

Fieldwork Ethics and Comparative Research Methods

ANTH 3500 (4 credits / 60 class hours)

International Honors Program (IHP) Human Rights: Movements, Power, and Resistance

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

This research methods and ethics course is designed to provide you with tools to gather and analyze information (and transform it into data), develop arguments and participate in debates about human rights. The focus of this course is your own research: your group **Comparative Analysis (CA) Project**. The readings and activities in this course will provide you with basic research skills and tools needed to identify and analyze challenges common to the countries we will visit, and to distinguish common challenges from others that are rooted in particular histories and social geographies. Moreover, the course will allow you to develop strategies to make meaningful comparisons, particularly concerning configurations of political, economic, and social power as they manifest in particular contexts. We will accomplish this with a combination of class discussions based on readings and practical exercises (workshops) that weave experiential learning with more formal academic activities. All these activities are aimed to nurture your final CA research project.

Research as part of scholarship and advocacy is a fundamental component of human rights movements, often leveraged to maximize the recognition of specific human rights crises and justify the need for positive solidarity grounded on the ideals of dignity and collective emancipation. Scholarly and advocacy research involves a practice of perpetual inquiry that can push greater self-reflection and raise awareness about injustice. However, the institution of research – embedded in a global system of imperialism and power – also is part of the long history of scholarly and epistemic oppression that positioned some peoples as ‘raw material’ and others as ‘experts’ (Said, 1978). Today, research and advocacy continue to play a role in framing specific communities within stereotypes, limiting the nuance of their given context, taking over the exercise of their voice and agency in self-representation and assuming ownership of their ways of knowing. Thus, the practice of knowledge-making is rife with both possibilities and risks. With this backdrop, researcher-advocates must negotiate the ethical responsibility of the methods, use and impact of the knowledge they produce.

The research process demands **systematic work, patience, consistency, persistence, curiosity, and creativity**. Answers to your question or the argument framing your final CA work do not come easily or automatically. In short, the purpose of this course is to foster a sense of curiosity and provide you with the tools to teach yourself how to (un)learn: how to develop and refine a research question; how to collect and analyze information that will allow you to answer that question; how to separate the ‘interesting’ from the ‘important’ pieces of information that will allow you to persuasively answer your question; how to formulate an argument that will improve/challenge our understanding of the ideals and practices of human rights, the forces shaping them and/or how people make sense and organize practices in the type of society we/they want or need.

The main task for this course will be a group research project (3 persons per group). Each group will select a topic (please refer to the **Program Manual** -p. 34- for approved, taboo, unexplored research topics) and will work collectively in the definition of a research question, the information collection strategy, the definition of articulating categories and central argument, and making a preliminary presentation in Jordan and a final presentation in Ecuador.

Course Methodology

The course includes workshops and seminar discussions, individual and group research discussions and presentations. In many ways, this course presents the best opportunity to make the program a transformative experience, because it brings together multiple strands running through coursework, class discussions, site visits, and guest lectures. This course is where you, individually and collectively, have the chance to put academic concepts and methods to the test of empirical research in the real world, and thereby realize the potential of the program as a whole. **More than any other course, this course will be what you make of it, and you will get out of this course what you put into it.**

Learning Outcomes

- To gain basic methodological and practical tools with which to ‘read’ and make grounded about given situations through observation, conversations and investigation guided by concepts derived from several academic disciplines (anthropology, politics, sociology, and development studies).
- To develop a shared understanding of, and commitment to, ethical research practices, which we implement individually, and as a group, in constant reflection and discussion as new situations arise.
- To connect class discussion/readings with on-the-ground experiences.
- To engage in continued critical reflection about our own positionality and how it frames the way we “read” a particular situation and understand the “other” with different life experiences and opportunities.

Assignments

- **Class participation and contribution to learning environment (10%)**

This course will require your full attendance and active participation. We will conduct the course in a collaborative format, which will necessitate that you come to our class-sessions prepared to critically engage with the readings, class discussion and activities, and to discuss your own on-going research experience. It also requires that you keep up with the CA Project (individually and collectively), as this experience will be the primary material for our collective learning proves. You will also be expected to provide peer feedback at certain points throughout the semester, which will also form part of your class participation.

