelihood, food security, human rights, and health; and how these aspects are interlinked with each other. Students will also be exposed to the interplay of different policies, cultural and social structures and economic opportunities to understand the status of women in Nepal, and how social change and development affect the discourse surrounding issues of inequality.

Students are encouraged to analyze the dominant discourse of development and gender, and their broader implications. The reading materials are designed to help students familiarize with broader theories, global efforts to equality and how gender relations have implications to other critical global issues of inequality, food security, environment, resource management, global health and education.

Lectures from field practitioners and visits to various organizations will allow students to understand the efforts to equality and equal rights in Nepal. Such visits and lectures will help students understand different challenges and potential that emerge from social, cultural factors and how these challenges morph and become dynamic with social change. Conversations with activists will also provide an inside view of efforts and resources, mobilization and strategies that the activists and leaders use to make meaningful changes in society. Students will then be able to use this knowledge and relate them to the broader theories that surround development, modernity, and gender. The integration of readings, lectures and field visits are designed to help students make a crucial connection between academia and implementation.
Two excursions are designed to provide an opportunity for the students to experience their learning, get intimate knowledge about issues related to equality and how it is changing with efforts to development. These visits are crucial for students’ learning and positioning local communities and their efforts to improve livelihoods while navigating external forces. During these excursions, students will be able to interact with local communities and observe how social roles and power relations play an important role in determining development and community resilience, and in return how these changes affect Nepali society.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will be able to:
- Articulate and critique prevailing discourses and theories surrounding development, community resilience and gender issues in Nepal and the world.
- Analyze the efforts to achieve gender equality and its relationship to development in Nepal and how various social, political, cultural and other global factors create opportunities and obstacles to these efforts.
- Examine the interlinkage between gender equality and other global issues of natural resource management, food security, human rights issues, global and household health, education and poverty.
- Understand how gender roles are changing with social change and evaluate their impact on development efforts.
- Evaluate how global climate change, politics, affect the society in Nepal and relate it to broader world.
- Integrate information gathered from unique primary resources available in Nepal with the information presented by local scholars, field practitioners, and immersive learning and critically analyze their impact on social change.
- Demonstrate critical insights on the connections between a modern development agenda, changing social structure and construction, and how they relate to the discourse surrounding development, gender issues and equality in Nepal.

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of economic change and development through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Course Requirements

Course Schedule
*Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers’ availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Development and Gender

Topics covered in this module: Introduction to Nepal, theories of development, institution of patriarchy, implication of gender inequality, analysis of Nepal’s constitution, and underlying historical factors that have shaped gender relations in Nepal

This introductory module is designed to give an introduction to Nepal in general, different theories of development, global gender issues and the status of women in Nepal. As a
predominantly patriarchal society, Nepal’s cultural, social and political fabric and many policies, rights and laws surrounding gender rights are based on specific social construction devoted to the concepts of patriarchy. This module allows students to understand and evaluate the underlying historical factors that have created gender inequality in Nepal and worldwide.

The weekly (end of the week) debriefing followed by student led discussions are designed to bring together the different components and learnings of the week. These discussions are crucial to providing a sincere approach to contextualizing societal norms, traditions, history and Nepal's law and how they impact social structure.

Module 2: Community based resource management and livelihood improvement

Topics covered in this module: Microcredit and livelihood, community-based resource management

There are multiple theories that relate economic opportunities among women and their direct impact on livelihood improvement. One of the big examples is Yunus' work on Grameen Bank that was designed to provide women the opportunity and resource to improve their economic status and livelihood. The readings and conversations with practitioners will help students understand how gender is closely tied with economic security, household education and improving livelihood.

Visits and interactions with community forestry user group will help students understand how local communities come together to protect their resources, while improving their livelihood. Students will be encouraged to think critically about how such opportunities can have long term impact on resource management and environment. Readings aligned to the field visits will help students relate their learning from the examples in Nepal to broader theories of community driven development.

Module 3: Social change and the discourse on gender, rights and sexuality

Topics covered in this module: Democracy and equality, sexuality and discourse surrounding rights of gender and sexual minorities in Nepal

Although Nepal is a strictly patriarchic society, gender rights and issues surrounding gender quality are rapidly changing. After Nepal opened itself to the outside world in 1951, new ideas of democracy and rights have developed which in turn have changed the discourse on gender, rights and sexuality. Through the lens of gender, students will be able to understand and analyze how the conversation has changed with time. Lectures from rights activists will open new understanding to the work and efforts to gender equality.

Visits to local organizations for advocacy and LGBTQ rights are an important part of this module. These visits will provide an opportunity for the students to learn directly from practitioners, gain first-hand knowledge about institutions and the platforms they have created for social change, and build networks with professionals in the field.

The weekly debriefing followed by student led discussion is designed to create a meaningful conversation around activism in Nepal, the efforts and strategies used by the activists and
their efforts to social change. These discussions are moderated to allow previous week’s learning as a context to understand different challenges and potential to change.

