Research Methods and Ethics
ANTH-3500 (3 credits)

Malawi: Sustainable Development Practice

This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Course Description

This course equips students with knowledge and skills for conducting research ethically and successfully in contexts such as Malawi. Beyond the research methods, this course draws on decolonial perspectives to open possibilities for students to consider a wider array of social research questions and methods. Research questions that students frame and research methods they choose to employ, will be shaped, and informed by the cultural and socio-political context of the chosen research context. The course builds into the learner a critical perspective, but also empowers the learner to make decisions that are sensitive to the rights of research subjects.

The course strives to live and adhere to the ideals and biases of decolonial thinking and praxis. Our view is no such a thing as a singular epistemology, nor a universal approach to framing research questions and research design. Research topics and questions are informed by the co-participation of the communities in which students work. As such the course will take considerable time unpacking issues related to decolonizing methodologies and attendant ethics. Following this, students choose a community or location in which they will work, and then proceed to develop a research proposal (research questions, how data will be gathered, analyzed, and used, etc.) around a key issue or issues identified by and with the community. Rather than being prescriptive, the course provides the space for students to develop research agendas, questions, and methods in an inductive way.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Appreciate the wide and limitless range of possibilities for conducting social research.
- Design a research project that adheres to the ideals for decolonial research methodologies.
- Demonstrate knowledge of research methods that are culturally relevant and appropriate.

- Explain the impact of their positionality on research protocols, research design and data.

Language of Instruction
Conversations in the course are conducted in English and where necessary translation or interpretation is provided.

Instructional Methods
Modules 1, 2 and 3 are conducted at the center led by SIT faculty. Module four to module nine are co-instructed with local community members with oversight by SIT faculty. Students will make four presentations to their peers on their progress with their ISP proposal and the lessons that they are learning.

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.

Required Texts
See the course schedule for a full list.
Additional readings and articles as assigned.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Positionality Paper (10%) – *students choose between two options*
Prompt One: How does your identity (gender, race, class, socio-economic status, etc.) impact your ontological views of the world, and how does this in turn influence your research interests and biases (the questions you will ask, how you will ask those questions, and how you will interpret the information that they encounter). Students will write a 1,000–1,200-word essay.

OR

Prompt Two: Use 6-8 pictures of themselves (which may include other people) to assess the ways in which their identity (gender, sexual orientation, class, socio-economic status, etc.) impacted their social relations, conversations, interpretation of their social situation.

2) Community Appraisal and Collaboration (20%)
Choose any community or community in which you will conduct your ISP.
I)   Describe the community (population structure and size, ethnicity, social class, key social norms, leadership structure, social infrastructure, key public concerns, key private concerns.
II)   Develop best practices for working collaboratively with the community.

3) Progress Presentations (20%)
Based on modules 4 to 8, students make four presentations to their peers on the progress that they are making in developing their ISP proposal.

4) ISP Proposal (40%)
All students must develop an ISP proposal. The ISP proposal should address a theme related to the program, include research question and objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, and comply with the ethical standards learned throughout the course.

5) Participation (10%)
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 do not, 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
        Positionality Paper – 10%
        Community Appraisal and Collaboration – 20%
        Progress Presentations – 20%
        ISP Proposal – 40%
        Participation – 10%

Attendance and Participation

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

Late Assignments

SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections, and experiences throughout the program.
Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+
84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64	F

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.
- 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.

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.

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: Introduction, experiential learning, and cultural adjustment
This module introduces unique aspects of SIT's experiential learning pedagogy and how it shapes SIT Malawi's program structure, student, and faculty roles. Most particularly, this module allows students to discover the power of experiential learning and use it as a tool to connect to local communities and individuals and develop into reflexive researchers who are attentive to their own positionality in relation to the local communities in which they engage for their ISP.

Sessions:
  a) Cultural Adjustment Cycle
  b) Homestay as a Cultural Experience and Site of Learning
  c) Doing Field-Based Research in a Study Abroad Context
  d) Experiential Learning Philosophy and the Politics of Culture in Malawi

Readings:
Kohls, Robert. "The Values Americans Live By."
www.claremontmckenna.edu/math/alee/extra/American_values.html.

Miner, Horace "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema". American Anthropologist, 1956, 58(3), 503-507 Levy, D. (2000).

Ritzer, George. (1983). "The McDonaldization of Society." Journal of American Culture, 6 (1), 100-107.

Module 2: Introduction to the ISP
This module will describe the ISP processes and help students brainstorm ideas and set goals for their ISP. The module will also walk the students through the Local Review Board (LRB) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and the application for Human Subjects Review (HSR application).

Sessions:
  a) Introduction to the LRB/IRB Process and HSR Application
  b) Discuss Preliminary ISP Ideas
  c) Identifying an ISP Advisor
  d) Identifying research partners and communities.

Readings:
No assigned readings.

Module 3: Research ethics from a decolonial perspective
This module covers issues related to positionality, research subjects, ethical use of published and non-published materials, reciprocity, and respect. We place a critical lens on the origins and implications of research ethics, and we explore the major critiques of Eurocentric research epistemologies that are emerging from decolonial scholarship.

Readings:
Thambinathan, V., & Kinsella, E. A. (2021). Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Creating Spaces for Transformative Praxis. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211014766.

Keikelame MJ, Swartz L. Decolonising research methodologies: lessons from a qualitative research project, Cape Town, South Africa. Global Health Action. 2019;12(1):1561175. doi: 10.1080/16549716.2018.1561175. PMID: 30661464; PMCID: PMC6346712.

Lincoln, Y. S., & González y González, E. M. (2008). The Search for Emerging Decolonizing Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Further Strategies for Liberatory and Democratic Inquiry. Qualitative Inquiry, 14(5), 784-805. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800408318304

Module 4: Framing Research Questions

Working with a local community, students work with the community to identify the key issues around which the community would like to conduct a research project, and then work with the community to frame those questions.

Readings: no assigned readings.

Module 5: Issues and questions in research design

How will you design your research project? Who will you work with? What is their role in the project?

Suggested issues:
a) Representation and objectivity.
b) Emic and Etic perspectives.
c) Positivism and its implications.
d) Research plan.
e) Preparing the ISP budget.

Module 6: Communicating and conducting interviews in the Malawi cultural context

The major question that this module attempts to answer is, how can we design interviews and interview instruments with a decolonial perspective? We will explore and critically consider some of the ways in which ethnography and participant observation situate interviewing as decolonial praxis.

Readings:
Bernard, H. Russell (2006) Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches 4th ed. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press. Chapter 3: "Preparing for Research."

Neuman, W. Lawrence (2005) Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches 6th ed.

Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon. Chapter 10: "The Logic of Survey Research."

<u>Decolonising interview methods: a call to look to the moon.</u>

Module 7: Data Collection Methods

Working with a community, students will design the research methods they will employ to answer the questions that they have framed in module 4 above.

No assigned reading

Module 8: Data analysis and report writing
Students are required to work with the local/community partners to design a data analysis and reporting writing plan and to present these plans to peers in class for further discussion.

No assigned reading.

Module 9: Presenting and disseminating the ISP report
Students are required to work with the local/community partners to design a data presentation and report dissemination plan and to present these plans to peers in class for further discussion.

Sessions:
Planning dissemination in the Malawi context
Use of logistics and other resources