



IFE course syllabus

Course title

Independent Study/Guided Field Research

Course taught by

The course is supervised and students' progress monitored by the IFE program coordinator.

Each student is assigned a qualified research adviser.

Each internship experience is supervised by a department head, manager or other professional on the staff of the host organization.

Methodological training is provided by a qualified IFE instructor.

Purpose of the course

The purpose of this course, which comprises the principal academic work students produce during their IFE semester, is closely related to the overall goals of the semester:

- perfecting language skills
- acquiring first-hand knowledge and understanding of the host society
- developing comparative knowledge and expertise in a specific field or subject matter.

The core of the IFE semester is a mission-oriented internship where students are expected to join a European workplace and contribute to the work of their host organization. This 12 week, full-time internship provides students the opportunity to integrate the host society via the workplace. This integration serves as a method to accomplish the above goals.

The purpose of the Independent Study/Guided Field Research course is to provide students the opportunity to reflect on the content of their internship experience through an in-depth, analytical treatment of some aspect of the work they undertake for their host organization. More specifically, the purpose of this exercise is threefold:

1. To fulfill the potential of experiential education by closely linking experience with structured, academic reflection.
2. To deepen and formalize the knowledge acquired by the student in their field or subject area.
3. To create a synergy whereby the internship offers access to source material for an undergraduate research project in a cross-cultural setting, while the research project adds breadth and value to the student's experience as an intern.

Description of the course

The Independent Study/Guided Field Research consists of a 30-page research paper, written in the host language, under the guidance of a research adviser specialized in the student's field.

The research focuses on a question arising from the student's work in their internship and the work of their host organization.

The student's internship placement is the result of a concerted strategy between student and the IFE program coordinator aimed at meeting the student's goals, background and other factors (choice of organization type, job description, etc.)

Students are assigned a qualified research adviser with whom they meet for individual advising sessions over the course of the internship.

Through their workplace, students have access to a range of sources such as data, internal documents, interviews with colleagues and/or experts in the field, and the like.

Students also benefit from informal conversations with colleagues, often receiving suggestions and advice on the subject area they are proposing to investigate.

Students undertake this course only after completing the IFE preparatory session (which takes place during the first six weeks of the semester.)

Course format

This course takes place over the final 12 weeks of IFE's Field Study and Internship programs' 18-week semester. While the research is conducted independently, all students follow a structured timeline detailed below.

The twelve week period:

Weeks 1 & 2: Students familiarize themselves with their host organization, the work of their new colleagues and the tasks and projects which they will be assigned.

End of week 2: The first bi-weekly meeting between student and research adviser.

End of week 3: Students have narrowed the choice of possible research topics, and have discussed potential topics with their internship supervisor.

End of week 4: The topic choice is finalized with the agreement of the internship supervisor and the research adviser, some sources have been identified, and background reading has begun.

Weeks 5 - 8: A detailed outline is established, research continues, writing has begun, and texts are shown to their research adviser, with whom students continue to meet bi-weekly.

End of week 8: Students give an oral defense of their research in-progress. They present the link between the host organization, their work within it, and the research topic. They also present and justify the outline, providing some idea of development expected conclusions, and finally discuss sources and any difficulties encountered to date.

The oral defense is a timed, ten-minute exercise in the host language, followed by ten minutes of questions from and discussion with the jury and audience (also in the host language.)

Weeks 9 - 12: Students finish writing and editing the paper, taking into account the jury's comments. The finished work is due on the final day of the program.

Additional course elements:

- mandatory workshops on intercultural communication--especially in the workplace--and professional coaching, as well as interactive exercises based on experiences from the internship
- mandatory methodological training to equip students with the tools needed to produce a research text structured in keeping with formal standards of the university culture of the host country
- optional writing workshops during the final four weeks of the course
- optional digital storytelling workshop in which students produce a short video focusing on some aspect of the internship experience itself, as distinct from the research focus.

Methodology

Students are trained in what is expected as professional behavior in their host society and are required to adhere to these standards throughout the internship.

Students are trained in the methodology necessary to structure a research paper per their host country's university norms, as well as in the research methodologies appropriate to their field and their subject, as needed.

Sources are expected to be primarily in the host language.

Students are supervised and trained in ethical research standards for any data-gathering involving surveys or interviews with human subjects (see additional note below).

Independent Study/Guided Field Research papers on technical subjects may follow standard format for articles submitted to peer-reviewed scientific journals;

Independent Study/Guided Field Research papers produced in the area of performing arts, visual arts, design, film and the like may take the form of a shortened paper (20 pages) accompanying an original work of art (graphics, art, music, video...) which corresponds to and further develops the research topic addressed in the paper.

Note: Comparative methodology – i.e. US university students' exposure to European university practices in the organization and presentation of a written argument – is an additional outcome for students completing an IFE program.

Grading

Oral presentation : 20%

Final paper : 80%

Note: students who enroll in the optional Digital Storytelling Workshop earn a point to be added to the grade for the research paper, by submitting a video at the end of the semester.

Equivalent in American university course offerings

The course bears some similarity to an independent study, an undergraduate research course, or a course based on field work. It differs from such courses in the high number of hours of internship/fieldwork (340), and the length of paper (30 pages), all researched and written on site in the host language and culture.

Additional notes

The individualized placement process, which begins as soon as a student is enrolled in an IFE program, makes it possible to orient the overall semester around an area of research chosen by the student. It also makes it possible to orient the semester around research as the main focus of the internship (laboratories, think tanks, research institutes, and the like).

Institutions seeking to assign credit for the internship separately from the field research should contact IFE for any additional information needed concerning that element of the program.

If the student's home university requires them to have IRB approval for the type of research they are conducting in order to receive credit, the student is advised to contact their home institution and follow necessary procedures.