

Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 (4 credits)

Vietnam: Culture, Social Change and Development

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 semester to semester.

Description

The Independent Study Project (ISP) offers students the opportunity to undertake an in-depth, analytical, and individualized approach to the independent study of an aspect of culture and socio-economic development or human-environment interaction that the student finds of particular academic interest. The ISP provides students with a hands-on research experience and the chance to interact with local experts and investigate a topic in which they are interested. Students use concepts and tools learned in their courses on Ethnicity, Gender, and Social Change, Economic Reform and Development, and Research Methods and Ethics to develop research questions and methodologies, collect primary data in the field, and analyze and interpret their results within the context of the literature. The ISP process challenges students to take responsibility for developing learning goals and outcomes, remain focused in their attention to details, analyze their pre-conceptions and methodological approaches towards interacting with people and the environment, exercise critical thinking and caution in the interpretation of their results, and learn from their successes as well as their setbacks.

For many students, the ISP represents the culmination of their semester's work and understanding of experiential learning in a field setting. The field research must relate to the academic theme of the program and be approved by the program's academic director. Students work with the academic director to identify an ISP advisor, who works closely with that student during the ISP portion of the program, helping them to frame their research and employ appropriate methodologies. The ISP advisors assist students during all stages of the ISP, from data collection, analysis of approaches, and interpretation of findings to the written presentation of results. The ISP normally results in oral and written presentations.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this ISP, students will be able to:

- Understand the potential strengths and weaknesses of research methods;

- Synthesize aspects of culture and socioeconomic relations or human-environment interactions in Vietnam through the application of hypothesis testing and analysis of primary data;
- Develop motivation, curiosity, and a sense of self-sufficiency in the development and execution of sound and rigorous research methodologies and data collection techniques;
- Gain confidence in interacting with host country professionals and lay persons, peers, and unfamiliar settings;
- Integrate and analyze information from a variety of primary and secondary sources;
- Recognize and appreciate the personal and professional responsibilities and ethical implications associated with researching both human and natural communities.

Course Requirements

Students work with the academic director to identify one or a range of appropriate ISP topics and contact relevant experts knowledgeable on the subject. It is not the role of the AD to develop your topic, only to act as a guide. Students' initial ideas could come from articles read prior to arrival in-country or the local media, Culture and Development Seminar lectures or readings, and discussions with visiting lecturers.

Once students have clarified a topic of interest, they will cultivate their contacts to develop an ISP advisor with whom they collaborate. The ISP advisor is generally a recognized expert or authority in the student's field of study and will help guide the student in the practical aspects of the study. In conjunction with the advisor, or the AD, the student refines the research question and develops appropriate methodologies and approaches for answering their research question during the ISP period. Throughout the four-week ISP field study period, students must complete at least 120 hours of project-related work. During the entire process of developing their project and process, students are expected to maintain a detailed and up to date account of their ISP experience in their ISP work journal. During the field portion of their project, the work journal should contain a compilation of raw data, as well as an analysis of the methodologies used and ideas generated. The completed ISP is in the form of a 20–40-page analytical paper and a 20-minute oral presentation with 10 minutes for questions.

Sample ISP topic areas, among many, include:

- Gender Roles in Vietnamese Society
- Heritage site management and conservation
- Entrepreneurship and business development in Vietnam
- Healthcare and inequality

Assignments and Evaluation

The ISP differs from the typical term paper:

1. The ISP is a 4-credit course and, as such, must evidence a substantial body of work. Approximately 120 hours of work should go into the field study.
2. Most of the ISP work should be conducted in the field (as opposed to libraries). The majority of the data should come from primary sources (field data collected by the student) and not secondary sources.
3. Students are not expected to take on broad, global topics such as "Environmental Policy in Vietnam". More appropriate topics have a more narrow and manageable focus. The ADs will assist with this.
4. The project must synthesize and analyze data collected. Simple description of observations is not acceptable.
5. The project must fall within the focus of the program.
6. Periodic progress conferences should be held with your AD both before and during the ISP period. SIT rules state that regular (weekly) contact must be maintained with ADs during the ISP period.
7. The final product is in the form of a 20–40-page analytical paper and a 20-minute oral presentation with 10 minutes for questions.

