

Research Methods and Ethics

ANTH-3500 (3 credits)

South Africa: SIT Choice

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.

This course is designed as a combination of theoretical, practical, and reflexive engagement with what it means to be doing academic research as an American undergraduate student in South Africa. It is nested within and related to the other streams of the semester programmes including orientation, homestays, academic seminars, assignments, and your own experience.

The design of the course is drawn from the Community Development Resource Action's (CDRA) Action Learning Cycle which defines learning as: "A continuous cycle – the end of each learning cycle becomes the beginning of the next cycle." We will start at the 'reflection' phase, using key readings from postcolonial theory to introduce you to critical thinking around issues of ethics, power, positionality, and reflexivity. Seminars will be structured around drawing lessons from reflecting on your experience in relation to these readings. Then more practical readings will help you think through tentative planning for your site visits, where you will put into action some of the things you have been learning. You will then return and present your findings to the group, followed by reflection in order to learn from your experiences before planning and taking your next action an iterative learning cycle. This cycle builds to include the readings, seminars, site visits, one-on-one mentoring sessions, journaling, local review board processes, interaction with your ISP supervisor, and skills based workshops. Different methods will be used in the seminars to encourage participation and sharing.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

- Use the one-month mentored research project on a chosen topic in South Africa as a learning experience;
- Apply ethical research norms to a chosen methodology, and think critically and reflexively during the research process;
- Consider broader ethical issues and responsibilities from a post-colonial and reflexive perspective in the context of conducting a research project in South Africa; and

- Design a research topic for study, refine its scope, execute it, and produce a substantial document based on four weeks of field experience.

Assignments and Assessment:

Grading:

1 st Impressions:	10%
Journaling:	10%
School visits oral:	5%
NGO visits oral:	5%
Rural paper:	20%
ISP proposal:	40%
Participation:	10%

Assignments Description:

Assignment 1: First Impressions

Descriptions: Write a letter to yourself on your first impressions of South Africa since your arrival. You should confine your impressions to the first two weeks of your time in South Africa.

You will not be marked on the content of the letter, your completion of the exercise will give you a pass/fail grade.

Assignment 2: Journaling

You are required to keep a research journal on the following:

Seminars & Readings: Keep notes on your thoughts on the readings to assist you in contributing in class. Feel free to make these notes on the hard copies.

School & NGO visits: Use your journal as a place to keep 'field notes' – observations, your own responses and reactions, and thoughts about the process.

Johannesburg travel: Keep notes on what you are observing and learning, and reflexively think about how your own position is influencing, how you as an individual are making meaning, and how the group is making meaning to what they observe.

Rural project: Use your journal to keep field notes, both of what you are observing and your own responses, comfort, discomfort, difficulties, and enjoyments.

ISP proposal preparation: Keep notes on your thoughts about your research topic, how you might want to go about doing it, how you are changing your mind and refining it and input from your one-one-one meetings. Work through the worksheets provided in the ISP handbook to help you prepare.

You are required to hand the journals in twice. You will not be assessed on the content of your

journaling, but rather on how you are using the process. Keep up to date with your journal and don't leave it until the due date.

Assignment 3: Schools visit oral

The group reports back to the class on their observations, describing in sufficient detail what you observed and your interpretations, and then evaluate these observations. This is a group assignment.

Assignment 4: NGO visit oral

You will feed back as a group on the responses to your interviews with staff members. Your group will be marked as a whole.

Assignment 5: Rural Research report

For the report, you may work in pairs for the field work, but each of you must write on a different issue. All write-ups must be done independently.

Objectives:

- i. To encourage an appreciation for the realities of rural life, and how this differs from urban life;
- ii. To provide more situations to practice Xhosa language and communication skills;
- iii. To practice a field study methodology and other skills such as note-taking and data analysis;
- iv. To work effectively to define, select, and refine a topic, using the ISP headings; carry out data collection; write a report and make a short presentation on your findings;
- v. To enable you to tailor an assignment to suit your own interests and learning style; and
- vi. To gain insight into obstacles encountered when doing fieldwork.

