

Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 credits)

Switzerland: Choose Your Track—Wildlife, Food Systems, Cities OR French Culture

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

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is a self-designed research project offering students the opportunity to undertake a personally significant and independent investigation, which highlights the regional and cultural reality that can only be encountered during a study abroad experience. The ISP is the academic component in which the student most directly applies the concepts, skills, tools, and techniques of experience-based learning articulated through the Research Methods and Ethics course and the thematic courses, while enabling students to further integrate their language skills. Each student will plan, develop, and independently undertake a research project, with the advice and guidance of the academic director and the academic advisor or a local academic and/or sexuality and/or gender expert or professional. The topic of study may be anything of interest to the student, within the scope of the program, and is usually developed out of lectures, discussions, field visits, and educational excursions. The final project should provide material evidence of student capability in utilizing appropriate methodologies and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture including the topic of gender and sexuality studies in the Netherlands. Students are expected to complete field-based (non-archival, non-library) research on their topic, submit a substantial written paper, and deliver an accompanying oral presentation. The presentation is usually a formal, academic paper, but students may opt for a creative presentation as well. In the past, students have created posters, short films, photo exposes, and podcasts. It is not uncommon for ISPs to strongly contribute to the student's choice of subject for graduate studies or professional career.

Students are required to comply with the legal and ethical research standards as defined by SIT and are subject to SIT Study Abroad Review Board (SARB) policies as presented by the academic director and/or available in the SIT student handbook. Students are also strongly encouraged to review these policies at their own schools.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Conduct field research independently, ethically, and effectively

- Understand the importance of the logistical and ethical considerations when designing field research
- Identify the key impediments to and idiosyncrasies involved in conducting field research in the Netherlands
- Discuss the results of their field research and its application

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

While the majority of the ISP work should be conducted in the field, readings for the ISP are strongly encouraged and will be based on the specific topic of study. Reference articles and books are available from local libraries, including those of the local universities and international agencies, the program library, and SIT's electronic library databases specifically related to student ISP topics. Students are also expected to consult appropriate course readings applicable to the ISP. Students will develop bibliographies appropriate to their individual areas of research.

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*

Course Methods

Throughout the ten weeks of seminars, students identify primary and secondary sources related to the topic of their ISPs. Students meet with the Academic Director on formal and informal basis to evaluate and discuss their progress of ISP research. Students contact experts working in fields related to their ISP topic and will meet such experts at various international organizations in Amsterdam. During the last month of the program, students work

exclusively on their ISP project which includes data collection, synthesis and analysis, interactive research, writing the ISP paper, and preparing for their oral presentation.

Course Requirements

1. Field-based study that applies methods of interactive research, including interviews, towards completion of the project; the ISP work journal accounts for the design of the project, the time periods of research, the research locations and the human resources/experts;
2. A 15-minute oral presentation, concluding in a Q&A session
3. A 25 - 45 page (250 words/page) academic paper that includes: abstract, title page, acknowledgments, table of contents, theoretical framework of analysis, research methodology, conclusions, notes, and bibliography
4. A final, hard copy of the paper and/or creative component
5. Electronic version the full paper and/or creative component

Potential list of Independent Study Projects

1. *High Femme: Gender Presentation and the Coffeehouse Culture of Amsterdam*
2. *Polyamorous Family Construction in the Netherlands*
3. *Sex and Senescence: Aging and the Sexual Self*
4. *Dutch Family/Muslim Family: Migration, Gender, and Family in the Netherlands*

ISP Guidelines and Requirements

Students will meet with both the AD and the academic advisor as needed. Unless approved for an alternative ISP, the final product is a typed and bound 25-45 page academic paper, double-spaced, with 12-point standard font, with citations in APA format. In addition, students give a 15-minute oral presentation highlighting research findings and analysis to colleagues, community members, program staff, the academic director, and other invited guests.

