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Social Science Methods and Ethics in Global Contexts

RSCH-3500 (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 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 quantitative and qualitative 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 quantitative and/or qualitative 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 quantitative and qualitative 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

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- 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
See the course schedule for a full listing.

Assignments and Evaluation

<u>Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria</u>

1) 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.

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2) CITI Training Certification (5%)
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.

3) Literature Review Assignment (15%)
Produce a literature review (3-4 pages, double-spaced) on a research topic of your choice. In the opening paragraph, clearly state your topic and research question. Your review should not be a simple listing of sources but rather a narrative synthesis that relates to your research question. Demonstrate your ability to critically review and connect texts with your topic.

4) Positionality Statement (5%)
Write a 1–2-page reflection on your researcher positionality, drawing on assigned readings about reflexivity and standpoint. Address how your social identities, experiences, and perspectives might influence your research approach and interpretation of findings.

5) Research Question and Methodological Planning (10%)
Define your research question and theoretical approach. Explain how you will approach this question quantitatively (what will you count or measure?) and qualitatively (what will you observe or explore?). Include a research timeline and justification for your methodological emphasis.

6) Methodological Skills Development (20%)
All students complete both components to develop basic competency across approaches:

Quantitative Component (10%): Design a survey instrument (5-10 questions) for your proposed research topic, test the instrument with peers for clarity and feasibility, and write a quantitative methodology section describing your planned approach, sampling strategy, and analysis plan.

Qualitative Component (10%): Develop interview guide or observation protocol for your proposed research, practice the techniques with peers, and write a qualitative methodology section describing your planned approach, participant selection strategy, and analysis plan.

7) Final Research Proposal (25%)
Develop a comprehensive research proposal (8-10 pages, double spaced) that includes:

- Introduction and statement of the research problem
- Literature review
- Research question(s) and justification for methodological approach
- Detailed methodology (emphasizing your preferred approach while demonstrating understanding of alternative approaches)
- Data collection and analysis
- Ethical considerations and researcher positionality

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- Timeline, limitations, and anticipated challenges

Students may choose to emphasize quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods approaches based on their research question and interests.

8) Research Proposal Presentation (10%)
Present your research proposal to the class (7-10 minutes). Presentations should clearly articulate your research question, chosen methodology, and anticipated contributions. Students will provide peer feedback on presentations.

Assessment

Participation (10%)
CITI Training Certification (5%)
Literature Review Assignment (15%)
Positionality Statement (5%)
Research Question and Methodological Planning (10%)
Methodological Skills Development (20%)
Final Research Proposal (25%)
Research Proposal Presentation (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

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+

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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

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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

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Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as Library resources and research support, Accessibility Services, Counseling Services, Title IX information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.

Course Schedule

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

MODULE ONE: FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND ETHICS

Guiding Questions: What is social science research? How do we develop researchable questions? 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 sessions may include:

- The nature and purpose of social science research
- Developing research questions and hypotheses
- Overview of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches
- 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

Readings:

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

Carapico, Sheila. 2006. "No Easy Answers: The Ethics of Field Research in the Arab World." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 39, 3: 429-431.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, 3: 717-723

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Kwon, D. (2022, March 22). The rise of citational justice: how scholars are making references fairer. *Nature*, *603*, 568-571. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-022-00793-1

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.

Possible class activities:

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

MODULE TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Guiding 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?

Class sessions may include:

- The role of theory in social science research
- Literature reviews across methodological traditions
- From research question to methodology selection
- Choosing appropriate methods based on research questions
- Individual research questions through different methods

Required Readings:

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

King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research. Princeton University Press. (pp. 99-114)

Possible class activities:

- Developing a conceptual framework for mixed methods research
- Operationalizing abstract concepts into measurable variables
- Evaluating published research designs

MODULE THREE: QUALITATIVE METHODS

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Guiding Questions: How do we collect and analyze qualitative data effectively? How do we document and interpret field observations? What are the strengths and limitations of qualitative approaches?

Class sessions may include:

- Interview techniques and focus group facilitation
- Observational methods and field notes
- Document and content analysis
- Qualitative coding strategies
- Ethics and positionality in qualitative research

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

Possible class activities:

- Practice conducting interviews and focus groups
- Field observation exercise with detailed field notes
- Coding workshop using sample qualitative data

MODULE FOUR: QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Guiding Questions: How do we design effective surveys? How do we collect and analyze quantitative data? What are the strengths and limitations of quantitative data? Whose voices and experiences might be missing from quantitative data? What are some ethical considerations in collective, analyzing, and reporting quantitative data?

Class sessions may include:

- Data Analysis of existing surveys
- Descriptive statistics and data visualization
- Overview of measures of central tendency and variation
- Interpretation of quantitative findings (one sample and two sample t-tests)

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

Asher BlackDeer, A (2021). Decolonizing data: A quantitative Native approach to Indigenous mental health and higher education. YouTube, 28 October.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okE2B8YvBMw&list=PLMab0CMUF6Y2VWy2UXYEERn-o9Rt2szzo&index=12

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Article to Analyze in Class (for two-sample T-test):
Jeffrey J. Mondak, "Newspapers and Political Awareness," American Journal of Political Science 39 (May 1995); see especially pp. 523-525, for a two-sample t-test.

Possible class activities:

- Survey construction workshop
- Data analysis and interpreting results

MODULE FIVE: METHODOLOGICAL INTEGRATION

Guiding Questions: How do we integrate insights from multiple methodological approaches? When should we emphasize one approach over another?

Class sessions may include:

- Integration strategies in mixed methods research
- Analyzing methodological choices in published research
- Comparing strengths and limitations of different approaches
- Addressing limitations and ethical considerations

Required Readings:
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.

MODULE SIX: 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?

Class sessions may include:

- Research proposal development
- Communication and presentation
- Course reflection and application

Possible class activities:

- Workshop: Peer review of research proposals
- Practice presentations of research designs
- Development of proposal in stages (draft, revision, final)

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