

What is an ISP Proposal?

The Independent Study Project (ISP) is a key component of the SIT Study Abroad Programs. Your ability to design an appropriate project with focus is a crucial element. A successful ISP aims to increase knowledge in a field of study that is related to the program theme and potentially sheds light on issues pertinent to the host community. Once on site, you may develop or change your proposal contingent on local realities and resources. Your Academic Director (s) will approve your final project proposal, and you will identify a local expert to act as your Project Advisor. As part of the approval process in-country, your proposal will be reviewed by SIT's Institutional Review Board. It would also be worthwhile to check in with your Advisor at your home college or university to see if there are any additional requirements for students conducting independent research abroad.

Why does SIT Study Abroad require an ISP proposal as part of the application?

1. To inform the Academic Director, local staff and program partners of the particular interests of each student;
2. To encourage you to begin thinking about thematic areas that you are interested in focusing on during your term abroad; and
3. To provide you with an opportunity to demonstrate to the Admissions Committee that your decision to study abroad is both thoughtful and intentional, and that your proposed research interests match the theme of the program.

Primary Considerations

FEASIBILITY

Choose a topic that you can gather conclusions from within one month, considering time constraints and other limitations.

INTEREST

Choose a topic that you will feel invested and passionate about. Your research will be much easier if you are genuinely interested in learning more about it.

RELEVANCE

Choose a topic that falls within the academic theme of your program.

ETHICS

Consider positive and negative consequences of both your results and your methodology as you define your topic.

Defining a topic

Think about the following:

1. Issues from your coursework, or ideas raised during classroom discussion;
2. Articles or books that stimulated your interest in a particular topic;
3. An experience from your travels and/or your involvements as a student that raised interesting questions for you that you would like to explore;
4. Problems or challenges in the country you have selected to study in; and
5. Cultural practices that influence or inform issues either positively or negatively.

Tips for Narrowing a Broad Topic into a Research Question

Begin by doing preliminary research. Look your topic up in an encyclopedia and read general information about it. By doing a search in a search engine, you will begin to gather relevant background information. Ask yourself questions about your topic idea...

1. Is your question appropriate in terms of its scope – not too broad and not too narrow?
2. Will you be able to answer your question, given limitations such as time, access or language barriers?
3. Can you find information about your question in the library, on the Internet, or through primary field research?
4. Have you worded your question in a concrete way, so that you have a clear understanding of what you are researching?

After you have narrowed your topic, you can develop a research question. Begin by brainstorming questions and write down the ideas that pop into your mind. Remember, some of the best research questions involve challenging and controversial issues. After you have answered these questions and you are satisfied with your answers, it is time to write up your ISP Research Question and submit it to SIT Study Abroad, along with the rest of your application.