

Social Science Methods and Ethics in Global Contexts RSCH-3500 (3 credits)

Switzerland: International Studies and Multilateral diplomacy

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
- Effectively network and organize interactive research in the local and international environments in Geneva, Brussels and Paris
- 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-cycles 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

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Participation (5%)

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.

2) CITI Training Certification (5%)

Complete online Institutional Review Board (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) Implementing Mixed-Methods Approach in a Group Field Exercise (25%)

The purpose of this assignment is to design and implement a relevant methodological approach, qualitative, quantitative, or mixed, to a research question related to Brussels, Belgium, or Belgian society, Paris, France, or French society. Students will conduct field interviews and/or surveys in Brussels or Paris, followed by an in-class group oral presentation. In small groups, students will carry out field interviews and /or surveys in Brussels or in Paris. Based on their primary data and their academic research, they prepare and deliver an oral group presentation.

4) Literature Review Assignment—individual oral presentation (10%)

During the mid-ISP individual advising meeting, present the key findings, strengths and weaknesses of three to four scientific articles and/or reports on your ISP topic, as well as any gaps in the literature. Rather than simply listing sources, your review should be a narrative oral synthesis that relates to your research question. Show that you can critically review texts and connect them to your topic.

5) Positionality Statement and Methodological Skills Development– Local Case Study (30%)

The aim of this exercise is to document your observations and evaluations of a local cultural phenomenon within its sociopolitical context. This assignment requires you to conduct interactive research. You will produce an 8-page research report integrating a minimum of two face-to-face interviews, as well as a 1-page reflexive section on your position as a researcher. Based on the assigned readings about reflexivity and standpoint, you should consider how your social identities, experiences and perspectives may have affected your research approach and interpretation of the findings.

6) Research Question and Methodological Planning– ISP Final Proposal and Application of Review of ISP research with Human Subjects (25%)

Write an ISP final proposal (5 pages), which includes your title, your research question, description of your analytical approach, research methodology, and field research design. Explain how you will approach your question quantitatively (what will you count or measure?) and/or qualitatively (what will you observe or explore?). Final ISP proposals must be submitted with the Application of Review of ISP research with Human Subjects.

Assessment

Participation (5%)

CITI Training Certification (5%)

Implementing Mixed-Methods Approach in a Group Field Exercise (25%)

Literature Review Assignment—individual oral presentation (10%)

Positionality Statement and Methodological Skills Development– Local Case Study (30%)

Research Question and Methodological Planning– ISP Final Proposal and Application of Review of ISP research with Human Subjects (25%)

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:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Classroom recording policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

SIT Policies and Resources

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

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [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 POSITIONALITY

Session 1: Introduction to Research Methods in Social Sciences and International Relations (part 1)

The session provides a comprehensive introduction to research methods in social sciences and international relations. The session covers theoretical considerations in research and discusses values and positionality of the researcher. It provides an overview of the step-by-step process in developing a research project. From the formulation of a research question, conducting a literature review and the selection of appropriate research methods, to the selection of approaches to data collection and analysis and the formulation of conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

Required Reading:

- Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan L., Bryman, A. (2021). The Nature of Qualitative Research (Part 3, Chapter 16, 349-375). In *Bryman's Social Research Methods* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan L., Bryman, A. (2021). The Nature of Quantitative Research (Part 2, Chapter 7, p.141-164). In *Bryman's Social Research Methods* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
- King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton University Press. (p. 99-114)

Session 2: Reflections on Positionality and Representation

This session builds on students' field exercise experience. Students reflect on their own positionality and ways in which it can impact their representations of the host culture. Particular attention is given to ways in which positionality shapes the research question, relation with the research subjects, approach in data collection, data processing, and the representation of their research subjects in the final ISP.

Required Reading:

- Jackson, P. (2011). Reflexivity. In *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: The Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics* (156-187). New York: Routledge.

