Narratives of Identity and Social Change (Core Course)
SOCI-3000 (3 credits)

South Africa: Program Name

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

Narratives of Identity and Social Change serves as the foundational course for all students in the South Africa study abroad program, regardless of their specific track in Health, Human Rights, Education, or Environmentalism. This course provides essential historical and cultural context through three interrelated modules exploring Xhosa, Coloured/Khoe, and Afrikaner identities. By examining social change across education, language, land, politics, rural development, social welfare, and tourism, students develop the contextual understanding necessary to engage meaningfully with their specialized track studies.

The course investigates how identity markers beyond race—such as gender, sexuality, class, and generational or political affiliation—shape experiences across South African communities. A central argument of the course is that identities are not static; cultures are fluid and evolve over time, with significant intra-cultural differences among groups and individuals. Students analyze how national and group identities are expressed through various media forms (television, internet, newspapers, magazines, artistic expression) while gaining deeper understanding through experiential components including homestays and site visits. This foundation prepares students to recognize how historical legacies and cultural dynamics influence contemporary issues they will explore in their specialized tracks.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Critically analyze the complex processes of social change in contemporary South Africa
- Evaluate how historical legacies continue to shape identity formation in post-apartheid society
- Compare and contrast different identity narratives across South African communities
- Develop a nuanced understanding of social justice movements in the South African context

- Apply interdisciplinary approaches to analyze social challenges facing South Africa today
- Connect broad cultural and historical themes to specialized topics in health, human rights, education, or environmental studies.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

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.

Required Texts
See the course schedule for a full list of reading assignments.

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.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

In-Class Participation and Field Engagement (10%) Active participation is essential for learning in this course. Students are expected to engage meaningfully in class discussions, field activities, and interactions with guest speakers and local organizations. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their contributions, critical thinking skills, respectful engagement with diverse perspectives, and ability to connect field experiences to course concepts. Participation is assessed through instructor observation during class sessions and field visits.

Field Observation Journal (25%) Students will maintain a handwritten field journal throughout the course, documenting their observations, reflections, and analyses of site visits, guest lectures, and community engagements. Journals will be collected at five points during the semester for review and feedback. Entries should connect field experiences to course readings and concepts, demonstrating critical engagement with course themes. Journal entries must be completed within 24 hours of each relevant experience to ensure accuracy and depth of reflection.

Collaborative Field Documentation Project (30%) Working in small groups (3-4 students), students will document and analyze a specific aspect of South African identity and social change through direct field observation. Each group will:

1. Select a specific site, cultural practice, or community organization to study
2. Conduct structured on-site observations during scheduled field visits
3. Document findings through photography, audio recordings, and field notes (all collected during class time)
4. Create a physical exhibition that presents their analysis through visual and multimedia elements

The final project requires an in-class presentation (15 minutes) where students explain their methodology, findings, and analysis. Groups will also lead a 10-minute discussion about their research process and conclusions. This project emphasizes real-time, in-person data collection and collaborative meaning-making, with all work completed during scheduled class sessions and field visits. The physical nature of the exhibition and in-class presentation

ensures academic integrity while developing students' observational, analytical, and presentation skills.

Oral Examination (35%) Students will participate in a 25-minute individual oral examination with the course instructor at the end of the semester. The examination will assess students' understanding of key course concepts, ability to analyze complex cultural dynamics, and capacity to synthesize information across the course modules. Questions will require students to analyze case studies, interpret cultural artifacts, and apply theoretical frameworks to specific South African contexts. Students will receive a rubric and study guide two weeks before the examination to prepare effectively. The oral exam will be recorded for assessment purposes.

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.** For an interactive course to succeed, you must be present, on time, and have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Being prepared with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone. Moreover, the content of this course is learned collaboratively, meaning that when a student isn't here, they take away from everyone's opportunity to learn. The only way to maximize our collective learning potential is if we are all here contributing. 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
- **Submit assignments on time:** 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.
- **Bring your curiosity:** Ask questions in class. Engage the guest lecturers, as these are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak. Remember, there are no foolish questions, and your inquiries might help others in class who have

similar ideas/thoughts. By actively participating and showing curiosity, you demonstrate respect for our guests and contribute to creating a dynamic learning environment for everyone.

- **Maintain academic Integrity:** As members of a learning community, we all want to submit work that reflects our own ideas and efforts. Even if it is unintentional, plagiarism can have serious consequences. Before you submit each assignment, ask yourself these questions:

- Did I reference ideas, quotes, phrases, or facts I read about in a book, article, or website, without citing the author and year of the source where I read about them?
- Did I paraphrase by changing only a word or two or moving the words around?
- Did you answer "yes" to any of the above questions? If so, you are committing plagiarism and need to give credit to appropriate sources before you submit your assignment

- **Principled Disagreement**: Learning often involves discomfort. Some discomfort can facilitate personal and collective growth. You, your peers, guest lecturers, instructors, and local constituents, have diverse experiences, values, beliefs, affiliations, and identities. Reflecting on these differences can be emotionally challenging, even when it deepens self-awareness and mutual understanding. In this course, we aim to encourage brave spaces were principled disagreement is encouraged rather than avoiding difficult conversations. *This is challenging work, and we will inevitably make mistakes.* Our goal is to thoughtfully critique ideas rather than attacking individuals. We aim to embrace productive discomfort and minimize unproductive discomfort, striving for principled disagreement.

