

## **Independent Study Project** ISP-3000 (4 credits)

### **Argentina: People, Environment and Climate Change in Patagonia and Antarctica**

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.*

#### **Course Description**

The Independent Study Project (ISP) provides students with the opportunity to undertake a significant, individualized research project through which they integrate and apply the academic, methodological, and ethical frameworks developed throughout the program. Drawing on experience-based learning acquired through coursework, homestay, language study, educational excursions, and the Environmental Research Methods and Ethics course, students design and carry out an original research project aligned with their academic interests and professional goals. Students select their ISP topic from a semesterly curated list of research options developed in collaboration with researchers and partner institutions mainly based in the base city of the program that offers advisory, logistic and equipment support. Projects may involve field-based research, laboratory analysis, desk-based research, or mixed-method approaches, and are conducted in collaboration with local academic, governmental, or civil society institutions, fostering engagement with regional research agendas and professional networks.

Although the final weeks of the program are dedicated primarily to the execution of the ISP, the research process begins earlier in the semester through guided preparation sessions, proposal development, and individual advising. These stages support students in refining research questions, selecting appropriate methodologies, addressing ethical considerations, and situating their work within the local environmental, social, and cultural context. Throughout the process, students receive academic guidance from the Academic Director and local advisors while maintaining primary responsibility for the design, implementation, and completion of their project. The ISP culminates in a substantial written research paper in Spanish and an oral presentation, demonstrating the student's ability to synthesize empirical research, academic literature, and experiential learning in a coherent and analytically rigorous manner.

#### **Learning Outcomes**

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

- *Design and articulate* a coherent, feasible, and ethically sound research project using appropriate methodologies that addresses environmental and socio-environmental questions related to climate change, ecology, conservation or human-nature relationships in southern Patagonia and/or Antarctica;
- *Apply* theoretical concepts, research methods, and practical skills developed across the program to conduct independent research in field-based, laboratory-based, desk-based, or mixed research contexts, in collaboration with local institutions and researchers;
- *Demonstrate* critical thinking, autonomy, and reflexivity throughout the research process, acknowledging positionality ethical considerations and contextual constraints in intercultural research settings;
- *Analyze, interpret, and synthesize* empirical data and relevant literature into a structured academic research paper written in Spanish, following accepted scholarly and disciplinary standards;
- *Communicate* research processes and findings clearly and effectively through an oral presentation and a written paper in Spanish to peers and other interested audiences.

### **Course requirements**

Students are required to complete a minimum of 120 hours of independent research work devoted to their Independent Study Project (ISP). Depending on the nature of the project, this work may include fieldwork, laboratory activities, desk-based research, data analysis, meetings with advisors or institutional partners, and the preparation of written and oral outputs. Projects are developed in coordination with the Academic Director and with researchers or professionals from partner institutions, and students are expected to manage their time responsibly and maintain regular communication with their advisors throughout the ISP period. The ISP culminates in a substantial written research paper and an oral presentation. Students are expected to engage deeply with their selected topic and to apply appropriate, ethical, and academically rigorous research methodologies. While students typically select their topic from program-supported research options, those who propose a well-developed independent research question may do so and the program will work to identify an appropriate academic tutor or institutional advisor to support the project.

Students are expected to participate actively in ISP preparation activities, including proposal development and individual advising meetings. Students are responsible for demonstrating independence, initiative, and accountability throughout the research process. The final paper must present a clear research question or objective, describe methods and ethical considerations transparently, and situate the analysis within the local environmental, social, and cultural context. Successful completion of the ISP requires adherence to academic standards, ethical research practices, and program deadlines.

### **Human Subjects Review**

Research related to the program theme possibly involves interaction with vulnerable populations such as indigenous or others. This is why all ISP proposals must reflect thoughtful and contextually appropriate consideration of the effects of the inquiry on the participants in the project. To that end, students are required to submit, along with their ISP proposal, an "Application for Review of Research with Human Subjects," to include a discussion of any potential harm that might come from the study, and to provide appendices including interview and survey protocols. If the Academic Director or the Local Review Board believes that the

proposed research insufficiently addresses the concerns of this policy, the student will be asked to revise their proposal. Standards for this review are developed in-country and reflect local academic practice and cultural values.

Additionally, if the ISP involves human subjects research the student will be required to present certification of the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Program on Social & Behavioral Research Basic.

If the student plans to take this research back to the home school or community for further dissemination, then the student must follow more stringent standards, i.e., not only those of the local community, but also those of the Office for Human Research Protections, with which SIT is registered. Any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the Local Review Board) are forwarded to SIT's Institutional Review Board for review.

