Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 credits)

Morocco: Human Rights, Social Justice, and Cultural Transformations

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 a self-designed research project offering students the opportunity to undertake a personally significant and independent investigation, which highlights the regional and cultural reality that can only be encountered during a study abroad experience. The ISP is the academic component in which the student most directly applies the concepts, skills, tools, and techniques of experience-based learning articulated through the Research Methods and Ethics course and the thematic courses, while enabling students to further integrate their language skills and the contacts they have developed at the level of the international community in Rabat as well as the regional (Moroccan, North African) levels. Each student will plan, develop, and independently undertake a research project, with the advice and guidance of the Academic Director and the ISP Advisor. The topic of study may be anything of interest to the student, within the scope of the program, and is usually developed out of lectures, discussions, field visits, and educational excursions. The final project should provide material evidence of student capability in utilizing appropriate methodologies and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture including the complexity of multiculturalism and human rights in Rabat. Students are expected to complete 180 hours of field-based (non-archival, non-library) research on their topic, submit a substantial written paper, and deliver an accompanying oral presentation. It is not uncommon for ISPs to strongly contribute to the student's choice of subject for graduate studies or professional career.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Demonstrate in-depth knowledge of a particular aspect of multiculturalism and human rights in Morocco;
- Gain competence in the processes of independent, primary, research – from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies, to final analyses and interpretations of data;
- Develop a greater appreciation of the challenges faced by field researchers;
- Demonstrate independence and self-confidence while conducting field research in Morocco;
- Produce an ISP 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.

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.

Course Requirements
While the student can count on the Academic Director (AD) to help focus the desired study, advise about practical realities of the local situation, and assist with advisors and contacts, it is incumbent upon the student to come up with their ISP topic themselves. The Independent Study Project format allows the student flexibility and the ability to exercise individual initiative, while also promoting academic quality. In turn, the ISP paper provides the material evidence of capability in handling of methodology and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. The final project should have a clear thesis, should be fieldwork-based, should include a clear description of ethical considerations, and should look at the host culture as it is, not as it should be.

Required Readings
While the majority of the ISP work should be conducted in the field, readings in preparation for, and throughout the ISP period, are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study.

ISP Guidelines and Requirements
The student will spend a minimum of 180 hours on the ISP with a majority of this work conducted in the field (as opposed to library research, for example). This includes time spent reading, developing contacts, interviewing, participating, making field observations, writing, and meeting with the Academic Directors and advisor. Students are responsible for scheduling at least 3-5 individual advising meetings with their ADs to review their ISP proposal and ISP planning. Periodic progress conferences will be held with the Academic Directors, 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 minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analyses will be given to colleagues, community members, program staff, the Academic Directors, the project advisors, and other invited guests.

Course Requirements
1. 3 interviews are required, with at least 2 formal interviews;
2. 180 hours of field-based study that applies methods of interactive research, including interviews, towards completion of the project; the ISP work journal accounts for the design of the project, the time periods of research, the research locations and the human resources/experts;
3. A 20 minute oral presentation and discussion of the ISP; power point is recommended though not required;
4. A 25-44 page (250 words/page) academic paper that includes: abstract, title page, acknowledgments, table of contents, theoretical framework of analysis, research methodology, conclusions, notes, and bibliography
5. The original ISP paper submitted to the Academic Director
6. Electronic version (disk or e-mail) of your fully formatted ISP

Guidelines for ISP Proposal
Before embarking on your ISP project, you need to submit a one-page 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, along with their ISP proposal, 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 Directors or the SIT Study Abroad Review Board believe that the proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, students will be asked to revise their proposal. Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic practice and cultural values.

If the research has been funded by a US government agency, or if the student plans to take this research back to the home school or community for further dissemination, then the student must follow more stringent standards, i.e., not only those of the host community, but also those of the Office for Human Research Protections, with which SIT is registered. Any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the SIT Study Abroad Review Board) are forwarded to SIT's Institutional Review Board for review.

Some recent ISP topic areas include:

- Divorce Experience : What the 2004 Moudawan Does and Does Not Do for Women in Morocco
- Packaging Morocco for the Foreign Eye : A Survey into the Moroccan Tourism Industry
- Post-Colonial Restructuring of Human Rights Systems in Morocco
- Examining the Culture of Poverty Argument in Morocco
- Inheritance Rights and *Itjihad* in Morocco's Modern Society
- Sufi Poetry: Chronicling Spiritual Ecstasy
- Laughter and the Politics of Expression among Women in Rural Morocco
- International and Local Non-Governmental Human Rights Organizations in Morocco: Cooperation and Activism
- Childbirth in Rural Morocco
- A Fictional History of a Moroccan Jew
- The Culture of Volunteering in Muslim Countries

Independent Study Project paper Mechanics
Getting Started
1. Decide on a topic
This can be easy sometimes, but more often it is difficult. This is where you ask yourself: "What do I want to study? What do I want to learn from the ISP? Is there a topic I have always wanted to investigate or learn more about?" Think about the ISP as an opportunity for self-fulfillment and growth or as a stepping-stone to further your studies in a particular area. You must be able to define a distinct and do-able project. As such, the next sentence is critical to keep in mind when deciding upon or refining your ISP topic. If you cannot clearly and completely state your project in one sentence, then your project cannot be completed within the time frame of the ISP period.