The Rural Report Assignment

The rural excursion is your first extended experience in the rural field. Among other things it is an opportunity for you to put into practice all that you have learned, so far, about primary research. Once in Tshabo you will determine a question to be answered. Due to the limits of time and potential language barriers, along with considerations drawn from the postcolonial critical reflexive lens, please ensure that you **do not** write as though you are:

1. Discovering or uncovering the truth
2. That your findings represent the community of Tshabo as a whole or some imagined entity called 'Xhosa culture'

Rather ensure you are clear that you are exploring the subjective opinions of a few residents and/or your own subjective observations. Ensure you try and follow Spivak's (in Kapoor) injunctions for mediating your complicity in the research process.

Some topic areas for the rural report you may want to consider:

The geography of the village you're living in: Layout of the area, relationship of buildings and

housing, significance of this vegetation, geography-principal physical features: rivers, roads, fields, sacred sites, tombs. The “centre of the universe” consideration for Tshabo residents (look back at “The Green Banana”).

Cultural Environment: Name of the community and meaning of the name; important people; places of interest; taboos, rituals, spirituality, religion. (Recording children's games. Music: on phones, in a church, local songs, traditional songs).

People: Family structure; population: age breakdown, gender representations, ethnic groups (Are there only isiXhosa speakers living here?), Gender roles (What is the process of getting married?) Traditional and current value systems. (How do clan names work?)

Economy: Primary occupations, economic indicators (expressions of wealth), organization of economic system: types of markets, goods available, external trade jobs/labor; sources of labor; available technologies.

Ecology: Waste disposal (water, household trash. What was in the trash in the home environment you stayed in and what happened to it?); natural resources of the area; water sources and value; relationship of people to the environment.

Communication and transportation: Information dissemination in the community; access to outside information; primary transportation means, frequency of use, value placed on transportation means. (What happens in emergencies? What does the government provide?)

Social: Community groups and organizations; special events or activities - what, when, who, where, why; leisure activities, sports, concept of “fun”.

Rural report structure and word count.

Use the ISP structure to write up your report, **combining the literature review and methodology section**, and ensuring that you demonstrate the critical reading and application of the RM&E readings, citing at least two RM&E readings, and one reading from the Xhosa Identities module of the Narratives of Identity and Social Change section.

Word Count Limit: minimum 3000 words, maximum 4500 words.

Assessment

This paper is a ‘practice’ paper for your ISP, and will be graded as a learning exercise. Your paper will be marked for clarity (the quality of your writing and communication), consistency (do you keep to your topic, explain yourself well) and coherence i.e. what have you asked as your central research question, how have you gone about gathering information to answer it (methodology / literature review), what are your findings, what do they tell you about your question. Particular attention will be paid to your relational and pragmatic ethics, and your reflexivity.

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 (through the Local Review Board) to SIT's Institutional Review Board.

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.

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 I: Postcolonial lenses, ethics, power, positionality and reflexivity

Session 1:

- Introduction to the course and the themes of the course
- Evaluation of student research experience and intentions
- Introduction to the distinction between relational and practical ethics (with some clear SIT guidelines for unsuitable research subjects).

Discussion on the reading:

Hall, Stuart (1992). 'The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power in Hall, S. & Giebens, B. (Eds.) *Formations of Modernity*. Cambridge and Oxford. Polity Press and Blackwell: 185-227.

Session 2:

Think further about discourse and the impact of being implicated in pre-existing discursive power relations, especially relating to representations and realities of 'the West' in 'Africa'.

Discussion on the reading:

Njambi, W. N. (2004). Dualisms and female bodies in representations of African female circumcision A feminist critique. *Feminist Theory*, 5(3): 281-303.

Session 3:

Thinking about relational ethics and how to mediate power during research and academic knowledge production.

Discussion on the reading:

Kapoor, I. (2004). Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other'. *Third World Quarterly*, 25(4): 627-647.

First one-on-one session: Meet and discuss your ISP with an experienced mentor.

Module II: Thinking about research in action

Session 1:

- Thinking traditionally about different forms of research from quantitative to qualitative with emphasis on scope and possibilities of small scale qualitative research.
- Preparing for school visits and a participant observation exercise.

Discussion on the readings:

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). Meeting Qualitative Enquiry in *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Batchelder, D. (1993). The green banana. *Beyond Experience: The experiential approach to cross-cultural education*, 2nd ed. Maine: Intercultural Press, Inc.