Guidelines for ISP Proposal

Before embarking on your ISP project, you need to submit a proposal in which you explain:

1. Clear research question.
2. Accessible source base and appropriate methodology.
3. A preliminary bibliography.
4. Ethical considerations.
5. Possible advisor.

Human Subjects Review

All ISP proposals must reflect a thoughtful and culturally appropriate consideration of the effects of the student's inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, you are required to submit an "Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects," which includes questions about any potential harm that might come from your study; appendices include interview and survey protocols. If the Academic Director believes that you have not sufficiently addressed the concerns of this policy, he/she may ask you to revise your proposal. Standards for this review are developed in country and reflect local academic practice.

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.

ISP Mechanics

Getting Started

1. Decide on a topic

This can be easy sometimes, but more often it is difficult. This is where you ask yourself: "What do I want to study? What do I want to learn from the ISP? Is there a topic I have always wanted to investigate or learn more about?" Think about the ISP as an opportunity for self-fulfillment and growth or as a stepping-stone to further your studies in a particular area. You must be able to define a distinct and do-able project. As such, the next sentence is critical to keep in mind when deciding upon or refining your ISP topic. If you cannot clearly and completely state your project in one sentence, then your project cannot be completed within the time frame of the ISP period.

2. Define your research questions and research methods (ISP draft proposals)

In the process of submitting your ISP draft proposals and meeting with the academic director, you will have to clearly define your ISP topic and research questions. Focusing your interest on a clear and precise question will allow you to begin your ISP period with as much clarity as possible and will help you complete your task in the given period of time.

3. Complete a final ISP proposal

The ISP proposal should provide a clear description of your topic, research questions and intentions, and expectations of the ISP you have chosen to pursue. The proposal will help you anticipate what you are going to do and what possible problems may arise. The proposal should help you to clearly define and refine your project ideas and focus so that your resulting work is a discrete project that can be accomplished in the given period of time.

4. Complete, sign, and hand in SIT forms: ethical guidelines, and SIT Study Abroad Review Board (SARB).

In addition to completing the ISP Proposal, students are also required to submit and comply with ethical requirements, agreeing to adhere to our written ethical policy, and to comply with our Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. This will be discussed in detail in the Research Methods and Ethics course. Please note that until items 3 and 4 above (ISP Proposal, Site Approval, and Ethical Guidelines Forms) are satisfactorily completed, students will not be allowed to embark on their ISP.

Important Dates & Deadlines

Week 3	Submit first draft of ISP proposal
Week 7	ISP final proposal due
Week 10	ISP period officially begins (you may start your research earlier)

Week 14	ISP due—NO EXTENSIONS
Week 15	ISP presentations

ISP Written Format—Organization and Presentation

I. Introduction

- a. Explain why you chose this topic
 - i. Points of interest (i.e., thematic courses, personal observations, previous research interests, future research interests, personal interests, etc.).
- b. Describe why this topic is relevant to the region/country/culture and program theme.
- c. Define the general parameters of your study, including the scope, depth, and expected outcomes (hypothesis).
- d. Define your terms, including the overall theory on which you are basing your work, while situating your work in a scholarly context.

II. Literature Review

- a. This segment is usually a general introduction into the literature and theories relevant to your topic. Think of the lit review as your opportunity to describe the discussion and indicate where you fit in it.
- b. Link your topic to the literature currently available on the subject—cite authors, book titles, theories, or general perceptions that you may or may not agree with.
- c. Explain why you feel these authors were right or wrong; argue with or against their theories using your own observations or those of other theorists.

III. Body of Paper/ Methodology

- a. This should be the fun part of the paper, as it allows you the opportunity to describe your overall research experience.
- b. Describe the way you decided to set out on your research (i.e., how you chose the participants that you interviewed or worked with, the locations where you conducted your research, etc.).
- c. Describe the methods you used while planning your strategy to obtain the data for your research (i.e., protecting the identity and integrity of your participants, maintaining the integrity of your data, how you planned to avoid any misunderstanding/misinterpretation of your data).
- d. Describe the obstacles and problems that arose during the course of your research.
- e. If necessary, explain how and why you had to change your original plans (basically a cause/effect section) and how that affected the quality, depth, and scope of your data.