Student led discussions and debriefs, along with field visits and readings are designed to bring together readings, lectures and field visits to allow students get a more holistic picture of development, gender and community resilience.

Module 4: Rural development and community resilience

Topics covered in this module are: Climate change and resilience, rural development, society and culture

Climate change has some significant implications on Nepal’s development, food and agriculture, natural resources, and vulnerability to disasters. Students will visit The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)’s knowledge park and learn about simple innovative ways to improve livelihood in the mountain communities of Nepal.

The major excursion will be helpful for students to see for themselves how these aspects are interlinked in rural communities of Nepal. Students will also be able to use different theoretical lenses, previous knowledge about gender issues to understand and complement with their experiential learning in the field. The opportunity to conduct a research during their major excursion will help students exercise their knowledge to develop their own critical thinking about equality, development and changing societal norms and identity.

Students will visit a remote part of Nepal, where they will live with the community. As a part of the major excursion, students will be required to conduct fieldwork and develop a small research project from their interactions and communications with the community. The objective of such project is to give students an opportunity to understand local priorities and needs and help them navigate rural Nepali society.

*The seminar concludes on return to Kathmandu, with the final development paper and final student led discussions that allow students get a more holistic picture of development, gender and social change prior to the start of the ISP or internship.

Required Readings for this course include:


Note: Additional recommended readings are available on Moodle.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Assessment:
The Seminar consists of 30 hours of formal classroom lectures and more than 50 hours of field visits, informal talks, and group and individual discussions. Student performance is assessed on the basis of the papers, contributions to group discussions, thoughtful journals, and enthusiastic initiative in his or her own learning process. The final grade is given by the Academic Director, according to each student’s active reflections and involvement as instantiated in their papers and according to his/her degree of enthusiastic exploration of and authentic insights into the academic and intellectual themes of the program.

Description of Assignments:
Students are required to complete seven weekly journals, complete three written essays (development papers) and a village project. Additionally, in conjunction with their Field Methods and Ethics course, students are also required to complete one field project during their major excursion village stay. Participation is also an important component of this course.
1. **Weekly Journal**: Every week, students are required to complete a weekly journal (7 weeks of journal writing in total). Journal entries should be thoughtful and constructive, elaborating student’s experiences, self-reflection and ideas. Journals can include reading materials, lectures and field visit on that particular week. The objective of these journals is to help students position themselves in Nepali society, allow self-reflection and understanding of their own biases and perceptions, and help them look at the experience in a more constructive manner.

2. **Written Essays (reaction papers)**: Students are required to complete two essays during the semester. In an effort to make sure that everyone is on the same page from the outset, all students will complete a reaction paper (essay) by the end of the 3rd week. The second essay will be due at the end of 6th week. The goal of these papers is to demonstrate students’ understanding of development, gender issues, and community resilience in Nepal. Students can choose general topics, or specific issues pertaining to these topics for their paper. Students are encouraged to write their final paper related to their ISP/internship topic/field.

Papers should be both a summary of the issues and critical in nature. Critical responses may present questions, rebuttals, syntheses of key ideas, or critical analyses of themes in the readings. The essays should be 4-5 pages, not including bibliography, appendixes, etc.

3. **Village Project**: This assignment will be briefed at the beginning of our major excursion. The project integrates fieldwork techniques such as interviewing, participant observation, and possibly even participatory rural appraisal, as part of the process. It requires students to communicate and interact with local community members, navigate and understand the priorities and needs of the local community and work on a small community development project with the local youth/community members. This project will be decided through interactions with the community members and upon understanding the needs of the local community. Students are given the chance, through rural homestays, to participate directly in village life; this sometimes takes the form of helping with farm work or being part of a village festival.

4. **Participation**: Participation is not the same as attendance. All students are expected to participate fully in all aspects of the seminar. This means asking pertinent questions to the course’s guest lecturers, engaging in discussion and analysis during lectures, group discussions and on excursions. Students are expected to complete the required reading in a timely fashion, and to demonstrate their understanding of texts through reflection, writing, and discussion.

- Weekly Journal - 35% (5% each)
- Essays (Development papers) - 40% (20% each)
- Village Study Project - 15%
• Participation - 10%

Grading Scale

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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 and done accordingly to the specified requirements and submit them in Moodle. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.

Ask questions in class and in the field: These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Use informal gathering, field visits, visits to organizations as an opportunity to learn, build networks and engage with professionals in Nepal.

Attendance: All students are required to attend all lectures at the SIT Nepal schoolhouse in Kathmandu and to participate in all discussion and analysis sessions. All excursions are mandatory, and students must discuss absences with the Academic Director before the planned departure.

Participation: Participation is not the same as attendance. All students are expected to participate fully in all aspects of the seminar, like asking pertinent questions, actively participating in the discussions and demonstrate thoughtful analysis and reflection.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont,
such as Library resources and research support, Disability Services, Counseling Services, Title IX information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.