Class participation for the course is broadly framed to include not only your participation in class sessions for the course, but also your participation on all program related site visits, guest lectures, excursions, debriefs, synthesis sessions—in sum all out of the classroom and in classroom activities of the program. How each of you interacts with the program’s guest speakers and site visit hosts is a crucial site for each of you to demonstrate preparedness, critical analysis, and thoughtful engagement with the course and program material.

- **Group research project (50%)**

- 1- Preliminary Project Proposal (5%) → Nepal

During the days of the course, your group will be asked to think of a theme or topic about human rights that you are interested in pursuing throughout the program. In the preliminary project proposal you will describe the topic that you have selected, how you aim to approach it, and your reflections on the feasibility of the project (500-700 words). Please refer to the Program Manual (p 34) for “IHP Human Rights Student Research Topics--Approved, Taboo, Unexplored”.

The proposal should address the following themes:

- Basic background information
- Research question
- Types of information needed to answer the question
- How you propose to obtain the information

- 2- Mid-semester presentation (10%) → Jordan

Towards the end of the Jordan program your group will make a presentation about the main finding thus far. The mid-term presentation provides an opportunity to present your findings and analysis to date and receive feedback from faculty and your peers. The presentation is an excellent chance to practice your presentation skills. Include experience, evidence, and analysis from Nepal and Jordan. The presentation should address the following:

- **Introduction** that establishes the research question, its context, the methodological framework, and argument
- Brief presentation and discussion of **evidence**.
- Thorough discussion of **conclusions** in a way that bring together argument and evidence.

3- Final research presentation (35%) → Chile

In this final group presentation, you will share your findings and analysis to fellow students, faculty, and other members of the learning community. You may use any medium to present your research, however your question, your central argument, a summary of your findings and at least one concept from the course readings -as a way to articulate data from every country- must somehow be included. The presentation should include your main argument and findings, and describe and explain the research process through which you arrived at your conclusions. You should also discuss your research questions and how these were modified in the course of your research.

- Background information to the topic
- Question guiding the research
- Basic categories that organize the data
- Main argument that organizes the categories
- Explanation how the information/data collected supports the argument

○ **Individual assignments** (40%)

1- Researcher Identity Memo (5%) → Nepal

To your Preliminary Project Proposal, you will also add a Researcher Identity Memo in which you describe your own identity and positionality in relation to your topic (400-500 words). This may include your motivation for choosing the topic as well as the ways that your own background may influence the assumptions you hold about the topic and how you enter into the exploration of it. What prior connection do you have to this topic? What assumptions are you holding about it? What do you hope to get out of the experience of exploring this topic comparatively? The purpose of this assignment is to begin to examine your goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings and values as they relate to your topic, and uncover resources and potential concerns your identity and experience may create for your project.

2. Portfolio entries and country memos (20%) → Nepal, Jordan

○ **Observations**

- a. General observations and jottings: Throughout the semester you will have the opportunity to attend site-visits and lectures that may pertain directly or indirectly to your topic. You will take notes on these when possible (or after if that is more appropriate). You will also find yourself making observations during your daily experiences - remember that opportunities may come up in unexpected moments and forms: a poster on the street, a passing conversation, a moment of culture clash – make sure to capture these as well.
- b. Field-notes: You are expected to carry out at least one day of observation on your topic (depending on your topic). These field notes should include the following: (a) describe what you observed; (b) interpret and analyze what you observed and how this relates to your topic; and (c) reflect on the process of observation and how it

relates to your emergent awareness of research practice.

- **Conversations/Informal interviews**
You will carry out at least 3 conversations about your topic in each country. You will log these in your notebook, including: description of when and where the conversation took place, the people with whom you spoke, the questions you asked, the notes you took during the conversation, any interpretations/analysis you have of the information that was shared, and reflections on the process itself.
- **Reflections**
While both of the above encompass reflection, you may also opt to use your notebook as a space to capture how your understanding of your topic is changing over time. Your reflections may include reactions to readings, guest lectures, site-visits, faculty sessions, other activities, or afterthoughts on your observations and conversations – as they respectively relate to your topic.