- **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 brave 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.

- **Our social identities** – Our social identities - race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual identity, religion, mental and physical ability, size, national origin, citizenship status, and more – shape how we are perceived, represented, and treated. They also influence what knowledge and learning is deemed valuable and legitimate. To challenge hegemonic paradigms and perspectives, this course intentionally includes readings, topics, videos, and assignments from authors and perspectives of diverse backgrounds. However, there may be gaps we have overlooked. Your constructive feedback is always welcome on how to make this course more inclusive and transformative.

- **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**: 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.
- **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](#), [Accessibility 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 - Xhosa Identities: History and Culture

This module focuses on the historical and current development of Xhosa identity. Students will be exposed to both the urban and rural realities of life in South Africa through immersive field visits and engagement with local communities. A series of lectures will complement experiences gained through study of the Xhosa language and interaction with local organizations and cultural sites. The module will include visits to both urban areas like Langa township and rural villages in the Eastern Cape, focusing on rural development, education, and livelihoods.

Scheduled seminars may include:

- Guest lecture on Xhosa History and Culture
- Guest lecture on Xhosa Identity
- Excursion to Robben Island
- Traditional Leadership and Contemporary Politics in the Eastern Cape
- Rural Development Challenges and Initiatives

Required Readings:

Alexander, N., & Heugh, K. (1999). Language policy in the new South Africa. In A. Zegeye & R. Kriger (Eds.), Cultural change and development in South Africa (Special Issue, 1998-9 Culturelink, pp. 9-33).

Pithouse, R. (2010, February 13). Faster, harder, smarter? South African Civil Society Information Service. Retrieved from www.sacsis.org.za

Module 2 - Afrikaner Identities: History and Culture

This module examines Afrikaner society and its ongoing transformation as it stakes its place in contemporary South Africa. Students will be based in Stellenbosch, engaging with local institutions, cultural sites, and community organizations. We explore the history of colonization through the Dutch East Indian (VOC) Company and the ideology that led to the development of Apartheid. Through lectures, discussions, and site visits we take a contemporary look at this society and how it is currently expressing its identity through politics, art, religion and economics.

Scheduled seminars may include guest lectures exploring topics including Afrikaner history and origins, contemporary political positioning, religious influence through the Dutch Reformed Church, media representations, and artistic expressions of identity. The module will also examine how gender and sexuality intersect with Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa, providing students with a multifaceted understanding of this community's ongoing cultural negotiations.

Required Readings:

Frueh, J. (2002). Political identity and social change: The remaking of the South African social order. SUNY Press.

Villa-Vicencio, C. (2008, June 18). On being South African: Identity, religion and culture [Beyers Naudé Memorial Lecture]. University of Johannesburg. Retrieved from www.ujdigispace.uj.ac.za

Module 3 - Coloured Identity: History and Culture

This module will be based in the Bo Kaap district of Cape Town, which is mainly inhabited by the descendants of slaves brought from areas in Asia and Africa. People here mainly practice the Muslim faith and speak Afrikaans as a first language. Through engagement with local organizations, cultural sites, and community leaders, students will examine the complexity surrounding the so-called "coloured" identity. We will place the spotlight on the process of displacement of communities during the Apartheid regime and how this history is currently playing out in Cape Town.

Guest lectures will cover various dimensions of coloured identity, including historical origins in slavery at the Cape, forced removals under apartheid, and KhoeKhoe indigenous heritage. Additional topics include the concept of Rainbow Nationalism, contemporary racial dynamics in South Africa, and the significant role of religious identity in community formation. The module provides opportunities for critical engagement with scholars and community leaders who offer diverse perspectives on these complex historical and contemporary issues.

Required Reading:

Adhikari, M. (2005). Not white enough, not black enough: Racial identity in the South African coloured community. Double Story Books.

Hadland, A., Louw, E., Sesanti, S., & Wasserman, H. (2008). Power, politics and identity in South African media. HSRC Press.

Module 4 - Urban Youth and Contemporary Culture

This module explores how younger generations are navigating post-apartheid realities through creative expression and civic engagement in Johannesburg's urban spaces. Guest lectures will address urban geographies, youth culture, arts activism, and cultural heritage, examining how these elements shape contemporary identity formation. Field visits to significant cultural sites and community initiatives provide firsthand exposure to these dynamics, connecting historical perspectives to current social movements relevant to students' specialized tracks.

McEachern, C. (2002). Narratives of nation media, memory and representation in the making of the new South Africa. Nova Science Publishers.
Cowan, J. K., Dembour, M. B., & Wilson, R. A. (2011). Culture and rights: Anthropological perspectives. Cambridge University Press.