ASIAN STUDIES PROGRAM
PROPOSAL TO ADD DIRECT-CREDIT STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM
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TIBETAN AND HIMALAYAN PEOPLES (SIT)

The Asian Studies Program proposes the addition of a direct-credit study abroad program titled “Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples.” The proposed program is administered by the School for International Training (SIT). Centered in Kathmandu, Nepal, this semester-long program focuses on issues of religion, migration, and identity in the Himalayan region. The program would enable Vanderbilt students to gain first-hand knowledge about Tibetan Buddhism, the Tibetan exile community and the role of the Dalai Lama, Sino-Tibetan relations, and relations among different ethnic groups in Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, and India.

RATIONALE
Interest in and awareness of Tibetan cultures has grown considerably among students in the past few years. Fascination with meditation, “mindfulness,” and the Dalai Lama permeates popular consciousness, and media abounds in stories ranging from self-immolating monks to Bhutan’s “Gross National Happiness” metric. Beneath the hype lies a very complex situation involving a far-flung diaspora existing within an ethnically diverse and politically contentious region. The Vanderbilt curriculum now includes courses related to South Asia, China, and the Himalayan region, taught in History (Lorge, Sheikh, Rogaski), Art History (Miller, Latif), Religious Studies (Campany, Lin, Stewart, Taneja), and Political Science (Benson, Mo). In particular, Prof. Nancy Lin’s Religious Studies course offerings, including “Tibetan Buddhism” and “Buddhism and the State,” have created a small but dedicated core of students who are primed and excited to explore issues of Tibetan society and culture in more depth.

Currently there is one “Himalayan”-based program on the GEO roster, the SIT program “Development and Social Change,” based in Nepal. This program was brought on-line by Peabody, not through A&S or Asian Studies. As we understand it, the “Development and Social Change” program focuses on economic and social elements of development in the nation of Nepal.

The Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples differs markedly from that program in multiple ways, primarily in its emphasis on the study of Tibetan Buddhism. It also requires intensive training in Tibetan language, and includes multiple sites for study of Tibetan exile communities, including several in India and Bhutan, in addition to Nepal. The curriculum allows students to explore unique issues such as the history of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and sects, the issue of self-immolation and anti-Chinese resistance, and the role of the Dalai Lama in Tibetan religion and politics (past groups have actually had small private audiences with the Dalai Lama).
While the numbers of applicants for this program will most likely never be huge, the faculty of Asian Studies believes that it will offer a fantastic opportunity for our students, and will always be a draw for our most engaged and inspired students. Faculty are committed to promoting this program: this year alone, as a result of taking courses on the history and culture of the region, two students have voiced strong interest in the program, even though it has not yet been approved.

The program is also a part of a larger set of recommendations that have been carefully researched by our faculty. In the fall of 2013, the Asian Studies Study Abroad Committee (consisting of Bryan Lowe [Japanese Religious Studies] and Samira Sheikh [Indian History] surveyed Vanderbilt’s current offerings in Asia and reviewed potential additional programs. The committee recognized a particular dearth of programs in South Asia. In the spring of 2014, the committee and the Asian Studies faculty enthusiastically recommended the SIT Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples program because of its outstanding leadership and faculty, long history of engagement in the region, student research component, and multi-site access.

PROGRAM PROVIDER: THE SCHOOL FOR INTERNATIONAL TRAINING (SIT)
The School of International Training is widely regarded as a provider of high quality study-abroad programs. SIT has a history of over seventy-five years in international education and sends approximately 3,000 students to a variety of programs each year. All SIT programs are accredited through the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. Vanderbilt has a good relationship with SIT: currently GEO maintains 14 SIT programs, including programs in Vietnam, Chile, India, Samoa, Uganda, and Morocco. “Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples” is one of SIT’s flagship programs. Established in 1987, the program has deep roots in the region and a reputation for academic excellence.

