

Research Methods and Ethics

ANTH-3500 (3 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.

Description

The Research Methods and Ethics (RME) seminar introduces students to conceptual and practical tools for gathering primary data. In this course, students gain the knowledge and skills that are essential to forming constructive relationships with organizations and/or individuals, which are necessary for completing an academic project in the cultural context of Switzerland. The main emphasis is on the development of empirical tools and the ethics of interactive research skills involved in the collection of primary data. The seminar includes lectures on qualitative research methods for projects studying politics, human rights, and social movements. The seminar uses lectures, readings, and field assignments to prepare students to undertake field study in the cultural context of Switzerland in strict observance of research procedures involving human subjects and the regulatory ethical norms defined by the Study Abroad Review Board (SARB) and SIT's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The overall aim is to support students with SIT's experience-based learning process and prepare them for the development of an Independent Study Project (ISP), which is largely based on data gathered from primary sources.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Demonstrate an acute sense of positionality and perspective and operate independently, using cultural sensitivity in collaboration with local networks of trust built over the course of the semester;
- Design appropriate methods and ethics for field research projects studying politics, human rights, and social movements;
- Analyze and process primary data gathered in the field and draw valid and ethical interpretations and conclusions;

- Produce an Independent Study Project proposal that is in strict observance of ethical academic standards and local values and that includes a research question, sample review of the relevant literature, outline of the research methods, and anticipated ethical challenges and ways of addressing them.

Language of Instruction

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

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.

Course Schedule

Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lectures' availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

Module 1: Experiential Learning and Positionality in Field-Based Research

This introductory module is designed to introduce students to field-based research in a study abroad context. Students learn how to relate to local communities and individuals. Most particularly, this module allows students to discover the power of experiential learning and use it as a tool to connect to local communities and individuals and develop into reflexive researchers who are attentive to their own positionality in relation to the local communities in which they engage their research.

Sessions may include:

- Cultural adjustment cycle
- Homestay as a cultural experience and site of learning
- Doing field-based research in a study abroad context
- Experiential learning philosophy and the politics of culture in Switzerland
- Positionality and outsider/insider research

Required Reading:

Flick, U. (2018). Chapter 1 “Why and how to do qualitative research” In *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. SAGE.

Kara, H. (2018). Chapter 3, “Eurowestern research and ethics”. In *Research Ethics in the Real World*.

Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), 215–232.

Module 2: Methods of Research in Comparative Politics, Human Rights, and Social Movements

This module focuses on the tools and methods required for conducting qualitative field research in comparative politics, human rights, and social movements. The module also addresses the ethics of research in data collection and interpretation.

Sessions may include:

- Research methods and ethics in politics, human rights, and social movements
- Selecting topics, formulating research questions, and writing a literature review
- Data collection: participant observation and interviewing
- Mixed methods research (process tracing)
- Data analysis, evaluation, and interpretation

Required Readings:

della Porta, D. (2014). Chapter 1. In *Methodological practices in social movement research*. Oxford University Press.

Flick, U. (2023). Chapter 10 “Using the existing literature” In *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. SAGE

Kapiszewski, Diana et al. (2015). Chapter 6, “Interviews, oral history and focus groups”. In *Field Research in Political Science*.

Hennink, Monique (2015). Chapter 5: Participant Recruitment. In *Qualitative research methods*, Sage.

Recommended Readings:

Klandermans, B., Staggenborg, S., & Tarrow, S. (2002). *Methods of Social Movements Research* (16). University of Minnesota Press.

Morgan, R., & Turner, B. (Eds.). (2009). *Interpreting human rights: social science perspectives*. Routledge.

Pacheco-Vega, R., & Parizeau, K. (2018). Doubly Engaged Ethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 17(1), 160940691879065.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918790653>

Module 3: Introduction to the ISP

This module will describe the ISP processes and help students brainstorm ideas and set goals for their ISP. The module will include a review and critique of past ISP papers. The module will also walk the students through the SIT Study Abroad Review Board (SARB) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and the application for Human Subjects Review (HSR application).

