

Comparative Field Methods and Ethics

ANTH-3500 (4 credits)

International Honors Program (IHP)

IHP Cultural Heritage: Legacy, Identity, and Curating the Future

Nepal, Ghana, Netherlands

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 Comparative Field Methods and Ethics seminar (CRME) introduces students to the conceptual and practical tools essential to forming constructive relationships with organizations and/or individuals from other cultures, particularly those required for completing academic work and cultural heritage projects. The course enhances students' skills at building a network; initiating purposeful dialogue in the cultural context of the three constituent countries; gathering, recording, and analyzing primary data; writing an academic report; and curating interpretative materials. The course pays particular attention to the ethics of working, researching, touring, and living, as a cultural guest. The class situates these ethical issues specifically as they apply within the cultural context of Nepal, Ghana, and the Netherlands and the program's critical global issues. The course aims to equip a student to produce curatorial projects in their program location. More importantly, it also gives students the intellectual tools to move about the world, learning and growing in an ethical manner.

The seminar includes readings, lectures, and discussions on theoretical and practical issues concomitant in ethical field methods.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Use professional knowledge acquired through field visits and discussions with curators and museum experts to strategize a career in cultural institutions' management;
- Use research skills and techniques such as formulating research questions, reviewing relevant literature, interrogating relevant primary-source material, material culture, and cultural artifacts, and conducting interviews in strict observance of local ethics and value systems;

- Integrate data collected through meetings with indigenous community leaders, curators, policy makers, and professional cultural workers to produce comparative research papers analyzing the relevance of cultural heritage to historical in/justice;
- Demonstrate an acute understanding of the positionality of the researcher and subject, and the ethics of living, working, researching, and, ultimately, building a career upon traveling as a cultural guest.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary in various languages related to course content in each program country.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Suggested Texts

- Alcoff, L. (1992). "The problem of speaking for others." *Cultural Critique*, No. 20.
- Ali, R. (2015). "Rethinking representation: negotiating positionality, power and space in the field." *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. Vol. 22, No. 6.
- American Folklore Society. "AFS Statement on Ethics: Principles of Professional Responsibility." *American Folklore Society*. February 1988. www.afsnet.org/?Ethics.
- Brown, Leslie & Susan Strega. *Research as Resistance: critical, indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005.
- Burnham, Rika (2011). *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience*. Getty Publications.
- Chase, J. C. (2018). *The beauty of purposeful living: Living traditions of Nepal*. Serindia Publications.
- Chilisa, Bagele. (2012). *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum.
- Horvat, E. (2013). *The Beginner's Guide to Doing Qualitative Research*.
- Luttrell, W. (2010). *Qualitative Educational Research*.

- May, T. (2011). *Social Research: Issues, Method and Process*. Berkshire: Open University Press.
- Pink, S. (2015). *Doing Sensory Ethnography*, 2nd ed. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Saxer, M. (2012). The moral economy of cultural identity: Tibet, cultural survival, and the safeguarding of cultural heritage. *Civilisations*, 61–1, 65–82.
<https://doi.org/10.4000/civilisations.3143>
- Sontag, S. (1973). *On Photography*. Rosetta Books: New York. pp1–12
- Sultana, F. (2007). “Reflexivity, Positionality and Participatory Ethics: Negotiating Fieldwork Dilemmas in International Research.” *ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 6(3).
- Sunstein, B. and Chiseri-Strater, E. (2007). “The research portfolio.” *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research*. St. Martin Press.
- Throsby, D. (1997). “Seven Questions in the Economics of Cultural Heritage.” In Hunter and Rizzo (Eds.). *Economic Perspectives on Cultural Heritage*. Pulgrave.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

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: Comparative Field Methods and Ethics in Nepal

In this module, the ethics of research in a variety of Nepali settings will be addressed, in relation to religious traditions and beliefs on the one hand, and, on the other, political circumstances and interactions with the global, regional and local nodes of power. While cultural environments may be “Nepali,” they will vary much and renewed cultural adaptation is required throughout the semester in diverse settings across Nepal.

Session 1: Cultural ethics

Discussion: Nepali (& Tibetan & Himalayan) customs

Required reading:

Moreno, Juan C. “Entering into the realm of ‘the other’: suggestions for crossing boundaries of human differences.” *Office of Diversity and Inclusion, University of Minnesota Extension*.

Session 2: Field methods in Nepal contexts

Lecture: Intro to methods—*Amina Singh*

Required readings:

Campbell, G. J. and Stone, L. (2011) "Social science research: a brief introduction to information gathering methods." *In The use and misuse of social science research in Nepal*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point.

Geertz, Clifford. (1998, October 22). “Deep Hanging Out.” Review of *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* by Pierre Clastres and *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* by Clifford James. *The New York Review of Books*.