ISP Proposals

A proposal is an integral part of any research project. Proposals are often required to obtain funding or permission for a project. ISP proposals should include the following items under appropriate headings:

1. Statement of problem or question
2. Brief review of literature and previous research on your topic
3. Methodology
4. Outline of the proposed content of your final product
5. Feasibility
6. Budget (including accommodation, food, transport, communications, equipment)
7. Time frame
8. Contact people
9. A potential advisor
10. References

ISP Work Journal

Students are required to keep a work journal detailing the progress of their ISP. This is essentially a running record of the progress of the project. Work journals have proved to be vital to researchers because human memory is very frail. This journal will be handed in with the written ISP and will be graded.

The work journal should include:

- A record of the process of formulation of the topic, study question, hypotheses,

methodology, techniques etc.

- A day-by-day log of activities during the ISP
- The data being collected unless you are using separate pro-forma sheets (remember to clearly differentiate between observation, interpretation, and evaluation)
- Ongoing interpretation and evaluation of the data being collected
- Periodic reflection on the progress and future directions of the project
- Ideas for future research
- A bibliography
- An index
- A list of all contacts including their titles, institutional affiliations, addresses and phone numbers (this is critical for the acknowledgment section and referencing of your ISP and for sending thank you cards)
- Appropriate sketches, maps, and diagrams

ISP Written Paper

The ISP paper should consist of 20-40 pages (excluding references and appendices) of typed, double-spaced text. Each student must submit 3 copies of the ISP paper (one for the student, one to be retained for the SIT library, and one for the advisor). The ISP must have a title that clearly reflects the focus of the study.

The format of each paper will vary but must include the following:

- Title Page
- Abstract
- Table of contents and page numbers
- Acknowledgments
- Lists of figures, tables, and abbreviations
- Introduction
- Methodology
- Body of the paper inc. graphs, tables, and maps where appropriate
- Conclusions and recommendations for further study.
- References
- Appendices

ISP Oral Presentation

The ISP presentation will be 20-25 minutes long with an additional 5-10 minutes for questions. Presentations should be well organized and express the most important points of the ISP paper, research project and conclusions. Students may use visual aids (e.g., overheads, slides, samples).

Assessment

The ISP written and oral reports are evaluated on content, organization, technical accuracy, clarity of ideas, and depth of analysis and synthesis. Comments and evaluations of the project advisors may be taken into consideration when the Academic Director assigns final ISP grades.

Final grades for this course will be based on the following criteria:

ISP Paper	65%
Oral Presentation	20%
ISP Proposal	10%
ISP Journal	5%

Late Assignments

Dates for submission of the final paper and oral presentation are inflexible. Late work receives the loss of a half a grade point for every day it is late.

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

ISP Schedule

Week 3

Students meet with the AD to develop preliminary topics of interest and discuss preliminary feasibility analysis

Week 4 & 5

Students submit ISP work journal that includes a planned approach and timeline to identifying research topic, along with a list of potential advisors

Week 6 & 7

Students submit ISP work journal with progress update and revision of their ISP plan

Week 7, 8 & 9

ISP proposals due. Prior to leaving for the start of their ISP fieldwork, all students will have submitted both a preliminary and final proposal.

The general outline for the final proposal consists of the following:

- 1) Statement of research problem
- 2) A brief and relevant review of literature and previous research on your topic, elucidating how the proposed study might add to the existing knowledge of the subject
- 3) Methodology
- 4) Feasibility & budget (including accommodation, food, transport, communications, equipment)
- 5) Time frame (including a list of tasks, period during which these tasks will be undertaken, and your contact address and/or phone number during all phases)
- 6) Ethical considerations and potential positive and negative impacts of the proposed work on the human and natural systems of the study
- 7) Bibliography

Fieldwork may commence only after the final proposal has received AD approval.

Weeks 11 to 14

The formal ISP period lasts approximately 4 weeks, at which time papers and oral presentations are due. A major emphasis of the ISP course centers on fostering student independence as they pursue their research agendas; therefore, it is the responsibility of the student to develop and impose their own deadlines within the ISP period.

Program Expectations

- Inappropriate projects are those that require extensive library research; cannot reasonably be completed in one month; or that could be done in the US.
- Subject matter limitation applies to certain topics: Politics, illegal matters, health issues in which there is a likelihood of infection, Catholicism, Protestantism, topics reliant upon government offices or government officials, and sensitive aspects of the Vietnam War.
- Project cannot be conducted outside Vietnam or in the provinces of Dac Lac, Kon Tum, Gia Lai, Quang Tri, Lai Chau, Son La and Ha Giang.
- Students are expected to work independently on their projects, document activities in their work journal, produce a quality written paper and an engaging oral presentation. They will coordinate their research with the Academic Director and Project Advisor and are expected to adhere to the highest levels of professional and ethical behavior.

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.