These individual and collective activities (observations, conversations, reflections) will be synthesized in a 'country memo'. Throughout the semester you will be writing down your observations and reflections in your portfolio (see "guidelines for portfolio" at end of this document). This will become the primary place to document your research process, including the logging, jotting, and analyzing of your field experiences. It will include:

- **Country Memo:** Toward the end of our stay in each country, you will read through the entries you have made in that country and write up a country memo (700-800 words), addressing the following:
 1. *Log* of your activities and information you gathered related to your topic.
 2. *Analysis* of the emergent themes as pertain to the topic.
 3. Reflection on the *process* of gathering information (including any changes to the approach that you may wish to integrate).
 4. Any lingering questions and/or steps you aim to take up in the next country or phase of the project.

3- **Final reflections of research process and outcomes** (15%) → Chile

The final reflections paper is an opportunity to look back and reflect on the outcome and process of the group research from your personal perspective. Some of the themes you could address are:

- What have been your main learning milestones (or 'a-ha' moments)?
- How have your notions of human rights changed (or not) during the semester?
- What have been the main experiences/readings that shaped your learning (individually and collectively) or allowed you to make critical connections?
- If you were to do individual research, what would you do differently? How would you go about doing research given what you learned during the semester?

Attendance and Participation

Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program.

Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

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

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.

Sessions and Readings

NEPAL

Session 1 - The Comparative Analysis (CA) project in context + double entry note-taking

The CA project is a long, intense and complex journey that in many ways will inform your semester experience. In this session you will start to explore potential ideas for your independent CA project, and develop a panoramic view of the process so you have a sense of what to expect during the semester. This means that you will need to take careful notes on your observations during your individual research projects, but also during site visits, homestays, and personal explorations. This will be crucial / conversations when you put together your final presentation/paper in Ecuador.

- Vogt Eric, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs. 2003. *The Art of Powerful Questions: Catalyzing Insight, Innovation, and Action*. Pp. 1-14.
- Sunstein, Bonnie and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. 2007. "Double-entry notes". In *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. St. Martin Press. Pp. 101-108.

Further reading:

- Wolfinger, Nicholas. 2002. "On writing fieldnotes: collection strategies and background expectancies". *Qualitative Research*. Vol. 2, N° 1, Pp. 85-95.
- Tjora, Akselh. 2006. "Writing small discoveries: an exploration of fresh observers' observations". *Qualitative Research*. Vol. 6, No. 4, Pp. 429-451.
- Emerson, Roberto, Rachel Fretz & Linda Shaw. 2011. "Fieldnotes in ethnographic research". In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press. Pp. 1-20.

Session 2 – WORKSHOP → research proposal

In this workshop we will work on a (more or less) viable research strategy that will serve as the guide for the work you will be doing during the semester. It is important to note that the questions and methodological ideas you define in this workshop will change (and they should!) during the semester as you learn more about the topic and ideas/concepts you want to engage. However, it is crucial that you begin the process of defining a general theme and direction of the research project at this stage.

RESEARCH PROJECT PROPOSAL

Session 3 - Research ethics and positionality

Do we have ethical responsibilities in the process of learning, particularly in the settings we will be visiting? YES, we do. In this session we will discuss some of the ethical consideration we need to keep

in mind as we interpret and reflect about a particular situation and/or a group of people. Similarly, part of these ethical considerations imply reflection about our own positionality or situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988): the way you look at and read a situation is informed by your personal history and your (class, race, gender) structural position.

- Smith Rotabi, Karen, Denise Gammonley & Dorothy N. Gamble. 2006. "Ethical guidelines for study abroad: Can we transform ugly Americans into engaged global citizens?". *British Journal of Social Work*. Vol. 36, N° 3, Pp. 451-465.
- Merriam, Sharan, Juanita Johnson-Bailey, Ming-Yeh Lee, Youngwha Kee, Gabo Ntseane & Mazanah Muhamad. 2001. "Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures". *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Vol. 20, N° 5, Pp. 405-416.

