

Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 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.

Course Description

This four-week Independent Study Project (ISP), scheduled in the final portion of the program, provides students a unique opportunity to study in-depth a topic of their choosing. The ISP draws upon the knowledge and various skills gained from the thematic, language, and Research Methods and Ethics seminars. At this point students will have worked with the academic director and various other in-country experts to develop their ISP proposals and to schedule interviews, arrange for translators if they will be required, and arrange other logistics that are essential to completing the ISP. They will also have developed the competence to act in culturally appropriate ways and to find resources in South Africa needed for ISP completion.

The ISP allows the students to practice and hone their primary data gathering skills and to practice various other skills learned in the Research Methods and Ethics seminar such as navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, building rapport, and navigating local bureaucracies. Further, students practice and hone their skills in gathering and analyzing data from primary sources, managing this data and making a coherent argument in a scholarly manner.

Each student finds or is assigned an ISP advisor with whom they work collaboratively to identify and schedule data collection appointments, review research tools for appropriateness and feasibility, and resolve any logistical and ethical issues that may arise during the course of their ISP. Students are also required to submit an ISP itinerary to their academic director and to check in with program staff regarding the progress of their ISP.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Analyze and synthesize data gathered from primary sources into a well written scholarly report and to compose an oral presentation from this report;
- Understand the importance of ethics and human relations in field research;

- Demonstrate competence in the processes involved in independent research, from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies to final analysis, and interpretation; and
- Demonstrate awareness of the contingencies and complexities of working across cultures.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

- Conversations with the academic director (AD) regarding choice of potential ISP topics will begin during the first week of the program and continue until the beginning of the ISP period;
- From the second to the ninth week of the program, students will conduct a research project in preparation for the ISP. This project is conducted alongside the Research Methods and Ethics classes and will help them practice and refine their research skills prior to the ISP;
- A minimum of 120 hours of independent fieldwork will be conducted (during a four week period). Fieldwork refers to hours of active data collection and analysis (i.e. interviews, observation, participant observation, note transcription, reading supplementary materials, writing, etc.) and not merely time spent in the field;
- All data will be transcribed into a field journal according to criteria presented and practiced in Research Methods and Ethics seminar (RME);
- Students will work in conjunction with a local academic advisor (preferably a host country national);
- An oral presentation will be presented to the group and invited guests upon completion of project;
- A well-documented, culturally sensitive and in-depth presentation of field study findings will be written.

Course Requirements

Decisions regarding the topic of study are a primary responsibility of the student. However, students can count on the academic director (AD) to help focus their ISP and to guide them about how to translate their ISP ideas given practical realities of the local situation, and for assistance regarding potential advisor contacts. The Independent Study Project format allows the student flexibility and the ability to exercise personal initiative, while also promoting academic quality. In turn, the ISP paper provides the material evidence of capability in handling methodology and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. The final project should have a clear thesis, should be fieldwork-based, and should include a clear description of ethical considerations.

Students are required to complete the following:

- 1) Four meetings with the academic director (AD) prior to the beginning of ISP to discuss research topic and approach.
- 2) Submit an ISP proposal and ISP itinerary for AD and Local Ethics Review Board (LRB) approval.
- 3) Complete a minimum of 120 hours of fieldwork towards completion of the project.
- 4) Reference a minimum of 10 articles from peer reviewed journals.
- 5) Submit two clean hard copies and one electronic copy (emailed to the AD) of the final paper. The ISP should be 30-40 pages, double spaced, 1" margins and font 12.
- 7) Make a twenty-minute oral presentation of the project to peers.
- 9) During ISP check in with the academic director or other designee at least once a week.
- 10) Keep a field work journal.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Oral Presentation

The presentation length is 20 minutes with an additional 10 minutes for questions and answers.

Evaluation of presentations includes the following criteria:

- Organization, clarity, and accessibility of presentation (including use of audio/visual aids or demonstrations)
- Clear explanation of ISP objectives and research questions
- Clear explanation of field strategy and implementation
- Ability to field questions and comments from the audience

ISP: Fieldwork Journal

Objectives:

- To document progress on your Independent Study Project
- To practice effective note-taking and transcription techniques

During the ISP period, students will be expected to keep a specific journal devoted entirely to recording field experiences. Some uses of the ISP work journal are as follows:

- Recording names and locations of contact persons, especially possible ISP advisors and other ISP resources.
- Recording thoughts about how you want the ISP to develop, the progress of the ISP and changes or developments in plans.
- Recording interviews conducted in the field relevant to the ISP.
- Recording observations and inferences made relating to the ISP.

Evaluation is based on content, organization and development of perspective, analytical quality, effective processing of data gathered from primary and secondary sources, achieved objectives, narrative quality and commitment to the learning process. The evaluation of the **written ISP paper** will be based on the following:

- Development of topic and achievement of objectives
- Project definition and focus
- Methodology
- Accuracy of information
- Critical analysis and thought
- Use of information from participant observation, interviews, and other techniques
- Use of cross-cultural communication skills
- Style and expression
- Grammar and documentation

Assessment

Written ISP paper	80%
Oral presentation	20%

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

- **Student research** (the Independent Study Project and Field Study Project) is a product of field work and as such students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical field work, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore copies of ISP/FSPs 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/FSP for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. 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.

- **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 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.
- **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.