Independent Study Project
ISPR-3000 (4 credits)

South Africa: Identity, Multiculturalism, & Social Political Transformation

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.

Course Overview
The Independent Study Project (ISP) is an academic project that is designed to allow you as a student, to further your understanding of a topic unique to the South African experience. A central aspect of the ISP is the collection and use of primary data. The ISP takes advantage of your presence as a student in South Africa, with access to materials and information sources available here. A local advisor, who specializes in the field of interest, must be selected by you, and approved by the Academic Director (AD). All topics must be finalized and approved by the AD, and advisors must be selected and confirmed before the project commences. Meetings will be held throughout the semester with the AD and other program staff to finalize the topic, help select an appropriate advisor, and identify potential sources of information. Allowing for travel and time to write, edit, and print the final paper, means your time to do actual field study will be limited. For this reason, your topic must be very specific and well-focused. At the end of the independent study period, you are expected to submit a paper and make a presentation of your fieldwork. The project is then evaluated in writing by the ISP Advisor and an Academic Director. The AD then submits a grade and narrative evaluation of the project to SIT, and in turn these assessments are then forwarded to your home university. The ISP carries a total of four credits.

Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students will be able to:
- Design, refine, and carry out an individual project in the South African context;
- Practice field study methods, those associated with the ethical context of field study; and
- Demonstrate confidence and a deeper understanding of experiential learning.

You will spend a minimum of 180 hours on the ISP. This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, making field observations, writing, meeting with the Academic Director and Advisor. You will be provided with a template for the final ISP which should be a spiral bound 35-40-page (+/- 17750 words for a social analysis and +/- 9000 words for a creative) document. To save paper, please have it printed back to back. A highlight of the assignment is a 20-minute presentation to fellow students, program staff, where possible your advisor and other invited guests.

What You Need to Do
1. Decide on a Topic

This can sometimes be easy, but more often, it is a challenge! This is where you ask yourself: “what do I want to do?” There are several ways to answer this question.

*What do I want to learn from the ISP?* Is there a topic you have always wanted to investigate or learn more about? Think about the ISP as being an opportunity for self-fulfillment and growth, or as a stepping-stone to your further studies in an area of interest.

*Am I choosing this to further other study goals?* Is my research project here part of a larger study or requirement of my home institution? If so, how can I best fulfill on the criteria for ISP along with the criteria of my home institution? What kinds of choices will I have to make? What ethical concerns might this raise?

The key to the ISP is finding the best match for your interests and abilities. Perhaps you have a really big question, but a small group of people you want to interview. Perhaps you have a very focused question. Work with your 1 on 1 mentors, the Academic Director and Coordinator, and use your time in your Research Methods and Ethics class to really think through your project. A key thing to keep in mind, you have very limited time and access.

*If you can clearly and completely state your project in one sentence, then your project can be completed within the time frame of the ISP period.*

2. Find an Advisor

You need an advisor for your project; here are a few things to keep in mind when choosing an advisor. You need to start this process as soon as you have finalized an area of interest, as advisors may not be available for this semester and so forth. The earlier you find an advisor, the better for the success of your ISP. A list of potential advisors list will be made available to you nearer the time. If you have additional contacts or alternative suggestions you are welcome to find the person that best fits your project.

**Ethical Guidelines for choosing an advisor**

- Initial contact with more than one advisor, to find a match for your interests, is fine, so long as you remember to inform both that you looking to see who could support your interests in your ISP.
- If you have contacted more than one advisor, it is ethically correct to inform the advisor you have not chosen, about this decision.
- It is ethically correct to request resources (not books, see below) from your chosen advisor, only once you have their signed agreement form which you will get an electronic copy of. See Appendix C for a sample.
- It is important to trust that the advisor you have chosen will supply you with ideas and referrals as necessary to your topic, they are there to guide you to the right places, not provide you with the resources. **This means that you should not ask potential advisors for hard copies of books/materials. It is ethically inappropriate to do so!**
Find an expert on the topic you would like to pursue. The advisor should be someone who has expertise in the field of interest and be able to work with you to design, implement, and evaluate the ISP. The person may or may not have a doctorate in the relevant field but is nonetheless able to give you the direction and support needed. Be sure to clear your advisor with your home-campus representative if they have specific requirements for credit.

Find someone who can spend adequate time with you. Many of the potential advisors are very busy professionals who may not be able to give you as much time as needed. You may need to look elsewhere, to a generalist social scientist with experience supervising papers, or a field-orientated professional with the ability to provide access, if you need a lot of coaching. It is suggested that the advisor meets with the student for at least four sessions, to define, discuss, and evaluate the student’s progress, i.e., discussing and defining the parameters of the research topic, determining research methods, suggesting resources and contacts, assistance in the organization of information, and reviewing the student’s final submission. It will be your responsibility to find 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.