Sessions may include:

- Critical review of past ISP papers
- Introduction to the SIT Study Abroad Review Board (SARB)/Institutional Review Board (IRB) Process and Human Subjects Review Application
- Identifying an ISP advisor
- One-on-one Meetings with the academic director to discuss preliminary ISP ideas

Required Reading:

Snow, D. and Tron, D. (2002). "The case study and the study of Social Movements". In Klandermans, Bert and Staggenborg, Suzanne (2002) *Methods of Social Movements Research*, University of Minnesota Press.

Module 4: Project Proposal Development for Studying Social Movements

Based on learning and engagement in the preceding course modules, this module focuses on ISP proposal development and guiding students through the development of the Human Subjects Review (HSR) application for review by the SIT Study Abroad Review Board (SARB). This critical phase in the course involves both large student group meetings and individual student meetings with the academic director and the ISP advisor.

Sessions may include:

- Writing an ISP Proposal
- One-on-one Meetings with Academic Director and/or ISP Advisor
- Peer review of ISP Proposal Drafts
- Writing the HSR Application
- ISP Proposal Presentation to Peers and Roundtable Discussion

Module 5: ISP in the Context of Switzerland

This module prepares the student for the ISP experience. It examines work-based norms and practices related to conducting research in Switzerland. The module highlights the importance

of applied methodology in the ISP experience and the expectations and responsibilities of the student.

Session 1: Preparing for the ISP

This introductory session prepares the student for the ISP. The session covers a range of areas that include how to approach and develop rapport with research participants, how to work collaboratively with the ISP advisor, and logistics of the ISP period, including travel, materials, and timelines. Students will also review the ISP assessment rubric.

Session 2: Research Norms and Practices in Switzerland

This session explores work-based norms and practices related to research in Switzerland exploring such issues as how best to describe the ISP to potential research participants and others, gender norms, issues of language, and expectations for behavior while conducting research.

Session 3: ISP Applied Methodology

This session covers strategies of time management, networking strategies, and problem-solving research challenges.

Required Reading:

Bell, J. (2010). Chapter 6. In *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers* (5th edition). McGraw-Hill Education (UK).

della Porta, Donatella, ed. (2014). Chapter 7 and 16. In *Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research*, Oxford.

Flick, U. (2023). Chapter 9 “Ethics of doing qualitative research” In *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. SAGE.

Recommended Readings:

Beach, D., & Pedersen, R. B. (2013). *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*. University of Michigan Press.

Kara, H. (2015). *Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Policy Press.

Ragin, C. C., & Amoroso, L. M. (2011). *Constructing social research: The unity and diversity of method*. Sage Publishing.

White, P. (2009). *Developing Research Questions: A Guide for Social Scientists*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Evaluation and Grading Criteria

Description of Assignments:

1) Practice Interview (15%)

Students are asked to conduct a practice interview with one of the members of their host family. They are asked to write a small reflection (2-3 pages) about their role and attitude towards their research subjects and the skills they brought to the interview to establish an ethical and safe environment for the interviewee. Students are also encouraged to explore how their own positionality along the lines of gender, sexuality, race, and class affected the set-up and wording of their questionnaire and consequently the outcome of the interview.

2) Podcast (25%)

During the semester students will be studying different qualitative research methods that they will use during their ISP period. This exercise is designed for students to apply many of these methods and ethics before going into the field to do their research project. The outcome of this exercise should be the elaboration of a Podcast where they should show creatively the use and understanding of what has been learned in class.

3) Field Work Journal (20%)

Students are expected to keep a work journal where they will document thoroughly all the activities and assignments carried out during the course. This will also continue during the Independent Study Project period. The work journal is submitted for review and evaluation two times during the course of the semester.

4) Research Proposal (30%)

All students must develop a research proposal. The research proposal should address a theme related to the program, include research question and objectives, theoretical framework, methodology, and comply with the ethical standards learned throughout the course. Students will work directly with the AD and/or ISP advisor on the development of the proposal, which may vary depending on the nature of the project.

5) Participation (10%)

This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions, and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
- Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don't, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
- Displaying Respect – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

Assessment:

Practice Interview – 15%
Podcast – 25%
Field Work Journal – 20%
Research Proposal – 30%
Participation – 10%

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, 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.
- 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 you 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.
- 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](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.