

Independent Study Project

ISPR-3000 (4 credits)

Ghana: Globalization, Cultural Legacies, and the Afro-Chic

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 four-week independent study project, scheduled in the final portion of the program, provides students a unique opportunity to study in-depth a key aspect of development in Ghana. The ISP draws upon the knowledge and various skills gained from the thematic, language, and research methods and ethics seminars. At this point students will have worked with the Center Director and various other in-country experts to develop their ISP proposals and to schedule interviews, arrange for translators if they will be required and arrange other logistics that are essential to completing the ISP. They will also have developed the competence to act in culturally appropriate ways and to find resources in Ghana needed for ISP completion.

The ISP allows the students to practice and hone their primary data gathering skills and to practice various other skills learnt in the Qualitative Methods and Ethics seminar such as navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, building rapport and navigating local bureaucracies. Further, students practice and hone their skills in gathering and analyzing data from primary sources, managing this data and making a coherent argument in a scholarly manner.

Each student finds or is assigned an ISP advisor with whom they work collaboratively to identify and schedule data collection appointments, review research tools for appropriateness and feasibility, and resolve any logistical and ethical issues that may arise during the course of their ISP. Students are also required submit an ISP itinerary to their Center Director and to check in with program staff regarding the progress of their ISP.

Learning Outcomes

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

- Analyze and synthesize data gathered from primary sources into a well written scholarly report and to compose an oral presentation from this report;
- Understand the importance of ethics and human relations in field research;

- Demonstrate competence in the processes involved in independent research, from choosing a viable topic and appropriate methodologies to final analysis, and interpretation; and
- Demonstrate awareness of contingencies and complexities of working across cultures.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English, but students will be encouraged to use local vocabulary and language throughout their ISP.

Instructional Methods

This course is designed around the principle that learning is an active, holistic process that extends well beyond the classroom. Seminars introduce key concepts and interpretive frameworks that are then examined, complicated, and enriched through direct engagement with people, places, and contexts — field visits, expert briefings, guided observation, and community-based learning. Field-based learning is integrated into course design rather than treated as enrichment: faculty prepare students for each engagement, guide interpretation on location, and facilitate the reflection that connects experience to course themes. Students move through cycles of experience, observation, and analysis, progressively taking greater ownership of their own inquiry. This process is not always linear, and that is by design — developing the capacity to learn from unpredictable, context-dependent situations is itself a transferable skill and a foundation for lifelong learning.

- Conversations with the Center Director (CD) regarding choice of potential ISP topics will begin during the first week of the program and continue until the beginning of the ISP period;
- From the second to the ninth week of the program, students will conduct a research project in preparation for the ISP. This project is conducted alongside the Research Methods and Ethics classes and will help them practice and refine their research skills prior to the ISP;
- A minimum of 120 hours of independent fieldwork will be conducted (during a four-week period) - fieldwork refers to hours of active data collection and analysis (i.e. interviews, observation, participant observation, note transcription, reading supplementary materials, writing, etc.) and not merely time spent in the field.
- All data will be transcribed into a field journal according to criteria presented and practiced in Qualitative Methods and Ethics;
- Students will work in conjunction with a local academic advisor (preferably a host country national);
- An oral summary will be presented to the group and invited guests upon completion of project;
- A well-documented, culturally sensitive and in-depth presentation of field study findings will be written.

Required Texts

Additional readings and articles as assigned.

Assignments and Evaluation

Requirement Descriptions and Grading Criteria

Decisions regarding the topic of study are a primary responsibility of the student. However, students can count on the Center Director (CD) to help focus their ISP and to guide them about how to translate their ISP ideas given practical realities of the local situation, and for assistance regarding potential advisor contacts. The Independent Study Project format allows the student flexibility and the ability to exercise personal initiative, while also promoting academic quality. In turn, the ISP paper provides the material evidence of capability in handling methodology and in synthesizing experiences in the host culture. The final project should have a clear thesis, should be fieldwork-based, and should include a clear description of ethical considerations.

Students are required to complete the following:

- 1) Four interviews with the Center Director (CD) prior to the beginning of ISP to discuss research topic and approach.
- 2) Submit ISP proposal and ISP itinerary for CD and LRB (Local Ethics Review Board) approval.
- 3) Complete a minimum of 120 hours of fieldwork towards completion of the project.
- 4) Have minimum of 10 articles from peer reviewed journals.
- 5) Submit two clean hard copies and an electronic copy (emailed to the CD) of the final paper. The ISP should be 30-40 pages, double spacing, 1" margins and font 12.
- 6) Make a twenty-minute oral presentation of the project to peers.
- 7) During ISP check in with the Center Director or other designee twice.
- 8) Keep a field work journal.

Oral Presentation

Presentation length is 20 minutes with an additional 10 minutes for questions and answers.

