

Project Cities: Community Engagement and Ethical Inquiry

URST-3500 (4 credits)

Comparative European Cities

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

Course Description

This course combines community engagement and self-directed inquiry to deepen students' understanding of the field of Urban Studies and the significance of cities. At each program site, students collaborate with local organizations on community-initiated projects while developing intercultural communication and ethical engagement skills. Simultaneously, they pursue an individual, inquiry-based project on a topic related to course themes – such as gentrification, cultural heritage, accessibility, or urban sprawl—through field research and expert interviews. The course culminates in a final integrative project and presentation, fostering a holistic, comparative perspective on global cities.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Analyze the complexities surrounding appropriate community engagement, including how to navigate personal positionality, community dynamics, and reciprocal relationships.
- Delineate the ethical considerations related to urban studies and the potential impact of research and collaboration on communities.
- Interact with host communities and individuals with respect and cultural humility.
- Apply appropriate methods for conducting field-based research
- Demonstrate critical thinking skills by posing and investigating questions to formulate a multi-dimensional perspective on global cities.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods

SIT's philosophy of education is rooted in the experiential learning model, which drives the design of this class. Each module allows for experience, reflection, and application. Experiences range from class discussions, interactions with host communities, and project-based learning on location. Reflection occurs throughout the learning process in various forms, such as formal written assignments and reflexive components in papers/projects. Through reflection, students are encouraged to become aware of their process of learning, to make sense of their experiences, and connect the learning acquired on the program with previous experiences and information. Application activities reinforce learning by practicing communication skills, experimenting with theories, and preparing to transfer learning to future contexts.

Required Texts

- Excerpts from the Forum on Education Abroad's *Guidelines for Community Engaged Learning Abroad*
- Articles on Course Reserve as determined by faculty

Assignments and Evaluation

Community Engagement Projects

- Field Notes 30% (3 @ 10%)

Inquiry-based Project

- Project Proposal 10%
- Progress Report 10%
- Final Project 35%
- Presentation 15%

Community Engagement Projects: Country teams in coordination with the Program Director will identify appropriate community-initiated projects. Depending on the project and the organizers' needs, students may contribute individually, in small groups, or as a class. Students will receive a briefing on the project, organization, and community need addressed. Prior to participation, students will learn about local norms and discuss the ethical dimension of their engagement with local communities. After each community engagement project, students will capture their observations and reflect on their experience in field notes. Field notes will be evaluated based on the depth of their observation, analysis of their positionality, and clarity of expression. Additional details on the specific projects, field notes requirements, and grading criteria will be provided on site.

Inquiry-based Project: Students will have the opportunity to synthesize their learning in a culminating inquiry-driven project that utilizes ethically appropriate techniques to explore a line of inquiry into the dimensions of health and well-being. Projects may be in the form of a written paper (case study analysis, essay, autoethnography, etc.) or an alternative such as a portfolio, proposal for a community project, or creative work based in the humanities, performing arts, or

studio arts. Alternative projects must be accompanied by a formal literature review and a creator's statement about the project. To support the project development process, this assignment includes preliminary stages where students will submit a **project proposal** and a **progress report**. In addition to reinforcing project management and time management skills, these assignments provide opportunities for constructive feedback on their works-in-progress. Students will also share their projects in a 20-minute **presentation** followed by a 10-minute question and answer session. Additional assignment details for all stages of the inquiry-based project will be provided during the semester. **Note:** students can petition to expand an assignment from another course taught on the program for their inquiry-based project provided it is not a group assignment. Another option for students is to adapt the design of an assignment from one of the program's other courses, expand its scope appropriately, and apply it to a new topic or line of inquiry.

Note on Attendance and Participation: Due to the nature of this experiential program, full participation in all classes and program activities is required. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the Program Director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, which may impact grades. Excessive, unexcused absences could result in program dismissal. Alternative work for absences will be expected.

Note on Late Assignments: IHP programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. 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. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis with approval from the Program Director or other designated staff person. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. Students who do not submit their work within the extension period will receive a failing grade.

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

Program Expectations

In order to make the most of the opportunities presented in the class and across the semester program, communicate respectfully, prepare for student success, and demonstrate best possible engagement, SIT has the following expectations:

- **Content Considerations:** The 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.
- **Learning Community:** 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 differences and consider other perspectives with respect.
- **Presence.** 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.
- **Engage.** Ask questions in class. Interact with the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- **Be Honest.** Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Store 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 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:** 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.
- **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. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

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*

Note: This is a suggested sequence of modules and topics based on the texts suggested above. Faculty should appropriately adapt how these topics are taught and select local texts, case studies, guest speakers, and site visits that are relevant to the context and CGI. This course framework is designed to be adaptable to the local context.

LOCATION #1: AMSTERDAM (weeks 1–5)

Module #1: Ethics, Etiquette, and Fieldwork

Topics:

- Introduction to fieldwork
- Local guide to culturally appropriate interactions in urban settings
- Local guide to culturally appropriate conversations about issues pertaining to urban life, identity, equity, access, and justice

Required Texts:

- Writing Field Notes. <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/assignments/fieldnotes>

Learning on Location: Contribute to an appropriate community-initiated project(s) organized by country team

Assignments:

- Field Notes #1

Module #2: Project Ideation

Topics:

- Guided activity to identify lines of inquiry and project options
- Concept creation
- Faculty feedback: conversations with faculty about concept and directions

LOCATION #2: LONDON (weeks 6–10)

Module #3: Ethics & Etiquette

Topics:

- Local guide to culturally appropriate interactions in urban settings
- Local guide to culturally appropriate conversations about issues pertaining to urban life, identity, equity, access, and justice

Required Text

- Excerpts from the Forum on Education Abroad's *Guidelines for Community Engaged Learning Abroad*

Module #4: Project Planning & Proposal Development

- Assessing information / data needs and appropriate methods
 - Observation: participant and non-participant
 - Interviews: formal, informal, and semi-structured
 - Mapping: geographical, mental, transect
- Secondary research skills
 - Literature reviews
- Developing the proposal

Assignment

- Project Proposal

Module #5: Ethical Engagement with Host Communities

- Global service learning, voluntourism, and reciprocal community engagement.
- Recognizing the gaps between good intentions and good outcomes.
- Positionality, power, and participation.

Required Texts:

- Taylor, S. R. (2020). Ethnographers and collaborators in the voluntourism encounter. *Annals of Anthropological Practice*, 44(2), 180–185. <https://doi-org.reference.sit.edu/10.1111/napa.12148>

Learning on Location

- Contribute to appropriate community-initiated project(s) organized by country team

Assignment

- Field Notes #2

Module #6: Project Development

Learning on Location

- Dedicated time to explore local resources, conduct interviews, or otherwise work on their project.
- Project Progress check-in

LOCATION #3: MILAN (weeks 11–15)

Module #7: Ethics & Etiquette

Topics:

- Local guide to culturally appropriate interactions in urban settings
- Local guide to culturally appropriate conversations about issues pertaining to urban life, identity, equity, access, and justice

Module #8: Ethical Engagement with Host Communities

Learning on Location

- Contribute to appropriate community-initiated project(s) organized by country team

Assignment

- Field Notes #3

Module #9: Project Development

- Dedicated time to explore local resources, conduct interviews, or otherwise work on their project.

Assignment

- Progress report

Module # 10: Presentations

Assignments:

- Final Project
- Presentation