Further readings:

- Ali, Rabia. 2015. Rethinking representation: negotiating positionality, power and space in the field". *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. Vol. 22, N° 6, Pp. 783-800.
- Cannella Gaile & Yvonna S. Lincoln. 2018. "Ethics, Research Regulations, and Critical Social Science". In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage Pp. 172-194.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective". *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 14, N° 3, Pp. 575-599.

Session 4 - Interviews and conversations

Interviews and (seemingly random) conversations are important sources of information. You never know when (where) a crucial insight will come (from). We will discuss strategies for engaging in conversations in ways that respect the others and allow you to obtain information.

- Spradley, James. 1979. "Asking descriptive questions". In *The Ethnographic Interview*. Wadsworth. Pp. 44-53.
- Beverly, John. 2005. "Testimonio, subalternity and narrative authority". In Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3rd ed.). Sage. Pp. 547-557.

Further reading:

- Schostak, John. 2005. *Interviewing and Representation in Qualitative Research Projects*. Open University Press. Pp. 1-8.
- Fontana, Andrea & James Frey. 2005. "The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement". In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. (3rd ed.) Sage. Pp. 695-728.
- Mullings, Beverley. 1999. "Insider or outsider, both or neither: some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting". *GeoForum*. Vol. 30, N° 4, Pp. 337-350.

- Döringer, Stefanie. 2021. “‘The problem-centred expert interview’: Combining qualitative interviewing approaches for investigating implicit expert knowledge”. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. Vol. 24, N° 3, Pp. 265-278.

Session 5 –Speaking for? Speaking with?

- Alcoff, Linda. 1992. “The problem of speaking for others”. *Cultural Critique*. N° 20, Pp. 5-32.
- Sontag, Susan. 2003. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador. Pp.59-63; 70-74.

JORDAN

Session 6 - WORKSHOP - Reflection and analysis: research question and data gathering

Your portfolio will be your main source of data/evidence. It is from this notebook that you will craft your final paper. In this session we will collectively address questions about the connection between data/evidence and argument.

- Sunstein, Bonnie and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater. 2007. “The research portfolio” In *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. St. Martin Press. Pp. 57-58; 220-221; 300-302; 412-414; 463-465.

Session 7 – WORKSHOP – Defining categories; defining argument

One of the key challenges is how to go about developing an argument that reflects the information collected. It is in this process that the definition of analytical categories will be a crucial process in connecting data to argument. In this workshop we will work on the categories of each of the groups.

- Dey, Ian. 2007. “Grounding categories”. In A. Bryant & K. Charmaz (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*. Sage. Pp. 167-189.
- Luker, Kristin. 2010. “Reviewing the Literature” In *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-glut*. Harvard University Press. Pp. 76–98.

Further readings

- Charmaz, Kathy, Robert Thornberg, & Elaine Keane. 2018. “Evolving grounded theory and social justice inquiry”. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage Pp. 720-776.

Session 8 –Mid-semester presentations

CHILE

Session 9 –WORKSHOP Putting it all together

You have been collecting information for several months and by this stage you need to begin making decision about how to present the information in a coherent manner.

Session 10 –Preparing to write

Writing is a powerful method of thinking through ideas. In the process of crafting sentences and paragraphs, you need to establish a degree of clarity about that you want to say and where you want to go. In this session we will discuss this process as a way to think about your individual writing assignment.

- Richardson, Laurel & Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre. 2018. "Writing: a method of inquiry". In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed.). Sage Pp. 1410-1431.

Session 11 –Final presentations

GUIDELINES FOR PORTFOLIO

The research portfolio (which you will keep as a souvenir of your Comparative Analysis - CA research process) will contain everything you collect that is relevant to your topic and your research experience, such as: rough and revised field notes, project reports, bibliographic references and reading notes; artifacts such as flyers, posters, photographs, maps, etc. While at the beginning it may seem like a random collection of materials, over time it will become a well-organized collection of materials/data according to the main themes and categories of your research. In that sense, your portfolio combines two separate, but connected, activities: 1) it is the repository for everything that pertains to the process of conducting your CA research and, 2) at the end of the course, it will represent your reflection/systematization these materials, and show your research process as a sort of the research roadmap.

