Independent Study Project (ISP) Seminar
ACM Botswana
Spring 2015
Class Time and Venue: TBA

Professor: Dr. Richard Mtisi (Associate Professor of Africana Studies and History)
Office: TBA
Office Phone: TBA
Office Hours: TBA
Email: mtisri01@luther.edu

Course Description

Using textual or material resources, interviews, field observations, and/or other techniques, students will have the unique opportunity to explore deeply a topic or issue on development in Southern Africa through a self-designed independent study project (ISP).  (For good examples of topics for independent study projects, visit the ACM Botswana website).  A second major element of the course will be performing voluntary work which will ideally relate to the theme of your research project. Carol Warren and Tracy Karner, “Discovering Qualitative Research Methods: Field Research, Interviews, and Analysis, Second Edition, 2010” is the only required text for the ISP seminar.  (Students are encouraged to purchase this manual before departing for Botswana). Most of the other readings will be student generated through their own library research and through consultation with local scholars or professionals whose expertise most closely matches the proposed study. Students will work independently carrying out work in a timely fashion, as assignments that factor into the final product will be due periodically.

Obviously, this course will require a great deal of hard work, but it will require even greater level of independent initiative from you as a researcher. What you get out of the project is going to almost completely depend on what you put into it. The class meetings will be few, but you will more than make up for this time in completing the project and undertaking the related volunteer work. Before your departure for Botswana, you will need to do some preliminary research using library sources—articles, chapters in edited volumes, a book or two—that pertains to your topic (s) of interest.

The class will meet roughly every week throughout the semester for an hour. Also, at times I will cancel class, and replace it with individual meetings with students about the projects. In addition to scheduled meetings, I will be available during offices hours and appointments to discuss your project.

Course Goals
• Formulate a research question grounded in some literature so that students can pursue individual interests on one aspect related to development in Botswana.
• Design data collection protocols and analysis strategies that will address the research question.
• Consult with local experts or professionals and emphasize local libraries, archival, and museum sources.
• Comprehend and critically analyze material or textual sources in the context of Batswana culture and society.
• Apply relevant qualitative methodological approaches—participant-observation, field note recording, interviewing, etc.

Course Outcomes

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

• Clearly formulate and develop a research question and determine how best to design and follow a plan of action to conduct an independent study project.
• Work effectively in a directed workshop involving both the ability to do independent work carried out in a timely fashion and do collaborative work involving constructive criticism of peer proposals and drafts.
• Demonstrate knowledge derived from the independent study in a final presentation.
• Explain the relevance of their independent study to understanding historical or contemporary issues in Southern Africa.

Required Text


Note: Please purchase this text before your departure for Botswana. Also note that additional readings will be made available through the website.

Course Requirements and Grades

1. This course meets once a week. Due to the nature of a seminar, which assumes class participation, attendance is required. (10% of the final grade)
2. During the first few weeks, students will revise their research question and prepare an annotated bibliography (10% of the final grade).
3. By the fourth week, students will submit a project proposal and an IRB application (10% of the grade).
4. 12-15 page draft presented and critiqued in class. (20% of the final grade)
5. **Revised 12-15 page paper and final presentation.** The revised paper must incorporate the suggestions of instructor and classmates and is due one week after first version is critiqued in class (30% of the final course grade).

6. **Weekly Journal Entry (related to volunteer work) (20% of the final grade)**

The final research paper will be graded based on four factors:

(i) the quality of the content

(ii) thoroughness

(iii) organization

(iv) style

Volunteer work journal entries will be graded on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being excellent, 3 average and 1 unacceptable. Journal entries should include a description of the week’s activities as well as a critical reflection on what happened and what you learned during the week.

**Volunteer Work**

All students in the course are required to undertake volunteer work with a local organization as part of the course. A list of local organizations will be distributed in class and it will be your responsibility to arrange the volunteer work. You should plan on doing three to four hours of work per week. The purpose of the volunteer work is to: expose you to Botswana specific development issues; get you off the UB campus and interacting with the community; provide an additional source of information for your independent research project.

**Volunteer Work Related Journal Entries:** Journal entries should be two and half to three and half pages (or 650-800 words) in length and submitted to the instructor via (mtisri01@luther.edu) by 8pm Sunday. Journal entries are to be submitted for weeks 2-7 and 9-14 (or 12 in total) (see schedule below). Each journal entry should include a description of the week’s activities as well as a critical reflection on what happened and what you learned during that week. You need to identify a volunteer opportunity and begin working by the end of week 3 (or Friday, February 6). Until you begin your voluntary work, journal entries may consist of a summary and analysis of two to three news articles from a local newspaper. The instructor will bring example newspapers to class.

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Final grades are based on a weighted average for the term using the American grading scale. Grade cutoff points are as follows: A = 93-100%; A- = 90-92%; B+ = 87-89%; B = 83-86%; B- = 80-82%; C+ = 77-79%; C = 73-76%; C- = 70-72%; D+ = 67-69%; D = 63-66%; D- = 60-62%, NC = < 60%.
Research projects:

Ethical protocols or guidelines will be followed in consideration of human subjects. In consultation with the ACM, the student and the instructor will endeavor to follow the proscriptions of both the home campus and/or the relevant Botswana authority.