## **Assignments and Evaluation**

### ISP Paper and ISP Oral Presentation

At the end of the ISP period, students are expected to present a written paper and deliver an oral presentation both in Spanish to the program learning community. The paper is written in Spanish, follows the structure of a publishable academic article, and has an approximate length of 20–25 pages, single-spaced. The oral presentation lasts 15 minutes, followed by a question-and-answer session, and focuses on the research question, methodological approach, and main findings.

Timely completion of all ISP assignments is expected. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on the accuracy of the information conveyed, the breadth and appropriateness of sources, the depth of analysis and insight, the quality of expression, the level of cultural sensitivity displayed, and adherence to the highest ethical standards. During the process of planning, developing, executing and presenting the ISP, students are evaluated on their ability to:

- Work independently and respectfully within Patagonia and in cooperation with institutions and advisors;
- Develop a logical and coherent framework for the study project, and clearly justify how the chosen topic lies within the scope of the program theme;
- Critically discuss and evaluate available and relevant theories, papers, and published materials on the proposed project; Clearly present the main objectives of the project, further developing them when needed;
- Present and justify a reasonable methodological framework to achieve the proposed objectives;
- Critically describe the data collected, analysis performed, and results;
- Present and discuss problems, findings and conclusions based on the methods used, data and information collected, and/or analysis performed;
- Be able to present all steps of the project clearly and coherently in a written and oral format for an independent audience.

In general, the criteria for ISP evaluation include the student's methods and effectiveness in gathering information, organization, assimilation, accuracy, analysis of the information, the

effectiveness of expression and communication in the final form, and clarity and strength of project presentation and defense.

### Assessment

ISP paper 75%

Oral Presentation 25%

### 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

### **Grading Criteria**

An “A” grade for an assignment entails superior (not just “very good”) performance - in terms of structure and organization - of both the written paper and oral presentation, analysis, logical argumentation and consistency, and the provision of factual, numerical and/or historical evidence.

### **Role of Academic Director and ISP Advisor**

Each student completing the Independent Study Project works primarily with an ISP Advisor (tutor), who is typically a researcher or professional affiliated with a local institution. In many cases, students contribute to an ongoing research or professional project led by their advisor; alternatively, students may propose an original research idea that is refined and developed in coordination with a tutor. In all cases, the ISP Advisor provides the main academic and professional reference for the student’s work.

The ISP Advisor offers guidance on the conceptual framing, methodological approach, and practical implementation of the project, as appropriate to the nature of the research. The form and frequency of interaction between students and advisors may vary depending on the project, institutional context, and research stage, and may include in-person or remote communication. The central aim of this collaboration is to contribute to the reciprocity component of the program, by conducting a research aligned with local standards and necessities at the same time the student is provided with local institutional and professional network and logistical support.

The Academic Director (AD) provides overall academic supervision of the ISP process. The AD supports students in refining research questions, ensuring methodological coherence and ethical standards, and assisting with feasibility and program requirements. Students may

consult the Academic Director throughout the ISP period, particularly during proposal development and key decision-making stages.

The final evaluation of the ISP paper and oral presentation is conducted by the program, under the responsibility of the Academic Director. While ISP Advisors may offer feedback and academic input on the student's work, grading and final assessment remain the responsibility of the program in order to ensure consistency and academic standards across projects.

### **Student Expectations**

Responsibilities when conducting ISP work:

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

The right of those providing information to students to either remain anonymous, or to receive recognition, must be scrupulously defended and respected.

Students must acknowledge the help and services they receive and must recognize their obligation to reciprocate in culturally appropriate ways.

Students must record and represent accurately all aspects of the field study. This includes not representing as their own work - either in spoken or written form - materials and ideas directly obtained from other sources.

Student research (Independent Study Project) is a product of field work and as such students have an obligation to assess both the positive and negative consequences of their field study. Ethical field work, as stipulated in the SIT Statement of Ethics, results in products that are shared with local and academic communities; therefore copies of ISPs are returned to the sponsoring institutions and the host communities, at the discretion of the institution(s) and/or community involved. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad may archive, copy, or convert the ISP for non-commercial use, for preservation purposes, and to ensure future accessibility. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad may archive ISPs in the permanent collection at the SIT Study Abroad local country program office and/or at any World Learning office. World Learning/SIT Study Abroad has a non-exclusive, perpetual right to store and make available, including electronic online open access, to the ISP. Please refer to the Student Handbook or the Access, Use, and Publication of ISP form.

If the research has been funded by a U.S. government agency, or if the student plans to take this research back to the home school or community for further dissemination, then the student may be required to follow standards from their home institutions in addition to the Local Review Board and those of the Office for Human Research Protections, with which SIT is registered. For applications that require a full review, the academic director will forward any questions or concerns that cannot be resolved at the program level (through the Local Review Board) to SIT's Institutional Review Board.

### **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.