Two hard copies of the ISP should be handed in to the SIT office: one for the Library, and one for your advisor. It is also your responsibility to ensure that your advisor receives a hard copy of the final ISP, (or an electronic copy to advisors requesting it in this format) before your presentation, for grading purposes. If you are emailing the advisor, you must request a receipt electronically for your email, so that you have proof that you sent it to them. If they have not stated a preference for the format they wish to receive it in, you must provide a printed hard copy for them and plan to get the copy to them.

ISPs unsupported by the assistance and evaluation of an ISP advisor will not be accepted. For more information on the role of the advisor, see the letter they receive in Appendix C. A similar letter will be given to advisors to help explain the nature of the advising relationship. For a sneak-peak at the evaluation guidelines for the narrative evaluation that the ISP Advisor will write, see Appendix D.

3. Decide on the appropriate research methodology for your Project.

One of the decisions that you will make in defining your paradigm of field study is to find the appropriate mix of methodologies for data collection and analysis. Your methodology should align with your research question. Broadly speaking there are two major poles of research, though in practice these are rarely so discrete:

**Quantitative:**

- Presents results in numerical statistics.
- Assumes the phenomena can be scientifically measured.
- Uses an established set of procedures, e.g. experimental and correlational procedures.
- The researcher attempts to be detached and objective.

**Qualitative:**

- Facts are presented as a narrative.
• Assumes that multiple realities are constructed by individuals or groups, and therefore one must explain the context.
• “Emergent design”, decisions about data collection are made during the research process, for example: ethnographies, case studies, and participant observation.
• Researcher is immersed. By virtue of the fact that the researcher is participating in a community or describing phenomena, it is impossible to be truly objective.

Creative:

• Often used in collaboration with other data techniques
• Rather than ‘talking’ or ‘filling out surveys’ participants are asked to draw, make something, body map, write poetry, take photographs etc. as another way of gathering data or making meaning. Usually participants are also asked to reflect on the process and what their creative engagement means about them.
• Provides alternative ways of people engaging in reflection about themselves, deeply interpretive, and open to critique on that basis, therefore need to research & justify your methodology with academic resources in your proposal & final ISP.
• Need to think clearly about whether your method is possible to achieve in the time available, and what kinds of resources you have available to you.

3.1 Interview numbers and target interviewees

Many of your ISPs will require you to get data via interviews from individuals or focus groups. Before you settle on your ISP, it is crucial that you find out whether your target interviewee audience will be available to you, due to timing constraints (e.g. scholars writing tests and exams, people away over holiday periods). If it looks like you’re going to have a problem accessing appropriate interviewees for your ISP, then we suggest you change your topic, so that your ISP is not beset with minimal data collection limitations. If you are struggling to find interviewees, we suggest you look for local interest groups on Facebook, advertise for interviewees on the local Gumtree internet site, - and be creative about how you can find interviewees.


The ISP Proposal should provide a clear description of your intentions and expectations of the ISP you have chosen to pursue. A proposal helps you anticipate what you are going to do and what possible problems may arise. A proposal also helps you to clearly define and refine your project ideas so that you end up with a discrete project that can be accomplished in the given ISP period. You must also read, sign, and agree to comply with the SIT Study Abroad Statement on Ethics, and submit this with your proposal. One will be provided to you by the program staff.

5. Complete the ISP Site Approval, Ethical Guidelines, and Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects forms.

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 during the ISP period. The Academic Director (AD) and program staff must be able to reach you during the ISP period in case of a local or global emergency. Ethical guidelines include completion of both reading/agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, but also successful completion of our Local Review Board (LRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in class. Please note that until items 4 and 5 above (ISP Proposal, Site Approval,
and Ethical Guidelines Forms) are satisfactorily completed, that 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.

**Two Types of ISPs**

**Social Analysis:** Most SIT students choose to complete a social analysis ISP on a topic. For example, a student interested in traditional African music may focus her or his study on understanding the social context of African music in a community called X. Depending on the specific focus of the project, data may be sought from interviews and observations from musicians, music-industry workers, and a group of music-listeners in a specific community, government officials, and academics. Where informants are difficult to access, students may seek out current opinions and statements in the media to complement the data. Methods are to be expressly stated so as to make obvious how the primary data gained is reflective of biases inherent in the process and the extent to which that data is truly reflective of specific or general communities. There must be at least one interview, and then if only one is obtained, this should be achieved at depth interview, possibly interviewing the person more than once. Documenting the process is extremely important, especially in cases where students find themselves unable to access much data. The total number of words required is +/- 17 750 words.