PROVIDER ADMINISTRATION
SIT Study Abroad is headquartered in Brattleboro, Vermont. The senior academic staff at Brattleboro includes the Provost, Dr. John Lucas; Vice Provost Dr. Priscilla Stone; the Academic Dean for Asia programs, Dr. Brian Hammer, and all admissions, external relations, and student affairs staff.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION
The Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples Program administration includes:

- Dr. Isabelle Onians, Academic Director. Onians received her doctorate in Oriental Studies in 2002 from the University of Oxford (where she was a classmate of Samira Sheikh, now Associate Professor of History at Vanderbilt). She first came to Kathmandu in 1990 to work as a volunteer teacher in a Tibetan monastery school and returned in 1992–1993 to study Tibetan (and Sanskrit) at Tribhuvan University.
- Hubert Decleer (Senior Faculty Advisor), founded the Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples program in the fall of 1987 and was the Academic Director from then until the spring of 2001. Decleer has introduced hundreds of American undergraduates to Tibetan culture through the program, and several program graduates have gone on to become well-known scholars in the field.
• Tenzin Choezom (Senior Program Coordinator), a native of Bouddha, the "Little Tibet" neighborhood which is the program’s base in Kathmandu. Tenchoe developed expertise as a media researcher working among the Tibetan exile community for many years.
• Phurwa Gurung, (Program Coordinator), BA in Sociology/Development and Rural Development from Tribhuvan University.
• In addition, the SIT program maintains a network of coordinators in Dharamsala, Bhutan, and other areas.

PROGRAM SITE(S)
The SIT Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples program is centered in Kathmandu. With a population of almost one million, Kathmandu is Nepal’s largest city. It is also Nepal’s capital, and is the country’s economic, political, and education center. Many of the region’s NGOs and research institutions are located in the city. The city is also a religious center for the region, and is home to numerous important Hindu and Buddhist sacred sites. Finally, the city and its surrounding regions are home to communities of Tibetan refugees, as well as communities representing many of the ethnic groups of the region.

The program includes six weeks in-residence in Kathmandu. The SIT Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples program facility is located in the Boudha (Boudnath) neighborhood. Sometimes known as “Little Tibet,” this neighborhood is centered on the Boudnath Stupa, and is home to many Tibetan families who were exiled from China in the 1959 Tibetan uprising. SIT maintains its own administrative offices and classrooms in its Kathmandu facility. SIT maintains a formal partnership with a local institution, Tribhuvan University, Nepal’s oldest and largest public university. Tribhuvan University provides many of the program’s lecturers and language teachers, and the university also supplies student visas. The program, however, does not use the university’s facilities.

Three and a half weeks are spent outside of Kathmandu on learning excursion to Tibetan exile settlements and Tibetan regions, and may include Dharamsala, Bhutan, Sikkim/Darjeeling, Mustang, or Ladakh (The PRC government does not allow US student groups to visit the Tibetan Autonomous Region). The excursions are integrated into the class syllabi with readings and assignments, and are also coordinated with potential sites suitable for Independent Study Projects (ISP, see below). The excursions deepen the students’ understanding of the range of Tibetan cultural traditions, and allow students to gain first-hand knowledge of the complex multi-sited Tibetan refugee and exile experience.

The excursion time is typically divided by between two excursions, the “Minor Excursion,” and a “Major Excursion.” The excursion destinations and content vary each semester. For example, the spring 2015 Minor Excursion takes students to the Buddhist holy lands: Bodhgaya and Sarnath (India) and Lumbini (Nepal), (coordinated with concurrent fieldwork for the Field Methods and Ethics course, two thematic seminars, and the language course, [see below]). The Major Excursion this semester takes students to Mustang (Nepal), with concurrent fieldwork for the Field Methods and Ethics course, both thematic seminars, and the language course.
The program ends with a month-long Independent Study Project (ISP). Some students remain in Kathmandu for their ISPs, while other students choose to leave Kathmandu and conduct their ISPs in a SIT-approved location. Most of these locations are places that the program has visited on excursion and where there is already SIT contacts/infrastructure in place. All students are assigned a local research advisor who serves as the on-site contact and provides regular contact/communication with the student. Students are required to have regular contact with their local advisor, and also to check in regularly via phone with program staff. All ISP locations and advisors are approved by the program Academic Director and are affiliated with the regions’ academic and monastic institutions, NGOs, and cultural organizations.