From the point of view of the ethical review of a research plan, there are three types of independent study projects:

1. Projects that do not involve interviewing or surveying any human subjects. These projects do not have to be reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board.
2. Projects that do involve interviewing or surveying people who are enrolled at or employed by the University of Botswana. These projects will have to get approval from the University of Botswana Institutional Review Board (IRB). The deadline to obtain permission to do the project is in early March 2015. (The specific deadline will be announced in due course). These projects have a reasonable chance of getting approved, provided that you write a great research proposal and explain how you will protect your human subjects from harm.
3. Projects that involve interviewing or surveying people who are not enrolled at or employed by the University of Botswana. These projects will probably have to be reviewed and approved not only by the University of Botswana IRB, but also by the federal government of Botswana. The deadline to obtain permission to do the project is early March. (The specific deadline will be announced in due course).

NOTE WELL: If you would like to propose a project that falls into categories 2 or 3, you will have to have a “back-up plan” in category 1, which you must carry forward through all assignments.

Research Projects:

Overview of the Independent Study Process

The independent study project includes several steps that will continue throughout the semester.

A) Permission and Collaboration:

Consult your OIEP staff or other local advisor /faculty for advice on how to gain appropriate entry to a setting and make your initial contact. Consider carefully how you will present yourself—what you will wear and say and how you will explain your academic discipline and independent study goals. During the first 5 to 6 weeks, as you prepare your project proposal and IRB application, you may with general permission conduct observations, participant observations, and have regular interactions and conversations BUT interviewing must wait until IRB approval.
B) Observation:

Focus on the characteristics of the setting of your study. Draw up maps noting detail about the physical space, the behavioral routines, and the people in it. Describe the events and steps in a process you have witnessed. Besides your initial observations, you may find occasions to do this several times during the semester. In your field notes and journal entries, always note the date, day and time; take mental or head notes if jotting is inappropriate; and always type up full field notes immediately after a “field” session.

C) Participant Observation:

In the beginning, focus on interactions between members in the setting, the type of participants and groups, the relationship among people, and the questions and problems you may face. As you mingle and establish friendly working relationships with people at your volunteer work site, learn the appropriate ways in which you can be an observing participant or a participating observer. While there is no universal prescription for what to record in field notes, each journal entry should include a description of the week’s activities as well as a critical reflection on what happened and what you learned during that week.

D) Textual, Material and Visual Sources:

Before your departure for Botswana, you did some preliminary research using library sources—articles, chapters in edited volumes, a book or two—that pertains to your topic of interest. Now in Gaborone, you might utilize local library, archival or museum sources. If applicable to your subject matter, you might collect and analyze physical objects, text-based artifacts, and visual materials.

E) In-depth Interviews:

Never mind that the IRB process—preparation, submission, and approval—might take 5 to 6 weeks because successful in-depth interviews are never the first data collection operation in good qualitative field research. Successful interviewing follows weeks of field observations so that good researcher-informant rapport can be established and appropriate interview questions can be formulated. After establishing yourself in the setting and uncovering variables, topics, and ideas through your field observations, begin to devise interview questions. Interview questions might solicit informant perspectives on context and history, how events or organizations function, steps in a process, shared knowledge and experience.

F) Tentative Outline and Theoretical Focus:

Combine your observations, field notes and or journal entries, interviews and primary ideas into a tentative outline. You need to assess the relative completeness of your data, look for gaps in your data, and develop concepts for analyzing your data. At this point, draw connections between your library sources and your research, asking how your data reflects topical, methodological and/or theoretical debates and vice versa.
G) Return to the “field”:

While formulating your tentative outline, you will probably discover that you do not have all the answers to your questions. You may need to ask follow-up questions or do more observations, interviews or casual conversations on specific topics.

H) Final Presentation and Paper:

One to two weeks before the final paper deadline you will do a public presentation of your draft. Your peers will also give you some feedback on the draft. The revised paper must incorporate the suggestions of instructor and classmates and is due one week after first version is critiqued in class.

**Preliminary Proposal**: 500-750-word research proposal is due in week three (3) with the following sections: introduction, importance of topic, research question, method for answering question, human subjects consideration. See guidelines for preparing research proposals.

**Draft**: A 10-12 page draft of the paper is due in week 13.

**Presentation**: Presentations of student research and peer-review will take place during week 14. Time and location will be announced at a later date.

**Final Paper**: The final paper (12-15 pages) is due by finals week. Specific dates and guidelines will be passed out in class.

**TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE & ASSIGNMENTS**

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<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td>Discussing the IRB process. Activities will include a practice session for completing the ACM form. One-on-one meetings will also be arranged.</td>
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<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Preliminary proposal due, present to class (5 min each)</td>
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<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Final proposal, ethical statement and IRB application due. Reading: TBA</td>
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<td>Week 5</td>
<td>Reading assignment: TBA</td>
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<td>Week 6</td>
<td>Reading Assignment: TBA</td>
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<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Reading assignment: TBA</td>
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**TUESDAY, MARCH 10- TUESDAY, MARCH 17**

Mid-semester break (safari)
**Week 8**
**Guest Lecture (TBA)**

**Week 9**
**Guest Lecture (TBA)**

**Friday, April 3 to Monday, April 6**
**Easter Break**

**Week 10**
**Visit Botswana Parliament (To be arranged)**

**Week 11**
**Guest Lecture (Botswana National Museum. To be arranged)**

**Week 12**
**Reading Assignment: TBA**

**Week 13**
**10-12 Pages Draft Paper Due (You need to submit two “Hard copies,” and electronically mail a copy to classmates).**

**Week 14**
**Presentations and written critiques. Major critic will prepare a 2-3 page typed critique. Other participants will prepare 1 page, typed critiques. (You must submit two copies of each critique-major or minor).**

**Week 15-16 (Finals Period)**
**12-15-page Revised paper due. The specific due date will be announced in due course.**