Session 3: A Historical Introduction to the "Geneva Spirit of Peace" - field visit

This field visit conducted by a professional historian introduces students to the history of Geneva. It includes the visit of the heritage sites of national and international importance around the old town of the city. Students discover the history of the "Geneva Spirit of Peace" and learn about the city's humanitarian tradition.

Required Reading:

- Kuntz, J. (2011). The Religious Rift: Geneva Comes to the Rescue of Europe's Protestants (Chap.1)/ The Moral Rift: A Commitment Against War (Chap.2)/ After the Catastrophe of 1914-1918: A Light Shines in Geneva? (Chap.3). In *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism: A History* (11-69) Genève: Editions Zoé.

Session 4: Switzerland: Geography, History, Culture and Political System

This session aims at presenting the main historical, geographical, demographic and socio-political specificities of Switzerland.

Required Readings:

Sager, F. and Zollinger, C. (2011). The Swiss political system in comparative perspective. In Trampusch, C. and Mach, A. (Ed), *Switzerland in Europe (27-42)*. New York: Routledge
Swiss Neutrality, 4th revised Edition. Federal Department of Defense, Civil Protection and Sports, and Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (Ed). (1-22), accessed Dec 2024: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/14841/broch_neutrality_e22.pdf

Background Readings:

The Swiss Confederation. (2025). *A Brief Guide*. Swiss Confederation, Federal Chancellery.
Kriesi, H. & Trechsel, A. (2008). The development of the modern Swiss nation-state / Neutrality / Federalism / Direct Democracy. In *Politics of Switzerland: continuity and change in a consensus democracy* (1-68). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Session 5: Field visit to the United Nations

Students visit the site of the “Palace of Nations”, the European Headquarters of the United Nations. They learn about the origins of the UN system, the current structure of the organization and the issue areas covered by it. Students will also meet the UN librarians to learn how to access the ample resources of the UN library.

Required Reading:

Kuntz, J. (2011). Geneva and the United Nations: Serving the Greater Good (Chapter 4). In *Geneva and the Call of Internationalism: A History* (69-88). Genève: Editions Zoé.

MODULE TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS, RESEARCH DESIGN & ETHICS

Session 1: Introduction to Research Methods in Social Sciences and International Relations (part 2): Ethics and Research

This session provides a general introduction to research design and to the importance of ethics in research. It also provides hands-on instructions for application of research ethics in interactive research.

Required Readings:

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan L., Bryman, A. (2021). Ethics in Business Research (111-122). In *Bryman’s Social Research Methods* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
Fujii, Lee Ann. 2012. "Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, 3: 717-723

Session 2: Collecting and Processing Information for Research

This session seeks to present the main aspects of collection and processing of information. The course will highlight the importance of critical thinking in relation to information analysis.

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) will be discussed.

Required Reading:

Hassan, N. (2018). *An Introduction to Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) Gathering*. Retrieved from: <https://www.secjuice.com/introduction-to-open-source-intelligence-osint/>

Recommended Reading:

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan L., Bryman, A. (2021). Getting Started, Reviewing the Literature (91-110). In *Bryman's Social Research Methods* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Session 3: Designing a Research Project

This session provides a practical introduction on how to design and develop a research project. It involves the formulation and refinement of the research question(s), description of the problem, preparation of a literature review with the use of critical and analytical methods and the integration of interview quotes into a research report. The session also covers the project management basics, and the preparation of a work journal and of an HSR application.

In-class Exercise:

Students choose a topic and rehearse how to develop research questions for their ISP projects.

Required Reading:

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan L., Bryman, A. (2021). Planning a Research Project and Developing Research Questions (76-90). In *Bryman's Social Research Methods* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

MODULE THREE: QUALITATIVE METHODS

Session 1: Field Research Techniques

This session provides an overview of the different field research techniques, such as networking strategies and interviews, and of the best practices how to contact experts in the international environment of Geneva, Paris and Brussels. Students are also briefed on the Group Field Exercise carried out in Brussels or Paris.