Evaluation of presentations includes the following criteria:

- Organization, clarity, and accessibility of presentation (including use of audio/visual aids or demonstrations)
- Clear explanation of ISP objectives and research questions
- Clear explanation of field strategy and implementation
- Ability to field questions and comments from the audience

ISP: Fieldwork Journal

Objectives:

- To document progress on your Independent Study Project

- To practice effective note-taking and transcription techniques

During the ISP period, students will be expected to keep a specific journal devoted entirely to recording field experiences. Some uses of the ISP Work Journal are as follows:

- Recording names and locations of contacts persons, especially possible ISP advisors and other ISP resources
- Recording thoughts about how you want the ISP to develop, the progress of the ISP and changes or developments in plans
- Recording interviews conducted in the field relevant to the ISP
- Recording observations and inferences made relating to the ISP

Evaluation is based on content, organization and development of perspective, analytical quality, effective processing of data gathered from primary and secondary sources, achieved objectives, narrative quality and commitment to the learning process. The evaluation of the **written ISP paper** will be based on the following:

- Development of topic and achievement of objectives
- Project definition and focus
- Methodology
- Accuracy of information
- Critical analysis and thought
- Use of information from participation, observation, interviews and other techniques
- Use of cross-cultural communication skills
- Style and expression
- Grammar and documentation

Assessment

Written ISP paper	60%
ISP field Journal	10%
Oral presentation	10%
Advisor evaluation	20%

Attendance and Participation

Participation is assessed based on consistent, informed engagement in class sessions, simulation activities, and experiential learning. This includes preparation for discussions, constructive collaboration within teams, responsiveness during simulations, and professional conduct during site visits and guest engagements. Students are expected to contribute thoughtfully, listen actively, and engage respectfully with peers and external partners throughout the course.

Consistent participation in classes, site visits, and required program activities is essential to the academic experience. Students are expected to participate fully and may not opt out of required components, as these activities are integral to course learning and collective discussion. If circumstances such as illness affect attendance, students must communicate promptly with the Program/Academic/Center Director or a designated staff member. Absences may affect academic performance and course grades, and repeated or unexcused absences

may result in additional academic or programmatic consequences. When absences are unavoidable, alternative academic work may be required.

Late Assignments

Because this program integrates classroom learning with site visits and debriefs, assignments are designed to build on one another and connect directly to learning on location. *Timely submission is therefore important for maintaining continuity and full participation in the academic experience.* Extensions may be granted *in limited circumstances and on a case-by-case basis* with approval from the Center/Academic/Program Director or a designated staff member. Requests should be made in writing as early as possible and no later than 12 hours before the posted due date. Students are expected to communicate proactively if challenges arise. Work submitted after an approved extension period may receive a reduced or failing grade, depending on the circumstances.

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

To support a respectful, engaging, and academically rigorous learning environment, students are expected to approach this program with professionalism, preparation, and openness. Because this is an intensive, field-based program, individual conduct directly shapes the quality of the shared academic experience.

- **Learning Community:** Students are expected to engage respectfully with differing perspectives, including those of classmates, guest speakers, and local partners. Agreement is not required, but attentive listening, intellectual openness, and respectful dialogue are essential.
- **Content Considerations:** Course materials and activities may engage sensitive or challenging topics. The classroom is a space for thoughtful, respectful engagement with complex ideas. When possible, faculty will flag particularly intense content in advance. Students who find that course content affects their ability to participate or keep up with coursework are encouraged to communicate with faculty and seek appropriate support.
- **Participation and Engagement:** Students are expected to come prepared and to engage actively in classes, discussions, and site-based learning. This includes

contributing thoughtfully to discussion, asking questions, and engaging respectfully with faculty, peers, and guest speakers. Meaningful participation supports collective learning and is an essential part of the program experience.

- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Schedules and activities may change in response to local conditions or logistical realities. Students are expected to approach such adjustments with flexibility and professionalism. Adaptability is considered part of meaningful engagement in the program.
- **Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to complete all work honestly and ethically, in accordance with academic integrity standards outlined in course and program policies (see link to full policy below).
- **Managing Academic Work:** Students are responsible for maintaining reliable access to their academic work by keeping multiple copies using secure storage methods (e.g., cloud-based platforms or the learning management system). Technical issues such as lost files or device failures do not excuse late or missing work.
- **Personal Technology Use:** Personal devices may be used for note-taking and course-related activities. Off-task use is not acceptable, particularly during discussions, site visits, or guest presentations, as it detracts from collective engagement.
- **Course Communication:** Course materials, assignments, and updates will be posted on Canvas. While the course calendar provides a general structure, adjustments may occur based on program flow or site-based learning opportunities. Students are responsible for checking the course site regularly and communicating promptly about access issues.
- **Recording Policy:** To support open discussion, recording of classes or program activities is not permitted without prior written approval from the instructor. Approved recordings are for personal academic use only. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

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.

Credit Hours: School for International Training (SIT) adheres to the standard that 1 credit hour equals no less than 45 hours of coursework. The calculation is based on the standard 50-minute academic hour. The number of credits each course carries determines how many total hours each course involves in a semester. Of the 45-hours for 1-credit hour, one third is designated for direct faculty instruction. Direct faculty instruction includes all learning activities led by the faculty whether in the classroom or in the field — lectures, guest speakers, site visits, hands-on field activities, etc.

The full policy on credit hours can be found [here](#).

AI Usage: SIT's [policy on Generative AI and Academic Programs](#) is included as an addendum to the academic integrity policy.

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*

Will be provided in-country.