IV. Findings

- a. The really fun part! This is where you get to explain what you found out during the research process.
- b. It's better to focus on the important points of your hypothesis in this section. Highlight the most important aspects of your data and cite responses or

observations that either prove or disprove your original hypothesis (it's okay to be wrong here) using the data you generated during the study.

- c. You can include your analysis of the data/interpretation of findings in this section or you can include this discussion in the "Conclusions" section.

V. Conclusions

- a. This is where you get to tie up all the loose ends and bring things together, while proving or disproving your original hypothesis.
- b. You can include your analysis/interpretation of findings in this section as the proof you need to argue for or against your original theory.
- c. Describe what the implications of your study are (i.e., why your findings are important. How can this information enhance the existing body of knowledge already available on the topic? What new questions arose out of your findings? How will these findings inform your future research interests?)

VI. Limitations of the Study

Though optional, this section is highly recommended. Legitimize your study by proactively pointing out its shortcomings and biases (all studies have them, of course).

VII. Recommendations for Further Study

This should consist of a short list of recommendations on how your study might be expanded upon or used as the basis for future ISPs.

VIII. Endnotes (unless you have used page-by-page footnotes)

IX. Bibliography and List of Sources

This should include all primary and secondary resources used. Primary resources (usually consisting of personal communications) and secondary (textual) resources should be listed under separate headings. Please use APA style/formatting.

X. Appendices

- a. Include a copy of your questionnaire, survey questions, etc. if applicable
- b. Include a copy of your written consent form (not the ones signed by participants—those you keep in a safe place), if applicable.
- c.

Role of Academic Director and ISP Advisor

The academic director and the ISP advisor advise students on methodology, background reading, and in-country contacts which the students will be encouraged to pursue. The ISP advisor evaluates the completed project and provides feedback to the Academic Director, who assigns the final grade.

Student Expectations

Responsibilities when conducting fieldwork:

- Students must respect, protect, and promote the rights and welfare of all those contributing to, and affected by, their work by protecting the privacy and dignity of the people and communities with whom they conduct field study.

- Students must respect the ethical considerations and guidelines of conducting research in vulnerable populations.
- Students must comply with participants' right of anonymity, privacy and confidentiality.
- Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive and must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in culturally appropriate ways.
- Students must record and represent accurately all aspects of the field study. This includes not representing as their own work—either in spoken or written form—materials and ideas directly obtained from other sources.

Student research is a product of fieldwork and, as such, students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical fieldwork, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore, copies of ISPs 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 for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad archives the ISP in the permanent collection at the SIT Study Abroad local country program office and/or at any World Learning office. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad has a non-exclusive, perpetual right to store and make available, including electronic online open access, to the ISP. Students retain all ownership rights of the ISP product and retain the right to use all, or part, of the project in future works. Please refer to the Student Handbook or the Access, Use, and Publication of ISP form.

Assignments and Evaluation

The evaluation of the ISP will be completed by the Academic Director with critical comments and evaluation from the project advisor. Assessment of the written project and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of information conveyed, the student's methods and effectiveness of gathering information, organization, assimilation, the clarity of the presentation, the quality of analysis and argumentation, oral expression, clarity of answers to questions and civility of interaction. Special emphasis is put on the student's ability to integrate primary sources and methods of interactive research and to present the findings in a clear, organized and well-synthesized format. The Academic Director assign the final grade.

During the process of planning, developing, executing, and presenting the ISP, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within The Netherlands and in cooperation with institutions and advisors;
- Develop a logical and coherent framework for the study project, and clearly justify how the chosen topic lies within the scope of the program and region;
- Critically discuss and evaluate available and relevant theories, papers, and published materials on the proposed project;
- Clearly present the main objectives of the project, further developing them when needed;
- Present and justify a reasonable methodological framework to achieve the proposed objectives;

- Critically describe the data collected, analysis performed, and results;
- Present and discuss problems, findings and conclusions based on the methods used, data and information collected, and/or analysis performed;
- Be able to present all steps of the project clearly and coherently in a written and oral format for an independent audience.

