



COURSE SYLLABUS

Field Study Seminar

FSS 3000 (3 credits, 30 class hours)

Spring 2011

SIT Study Abroad Program:

Rwanda: Post-Genocide Reconstruction and Peace-Building

Academic Director: Stefanie Pollender

Course Description

The Field Study Seminar (FSS) offers students the opportunity to learn across cultures (epistemology) and how to adjust to the new cultures and countries (practicalities), whereby the students are equipped with the methodologies of field research. The students are prepared for every aspect of their ISPs such as: Logistics (transport, phones, etc.), permissions (NGOs, local government, communities), understanding the issues in context (how to not apply American common sense to issues), and how to conduct qualitative field research.

Course Objectives

The FSS course is designed to accomplish three objectives:

- 1) To provide a forum for processing, exposing, understanding, discussing, and sharing the varied experiences the student will be having throughout the semester.
- 2) To provide a theoretical and practical framework that will facilitate a successful adjustment to life in Uganda/Rwanda and enhance capacity to accomplish tasks in a new and unfamiliar setting.
- 3) To better prepare the student for their Independent Study Project through readings and activities that focus on building skills in participatory research methodologies as well as ethical and practical considerations of engaging in fieldwork.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able:

- To identify and apply field research methods appropriate to their Independent Study Project to obtain first hand data.
- To demonstrate understanding of ethical considerations and to adequately protect the identity of their research participants.

- To demonstrate understanding of their own cultural identity and how this can potentially influence their research project.
- To engage in field research in a culturally appropriate way.

Methods

- 1) Lectures, readings, and related discussions, including FSS and processing Sessions.
- 2) Discussions about aspects of daily life, including student's reactions to the overall cultural environment and relevant program components.
- 3) Assignments.
- 4) Field visits to places around Gulu and Kigali to practice skills in interviewing, Rapid Rural Appraisal and Participatory Rural appraisal.
- 5) Individual sessions with the academic directors as student's ideas and plans for their ISP's evolve.

Course Requirements

Readings

Required readings, selected for their relevance to the topic, will be assigned in advance of each FSS session. Additional readings about field research methodologies and cross-cultural adjustment are available in the Resource Center in Kigali.

FSS Assignments

As part of your FSS experience you will be required to practice the FSS methods that you will have learnt in class. Students are expected to plan and get immersed in these experiences. Plenty of initiative and creativity is required to do this. Finding a research project can sometimes be a very challenging as well as a potentially very rich learning experience. Free slots have been set-aside in the schedule for that purpose. Students are encouraged to begin thinking about their research project from the beginning of the semester and to utilize all available resources: homestay family members, lecturers, NGO practitioners and program staff. Looking at previous ISP papers and the contacts that former students have used may be a useful starting point. The ISP proposal is one of the FSS assignments, as it is a test of the field study techniques that you will have learned during the FSS.

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| 1. Drop-Off Presentation | 10% |
| 2. Description, Evaluation and Interpretation Paper | 30% |
| 3. Family Tree | 20% |
| 4. ISP proposal | 30% |
| 5. Participation | 10% |

The Drop-Off

In pairs, you will be required to investigate any one of the following topics regarding life and culture in Kigali: transport, banking and forex bureaus, markets, communication, restaurants, and eating places, the media (broadcast and print), construction, water and electricity, religion and fun. The assignment is intended to provide first hand experience with data collection in Kigali, and to help with the cultural adjustment process. You are expected to be creative (use a combination of data collection tools) in gathering all the necessary information. As you investigate your area please pay attention to peoples' behavior, communication styles and the general cultural set-up in the environment. You will report the details of your observations to the rest of the group at the end of the exercise.

Drop Off Presentation

Due: After the drop-off during orientation
Weight: 10% towards your FSS grade
Length: 15 minutes per group

On your first day in Kigali you will be sent on a drop-off (see explanation above). After the exercise you will reflect on how it went, which methods you used to obtain information, which methods worked best, what your challenges were, and what you thought and felt during the exercise. Also record all encounters that gave you an insight into the culture and the way people live/think/behave. Every person in the group should be given equal amount of time for their presentation.