SIT has deep connections with multiple organizations in the region, and coordinates excursion schedules and ISP’s depending on availability and current on-the-ground situation. For a complete list of sites and organizations affiliated with the SIT program, see http://studyabroad.sit.edu/sn/programs/semester/fall-2014/npt/ (see “key features” tab)

COURSES and FACULTY
SIT Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples is a 15-week long semester program consisting of 16 credit hours. There is a fall semester program and a spring semester program; there is no summer or full academic year program. Each semester’s curriculum consists of four courses (each 3-credit hours, 45 contact hours), and one independent research course (4 credit hours/120 hours). The courses offer an in-depth education in the political, social, and cultural complexities of the region. The courses currently consist of the following; all (except TIBE 1000) are taught in English:

- The Politics of Tibetan and Himalayan Borders  
  (ASIA 3020 / 3 credits / 45 class hours)
- Religious Change in Tibet and the Himalaya  
  (ASIA 3010 / 3 credits / 45 class hours)
- Intensive Language Study: Tibetan  
  (TIBE 1000 / 3 credits / 45 class hours)).
- Field Methods and Ethics  
  (ANTH 3500 / 3 credits / 45 class hours)
- Independent Study Project  
  (ISPR 3000 / 4 credits / 120 class hours)*

*A note about the calculation of credit hours, directly from SIT’s representative: “In class lecture and discussion hours are counted as 15 classroom hours = 1 credit hour. However, outside-the-classroom course time requires twice as much actual time per credit hour. This means that 30 outside-the-classroom class hours = 1 credit hour. SIT’s thematic seminars, language classes, and methods and ethics courses all follow the 15 class hours = 1 credit rule (if an excursion is part of a course, then that portion of the class time is double counted as 2 hours toward the 15 hours per credit hour rule), but generally speaking the seminar class hours operate on a 15 class hours = 1 credit standard. The Independent Study Project (ISP) course, however, is different than the others in that the ISP course takes place entirely outside the classroom. A small exception is the formal presentation at the close of course, but is but 30 minutes of the total class/course
Detailed syllabi, including weekly schedules and extensive reading lists for these courses are available at [http://studyabroad.sit.edu/sn/programs/semester/spring-2015/npt/](http://studyabroad.sit.edu/sn/programs/semester/spring-2015/npt/) (select “Coursework”). The syllabi are thorough and reflect rigorous academic standards, with clear assignments and extensive reading lists drawn from scholarly literature. To re-emphasize, the courses are deeply coordinated with excursions, so that, for example, study and discussion of scholarship on “the politics of the Tibetan exile government” will take place while visiting Dharmsala, or exploration of “Tibetan architecture and gardens” coordinates with an excursion to Lumbini, a UNESCO world heritage site traditionally held to be the birthplace of the Buddha.

Courses tend to be team taught, incorporating multiple lectures/session-leaders who are experts on various topics, and overseen by SIT faculty advisors. The lecturers include religious leaders, scholars of Tibetan Buddhism, faculty from Tribhuvan University and the Royal University of Bhutan, local architects, journalists, artists, and NGO leaders.

**Independent Study Project**
The curriculum ends with a month-long faculty-directed Independent Study Project. The ISP syllabus includes a clear set of criteria for guiding students in their fieldwork, and students complete a “Field Methods and Ethics” course that prepares them for their independent work. Projects have included a diverse array of topics, including studies of Bhutanese calligraphy; Tibetan ethnoastronomy; traditional Tibetan medicine; the reemergence of the Bön tradition; traditional arts (with apprenticeship) in Bhutan; the changing status of women in Buddhist monastic life; and life in Tibetan exile settlements. The independent study project generates a research paper that is archived in the SIT Digital Collections. Past projects can be viewed at [http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/nptl/](http://digitalcollections.sit.edu/nptl/).