<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1998/10/22/deep-hanging-out/>

Module 2: Comparative Field Methods and Ethics in Amsterdam and the Netherlands

Session 1: Cultural ethics

Discussion: Dutch research standards/Global research standards

Required reading:

Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (2018), 30 pp.

Session 2: Research methods in Dutch contexts

Workshop: museology and curating exhibitions

Required reading:

Burnham, Rika (2011). *Teaching in the Art Museum: Interpretation as Experience*. Getty Publications.

Module 3: Comparative Field Methods and Ethics in Ghana

Session 1: Cultural ethics

Discussion: Ghanaian customs

Visit to Chief's Palace

Discussion with the Nana Project (<http://thenanaproject.org>)

Session 2: Research methods in Ghanaian contexts

Required Reading:

Bob-Milliar, G. M. (2020). Introduction: methodologies for researching Africa. *African Affairs*.

Recommended Reading:

Feukeu, K. E., Ajilore, B., & Bourgeois, R. (2021). The capacity to decolonise: building futures literacy in Africa.

Additional Activities

Group Discussions: Synthesis and Debrief

(60 minutes x 9, see assignment below)

group 1: From USA to Nepal

group 2: Nepal midway

group 3: Nepal & beyond

group 4: From Nepal to The Netherlands

group 5: The Netherlands midway

group 6: The Netherlands & beyond

group 7: From the Netherlands to Ghana

group 8: Ghana midway

group 9: Ghana & beyond

Local Drop-Offs

Students will be “dropped-off” in a location and asked to complete local field-based research before returning for a group debrief. Students are asked to collect visual and oral/aural observations with special attention to positionality and outsider/insider perspectives. Local drop-offs are an experiential method of sharpening field-based research skills such as note taking, interview techniques and the politics of culture in Nepal, the Netherlands and Ghana. Drop-offs will take place in each program country.

Person of the Day (POD)

Person of the Day (POD) is a student who takes responsibility for the day and coordinates with IHP staff. The responsibility for POD rotates through the student group over the semester.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Group discussion: Synthesis and Debrief (15%)

Objectives

- To enable the group to reflect on what we have learnt from various parts of the course, to integrate knowledge gained from a variety of sources, including field trips, and to share insights;
- To provide a forum for discussion of course readings;
- To give you practice at facilitating discussions and making presentations.
- To engage critically with distinct threads from among the semester themes

How it works

In the first week of the semester, you will be assigned to one of nine groups. Each group will be assigned one group discussion to facilitate during the semester. These discussions will be guided by faculty but run by students. The group discussions will last for 60 minutes and will **foster debate or discussion** about what we have learnt in synthesis in each of the four courses since the previous meeting, and will integrate what we have learnt that week in workshops, lectures, **field trips** and **readings** with what we have previously covered in the semester. Each group will moreover be assigned a distinct thread from one of the semester themes, to be addressed in the discussion **but not as the theme of the entire discussion**.

When it is your turn to facilitate a discussion, you need as a group to **identify the most important topics (check the learning goals) that are suitable for class discussion** (don't pick so many topics that there isn't adequate time to discuss them all). At the meeting, the facilitators should first identify the topics to be covered in the meeting. They should then encourage and direct group discussion of the topics, ensuring that every member of the group is **given space to speak**, and indeed that **everyone does make a contribution**, however small. Facilitators are scheduled to **meet with a relevant faculty member** for 15 minutes just prior to their session in order to review the questions you will put to the group. Please feel free to approach any faculty member prior to starting your preparation for your own meeting in order to review the topics to be discussed. Faculty reserve the right to include critical questions

or topics if they are absent from your list. **It is important to allow sufficient time for discussion of the readings.**

Grading

Synthesis and debrief discussions make up 15% of your CRME grade. The quality of your contribution to the discussions throughout the semester is worth 7.5% and your facilitation of your session is worth another 7.5%. As a participant, you should come to group discussions with notes from the readings including a sentence summarizing the author's main message. You should contribute to the discussions but not dominate them, your contributions should be informed and you should respect other's opinions but not be afraid to disagree.

The criteria for evaluating the facilitators are:

- Your introduction identifying the topics to be discussed (5%)
- Your identification and framing of the important issues to be discussed from lectures, workshops, fieldtrips, etc., and the quality of the questions and prompts you used to initiate and direct the discussion (40%)
- Your identification of the important issues contained in the readings and your facilitation of the discussion of those readings (35%)
- Your facilitation of the group discussion (did you get everyone involved in and enthused about the discussion? Did you use any innovative approaches? Were you able to control the discussion and get it back on track when it wandered off the topic? Did you manage the time well—so that all topics were covered?) (20%)

Local Drop-offs (20%)

Objectives

To initially explore, observe, document and reflect upon a location; To develop field work skills with group and research collaborators, note taking, transcribing and synthesizing interviews; To give you practice at facilitating discussions and making presentations.

