Social and Political Context of Spain
IDST-3000 (3 credits)

Spain: Choose Your Track—Climate, Psychology, Economics OR Cinema

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 foundational core course, required for all students regardless of specialized track, provides essential knowledge of Spain's political system, cultural diversity, and contemporary challenges necessary for meaningful engagement with Spanish society and coursework. The course examines Spain's complex contemporary landscape through five interconnected modules that integrate theoretical frameworks from nationalism studies with experiential learning. Through lectures, discussions, and field visits, students will analyze Spain's transition from dictatorship to democracy, its unique "state of autonomies" system, and regional nationalist movements (Catalan, Basque, Galician) within a comparative European context. The course explores how historical legacies shape contemporary political discourse, including the rise of new parties like Podemos and Vox, while examining approaches to managing cultural diversity, language rights, and territorial conflicts in a multilingual, multinational democracy. Students will engage directly with communities, politicians, and scholars to develop analytical tools for understanding how democracy, regionalism, and European integration intersect with issues of identity, migration, and social change in contemporary Spain.

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

- **Apply** major theoretical frameworks from nationalism studies to analyze peripheral nationalist movements in Spain and compare them with similar movements across Europe
- **Critically analyze** Spain's "state of autonomies" system as a form of asymmetric federalism and evaluate its effectiveness in managing territorial diversity within the context of European integration
- **Assess** how nationalist ideologies influence political institutions, cultural expressions, and contemporary challenges including the rise of new political movements like Podemos and Vox
- **Evaluate** the complex relationship between historical legacies, democratic consolidation, and ongoing territorial conflicts in Spain using comparative European perspectives
- **Demonstrate** skills in cross-cultural communication and critical analysis through engagement with diverse Spanish communities and perspectives

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

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1. **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 theoretical concepts.

2. **Regional Identity Photo-Story Project (30%)** Students will create a digital photo-story (10-12 photos with captions) documenting how regional identity is expressed in everyday life in Seville/Andalusia. This project combines visual storytelling with ethnographic observation and critical analysis.

   Requirements:

   - Take original photographs showing how Andalusian identity appears in daily life (street art, flags, food, language, music, festivals, architecture, etc.)
   - Write 100–150-word captions for each photo connecting observations to course concepts about nationalism and identity
   - Include at least 3 brief interviews (2-3 questions each) with locals about their sense of regional vs. national identity
   - Create a final 5-minute digital presentation combining photos, audio clips, and analysis
   - Submit a 500-word reflection comparing Andalusian identity expression with one other Spanish region studied in class

3. **Spanish Politics News Analysis Portfolio (30%)** Students will create a portfolio tracking major political developments in Spain throughout the semester, analyzing events through the lens of course theories and themes.

   Requirements:

   - Weekly collection of 2-3 news articles from Spanish media (El País, ABC, regional newspapers) on territorial politics, nationalism, or regional issues
   - Write 300-word analysis for each article applying course concepts
   - Maintain a visual timeline of major events with brief explanations
   - Submit mid-semester progress report identifying patterns and trends
   - Final portfolio includes 1,000-word synthesis essay connecting semester's events to course themes

4. **Territorial Politics Simulation and Reflection (30%)** Working in teams of 3-4, students will participate in a simulation of Spanish territorial negotiations, followed by individual reflection papers analyzing the experience and outcomes.

   Simulation Component: Students will role-play key stakeholders (central government ministers, regional presidents, party leaders, EU representatives, civil society groups) in negotiations over a current territorial issue such as:

   - Catalan fiscal autonomy negotiations
   - Language policy in education
   - Regional development funding
   - Cultural preservation vs. national integration

Teams will research their assigned positions, develop negotiation strategies, and participate in structured negotiation sessions with realistic constraints and competing interests.

Reflection Component: Following the simulation, each student will write a 1,200-word reflection paper analyzing:

- How their assigned role's interests and constraints shaped their negotiation strategy
- What they learned about the complexity of territorial politics in Spain
- Connections between the simulation experience and course theories about nationalism
- Potential real-world solutions to the territorial challenge addressed
- Comparisons with similar conflicts in other European countri

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, 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: Theoretical Frameworks - Understanding Nationalism and Identity Politics

This module establishes the theoretical foundation for understanding nationalism, providing students with analytical tools to examine peripheral nationalist movements in Spain and Europe. Students will explore different definitions of nation and nationalism, examining how these concepts apply to contemporary political movements and identity conflicts. Field visits may include cultural institutions that preserve and promote regional identities, sites of historical memory related to national/regional conflicts, and meetings with cultural organizations involved in identity preservation.

Readings:

- Anderson, Benedict (1983). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso. (Chapters 1-3)
- Gellner, Ernest (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. (Chapters 1-2)
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation?" in Homi Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*. Londo: Routledge, pp. 8-23
- Smith, Anthony D. (2003). *Nationalism and Modernism*. Cambridge: Polity Press. (Chapters 1-2)
- Hobsbawm, Eric J. (1990). *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Cambridge: CUP. (Chapters 1-2)

Module 2: Democratic Transition and Constitutional Framework

This module examines Spain's transition from Francisco Franco's dictatorship to democracy, focusing on the negotiation and implementation of the 1978 Constitution within the broader European context of democratic consolidation. Students will analyze how this transition shaped Spain's current political system and its approach to managing territorial diversity. Field visits may include historical sites in Seville related to the transition period, the Andalusian Parliament building and local government offices demonstrating democratic governance.