School visits:

You will be divided into groups and each group will visit a different school. Your role is to observe the school as 'participant observers' and to present your observations to the class. Use the Describe, Interpret, Evaluate process (please see examples of D.I.E's in your reading pack).

Session 2:

Reflection on the schools visit using the reading:

Racine, L. (2003). Implementing a postcolonial feminist perspective in nursing research related to non-Western populations. *Nursing inquiry*. 10(2): 91-102.

Preparation for methodologies options in session 3:

Divide into groups of 2-3 and prepare a 3-5 minute presentation with a recommended reading on one of the following research methods:

- i) Surveys
- ii) Interviews
- iii) Focus groups
- iv) Rapid ethnographies
- v) Photo voice
- vi) Body mapping
- vii) Oral histories
- viii) Image elicitation

Or another methodology you're interested in...

(Here is a cool set of interesting case studies of creative methodologies
<https://creativeresearchmethods.wordpress.com/case-studies-overview/>)

Answer the questions:

What kind of research is this best suited to?

How do you do the research?

Second one-on-one session: Meet and discuss your ISP ideas with your mentor.

Module III: Thinking about research in action continued

Session 1:

Thinking about interviews traditionally and creatively

Discussion of the reading:

Slim, H., Thompson, P., Bennett, O., & Cross, N. (1998). Ways of listening. *The oral history reader*. 114-125.

Presentation of alternative research methodologies

Preparation for NGO visit

NGO visit:

You will be visiting a variety of NGOs as a group. During the visit you will interview a staff member or members to get a better sense of what the organisation does, what challenges they face, and how they see their work contributing to the country. You will report back as a group in the afternoon.

Session 2:

Reflecting on the NGO visits and interviews using the reading:

Maxwell, M., Abrams, J., Zungu, T. & Mosavel, M. (2016). Conducting community-engaged Qualitative research in South Africa: Memoirs of intersectional identities abroad. *Qualitative Research*. 16(1): 95-110.

Session 3:

Preparing for the rural homestay mini-ISP using the following reading:

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
And reviewing the ISP handbook as a resource.

Third one-on-one session:

This will be the penultimate one-on-one session, and there will be a break during travels.

Module IV: Putting it into practice

Session 1: Journaling:

You will be travelling during this time. Use your journal to practice reflexivity, and keep writing about your experiences during this time. See the notes in the assignment section on how you might think about doing this.

Session 2: Rural Homestay mini research project:

You will do a mini research project during your rural homestay as an action learning process toward your ISP. See the notes in the assignment section for more details.

You have two weeks until your ISP proposal is due. Start thinking about refining your topic. You will review progress with your peers.

You will need to submit a short paragraph with your proposed title, and short description to the academic director and academic coordinator as a step in the planning and ethics process.

Module V: Putting it into the proposal

Session 1:

ISP Proposal workshop

Final one-on-one consultation: You will meet with your mentor to get feedback on your ISP idea to incorporate into your proposal.

Session 2: practical processes:

Your ISP proposal will be marked and reviewed by an internal review board as part of the ethical clearance process. This is the 'official' end of the RM&E course, but we think that the process of learning is really beginning as you put your ISP into action. Optional skills

workshops will be available to you during ISP time to assist with practical concerns.

Module VI: Optional skills workshops

Three optional workshops will be offered for students wishing to hone or refine particular skills as they go into the field.

Session 1: Qualitative Interview workshop:

This interactive group work based workshop will cover:

- i. An introduction to best practice in qualitative research
- ii. Brainstorm and refine ISP interview questions
- iii. Briefly practice interviewing

Session 2: Literature review workshop:

This interactive group work based workshop will cover:

- i. Reviewing some 'best practices' / how to write a literature review
- ii. Review two literature reviews from existing published research articles for examples of how literature reviews can look
- iii. Brainstorm around your own literature review structure and sources

Session 3: Data analysis workshop:

This interactive group work based workshop will cover:

- i. Some theoretical frameworks for data analysis
- ii. A practical exercise working with your findings
- iii. Setting up a basic structure to work with for your findings section