

## **Independent Study Project** ISPR-3000 (4 credits)

### **India: Public Health, Gender, and Sexuality**

*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) is an opportunity for in-depth study of a topic related to public health, gender, and sexuality within the Indian context. In conducting the projects, students employ field research, developed through the Field Method and Ethics Seminar (FME) to deepen knowledge gained from the Reproductive Epidemiology (RE) and Sexual Minorities and the Right to Health Care (SMRH) courses as well as from contacts made in the homestay or larger community. Students are encouraged to apply their Hindi language skills in areas such as organizing their daily needs, traveling, or working with a translator to gather data. In the process, students hone their skills in managing and learning from the unexpected, while designing a substantive academic fieldwork project and independently seeing it through to completion, with the support and guidance of an advisor. If appropriate to their undergraduate course of study, the ISP may form the basis for a senior thesis, or it may be a chance to learn formally about a new topic of interest.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the *Independent Study Project* course students will be able to:

- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of reproductive epidemiology, gender and sexuality in the context of India;
- Gain competence in the processes of independent, primary, research—from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies to final analyses and interpretations of data;
- Demonstrate independence and self-confidence while functioning in daily life of India;
- Demonstrate awareness of the ethical issues in reproductive and sexual health;
- Integrate the learning acquired in all program components to write a research paper or white policy paper with an average length of 25-45 pages in total observance of the norms of ethics shared by the host culture and the international academic community.

#### **Language of Instruction**

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of reproductive and sexual health through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

### **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.

### **Readings**

While the majority of the ISP work should be conducted in the field, readings for the ISP are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study. Reference articles and books are available from local libraries and SIT's electronic library databases specifically related to student ISP topics. Students are also expected to consult appropriate course readings applicable to the ISP.

### **Course Requirements**

As the ISP is the academic culmination of the learning experience, students are encouraged to start thinking actively about their research topic as early in the program as possible. All components of the program, beginning with orientation and including the Research Methods and Ethics in Health course, the two thematic courses, homestay, educational excursions, Hindi language study, and associated forms of cultural interaction within the host society must be used diligently to refine and deepen this thinking.

In the first month of the program, students submit a substantive fieldwork project proposal, which includes above all a well-focused analytical research question, a review of both primary sources (e.g. government or news reports) and secondary literature (i.e. academic publications) pertaining to this question, and the outline of a feasible methodical strategy with which students hope to find answers to their question within the limited framework of the ISP. The proposal also contains a justification of the project's significance and integrates advice from the AD/ISP Supervisor and ISP Advisor. Students are required to submit final research proposals outlining their ISP topic, methodologies, and the plan for implementation to ensure that the project is conducted in an ethical, responsible, and culturally appropriate manner.

All ISP topics must receive advanced approval by the academic director Academic Director before the project begins. It is assumed that most students will be conducting fieldwork on this scale for the first time. Accordingly, evaluation for the ISP includes consideration of the process involved in designing and executing a project of this scale through the ISP Work Journal, which provides a means to assess students' learning over the entire semester.

Ultimately, the successful completion of the ISP depends, to no small degree, on the methodological rigor, originality, and sophistication with which a student has attended to the research topic. Each student will be assisted by an advisor who helps the student through the process of finalizing the research questions, determining field resources, collecting and processing data, and writing a final paper that should be between 25-45 pages. The ISP must give evidence that the student has mastered the methodological and critical tools, as well as culturally and ethically appropriate techniques, of data generation and analysis

### **ISP Guidelines and Requirements**

The student will spend a minimum of 185 hours on the ISP. Fieldwork, which may include primary and secondary sources, depends on the nature of the topic and research design as agreed upon with the academic director and/or ISP advisor. This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, participating, making field observations, writing, and meeting with the academic director and ISP advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least 3-5 individual advising meetings to review their ISP proposal and ISP planning. Periodic progress conferences will be held with the academic director, as needed. Unless approved for an alternative ISP, the final product is a typed and bound 25-45-page academic paper, double-spaced, with 12-point standard font. In addition, a 20-30-minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analyses will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the academic director, the ISP advisors, and other invited guests.