Description - Interpretation – Evaluation (D-I-E) paper

Due date: Feb. 14th
Weight: 30% towards FSS grade
Length: 5-8 pages, typed

This assignment consists of observation, writing, and analysis. The goal of the D-I-E assignment is to learn to remove your "cultural blinders" and to examine different aspects of Ugandan/Rwandan culture from perspectives that differ from your previous experience. Through using the D-I-E format you will learn to separate your emotional or instinctive reaction to events and train yourself to examine situations in foreign settings as objectively as possible and from several viewpoints.

Please follow this format when writing your D-I-E paper:

DESCRIPTION: Take a situation and describe it as detailed as possible. You should be clear and concise. Interesting metaphors and a colorful use of language is appreciated, but this is not a creative writing assignment. Write so that someone who was not there with you gets a complete and neutral picture of what happened. This section should not include your feelings about what you are describing, nor your reactions other than what role you played in the situation.

Abbreviated examples: (a) "I was walking through Kigali and saw a man in tattered clothes with no shoes." (b) "I was with another student in the market watching people play a game. A man in a window above us began whistling at us and saying things to us in Kinyarwanda that sounded lewd. We both felt uncomfortable and were upset by his actions. Our male Rwandan friend did not defend us, but instead smirked."

INTERPRETATION: Then write your interpretation of the situation. This is where you describe your feelings, judgments, gut reactions and hasty conclusions to the situation you described. If the situation shocked you, upset you, confused you, this is where you describe that reaction. I.E. - (a) "It was sad to see this person dressed in dirty clothes. [your feeling/reaction]. There's terrible poverty here." [your initial conclusion] (b) "I was so shocked that he whistled and called out to us. That is so rude! Don't people have manners? And our male friend did nothing to help us and even thought it was funny. [your reaction] I know why women never leave the house - they don't want to be hassled!" [your initial conclusion]

EVALUATION: Then you evaluate what you wrote in the Interpretation section. Try to look at your conclusions and figure out if they are an accurate reflection of the events in question, or if they are snap judgments made on the basis of your own values. How appropriate are those to the reality of the situation? In the interpretation of example (a), the author decided that tattered clothes meant the man was poor and then felt pity for him. Is this an accurate description? From what perspective was this judgment made? Are there other reasons beyond poverty that might explain his dress? Does this person see himself as poor, miserable, deserving of pity? How do you think he sees himself?

In example (b) you may find that your interpretation/reaction is in many ways correct. Maybe the author thought about it from as many perspectives as possible and found that no matter what the perspective, the fact that a man made catcalls and lewd suggestions was rude. The evaluation is then WHY did he do it? Was it because the author was foreign and young? Does he act this way to all women, or just foreigners? Is this accepted cultural behavior, or is he just a rude individual? Why did the Rwanda friend smirk? Was it that he accepted the behavior and thought it was funny? Did he not know how to react and smiling was a nervous reaction? Or did he understand the man's Kinyarwanda where the author did not and realized he was not rude, but making a joke? How do you think Rwandans would interpret the same situation? Would they have felt the same way the author did?

Following are some overall comments, which may be helpful as you work on your essays and assignments:

D-I-E's should be about the culture, not about you. Your reactions are important and will appear in the Interpretation but your Evaluation should be about the culture and why you think it is the way it is, **not** about yourself.

Avoid using the term "native" when referring to people, as it has negative connotations from colonial times and tends to come across as dehumanizing. Use "Acholi", "Rwandan", "African", "Ugandan", "local," etc. Keep the description section as basic description. Once you use words that are more judgmental ("treated like a slave", etc.), this is already flavoring your description with your own feelings and interpretation.

It's OKAY to think, feel, and write about your thoughts even if they are judgmental - just not in the Description section. Reactive thoughts and feelings belong in the Interpretation section. Have the evaluation section be the meatiest section. Dig deep and try to understand the values behind behaviors. Explain how you feel about this situation and why. Recognize that these are your own values and opinions and also try to include alternative explanations from several points of view. For instance:

"I don't like to see people being cruel to animals, because in my culture animals are (usually) treated with respect and compassion and pets are considered members of the family. Here it seems that animals are not loved this way, maybe because people are living closer to the edge, trying to survive, and compete with animals for resources. I think it's my own perception that people are being cruel, maybe from their point of view cruelty doesn't enter into it, it's just the way animals are treated and people don't really think about it."

Family Tree

Due date: Feb. 21st
Weight: 20% towards FSS grade
Length: 5 pages, typed including the family tree

This assignment will help you improve your relations with your host-family and you will begin to understand basic kinship relations and their importance to Rwandans. It will also give you the opportunity to practice your interviewing and recording techniques and practice your Kinyarwanda.

Through discussions or informal interviews with members of your homestay family you will investigate the family history, origins, ancestry, etc. You should draw the family tree, since it will help you talk about the different family members and help you keep an overview of who is who. You might want to draw the family tree of your own family as well.

When you write your paper, one page should be showing the family tree and on 3-4 pages you should describe the family history, origins and/or ancestry, and any peculiarities that you have shown on the tree. Also reflect on the ways in which your (extended) host family differs from your family at home. Furthermore describe the interview process, how you obtained your information and what was difficult. Please also include any personal learning or insight you obtained through this exercise.

ISP Proposal

Length: 4-6 pages, typed
Weight: 30% of FSS grade
Due Date: April 1st

You are required to begin developing ideas for your ISP from the beginning of the semester. There are many aspects of the ISP that you will need to consider during the course of the first 10 weeks of the semester:

- The topic on which you will focus in your ISP
- The site. Where will you conduct your ISP?

- Participants: Who will you interview?
- An advisor!
- The necessary logistics such as accommodation, food, transport, etc.
- Partner/supporting organizations

It is a good idea to draw on program staff, lecturers, homestay family members, and development practitioners whom we meet during the excursions. You should be thinking about your ISP during the program activities and take advantage of all the potentially useful contacts that you may encounter throughout the semester. These ideas should then be presented in a proposal, including an ISP contact sheet, to be submitted to the AD on April 1st. Please note that there is time set aside throughout the semester and particularly during orientation for a group ISP meeting to discuss your ISP ideas. However, feel free to contact the AD any time during the course of the semester should you need to discuss your ISP ideas.

The ISP proposal has 2 parts:

1. The ISP Journal

You are required to keep a journal reflecting the development of your ISP from its incipient all the way through to its completion as an academic paper. You should write in your journal AT LEAST twice each week throughout the semester. The journal should contain:

- Ideas for your ISP, about topics, locations, issues
- It should show how your understanding of the topic is evolving and your thinking is influenced by what you are experiencing on the ground
- Contact information of valuable people or organizations
- Newspaper clippings, brochures, pamphlets
- Information about secondary sources, including websites
- Any additional information relating in any way to your ISP

2. ISP Proposal:

The Final Proposal **MUST** have the following sections:

- Introduction
- Background
- Justification
- Statement of Objectives
- Methods/What you will be doing
- List of Bibliography
- Calendar
- Budget
- SIT Practicum Contact Sheet
- Advisor Information
- Ethics Statement
- Filled Form: “Application for Review for Research with Human Subjects” (handed to you by the AD)

Note: Your proposal must meet the AD's approval and in special cases, the approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB) before your ISP stipend is released to you.

Class based Sessions:

Drop-off briefing and drop-off debriefing

Information/data gathering/Rwandan culture/getting around, useful places and resources.

Session 1: Experiential Learning and Cultural Adjustment

What is experiential learning and what role does it play in SIT's programs?

We will explore the identity of the researcher (gender, class, age, etc.). You will get to reflect upon your identity as a fieldworker in relation to the area and community of interest you are thinking of choosing. What do you think are the most important issues around the researcher's identity?

Activity: Discuss in groups what some of your core values are and how they relate to your research project. How could your research be influenced by the different cultural context than your own?

Readings:

Bagish, Henry (1992). Confessions of a former cultural relativist. *Anthropological Perspectives*, p. 30-37.

Bennett, Janet. Transition Shock: Putting Culture Shock in Perspective.

Session 2: Interviewing and Observation in a cultural context

In this session we will talk about interviewing skills and the technique of participant observation as two possible research techniques.