**Creative:** You may wish to take advantage of the opportunity to gain creative skills to express yourself artistically in response to your South African experience. In the same way that we insist that analytical ISPs be grounded in primary data, we insist that creative ISPs be grounded in South African context. We encourage a collaborative approach with other South African creative artists/writers, so that students gain skills specific to this context. Students devote themselves to a considerable period of time during which they create in response to South African stimuli, in collaboration with South African artists/writers/poets. The skills acquired need to be documented on media that can be kept in our library with other ISPs, on CDs, disks, photographs etc.

The work must be complemented by a written description of the social context, and all works must be described so as to make plain the links between the ISP experience and the works produced, in other words, the ISP report provides a contextual background to the work, including literature that is relevant, the methodology section will details the kinds of collaboration used, and the findings section will reflect on the methods of collaboration and provide self-critical analysis of the artistic merit of the productions, thereby including many aspects of the social analysis paper, but in less detail. The number of words for this ISP may vary from student to student, and should be discussed with the Academic Director, and ISP supervisor. Approximately a maximum of 9000 words long is a guideline. **Please remember to submit your creative project in hard copy: DVD, CD, photographic album of exhibition.**

**PLEASE NOTE:**

- USING CREATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU ARE PRODUCING A CREATIVE ISP
- DOING A CREATIVE ISP IS NOT LESS WORK, IT IS MORE, WORD COUNTS DO NOT REFLECT WHAT IS EXPECTED AND THE TIME THESE PROJECTS TAKE

The two types of ISPs utilize the same ISP Proposal form, though the focus of the responses will be somewhat different. In each case, however, you need to have a clear objective/purpose for undertaking the study. The overall purpose or objective should be specific, realistic, and achievable, given the resources and time available to you. In the case of a practicum, for example, what are you hoping to
get out of the experience or work with the agency? In the case of a social analysis ISP, what specific issue do you wish to investigate? In a creative work, what will you produce and how will it reflect South African reality/techniques?

 Attempt as much as possible and as early as possible to focus your ISP as an achievable project given the limited time and resources you have on the program. The scope of attempting to solve South Africa’s problems with your undergraduate ISP will be daunting! Come back and do that later when you have more time, skill and knowledge of context. Rather, the goal is to fully engage with the ISP process as an early field-based experience in your upcoming academic and professional careers. In this way, successfully completing your ISP will assist in your future field-based endeavors, may they be in graduate school or other organizations.

 You will be provided with an electronic template for the final ISP which is set up to conform to all required standards. The following details are for guiding you through your Rural Research paper.

 Format for Writing the ISP

 Your written product must include the following.

 1. **Title page:** Your title, the name of the course, and your details should be on the cover page as per the template (for the rural ISP, the formatting is not an issue)

 2. **Table of Contents:** your table of contents should contain the chapter or section headings into which your ISP is divided, and the main headings and subdivisions in each section, noting all page numbers. It should provide the reader with an analytical view of the material covered by the study, together with the order of discussion.

 3. **Acknowledgments:** thank people who have been inspirational or helpful, or who you think need to be acknowledged.

 4. **Abstract:** a tightly written, summary of your paper. The first paragraph summarizes the introductory and conceptual aspects of your study, including the organization/project with which you worked, if applicable), the second, notes the methods used, and the third paragraph summarizes the findings/discussion and conclusions.

 5. **Introduction to the paper:** This can be the most important part of your paper, as it states what you are doing, why and how. The introduction is the precursor which helps your reader judge the validity of the social analysis which is to follow. A well-written introduction should tell the reader in brief, what your rationale is for writing this paper, and what he/she should expect. It should be a guide to the rest of the paper. The introduction should accomplish the following tasks in the following order (NOTE: do not use these sub-points as sub-headings in your introduction, this set out this way in the guide to assist you with your structure):

   5.1 **What is your topic?**

   This should provide some justification for looking at the broad problem area you have selected. This might be in terms of the timeliness of the topic, the absence of any other serious scrutiny of the
problem, the centrality of the problem to understanding other problems of a subordinate nature, and the clarity with which the problem illuminates other problems.

5.2 What did you set out to study?

This should set forth the objectives of the paper. “Specifically, the objectives of this paper are twofold …” Objectives must be stated unambiguously. Simply defining precisely what it is you want to examine and what is extraneous will be a great help to you in isolating a research problem. What is your interest in this topic?

If you're doing a creative ISP, please briefly introduce your collaborators and give your personal / professional rationale for working with them.