### **Guidelines for ISP Proposal**

Before embarking on your ISP project, as part of the Research Methods and Ethics in Health course, you need to submit a proposal in which you explain:

1. Your thesis.
2. The methodology you will use to collect information and analyze it.
3. Where and/or from whom you will collect information.
4. What secondary sources you have consulted or will consult.
5. The kind of ethical issues you face or will face while doing your research.
6. What resource persons (including a possible advisor) you have contacted or will contact.

### **Human Subjects Review**

All ISP proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, students are required to submit an "Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects," to include a discussion of any potential harm that might come from the study, and to provide appendices including interview and survey protocols. If the academic director or Study Abroad Review Board

believes that the proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, the student will be asked to revise their proposal. Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic practice.

If the research has been funded by a U.S. government agency, or if the student plans to take this research back to the home school or community for further dissemination, then the student may be required to follow standards from their home institutions in addition to the Local Review Board and those of the Office for Human Research Protections, with which SIT is registered. For applications that require a full review, the academic director will forward any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (SARB) will be passed to SIT's Institutional Review Board.

## **ISP Written Format—Organization and Presentation**

### **I. Introduction**

- a. Explain why you chose this topic
  - i. Points of interest (i.e., thematic courses, personal observations, previous research interests, future research interests, personal interests, etc.).
- b. Describe why this topic is relevant to the region/country/culture and program theme.
- c. Define the general parameters of your study, including the scope, depth, and expected outcomes (hypothesis).
- d. Define your terms, including the overall theory on which you are basing your work, while situating your work in a scholarly context.

### **II. Literature Review**

- a. This segment is usually a general introduction into the literature and theories relevant to your topic.
- b. Link your topic to the literature currently available on the subject—cite authors, book titles, theories, or general perceptions that you may or may not agree with.
- c. Explain why you feel these authors were right or wrong; argue with or against their theories using your own observations or those of other theorists.

### **III. Body of Paper/Methodology**

- a. This should be the fun part of the paper, as it allows you the opportunity to describe your overall research experience.
- b. Describe the way you decided to set out on your research (i.e., how you chose the participants that you interviewed or worked with, the locations where you conducted your research, etc.).
- c. Describe the methods you used while planning your strategy to obtain the data for your research (i.e., protecting the identity and integrity of your participants, maintaining the integrity of your data, how you planned to avoid any misunderstanding/misinterpretation of your data).
- d. Describe the obstacles and problems that arose during the course of your research.

- e. If necessary, explain how and why you had to change your original plans (basically a cause/effect section) and how that affected the quality, depth, and scope of your data.

#### **IV. Findings**

- a. The really fun part! This is where you get to explain what you found out during the research process.
- b. It's better to focus on the important points of your hypothesis in this section. Highlight the most important aspects of your data and cite responses or observations that either prove or disprove your original hypothesis (it's okay to be wrong here) using the data you generated during the study.
- c. You can include your analysis of the data/interpretation of findings in this section or you can include this discussion in the "Conclusions" section.

#### **V. Conclusions**

- a. This is where you get to tie up all the loose ends and bring things together, while proving or disproving your original hypothesis.
- b. You can include your analysis/interpretation of findings in this section as the proof you need to argue for or against your original theory.
- c. Describe what the implications of your study are (i.e., why your findings are important. How can this information enhance the existing body of knowledge already available on the topic? What new questions arose out of your findings? How will these findings inform your future research interests?)

#### **V. Limitations of the Study**

Though optional, this section is highly recommended. Legitimize your study by proactively pointing out its shortcomings and biases (all studies have them, of course).

#### **VI. Recommendations for Further Study**

This should consist of a short list of recommendations on how your study might be expanded upon or used as the basis for future ISPs.