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Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Independent Study Project (ISP) (80%)

Assessment of the ISP is done on the basis of SIT's assessment rubric for the Independent Study Project with the grading evaluation and criteria listed below.

Evaluation criteria for ISPs include:

Title/Acknowledgements/Abstract

- The title is succinct, interesting, and engaging, and it clearly explains the project
- The acknowledgments are complete and professionally written
- The abstract clearly summarizes the project

Research Question/Objectives/Justification

- The study/research question is relevant, thought-provoking, and original
- The project aims to contribute information on a topic relevant to local community and/or other researchers
- The objectives of the study are clearly presented and appropriate
- The justification of the project is clear and contextualized

Context and Literature Review

- The content is relevant. Important themes and background information is provided
- The paper includes appropriate, high-quality relevant background sources, including several from peer-reviewed journals

Methods

- The explanation of methodology is clear and accurate and supporting materials are included
- Implementation of methods through the research process is thoughtful and handed with care
- The methods are appropriate

Ethics

- Human subject policies and ethical research guidelines are adhered to and thoroughly discussed
- Appropriate consideration is given to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of research participants, in keeping with human subjects protocols and the LRB-approved ISP proposal
- The ISP is responsive to host community needs, as applicable

Presentation of results/findings

- The findings are complete and are logically and convincingly presented
- The prose discussion of findings is clear, succinct, and logical
- Tables, graphs, photos, and direct quotes are relevant and support the argument

Depth of analysis/Conclusions

- Important implications raised by the findings are included
- The argument is well-structured and different sources of information are well-integrated
- Patterns in the findings (or lack of a pattern) are identified and discussed
- The author gives logical explanations of what findings mean
- The author clearly and specifically related his/her findings to the study/research question and to previous research in the field

Technical aspects/Effort

- The paper is organized into major sections and/or follows the guidelines in accordance with the orientation of the program
- Table of contents, in-text citations, and reference list or bibliography are done correctly and completely
- There are no mistakes in writing, grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Evaluation criteria for oral reports include:

- Organization of presentation, with a view to holding audience interest
- Use of appropriate examples and personal experiences
- Clear explanation of ISP strategy and implementation

Oral Presentation (20%)

Assessment of the ISP Oral Presentation is done on the basis of SIT's assessment rubric for the Independent Study Project Presentation with the grading evaluation and criteria listed above.

Assessment

ISP Paper - 80%

Oral Presentation - **Grading Scales and Criteria**

Grades are given both fairly and rigorously and in accordance with the system below. They will reflect a combination of absolute quality of performance, progress made, the ability to take into account and assimilate the Academic Director's and the teachers' advice in assessing the work done. An "A" letter grade reflects exceptional work, perfect combination of academic competences and personal research and analysis. It shows great ability to integrate field-based investigation and personal reflection into a structured and well-argued paper. A "B" letter grade reflects serious and methodical work as well as a substantial effort at analyzing and understanding cross-cultural issues. A "C" letter grade shows the work meets the requirements but needs more in-depth reflection and personal involvement. A "D" letter grade is insufficient and clearly reflects lack of work or serious deficiencies.

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	Excellent
90-93%	A-	
87-89%	B+	
84-86%	B	Above Average
80-83%	B-	
77-79%	C+	
74-76%	C	Average
70-73%	C-	
67-69%	D+	
64-66%	D	Below Average
below 64	F	Fail

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.
- Appropriately complete assignments in a timely fashion.
- Pay attention during lectures, ask questions in class, and engage the lecturer.
- Do not cheat, plagiarize, nor in any other way act unethically.

- Respect classmates, lecturers, and yourself.

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.