Readings:

- Conversi, D. (2002). The smooth transition: Spain's 1978 Constitution and the nationalities question. *National Identities*, 4(3), 223-244. https://doi.org/10.1080/1460894022000026105Linz,
- Font, Joan and García-Espín, Patricia (2019) "From Indignad@s to Mayors? Participatory dilemmas in Spanish municipal movements", in Flesher Fominaya, C and Feenstra, Ramon (2019) Routledge Handbook of Contemporary European Social Movements. Protest in Turbulent Times, Routledge, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351025188
- Spanish Constitution of 1978 (Articles 1-9, 137-158)
- Gunther, R., Montero, J.R., & Botella, J. (2004). *Democracy in Modern Spain*. Yale University Press. (Selected chapters)

Module 3: The State of Autonomies - Asymmetric Federalism and Territorial Politics

This module examines Spain's unique "state of autonomies" system as a form of asymmetric federalism, analyzing how 17 autonomous communities manage their affairs while remaining part of the Spanish state. Students will critically evaluate this system's successes and challenges using comparative perspectives from other European federal and quasi-federal systems. F**ield visits** may include the Andalusian Parliament to observe parliamentary sessions and meet with deputies, the Junta de Andalucía headquarters to understand regional governance, inter-institutional cooperation bodies managing center-periphery coordination, regional economic development agencies, and meetings with regional politicians and civil servants.

Readings:

- Colino, C. (2013). Constitutional change without constitutional reform: Spanish federalism and the revision of Catalonia's Statute of Autonomy. *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*, 43(2), 262-288.
- Colomer, J. M. (1998). The Spanish 'state of autonomies': Non-institutional federalism. *West European Politics*, 21(4), 40-52.
- García-Álvarez, J., & Trillo-Santamaría, J.-M. (2013). Between regional spaces and spaces of regionalism: Cross-border region building in the Spanish 'State of the Autonomies'. *Regional Studies*, 47(1), 104-115. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2011.552495
- Autonomous Community Statutes (selected articles from Andalusia, Catalonia, Basque Country)

Module 4: Regional Nationalisms and Cultural Identity Politics

This module provides in-depth analysis of the three main peripheral nationalist movements in Spain— Catalan, Basque, and Galician nationalism—examining their historical development, contemporary political expression, and cultural dimensions. Students will explore how these movements compare with similar cases across Europe and how they challenge traditional concepts of the nation-state. Field visits may include cultural institutions preserving Catalan, Basque, or Galician heritage, meetings with nationalist political parties and cultural organizations, sports clubs and their role in identity construction, language immersion programs and schools, sites of historical significance for regional nationalism.

Readings:

- Conversi, D., & Jeram, S. (2017). Despite the crisis: The resilience of intercultural nationalism in Catalonia. *International Migration*, *55*(2), 53-67. https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12323
- Conversi, Daniele (2000). *The Basques, the Catalans and Spain*. University of Nevada Press. (Selected chapters)

- Balfour, Sebastian et al. (2007). *The Reinvention of Spain*. Oxford University Press. (Chapters on regionalism)
- Miley, T.J. (2013). "Blocked articulation and nationalist hegemony in Catalonia." *Regional & Federal Studies*, 23(1), 7-26
- Tuñón, Jorge and Brey, Elisa (2012). "Sports and politics in Spain: Football and nationalist attitudes within the Basque Country and Catalonia." *European Journal for Sport and Society*, 9(1-2), 7-32

Module 5: Contemporary Challenges - New Politics and European Integration

This final module examines how traditional nationalist conflicts in Spain intersect with new political challenges including economic crisis, populist politics, migration, and European integration. Students will analyze the emergence of new political parties (Podemos, Vox) and how they represent different approaches to Spanish territorial organization and European integration.

Readings:

- Alonso, Alba, and Julia Espinosa-Fajardo. "Blitzkrieg Against Democracy: Gender Equality and the Rise of the Populist Radical Right in Spain." *Social Politics* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2021): 656-681. https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxab026.
- Jones, Erik, R. Daniel Kelemen, and Sophie Meunier. "Failing forward? Crises and patterns of European integration." *Journal of European Public Policy* 28, no. 10 (2021): 1519-1536. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.1954068.
- Oleart, Alvaro. "Spanish Parliamentary Involvement in the CoFoE: Between European Political Entrepreneurs and Depoliticised Domestic Politics." In *Conference on the Future of Europe*, chapter 8, 156-174. 2023. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003470793-11.
- Rama, José, Guillermo Cordero, and Piotr Zagórski. "Three Is a Crowd? Podemos, Ciudadanos, and Vox: The End of Bipartisanship in Spain." *Frontiers in Political Science* 3 (August 2021): 688130. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.688130.