#### **VIII. Endnotes** (unless you have used page-by-page footnotes)

#### **IX. Bibliography and List of Sources**

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. APA style/formatting required.

#### **X. Appendices**

- a. Include a copy of your questionnaire, survey questions, etc. if applicable

- b. Include a copy of your written consent form (not the ones signed by participants—those you keep in a safe place), if applicable.

### **Important Dates & Deadlines**

Week 10	Confirm local ISP Advisor and submit first draft of ISP Proposal
Week 11	ISP final proposal due
Week 11	ISP period officially begins (you may start your research earlier)
Week 14	ISP due – NO EXTENSIONS
Week 15	ISP presentations

### **Role of Academic Director and Academic Advisor**

The academic director and the academic advisor advise students on methodology, background reading, and in-country contacts which the students will be encouraged to pursue. The academic director, in consultation with the academic advisor, and in some cases with the help of the ISP advisor (if applicable) evaluates the completed project and assigns the grade.

They receive further support and training by professional researchers for developing their research projects and ISP proposals.

### **Assignments and Evaluation**

#### Evaluation and Grading Criteria

At the end of the ISP period, students are expected to present their work to the group and the academic director. Timely completion of all ISP assignments is expected. Late submissions will be penalized. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the quality of expression, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and adherence to the highest ethical standards. During the process of planning, developing, executing, and presenting the ISP, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within India and in cooperation with institutions and advisors;
- Develop a logical and coherent framework for the study project and clearly justify how the chosen topic lies within the scope of the program and region;
- Critically discuss and evaluate available and relevant theories, papers, and published materials on the proposed project;
- Clearly present the main objectives of the project, further developing them when needed;
- Present and justify a reasonable methodological framework to achieve the proposed objectives;
- Critically describe the data collected, analysis performed, and results;
- Present and discuss problems, findings, and conclusions based on the methods used, data and information collected, and/or analysis performed;

- Be able to present all steps of the project clearly and coherently in a written and oral format for an independent audience.

In general, the criteria for ISP evaluation include the student's methods and effectiveness in gathering information, organization, assimilation, accuracy, analysis of the information, the effectiveness of expression and communication in the final form, and clarity and strength of project presentation and defense.

### **(1) ISP Work Journal (20%)**

This is the reservoir of all your fieldwork and the planning for the project. The extent to which you can use the ISP Work Journal is limitless, but as a minimum, it should include records of preparation and follow-up for your formal meetings over the semester and progressively refined versions of your ISP Abstract. Some other suggestions:

- names and locations of contact persons, especially possible ISP advisors and other ISP resources
- site plans, grids, maps, drawings, photographs, recordings
- notes from interviews conducted in the field relevant to your ISP
- statistical or other hard data, whether gathered in the field or through appropriate readings
- vocabulary items, phrases or excerpts from written or oral works in Hindi relevant for your ISP

Evaluation for the ISP Work Journal emphasizes your attention to process, and degree of preparation for each of your formal meetings. The following points of evaluation are also to be noted:

- Efforts made in meeting all assignment deadlines
- Consistency of Entire demonstrating a steady pace of progress
- Development of project in relationship to your objectives
- Evidence of preparation for and follow-up from your formal meetings over the semester
- Integration of Hindi language learning where appropriate

### **(2) ISP Final Paper (60%)**

The Final Paper should be approximately 30 pages of *analytical written content*, exclusive of secondary material such as photographs, maps, bibliography and footnotes or endnotes. It is expected that the ISP Paper be **rigorously edited** so that it exhibits the following attributes:

- freedom from grammatical errors and typos;
- compliance with a standard format of citation for both primary and secondary sources; and

- most importantly, concise and logical argument, which weaves your empirical findings into a convincing answer for your research question.