How it works

Students will be “dropped-off” in a location and asked to complete local field-based research at one or more sites. Students are required to return from the drop-off with a specific number of visual and oral/aural observations with supporting documentation which they must present and explain during a group debrief.

Grading

Participation in the local drop-offs will make up 20% of your CRME grade.

Curatorial projects (45%)

Small group curatorial project—Nepal (15%)

Individual curatorial project—the Netherlands (15%)

Whole group curatorial project—Ghana (15%)

Objectives

The curatorial projects are designed to help you to reflect upon, **analyze and synthesize** what you are learning from excursions, field trips, lectures, seminars, readings, formal and informal discussions and your own observations and to **take on the role of ‘curator’** to present an exhibit/archive/experience that reflects our course theme[s].

How it works

In each country, you will be asked to reflect in an essay on aspects of the fieldwork you have carried out and **to relate this to what you have previously learnt and observed** in the three thematic courses. Your essay needs to be succinct, well organized and to show that you are thinking about what you are experiencing and that you are synthesizing what you learn from disparate sources. Together with this essay you will also **curate an exhibit/archive/experience** related to or inspired by your essay topic. Exhibits can be tangible, i.e., a physical or digital art or photography exhibit, or intangible, i.e., dance, song, food etc.

The first project, which you will complete in Nepal, will be a small group curatorial project (15%). This will entail a 1,000-word **minimum** contribution to a paper prepared in collaboration with a small number of you program peers and a related exhibit curated by that small group.

The second project, which you will complete in the Netherlands, will be an individual curatorial project (15%). This will entail a paper with a 1,600-word **minimum** and a related exhibit curated individually.

The third project, which you will complete in Ghana, will be a whole group curatorial project (15%). This will entail an individual paper with a 1,000-word **minimum** and an exhibit curated through collaboration with your entire cohort.

Grading

These three curatorial projects will each comprise **15% of your CRME grade, together totaling 45% thereof.**

Students should note that topics for curatorial projects as well as their field study journal are open. Students should not feel they are limited only to topics explicitly explored in the courses but should feel free to use each project and paper to explore a variety of topics. To reinforce and emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of these Curatorial Project assignments, the weight given in evaluating the projects and papers in each country will be split equally between the grading of the four courses in that country.

Person of the Day (POD) (10%)

Objectives

The “Person of the Day” (or: P-O-D) is a student who takes responsibility for the day, any day that we are together, including travel days. It is an important way for students to take initiative for their learning, and to take responsibility for the day in coordination with the leadership team. It is an opportunity for students to talk in front of a group and get a feel for facilitation.

How it works

Students are organized (numerically or alphabetically) at the beginning of the semester, and the responsibility for POD rotates through the student group over the semester, following numerical or alphabetical order. This element is worth **10% of your CRME** grade.

Examples of POD activities and responsibilities:

- Reviews schedule for the day with leadership team and briefs students on changes and expectations
- Confers with leadership team and fellow students and makes time for announcements, moderates announcements, birthday greetings, book exchanges, etc.
- Orchestrates division of students into discussion or field trip groups
- Organizes an interactive activity (can be silly, thoughtful, and/or fun!)
- Briefs the group on news from countries visited or the US
- Takes responsibility for announcing the breaks, lunch duration, and rounding up classmates
- Greets the guest speaker on behalf of the whole group when he/she arrives
- Introduces the group to guest speakers (who we are and what we are doing and what we are looking forward to in your presentation)
- May introduce the speaker to the group (bio in orientation materials)
- May be time keeper or designate one for speaker or for student presentations
- Makes sure leadership team is conveying field trip instructions to the group
- Represents the student group on general questions throughout a day

Preparation, participation, and contribution to group learning (10%)

In this seminar, great emphasis is placed on the students' active participation in their own education. This element is worth **10% of your CRME** grade. Your grade is allocated on an assessment of your timely attendance and informed participation in all activities, including field trips; your adherence to codes of conduct and conditions of participation; and your general contribution to the maintenance of a positive learning environment throughout the course.

This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance—promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening—paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
- Involvement in Class Discussions—either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability—positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
- Displaying Respect—culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

Assessment

Group discussion: synthesis and debrief	15%
Local drop-offs (in three countries)	20%
Small group curatorial project (Nepal)	15%
Individual curatorial project (the Netherlands)	15%
Whole group curatorial project (Ghana)	15%
Person of the Day (POD)	10%
Preparation, participation, and contribution to group learning	10%
	(100%)

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

Program Expectations

- 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, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates', lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Storing Your Work: Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will always be available to despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- Personal Technology Use: Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- Course Communication: Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- Classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

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.