Required Readings:

Seidman, I. (2019). Interviewing as a Relationship. In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research. A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (101-120). *Fifth edition*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Seidman, I. (2019). Establishing Access to, Making Contact with, and Selecting Participants. In *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (45-61). *A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences. Fifth edition*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Recommended Reading:

Clark, T., Foster, L., Sloan L., Bryman, A. (2021). Interviewing in Qualitative Research (424-451). In *Bryman's Social Research Methods* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Session 2: Religion and Politics: Islam in Europe, with a focus on Belgium

The objective of this session is to discuss the influence of religion on politics with a focus on Islam(s) in the evolving political context of Europe and through a socio-anthropological perspective.

Required Readings:

- Marechal, B., Djelloul, G. (2022). Transformations in “Muslim” Claims and Collective Mobilization Efforts in Western Europe”. In Totolli, R. (Ed), *Handbook of Islam in the West* (121-136). 2nd ed, Routledge.
- Gusciute E, Mühlau P, Layte R. (2021). All Welcome Here? Attitudes towards Muslim Migrants in Europe. *Int Migr.* 2021;59:149–165:
<https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12810>

Recommended Reading:

- Marechal, B., Djelloul, G. (2017). Islam in Belgium. In Fleet, K. Krämer, G., Matringe, D. Nawas, J. and Rowson, E. (Ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition* (16-21). Brill

Session 3: Small States in the International System: The Case of Belgium

This session seeks to examine the role of small states in the international system with a focus on Belgium. It also introduces the political system of the country.

Required Readings:

- Deschouwer, K. (2012). Why Belgium? / A Short Political History / Belgium in the World (1-17; 18-44; 225-60). In Deschouwer. K., *The politics of Belgium*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Witte, E., Craeybeckx, J., & Meynen, A. (2009). *Political History of Belgium from 1830 Onwards* (8413-455). Brussels Academic and Scientific Publishers ASP.

MODULE FOUR: QUANTITATIVE METHODS AND METHODOLOGICAL INTEGRATION

Session 1: Quantitative Methods in Social Sciences

This session provides an overview of the quantitative methods in social sciences. The session covers the theoretical and methodological foundations of the application of surveys and polls, and the needed statistical tools and different data processing programs in social sciences. Session 1 also introduces the ethics of the use of AI and discusses useful techniques for its appropriate use in an academic context.

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

Session 2: Local Case Study Individual Meeting

An individual meeting is organized with each student to discuss their Local Case Study (LCS)'s proposal, and to identify targeted research settings for this exercise.

Required Reading:

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 FIVE: RESEARCH PROPOSALS AND PREPARING FOR ISPs

Session 1: How to Choose an ISP Topic?

This session seeks to discuss the different parameters related to the selection process of an ISP topic.

Required Reading:

Silverman, D. (2005). Writing a Research Proposal. In *Doing Qualitative Research* (139–146). Sage Publications.

Session 2: ISP Applied Methodology

This session, which takes place at the beginning of the ISP period, provides an overview of the requirements for an ISP. It reiterates the contents of the theoretical and practical sessions which help develop the skills necessary for a successful design and delivery of the ISP. The session also covers the effective strategies of time management, networking strategies, and the ISP evaluation criteria. It also explains the core requirements in relation to the ISP presentations which take place at the end of the semester.

Required Reading:

Maliniak, D. Peterson, S., Powers, R., Tierney M. (2020). Explaining the Theory-Practice Divide in International Relations: Uncertainty and Access (chap.1). In *Bridging the Theory-Practice Divide in International Relations* Washington. DC: Georgetown University Press.1-26.

Session 3: Individual ISP Advising Sessions

The objective of the individual advising sessions is to allow students to discuss the ISP topic, the research question and the interactive research strategies with the Academic Director and Advisor, and to guide the students in preparing a coherent ISP final proposal. Further meetings are organized during the ISP period to discuss the research progress.