Evaluation includes the following criteria:

- Critical analysis of your topic guided by your chosen research question
- Clarity of presentation and argument while answering this question
- Use of primary resources and demonstrated cross-cultural communication skills
- Use of appropriate secondary sources to contextualize information gained from primary sources
- Concise use of language purged of filler phrases/adjectives
- Correct grammar, spelling and punctuation

Assessment of the ISP is done on the basis of SIT's assessment rubric for the Independent Study Project with the grading evaluation and criteria listed below.

Evaluation criteria for ISPs include:

Title/Acknowledgements/Abstract

- The title is succinct, interesting, and engaging, and it clearly explains the project
- The acknowledgments are complete and professionally written
- The abstract clearly summarizes the project

Research Question/Objectives/Justification

- The study/research question is relevant, thought-provoking, and original
- The project aims to contribute information on a topic relevant to local community and/or other researchers
- The objectives of the study are clearly presented and appropriate
- The justification of the project is clear and contextualized

Context and Literature Review

- The content is relevant. Important themes and background information is provided
- The paper includes appropriate, high-quality relevant background sources, including several from peer-reviewed journals

Methods

- The explanation of methodology is clear and accurate and supporting materials are included
- Implementation of methods through the research process is thoughtful and handed with care
- The methods are appropriate

Ethics

- Human subject policies and ethical research guidelines are adhered to and thoroughly discussed



- Appropriate consideration is given to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of research participants, in keeping with human subjects protocols and the LRB-approved ISP proposal
- The ISP is responsive to host community needs, as applicable

#### Presentation of results/findings

- The findings are complete and are logically and convincingly presented
- The prose discussion of findings is clear, succinct, and logical
- Tables, graphs, photos, and direct quotes are relevant and support the argument

#### Depth of analysis/Conclusions

- Important implications raised by the findings are included
- The argument is well-structured and different sources of information are well-integrated
- Patterns in the findings (or lack of a pattern) are identified and discussed
- The author gives logical explanations of what findings mean
- The author clearly and specifically related his/her findings to the study/research question and to previous research in the field

#### Technical aspects/Effort

- The paper is organized into major sections and/or follows the guidelines in accordance with the orientation of the program
- Table of contents, in-text citations, and reference list or bibliography are done correctly and completely
- There are no mistakes in writing, grammar, spelling, and punctuation

#### Evaluation criteria for oral reports include:

- Organization of presentation, with a view to holding audience interest
- Use of appropriate examples and personal experiences
- Clear explanation of ISP strategy and implementation

### **(3) ISP Final Oral Presentations (20%)**

The Final Presentation should not be more than 20 minutes total and should summarize the contents of the ISP Final Paper and discuss your research process. Students are welcome to use props (themselves included), photographs, images, posters, and so on.

It may be helpful to think of the ISP Final Presentation as though you are teaching a class to a group of semi-specialized listeners. Rather than simply giving a speech keyed to the pages of the ISP Final Paper, try to teach listeners about the topic, include information and background that you may take for granted, and try to convince your audience of your answer to the research question posed. You may wish to make a handout with specialized Hindi vocabulary items. Do a dress rehearsal so that your timing is within the 20-minute frame.

Evaluation includes the following concise criteria:

- Organization, Clarity and accessibility of presentation

- Use of appropriate examples and personal experiences
- Clear explanation of ISP strategy and implementation
- Ability to field comments and questions

### **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

### 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.

### **Program Expectations**

#### **Responsibilities when conducting fieldwork:**

- Students must respect, protect, and promote the rights and welfare of all those contributing to, and affected by, their work by protecting the privacy and dignity of the people and communities with whom they conduct field study.
- Students must respect the ethical considerations and guidelines of environmental research.
- The right of those providing information to students to either remain anonymous, or to receive recognition, must be scrupulously defended and respected.
- Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive and must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in culturally appropriate ways.
- Students must record and represent accurately all aspects of the field study. This includes not representing as their own work—either in spoken or written form—materials and ideas directly obtained from other sources.

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

### **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.