

Social Science Methods and Ethics in Global Contexts RSCH-3000 (3 credits)

Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action

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 course is designed to introduce you to the methodological tools deployed by social scientists to conduct empirically grounded and theoretically engaged research. The course will cover the basic elements of research design, the role of theory in empirical research, and the ethics for social scientific research, with particular attention to the complex ethical considerations that arise when conducting research in international and cross-cultural contexts. Students will gain hands-on experience with both basic qualitative and quantitative methods, with the flexibility to emphasize their preferred methodological approach in their final work. Using this project-based approach, the course will prepare you to design and execute social science research projects while developing competency across methodological traditions.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Design a research project that effectively employs appropriate qualitative and/or quantitative methodological tools for specific research questions
- Formulate research questions and hypotheses that can be investigated using different methodological approaches
- Design data collection approaches using various methods
- Analyze and critically evaluate both qualitative and quantitative data using appropriate techniques
- Critically analyze cultural and social contexts in relation to research questions and their own positionality as researchers
- Apply ethical principles to real-world research scenarios and articulate ethical issues in human subjects research
- Develop a Study Abroad Review Board (SARB) application and understand Human Subject Review processes, including completion of CITI training
- Design an Independent Study Project (ISP) proposal that demonstrates integration of methodological, theoretical, and ethical considerations

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

A listing of select readings is available below, after the overview of the Assignments and Modules.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1. Independent Project (IP) model choice and topic idea 5%

Early in the semester students are required to submit a short assignment which includes an outline of what IP model the student is choosing, why they are choosing it, and what their primary research or internship interests are.

2. Independent Project Proposals

Preliminary Proposal	10%
Final Proposal	20%

As the semester unfolds, students are required to submit a 'preliminary proposal' which is their first statement of their research or internship project. This is reviewed by their research advisor or internship coordinator (depending on model choice), and feedback is shared. That feedback, plus further research, will shape their 'final proposal' which sets the foundation for their IP experience. Further feedback is shared on the final proposal.

3. Choose 2 of the following 4 Assignments in Research Methods: 30%

Throughout the semester, there are various RME classes that provide lessons in diverse social science research methods. Students are asked to choose two research methods closely aligned with their IP project (Internship students must

choose interview and observation assignment, unless otherwise agreed with the Academic Director). The two assignments selected are worth 15% each.

- 3a. Intensive Interviewing Assignment
- 3b. Content Analysis Assignment
- 3c. Observation Assignment
- 3d. Survey Assignment

4. 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.

5. Open-book Exam **25%**

Before the IP period begins (around Week 9), there is an open-book RME exam which is based on the RME content covered throughout the semester.

Assessment Summary

- 1. Independent Project model choice and topic idea **5%**

- 2. Independent Project Proposals
 - Preliminary Proposal **10%**
 - Final Proposal **20%**

- 3. Choose 2 of the following 4 Assignments in Research Methods: **30%**
 - * Internship students must choose interview and observation assignments
 - 3a. Intensive Interviewing Assignment
 - 3b. Content Analysis Assignment
 - 3c. Observation Assignment
 - 3d. Survey Assignment

4. Participation	10%
5. Open-book Exam	25%

CITI Training Certification (Mandatory but not part of assessment)

Complete online IRB training through CITI programs. This training addresses human subjects research protocols and ethical considerations essential for conducting ethical research. You can find a FAQ for students which includes guidelines on how to access the training at this link: [CITI - FAQ Doc for SIT students.docx](#).

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

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 the reason for the request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted. 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.** 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 where 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 despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** If used appropriately, cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities, unless advised otherwise. Off-task usage is not acceptable. Sometimes you will be advised to close all computers and put phones away. 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](#), [Accessibility Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule and Select Readings

There are four 'Modules' which structure this Research Methods and Ethics course:

- 1) Foundations of Social Science Research;
- 2) Research Ethics in Social Science;
- 3) Qualitative and Quantitative Methods; and
- 4) Research Proposals and Preparing for ISPs.

These Modules are taught in an integrated way into the Research Methods and Ethics course. Each one is designed to prepare students for their Independent Study Projects (ISPs). After the Module overviews below there is a select reading list. More detail on content and readings will be provided in the student handbook during orientation.*

**Please be aware that topics, readings, 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 ONE: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Guiding Questions: What is social science research? How do we develop researchable questions? How does theory guide research? How do we move from abstract concepts to measurable variables? How do we critically engage with existing methodological approaches? How can we minimize our environmental impact while studying in Australia? What cross-cultural issues should researchers be aware of travelling from the US to Australia?

Class content may include:

- The nature and purpose of social science research
- Developing research questions and hypotheses
- Overview of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches
- The role of theory in social science research
- Literature reviews across methodological traditions
- From research question to methodology selection
- Critical cross-cultural analysis of US and Australia stereotypes
- Developing a 'sense of place' as a researcher and environmentalist

Possible class activities:

- Practice developing research questions from social phenomena
- Choosing appropriate methods based on research questions
- Exploring individual research questions through different methods

MODULE TWO: RESEARCH ETHICS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

Guiding Questions: What is required to conduct ethically appropriate research? What types of ethical issues arise that need to be considered? What is your 'positionality' as a researcher and how might this affect your research? What does responsible, ethical social science research look like? How do power dynamics between researchers and participants

affect the research process? What are the specific ethical considerations for conducting research in global contexts?

