

Beginning Samoan SAMO-1003 (3 credits)

Samoa: Social and Environmental Change in Oceania

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 introduces students to the Samoan language through everyday life, relationships, and cultural experience. The goal is not just to learn vocabulary and grammar, but to build the confidence to communicate meaningfully with people in Samoa.

Students begin with foundational language skills in the classroom and then apply these in real-world settings through a five-day rural village stay and a nine-week homestay with urban Samoan families. These experiences allow students to practice language in daily routines—greetings, meals, family conversations, church, transport, and community life—where learning happens through participation as much as instruction.

Language learning is interactive and practice based. Classes include dialogue, role-play, group activities, and regular use of songs and dance to support pronunciation, memory, and cultural understanding. Students are expected to use Samoan as much as possible outside the classroom, learning directly from host families and community members.

Throughout the course, students are encouraged to reflect on how language is connected to Samoan values such as respect, family, and relationships. By the end of the program, students will be able to communicate in everyday situations and demonstrate an appreciation of how language is lived and practiced in Samoan contexts.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Communicate confidently in everyday Samoan contexts using appropriate greetings, expressions, and cultural protocols (fa'aaloalo).
- Introduce themselves and others, and engage in basic conversations about identity, family, and daily life.
- Construct simple sentences using VSOLT structure, applying pronouns and tense markers in context.
- Ask and respond to questions about social and practical situations (e.g., meals, transport, shopping).
- Demonstrate understanding of how language expresses Samoan cultural values, including respect, kinship, and relational identity.

- Use Samoan appropriately in real-life settings, including homestay households and rural village environments.
- Participate in songs, dance, and cultural performance as forms of language learning and expression.
- Reflect on language learning through journals that connect language, culture, and lived experience.
- Show increasing fluency and confidence through sustained interaction with host families and community members.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English and Samoan.

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

School for International Training, 2026, A Guide for Learning Samoan Language.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Participation (25%)

This includes active involvement in lectures, 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.
- Active use of language in class, homestay, and village

2) Journals (25%)

Reflection linking language, culture, and experience

3) In-Class Tasks (25%)

Worksheets, dialogues, role-plays, group activities

4) Cultural Performance (25%)

Participation in songs, dance, and expressive language use

Assessment

Type	Due Date	Weight
Participation	Week Two – Seven	25%
Journals	Week Two – Seven	25%
In-Class Tasks	Week Two – Seven	25%
Cultural Performance	Week Two – Seven	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 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

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 1: ENTERING THE LANGUAGE — SOUND, RESPECT AND EVERYDAY INTERACTION

Focus

Building foundational communication through sound, repetition, and social interaction

Topics

- Samoan pronunciation and sound system
- Greetings and stock expressions
- Asking for help and clarification
- Basic vocabulary development
- Cultural protocols of greeting and respect

Learning in Practice

- Classroom: Pronunciation drills, repetition, interactive dialogue
- Homestay: Daily greeting exchanges with family members
- Songs & Dance: Learning simple songs to reinforce rhythm, pronunciation, and memory

Assessment (In Context)

- Participation in spoken exercises
- Demonstrated use of greetings in class and homestay
- Vocabulary recall through interactive activities

MODULE 2: IDENTITY, FAMILY AND RELATIONAL LANGUAGE

Focus

Language as a way of locating oneself within relationships

Topics

- Introducing oneself and others
- Counting and basic numeracy
- Asking and answering “where” questions
- Talking about family and kinship
- Forming simple sentences (VSOLT structure)

Learning in Practice

- Classroom: Structured dialogues and sentence-building
- Homestay: Sharing family stories, describing photos
- Songs & Dance: Group performance that incorporates identity and storytelling

Assessment (In Context)

- Oral self-introduction
- Family description tasks
- Journal reflections linking language and identity

MODULE 3: LIVING THE LANGUAGE – VILLAGE IMMERSION AND DAILY PRACTICE

Focus

Applying language in lived, communal, and cultural contexts

Topics

- Pronouns (independent and dependent)
- Tense use (positive and negative)
- Asking and responding to questions
- Food, meals, and preferences
- Everyday interaction in family and community settings

Learning in Practice

- **Village Immersion:**
 - Living with host families
 - Participating in daily routines (meals, chores, church, gatherings)
 - Practicing language in real situations
- **In-Village Lessons:**
 - Targeted grammar support based on lived experience
- **Songs & Dance:**
 - Learning and performing cultural songs and dances with the community

Assessment (In Context)

- Observation of participation in village life
- Oral interaction with host families
- Reflective journaling on language use and cultural meaning

MODULE 4: EXPANDING EXPRESSION – MOBILITY, INTERACTION AND FLUENCY

Focus

Developing independence and confidence in communication

Topics

- Talking about past activities
- Expressing wishes, permission, and intentions

- Descriptive and connecting language
- Weather
- Shopping and market interactions
- Transport (buses, taxis)
- Language consolidation and practice

Learning in Practice

- **Classroom:** Role-plays and scenario-based learning
- **Homestay:** Real-life practice (shopping, travel, daily conversations)
- **Songs & Dance:**
 - More complex performance pieces
 - Reinforcing vocabulary, rhythm, and fluency

Assessment (In Context)

- Role-play performances (e.g., shopping, transport)
- Group-designed language activities/games
- Ongoing participation and fluency in discussions
- Final reflective journal demonstrating growth in language and cultural understanding