In short, your portfolio will contain a selection of materials that allow us to see connections made between different steps in the process of your experiential learning / CA experience. Consistent progress is the key here. **Progress** is not simply **assessed** in terms of the number of hours you have put in or the activities you have engaged in (we know you will do a lot!), but more importantly on **how well you have reflected** on what you have learned at different stages of the research process. This means how clearly and coherently you present your portfolio and how it “feeds” into the final CA paper. Post-its notes may be useful here, because they can provide commentary on notes, artifacts, photos, etc. and can be moved around easily. Be creative and make it work for you!

At different moments of the semester (in Buenos Aires and Barcelona), you will present to the rest of the class your portfolio. However, we strongly encourage you to form small groups (2-4 people) and discuss what you have been including in your portfolio, ideas you are having about the material, and patterns you are discovering.

At the end of the semester, you will turn-in as an appendix to the CA paper the following: 1) an annotated table of contents; 2) a one-page analysis of the portfolio’s content. The annotated table of content is an inventory of the kinds of materials collected organized in a systematic manner. The one-page analysis is a reflective commentary about the semester-long process of collecting, selecting, reflecting, and projecting.

Below is a list of the points that I think may be especially helpful for you to visualize the idea of the portfolio:

- A portfolio is a flexible collection of working files “for **tracking your learning** and **documenting your work** throughout the research process” (56). To keep track of your project you will move back and forth among four key activities: collecting, selecting, reflecting and projecting”

- **Collecting** materials (artifacts, photos, maps, drawings, fliers, fieldnotes, ideas, etc.) **(ALWAYS DATE AND PLACE)**. At the beginning it is a random collection, but over time it will become a focused collection of materials that will shape your research / field work.

- **Selecting** the material according to emerging themes and focus (as you do this begin to think in ways of organizing – classifying - indexing). Define and redefine the categories of data, think of it as folders or drawers in a filing cabinet.
- **Reflecting** on your overall data and themes. Once a week or at the beginning and at the end of each city, take the time to reflect on the data already collected. “every item that you include in the portfolio will require reflective writing on your part, from short field note entries to longer memos to yourself. When you review your data alongside your thinking, you’ll find options for further focus and analysis” (58)
- **Projecting** as you look forward toward further progress and continue to form your plans. “When you look over what you’ve read, thought, said, written, and collected, you will begin to find meanings and patterns that may instruct you about where your work is headed” (58).

- Emphasis on the importance of **reflecting** through **writing** and reflecting on your writing. “To reflect is think about your own thinking, to monitor the evidence of your minds work” (112). ... “Stick-on notes are useful tools because their small size forces you to summarize succinctly and they’re easy to replace as your insights change over the course of your project” (112).

- “The portfolio is the site of your research **reflections**” (p 167). It should contain reflections **on artifacts, readings, and writings**. “The portfolio captures both your fieldwork and your deskwork” (167). Reflecting on the collected materials and on your field notes implies constantly asking yourself (and writing your ideas about: “How does your own personal history affect what you have chosen? What does each artifact represent about a growing theme in your research? How do the artifact connect to one another?” (168).

- “Think of your **portfolio as a cultural site**—your personal field site—and the artifacts you choose to place in your portfolio as data that teach you about your own field working process. The readers of your portfolio [...] will need to know **why** you have collected and selected the cultural artifacts you display.” (220)

- “One of the jobs of a research portfolio is to help you synthesize what you have collected and selected. It offers you an opportunity to reflect on what you have learned and on how your research writing fits into the larger picture of your research.” (352)

- “A portfolio offers you the chance to sift through the chaos of piles of data and select representations that will enable you to see what you have more easily.”

“Like a **well-designed web page**, it displays the items and **connections** (links) you’ve selected to **represent the categories of your research**, the data you have collected and the ways your thinking develops as you look it over, plan more research, and then perhaps re-categorize further.” (412)

Source: Sunstein, Bonnie Stone and Elizabeth Chiseri Strater, 2007. *Fieldworking. Reading and Writing Research*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s.