Overall, we in Asian Studies find that this program offers challenging courses, one-of-a-kind on-site experiences that absolutely can not be replicated in the classroom, a strong research component with a tangible end-product, and clear faculty guidance – in short, it is exactly the sort of ‘immersion experience’ that we want our students to have. We believe that Vanderbilt students will thrive in this environment.

**GRADING SCALE**

All SIT courses use the following standard grading scale:

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The vast majority of ISP course time involves engaging in research, reading, and writing outside the classroom. Therefore, on the ISP syllabus we require double the class hours (outside-the-classroom hours) to equal a credit hour. In sum, while a thematic seminar’s 45 class hours (counted as in-class hours) = 3 credits, the ISP’s 4 credits are realized through 120 hours of outside-the-classroom work. If it were an in-class course, the ISP’s 4 credits would be equivalent to 60 hours of in-class hours. But in this case we double the hours to follow SIT’s rule that differentiates in-class and outside-the-classroom class time.
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Further information about credits, grades, and transcripts may be found online at [http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/prospective-students/academics/](http://studyabroad.sit.edu/pn/prospective-students/academics/)

**CALENDAR**

Program dates roughly follow the U.S. academic calendar. The fall term begins in late-August and concludes in early-December. The spring term begins a bit later, in early February, and finishes mid-May. This academic year’s schedule is:

Fall 2014: Aug. 26-Dec. 8  
Spring 2015: Feb. 3-May 18

**ADMISSIONS**

SIT Study Abroad staff make decisions about admissions, in coordination with the Vanderbilt Global Education Office. SIT accepts applications from undergraduate students who:

- Are in good academic and disciplinary standing at an accredited college or university.
- Have completed at least one year of college-level coursework at the time of application.
- Have a cumulative grade point average of 2.5 or higher (Vanderbilt requires a minimum GPA of 2.700).

In cases where there are more applicants than spaces available, the applicant’s entire application is taken into account. SIT reviews all portions of the application, including the applicant’s GPA, essays, Independent Study Project proposal, references, and the overall quality of the application. The student’s major does not formally factor into the ranking of the applications.

SIT Study Abroad has rolling admissions, and applications are reviewed on a rolling basis between the opening and closing dates of an application cycle. Applications can be started at any time. Complete applications received prior to the opening date will be reviewed after the opening date has passed.
For the Fall semester program, admissions open December 15th (of the previous year) and close May 15th. For the Spring semester program, admissions open April 15th (of the previous year) and close November 1st.

The School for International Training does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, ancestry, national origin, gender, sexual or affectional orientation, religion, age, or disability in its educational programs, activities, admissions or employment practices as required by Title IX of the Educational Amendment of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and other applicable statutes.

HOUSING AND MEALS
Because of the unique structure of the program, students will experience a variety of housing formats.

Homestay
For the first six weeks of the program (after orientation), students are housed with local families in Kathmandu in the Tibetan community around Boudha. Students share daily activities with their host families and are frequently invited to larger family gatherings as well as cultural events and outings. There is only one student per family. The students are expected to spend evenings, nights, and weekends with the homestay families. Students walk from their homestay families to the program center.

Homestay families are vetted by the program Homestay Coordinator, who is a long-term resident of the Boudha community. The coordinator’s work is directly supervised by the program Academic Director, Dr. Isabelle Onians. The Homestay Coordinator visits each family, interviews its residents, completes a homestay family checklist developed by SIT’s Office of Student Affairs, and checks-in with families and students over the course of the semester.

The students have lunch at the program center and all other meals with the homestay family. The cost of all meals is included in the program fees.

Excursions
When students are on excursions, they stay in guesthouses, hostels, educational institutions and/or small hotels arranged by the program. The program provides meals for the students during the excursions.

Independent Study Project
Students are typically housed in local guesthouses while they conduct their Independent Study projects. Housing is arranged by the student, with the help of SIT staff and local research advisors. Since SIT students regularly travel each semester to these locations, the program staff generally recommend to students where they should stay. The SIT Academic Director vets the housing choices of students. While conducting their Independent Study Project, students receive a stipend to cover the cost of meals and housing. While conducting research students will arrange their own meals, with ready advice and help from SIT staff as needed.
The semester begins with a three day orientation. Program staff present program logistics (the various program components, the academic requirements, etc.) and introduce the program in terms of the historical, political, religious and cultural contexts of Tibetan and Himalayan studies. Through the orientation, students are introduced to local customs, manners, and other cultural issues. Safety and security are also discussed thoroughly during orientation. During the orientation, students stay in a small guesthouse, and all meals are provided by the program.

SAFETY AND SECURITY
Orientation includes an extensive health and safety component. All local staff members are trained in emergency response and are on call 24-7 for student emergencies. SIT maintains a communication protocol for handling student medical or criminal emergencies and for contacting parents and home institutions where appropriate. SIT helps students procure low-cost local phones during orientation. SIT requires all students to carry a cell phone and to keep credit on their phone so that they can be reached at any time.

SIT's US headquarters monitors daily U.S. State Department security announcements and other security-related news outlets. On-site staff ensure students are properly registered with their respective embassy or consulate upon arriving in Nepal.

All SIT Study Abroad students have access to accident and sickness insurance as part of their program fee. Some features of the accident/sickness plan include:
- Emergency reunion benefits for one immediate family member
- Medical evacuation in the event of a serious emergency
- Security evacuation expenses
- Lost baggage and personal property
- Repatriation and accidental death and dismemberment

Safety and Security
Students and parents can find security and safety information about particular study abroad locations at the following websites, and, based on the information provided therein, students and parents can make informed decisions about whether to participate in a study abroad program.

GEO travel warnings and alerts:
TUITION/FEES

SIT’s costs are all inclusive – all meals, in-country transportation, and accommodations are included in the program fee. The specific costs for this program are listed below:

Tuition: $15,860
The tuition fee covers the following program components:

- Cost of all lecturers who provide instruction to students in:
  - History and politics
  - Buddhism across the Himalayas
  - Contemporary Tibetan culture
  - Cultural anthropology
  - Arts and sciences
- Field Methods and Ethics course on research methods and Human Subjects Review
- Intensive language instruction in Tibetan
- All educational excursions to locations such as: Nepal, visiting Tibetan communities (Pokhara, Solu Khumbu) and/or Himalayan peoples (Mustang, Tsum, Yolmo); India, to Ladakh, Spiti, Dharamsala, or Sikkim/Darjeeling; and/or to the Kingdom of Bhutan, including all related travel costs
- Independent Study Project (including a stipend for accommodation and food)
- Health insurance throughout the entire program period

Room & Board: $3,690
The room and board fee covers the following program components:

- All accommodations and transportation during the entire program period. This includes airport pickup and sending-off, orientation, time in the program base (Kathmandu), accommodations and transportation on all excursions, during the Independent Study Project, and during the final evaluation period. Accommodation is covered either by SIT Study Abroad directly, through a stipend provided to each student, or through the homestay.
- Homestay (six weeks in Kathmandu)
- All meals for the entire program period. Meals are provided by SIT directly, through a stipend provided to each student, or through the homestay.

Program fees do not include international airfare, visa expenses, immunizations, books, and discretionary expenses.
Dear Jonathan,

Attached you will find the application materials for a proposal to add direct-credit study abroad program “Tibetan and Himalayan Peoples”, approved by the Committee for Education Programs on March 19, 2015. The CEP is recommending this for consideration by Faculty Council.

Best Regards,

Brian Bachmann