Homework:

1. Formulate at least three questions that will be relevant for your ISP and interview two people (for students who are not in the country where they are planning to do their ISP, you might still want to talk to the people around you about your topic and see how they respond).
2. Find a place that is relevant to your proposed ISP. Get comfortable in this place and make a 15 min. observation. Jot down the time of the day, the weather conditions, describe your surrounding as detailed as possible. Also reflect on your role as a researcher (check May's article, chapter 7).

Readings:

May, T. (2001). Interviewing: Methods and process. In: Social Research, Buckingham: Open University Press, Chapter 6, only p. 120-137.

May, T. (2001). Participant observation: perspectives and practice. In: Social Research, Buckingham: Open University Press, Chapter 7, only p. 153-168.

Session 3: Focus Group Discussions

Introduction to different research methods, class discussion on appropriateness in different contexts

Activity: Get into small groups and discuss the feasibility of the different research methods for your proposed study. Get feedback from your classmates. What advantages / disadvantages do you see with the methods you have learned so far?

Readings:

David L. Morgan (1997). Focus Groups as Qualitative Research. London: Sage, p. 8-17 and 31-45.

Session 4: Ethics of research

When doing research in the field, the researcher needs to think about his/her impact on the people studied, whether or not he/she changes the environment of the participant through the research and whether the research is morally and ethically feasible. We will review the SIT policy on ethics of Field Research and discuss other issues specific to Ugandan/Rwandan society and culture.

Homework: Identify what might be ethical issues in your area and community of interest. Make notes and bring them to class.

Readings:

SIT Policy on Research Ethics

May, T. (2001). Values and ethics in the research process. In: Social Research, Buckingham: Open University Press, Chapter 3, only pages 59-68.

Kumar, R (2005). Considering ethical issues in data collection. In: Research methodology, 2nd edition, London: Sage, Chapter 14, p. 209-216

Session 5: Interviewing revisited

Interviewing is the widest used method of investigating the social world. Therefore, we will examine the interview experience from the perspective of the interviewer and the interviewee again.

Activities: 1) Come to class prepared to conduct and observe an informal conversational interview. As interviewer, prepare a set of 3 questions that would open up a conversation; 2) As a person who will be interviewed think about what you feel comfortable disclosing and what influences this. 3) As a person who will be observing, consider what you feel comfortable hearing and viewing as a non-participant.

Homework: Formulate at least three questions that will be relevant for your ISP and interview two people (for students who are planning on doing their ISP in Uganda, you might still want to talk to Rwandese people about your topic and see how they respond. Depending on your topic, it might not be possible though. Look for the interviews you have conducted in Uganda and organize the answers in arising themes). Bring write-ups from all interviews you have conducted throughout the semester and color code them according to themes arising.

Readings:

Glesne, C. (2006). Making words fly: developing understanding through interviewing. In: Becoming qualitative researchers. Boston: Pearson, Chapter 4, p.79-104

Session 6: Data analysis (qualitative)

Data analysis is a major part in the research process. We will talk about how to organize the data obtained through interviews, observations and focus group discussions. We will briefly touch upon the Grounded Theory and how the literature review section has to be tied in with the data analysis.

Homework: Read a former ISP paper. Which parts did you like, what would you have improved? Is the research question they set out to investigate really answered? In small groups you will discuss the ISP.

Readings:

Glesne, C. (2006). Finding your story: Data analysis. In: Becoming qualitative researchers. Boston: Pearson, Chapter 7, p. 147-171

Session 7: How to write a research report

We will discuss the sequencing of different parts and about the structure of a research report in general and what content they need to include. Especially those students who have written a research report before are invited to share their experiences and point out the most challenging parts.

Readings:

Glesne, C. (2006). Writing your story: What your data say. In: Becoming qualitative researchers. Boston: Pearson, Chapter 8, p. 173-192

Silverman, D. (2006). Writing your report. In: Interpreting qualitative data. London: Sage, Chapter 10, p. 336-344.

Session 8: Practical issues in doing research

When setting out to do research in a different cultural context, the researcher has to consider a number of practical issues: Do I need a translator? How do I get a translator? How do I access the population I want to research? Do I have to seek permission, if yes, from whom? How do I record my data? How do I make sure that I follow the cultural norms and standards?