5.3 What is the structure of your paper?

This should outline the structure of the paper and summarize the argument to be presented. This is vital for communicating your thoughts to the reader, and helps you to stick to the point e.g. “The ISP consists of five sections. The first considers …” By providing a brief outline like this, the reader knows what to expect and should understand how you are going to organize and present you argument.

5.4 What are the limitations of the study?

All studies have their limitations! Legitimize yours by pro-actively pointing out its shortcomings and biases. Turn what you were unable to achieve, into a positive statement. Instead of listing the problems you had in getting people to be interviewed, for example, state the volume and quality of the interviews you did make in the time available to you. The short duration of your ISP time should be mentioned in conjunction with what you were able to achieve. Write the limitations section in positive language.

6. Literature review:

An academic, professional discussion of the literature, not a listing of articles and books and basic descriptions. You must engage with the literature and explore themes, relevant concepts, and gaps.

The literature review is a narrative summary and synthesis of the literature relevant to your project. A good literature review will help to define and limit the problem and place your project in historical and relational context as well as help you to avoid replicating someone else’s work. A literature review is a narrative, which discusses the literature that you have read in formulating your project, and how that literature influenced your thinking. A literature review helps to map out the progression of thinking that lead to the formulation of your project. The literature review for the ISP should show that you have considered academic contextualization of your ISP question. An appropriate literature review includes an overview of international, national and local information and debate on the issue of your ISP content

7. Methodology:

Your methodology section should include a statement which justifies the methodological approach taken. You should defend the stance of the literature you chose to use and the rationale behind the treatment of your analysis. It should be able to explain: ‘Why these answers to that question?’
Explain how you collected your information (when, who, where, what, how), the techniques and methods used and your reasons for using these, the field study methods employed, and the strengths and weaknesses of the specific methodology you used.

Ethical Reflexivity

Following the guiding questions laid out in the ISP Proposal Guidelines, please write a few paragraphs reflecting on your ethical reflexive practice, throughout the research process. Typically, this section would include how you recognized the power dynamics faced by your placing yourself in cultural situations very different from your personal context. Please note that a consideration of these ethical concerns must be reflected in your research practice, especially your methodology. Where appropriate, it should also be evident in your analysis.

9. Body of paper:

This section will form the bulk, 70 - 80% of your ISP. Here you will present your research findings and their analysis.

The question you posed: Start by stating the research question you posed, to get this section rolling. If you did a creative ISP, you would need to give some background and description of the people or organization with which you worked, and an evaluation of the process of producing your final creative work.

Your argument:

Link this question to your argument statement.

What did you find?

Introduce your participants, say why you chose to work with these people, and how working with them justifies your findings, or swings your argument.

Link the argument statement to the analysis section which now follows. To explain how your findings, illuminate and/or answer the question which you asked, present your findings in such a way that they shape and structure your argument.

Why is this important/interesting/surprising?

You need to reconcile all the matched and unmatched threads in your fieldwork and let your analysis weave them into a single cloth. Make meaning of the data you gathered. Say how your analysis informs and illuminates your area of study.

How can you write this analysis clearly?

Please consider the use section headings, and most likely, sub-headings, to maintain a strong sense of organization in your paper. Precise headings and subheadings within this vary according to your topic. However, it is very important to ensure that each section is logically linked to the next, and follows the structure outlined in your introduction. This can be done by providing a brief concluding
paragraph at the end of each section, summarizing that section, relating it to your main argument, and indicating how the following section relates to it. It is very important that the reader can see how each section relates to the previous one and can follow a logical path through your paper.

**Ethical Reflexivity**

Don’t forget to surface your positionality as part of the necessity of ethical reflexivity in your analysis.

10. **Conclusions:** Your conclusions should demonstrate how your ISP fulfilled the objectives you outlined in your introduction and summarize the main outcomes of your study. Read together with the introduction, the reader should know what you intended to study, why, what you found, and how that relates to broader issues.

This section is not always given the attention it deserves – it is common to find only a half-page of discussion of conclusions – it is as if the writer has run out of petrol! This section should bring out the best in you as a researcher. You need to make powerful conclusions at this point, relate your arguments and findings to larger issues of multiculturalism and/or social change, and derive implications for theory and practice. Where do you go from here? This is the “NOW WHAT?”

If you did a creative ISP, your conclusion should also contain two or three paragraphs (minimum) discussing lessons learnt during the process of producing your final creative work.

11. **Recommendations for further study:**

This should consist of a short list of recommendations on how your study might be expanded upon or be used as the basis for future ISPs. Please include contact information where possible and appropriate within the ethical guidelines set by SIT.

12. **Bibliography/Reference List:** 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. Please use the standard for all referencing, the APA Method. A copy has been given to you.

We suggest you keep it handy while you’re writing, for quick referencing.

13. **Appendices:** for relevant (and cited) statistical information, genealogical charts, maps, photographs, or other such material. One required Appendix is that of your interview questions. You are not required to submit original interview transcripts or summaries of interviews.

**Some Things to Avoid in the Written Product**

Plagiarism – do not copy anyone else’s direct words, or even ideas, without giving them credit for it. Your point can be made strongly by doing so because you are the one who has found their idea, and is using it, along with yours and those of others, to assemble your argument. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade. This includes copying previous ISPs – they should be referenced like any other work.

All works referred to in the text need to appear in your bibliography.
Be wary of making your ISP too emotional, too colloquial or chatty.

Be wary of attributing dubious causal relationships, e.g., “because of apartheid . . .” This implies that whatever effect you are attributing to apartheid may not exist anywhere else in the world. In most instances this is not the case, so your argument is more easily refutable.

Remember the importance of careful writing and nuance in your argument.

Be wary of writing your ISP as if you have been hired as a consultant to, e.g., make sweeping suggestions for changes, how things should have been done better, definitive evaluations.

Related to this, be careful not to have too much of an advocacy approach.

**Basic Requirements for Site Approval**

ISPs may be conducted in any area of South Africa that meets with the approval of the Academic Director, and for which the program has existing affiliate relations and reliable contacts who can provide a liaison between students, the program base, and local communities. ISPs may also be completed in other areas of South Africa, but such cases are rare and require a stricter site approval process. Any travel away from the ISP site during the ISP period must be directly relevant to your project. Independent travel during the ISP is not allowed.

You must be able to return to the program base if directed to do so within any 24-hour period. It is therefore important that you are familiar with transportation routes to and from your ISP location and have at least two options for travel plans. SIT must have reliable phone numbers through which you can be easily contacted throughout the ISP period; during periods in which you may be outside of areas with easy access to a phone, SIT must have a phone contact with a trustworthy local contact who can locate you within any 12-hour period and assist in your evacuation from the field, when and if a situation requiring evacuation of the program arises.

**During the ISP period you will be required to check in with the program office at least once a week by phone or in person.**

If contact is via telephone, it is imperative that we hear your voice, and not receive messages from other students that you are OK. Failure to check in at least once a week will result in penalties ranging from academic and/or behavioral probation, to a lowering of your final ISP grade by ten or more percentage points, to dismissal from the program, depending on the seriousness of the offence.

**Assignments and Evaluation**

**Grading Criteria**

*A final ISP must be emailed to the SIT office and copied to your advisor, by the due date indicated in the front of this handbook by 18h00.*

A penalty of 10 percentage points off the final ISP grade will be deducted, if this final draft is not received, or received after this date or time. Your advisors will be required to check any changes and get back to you.
Please note that a special late submission policy applies to the ISP, whereby ISPs submitted a day late (as defined in other program components) will be penalized ten percentage points. ISPs submitted more than a day late will not be accepted.

It is a good idea to assume that you are going to have problems in the final formatting, printing, binding, and e-mailing of the ISP, and thus to complete the entire product at least one day early. This has the added advantage of giving you additional time to prepare for your oral presentation.

Backup frequently on disk and email servers. Please email yourself a copy every time you complete an ISP writing session.

In conjunction with the academic advisor, the Academic Director evaluates student performance on the ISP. Assessment of the written work and oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed; the breadth and appropriateness; the depth of analysis and insight; the level of cultural sensitivity displayed; and the quality of expression. Special emphasis will be placed on the student’s ability to integrate primary and secondary sources, to present the findings in a clear, organized and well-synthesized format, with attention to the ethical context of field study. The following breakdown will be used to determine your final grade for the course.

**Assessment**
- Written Independent Study Project - 80%
- Oral Presentation - 20%

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

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<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>94-100%</td>
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<td>90-93%</td>
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<td>87-89%</td>
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<td>84-86%</td>
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<td>64-66%</td>
<td>D</td>
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**Grading Criteria** All grades assigned will take into account the students’ special circumstances and challenges they face as foreign students. 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 Academic Seminar lectures, discussions, field trips 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.

*All written assignments should be typed.*
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.

Student research (the Independent Study Project and Field Study Project) is a product of field work and as such students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical field work, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore copies of ISP/FSPs 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/FSP for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives my ISP/FSP 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/FSP. Students retain all ownership rights of the ISP/FSP product and retain the right to use all, or part, of my project in future works. Please refer to the Student Handbook or the Access, Use, and Publication of ISP and FSP form.