2. Define your research questions and research methods (ISP draft proposals)
In the process of submitting your ISP draft proposals and meeting with either the Academic Director or the ISP Advisor, you will have to clearly define your ISP topic and research questions. Focusing your interest on a clear and precise question will allow you to begin your ISP period with as much clarity as possible and will help you complete your task in the given period of time.

3. Complete a final ISP proposal
The ISP proposal should provide a clear description of your topic, research questions and intentions, and expectations of the ISP you have chosen to pursue. The proposal will help you anticipate what you are going to do and what possible problems may arise. The proposal should help you to clearly define and refine your project ideas and focus so that your resulting work is a discrete project that can be accomplished in the given period of time.

4. Complete, sign, and hand in SIT forms: ethical guidelines, and Institutional Review Board (IRB).
In addition to completing the ISP Proposal, students are also required to submit and comply with ethical requirements, agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, and to comply with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in the Research Methods and Ethics course. Please note that until items 3 and 4 above (ISP Proposal, Site

Approval, and Ethical Guidelines Forms) are satisfactorily completed, students will not be allowed to embark on their ISP.

Important Dates & Deadlines
Week 4   Submit first draft of ISP proposal
Week 7   ISP final proposal due
Week 10   ISP period officially begins (you may start your research earlier)
Week 14   ISP due—NO EXTENSIONS
Week 14-15 ISP presentations due

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?)

VI. 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).

VII. 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. Whatever style you choose to use, be accurate and consistent.

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.

Role of Academic Director and ISP Advisor

The two individuals who work most closely with each student on the project are the Academic Director and the ISP Advisor. The AD advises students on methodology, background reading, and in-country contacts which the students will be encouraged to pursue. The Academic Director, in consultation with the in-country advisor, evaluates the completed project and assigns the grade.

The ISP Advisor's precise role may vary according to particular circumstances. In general, the individual selected for this role should be a host national or long-time foreign resident in the country, who has expertise in the student's field of interest and works with the student (and, to some extent, the Academic Director) on design, implementation, and evaluation of the ISP. The ISP Advisor may be a host-country academician, field professional, artisan, or topical informant. The role may be more or less directive or consultative, depending on the student and the need. Finding an advisor is the responsibility of the student, but the AD will assist and must approve the advisor. Occasionally, a student may have more than one advisor/consultant, one of whom may be from outside the host country. The main purpose of an advisor, beyond providing needed expertise, is to provide students with the experience of working closely with *local* professionals.

Students will generally meet with the ISP Advisor several times throughout the semester. The first session is likely to be devoted to an exploration of the student's background in the subject area, his or her topic of study, the preliminary project proposal, and how the project fits into the student's undergraduate curriculum and broader interests. Various methodologies introduced during the Research Methods and Ethics course should also be discussed. The ISP Advisor and student will agree on specific requirements (to be submitted to the Academic Director for approval) and on an initial plan of action. The following sessions (which can be conducted in person, over the phone, or by email) should be devoted to a discussion of student progress and resolution of any difficulties. The final session, at the conclusion of the program, will be an evaluation of the final product, which will have been submitted to the advisor beforehand. It is the student's responsibility to secure and keep appointments with the project advisor.

Assignments and Evaluation

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 Morocco 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 theme;
- 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.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Independent Study Project paper (60%)
Assessment of the ISP paper 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 SARB-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

2) Independent Study Project Oral Presentation and Paper Defense (40%)
A 20-minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analyses will be given by the individual to community members, program staff, the AD, the ISP advisor, and other invited guests. Assessment of the ISP Oral Presentation is done on the basis of SIT's assessment rubric for the Independent Study Project Presentation with the grading evaluation and criteria listed above. It should include the following:

- Introduction (including research question, rationale and hypotheses)
- Methods adopted to collect data and justification of validity
- Major issues involved in the research project
- Findings and their relevance to the field of research
- Limitations and pitfalls, Ethics of research
- Conclusions and prospects of further research

- Time for questions and comments and for the student to defend their research

The final portion of the presentation should be reserved for the ISP paper defense. Students will be assessed on the basis of the ability of the student to back up claims with solid references, to establish interesting transitions between points raised, to provide complete and eloquent answers to questions, and to show lucidity and be persuasive when challenged.

Assessment
      ISP Final Paper - 60%
      ISP Project Oral Presentation & Paper Defense - 40%

Grading Scale
The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

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

I	=	Incomplete
W	=	Withdrawal (Student initiated)
AW	=	Administrative withdrawal

Grading Criteria
An "A" grade for an assignment entails superior (not just "very good") performance—in terms of structure and organization—of both the written paper and oral presentation, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence.

Student 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.
- 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.