Class content may include:

- Ethical principles in social science research
- Cultural sensitivity and research with marginalized populations
- Power dynamics in the research relationship
- IRB processes, SARB applications, and CITI training introduction
- Ethics and positionality in qualitative research
- What is a positionality statement?
- What does 'intersectionality' mean in a research context?
- Whose voices and experiences might be missing from research?
- What are some ethical considerations in collecting, analyzing, and reporting data?

Possible class activities:

- Case studies analyzing ethical dilemmas in social science research
- Exercise: Identifying your positionality as a researcher in global contexts
- Introduction to SARB application requirements and processes

MODULE THREE: QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Guiding Questions: How do we document and interpret field observations? What are the strengths and limitations of qualitative approaches? How do we collect and analyze qualitative data effectively? How to conduct an interview? What makes a rigorous and effective survey? How to conduct participant observation? What is content analysis and how is it practiced?

Class content may include:

- Interview techniques and focus group facilitation
- Observational methods and field notes
- Document and content analysis
- Qualitative coding strategies
- Comparing strengths and limitations of different approaches
- Designing effective surveys
- The strengths and limitations of quantitative data
- Presenting data effectively

Possible class activities:

- Practice conducting interviews and focus groups
- Field observation exercise with detailed field notes
- Coding workshop using sample qualitative data
- Developing a conceptual framework for mixed methods research
- Operationalizing abstract concepts into measurable variables
- Survey construction workshop
- Data analysis and interpreting results

- Interpretation of quantitative findings

MODULE FOUR: RESEARCH PROPOSALS AND PREPARING FOR ISPs

Guiding Questions: How do we create compelling research proposals? How do we justify our methodological choices? What have we learned about designing research for global contexts? What is an Independent Study Project (ISP)? What models are available? Which model should you choose?

Class content may include:

- Research proposal development
- Course reflection and application
- What is an 'independent project'?
- Available models
- Choosing a suitable model
- Submitting your ethics application
- Writing a social science report
- APA referencing
- Writing a good title
- Library and research skills
- Communication and presentation

Possible class activities:

- Review previous ISPs and present summary in class
- Workshop: Peer review of research proposals
- Practice presentations of research designs
- Development of proposal in stages (draft, revision, final)

SELECT COURSE READINGS (subject to change, reviewed and revised each semester to reflect contemporary issues):

Content in student handbook (to be provided during orientation)

Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications. (Chapters 3-4)

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Mixed methods procedures. In *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed., Chapter 10). SAGE Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Quantitative methods. In *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed., Chapter 8). SAGE Publications.

Anti-Colonial Research Library. (2023) Welcome to the Anti-Colonial Research Library. - <https://www.anticolonialresearchlibrary.org/>. This Library holds a collection of open-access

articles and books, websites, and YouTube videos on Indigenous and anti-colonial research methodologies.

McGuirk, P. & O'Neill, S. (2005). Using questionnaires in qualitative Human Geography. Chapter 10, in Iain Hay, (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in Human Geography*. Second Edition. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Hay, I. (2002). Communicating with figures and tables. Chapter 6 in Iain Hay, *Communicating in Geography and the Environmental Sciences*. Second Edition. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press. (Pp 96-107 and 119-120 compulsory)

Guest, G.S., Namey, E.E., & Mitchell, M.L. (2013). Participant Observation. Chapter 3 in *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research*. London: Sage Publications. (Pp. 89-99 compulsory for assignment)

True, J. (1989). Indirect and observational methods of data collection. Chapter 5 in J. True, *Finding Out: Conducting and evaluating social research*. Second Edition. Belmont: Wadsworth. (Pp 154-158 compulsory, the rest is recommended).

Lockie, S. (2006). Capturing the sustainability agenda: Organic foods and media discourses on food scares, environment, genetic engineering, and health. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 23, 313–323. DOI 10.1007/s10460-006-9007-3 (Pp. 313-314 compulsory, the rest is recommended as example of content analysis).

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Qualitative methods. In *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (6th ed., Chapter 9). SAGE Publications.

Rogers, Z. & Bragg, E. (2012). The power of connection: Sustainable lifestyles and sense of place. *Ecopsychology*, 4 (4), 307-318. doi: 10.1089/eco.2012.0079. (*Recommended as an example of a social science paper in APA format*).

Castañeda, E., & Smith, C. (2023). Conducting research with marginalized populations: Methodological, ethical, and IRB considerations. *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 17(1), 111-131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19367244221141326>

Hay, I. (2002). Referencing and Language Matters. In I. Hay (Ed.) *Communicating in Geography and the Environmental Sciences*. Second Edition. Pp. 195-200. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Hay, I. (2002). Preparing and giving a talk. Chapter 8 in Iain Hay, *Communicating in Geography and the Environmental Sciences*. Second Edition. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

APA reference guide (latest edition): <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples>