

Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 credits)

Tanzania: Zanzibar Coastal Ecology and Natural Resource Management

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 Description

The Independent Study Project (ISP) provides an opportunity to study in greater depth an aspect of particular academic interest relating to the program theme in Tanzania. Although students indicate their proposed area of study as part of the admissions process to SIT, this area of study often is revised once in-country or a new topic is developed. The ISP draws on the knowledge and various skills gained from the thematic, research methods, and language courses and exercises combined with broader student experiences on excursions. Students work with the Academic Directors and expert partners to select a topic of study, develop an ISP proposal, and arrange field logistics. With the assistance of the Academic Directors, students select an appropriate ISP advisor: host country professors and/or experienced field professionals with academic qualifications.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the ISP course, students will:

- Exhibit in-depth knowledge of a dimension of ecology, wildlife, conservation, and/or natural resource management in Tanzania;
- Demonstrate the ability to design an ethically-sound project and appropriate methods to assemble primary data;
- Develop the self-confidence to function independently in Tanzania;
- Develop a critical understanding of field-based learning and the challenges faced by natural and social scientists;
- Complete a focused study relevant to the program theme that yields a critical and original interpretation of outcomes;
- Demonstrate awareness of the contingencies and complexities of working across cultures reciprocally.

Course Requirements

The Academic Directors must approve individual ISPs. Ahead of the 4-week ISP period, students make preparations through individual meetings with the Academic Directors and ISP advisors. In addition, during the semester students complete exercises inspired by past ISPs and discuss possible ISP topics and appropriate methods, building on input from

experts in Tanzania and field activities. Students submit a detailed ISP itinerary and proposal to the Academic Directors prior to the launch of the ISP period to ensure a logistically feasible, scientifically accurate, culturally appropriate, ethically responsible, and safe project.

In conducting their individual projects, students apply the concepts and skills gained in the topical seminars, the Research Methods and Ethics seminar, language capabilities developed through classroom instruction and everyday use, and contacts made in the larger Tanzanian community. Thus, students employ skills to deal with and learn from a range of experiences while completing a substantial field project. Students must complete 180-hours of field-based research, submit a thoughtful paper of no less than 30-pages about the project and its outcomes, deliver a 20-minute oral presentation to experts and the public, and keep a field journal that documents ISP activities during the 180-hours of the project's field time. Moreover, each student must check-in with program staff throughout their ISP to ensure academic progress and student health and safety.

Course Readings

Readings for the ISP are self-directed and based on the topic of study. Reference articles and books are available from the program libraries and through SIT's electronic library database. The Academic Directors and local experts assist students with compiling useful and up-to-date bibliographies relevant to their ISP.

Course Evaluation

Evaluation of the written report for the Independent Study Project employs the following criteria:

1. Selection of relevant topic
2. Design of project and achievable objectives
3. Up-to-date literature review
4. Appropriate methodology
5. Collection and documentation of accurate primary data from participation, observation, oral interviews, surveys, scientific tests, and/or other activities
6. Critical analysis of data
7. Thoughtful interpretation of outcomes
8. Focused and up-to-date bibliography
9. Timely submission and appropriate length, terminology, writing style, and format
10. Ethical field practices and writing

Evaluation of the oral presentation for the Independent Study Project employs the following criteria:

1. Appropriate length (20 minutes)
2. Consistent volume, rhythm, and eye contact
3. Logical structure (e.g., introduction, study question, methods, results, conclusions)
4. Up-to-date framing
5. Appropriate use of scientific names, maps, charts, tables, and photographs
6. Quality of PowerPoint slides and other visual aids
7. Accuracy of information
8. Evidence of objectivity and consciousness of subjectivity (e.g., recognition of project and data strengths and weaknesses)
9. Adequate justification of conclusions and recommendations
10. Thoughtfulness and quality of responses to questions from advisors and audience

The primary ISP Advisor and Academic Directors determine the overall ISP grade based on these criteria and an ISP rubric.

Course Grading Distribution

Independent Study Project Paper - 70%
Independent Study Project Oral Presentation - 20%
Independent Study Project Field Journal - 10%

Course Grading Scale

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

Course Grading Criteria

All assigned grades take into account the students' special circumstances and challenges as foreigner. An "A" grade entails superior (not just "very good") performance in terms of accuracy, structure, and organization for assignments. An "A" grade refers to full attendance, punctuality, attentive listening, and active engagement in all language classes, field exercises, and other activities. It also means polite and respectful behavior. The frequency and quality of the students' participation is monitored and taken into account.

Student Expectations

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warnings, probations, diversity, disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process. In addition, students should refer to information in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier distributed during orientation.

When conducting field work, students must follow guidelines:

- Respect the dignity, rights, and welfare of people involved in or affected by the study; respect and conserve the environment and natural elements (e.g., non-human animals) involved in or affected by the study.
- Respect and defend the rights of people providing study input either to remain anonymous or to receive recognition.
- Acknowledge the assistance of people and organizations that aided the study; reciprocate in a manner that is culturally and environmentally appropriate.
- Accurately, responsibly, and ethically record and represent all aspects of the field study, orally, visually, and in writing.
- When appropriate, share the study outcomes with experts, academic institutions, and the community in Tanzania, including copies of the written ISP.

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 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.