

Virtual Internship & Seminar

ITRN 3005 (5 credits)

Ecuador: Virtual Internship in Environment, Conservation, and Ecosystems

This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

Description

This virtual internship and seminar is a summer six-week distance learning course comprised of 225 hours. Students intern with a local community organization, a research organization, a business, a government agency, or an international NGO. Students will be expected to devote approximately 37.5 hours a week to both on synchronous and asynchronous course activities. Synchronous activities may include orientation sessions, seminar country and theme specific lectures, initial meetings with your internship advisor, group reflection sessions, and project presentations. Frequency, duration, and scheduling of synchronous activities will be determined the first week of the course in conversation with participants to find mutually convenient times. In the event that a student cannot attend a live session, every effort will be made to provide a recording, transcript, or summary for off-line viewing. Asynchronous activities may include seat time at your internship, break-out groups, check-ins with your academic director, internship coordinator and your internship mentor, writing progress reports, discussion boards, completing assignments and a final paper, and using audio or video to record reflections on the internship experience. Students are required to demonstrate a strong online presence by participating in group discussions, answering questions, and interacting with course participants and staff.

The aim of an internship is to enable students to gain valuable experience and enhance their skills in careers relating to, but not limited to: environment & conservation. Such careers include environmental education; environmental campaigns, design and development; environmental activism and problem solving, and many more. An important aspect of this internship is to provide students elements to understand Ecuador's (including the Galapagos Islands) conservation & environmental movements, and to create a network of NGOs and other organizations that students may use in the future for their professional career.

SIT will facilitate an internship placement for students. The organization and the student's internship activities, including the Internship Learning Agreement, must be approved by SIT's academic director. SIT will maintain oversight of internship placements in line with SIT academic

policies and student health and security guidelines. Ultimately, each student takes responsibility for being proactive in engaging with internship colleagues and the internship supervisor to achieve internship objectives.

Students will be informed of the types of internships available and the placement process early in the program. An interview may be required before an internship placement is finalized. Internship placements may include NGOs or research teams working in topics such as: designing environmental campaigns, plan environmental education programs, monitor ecosystems, habitats and species, conservation activities, pollution (rural and urban), support environmental activism, local peoples' and human rights, and other related topics according to the student's interests.

Each student will be required to submit a final paper in which they process their learning experience on the internship and link those reflections to core program themes. Approved in advance by the academic director, the internship supervisor, the internship paper may involve interviews and other data collection methods relevant to achieving internship learning goals. Students will also do a final presentation to demonstrate how the internship experience enhanced their understanding of the SIT program theme and its Critical Global Issue focus. Rubrics for the paper and presentation will be shared with students before the internship begins.

Learning Outcomes

The Internship & Seminar comprises 225 hours for five academic credits. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate awareness of the ethics involved in doing an internship in the context of Ecuadorian environmental movements;
- Describe, analyze, and synthesize their learning experience in the internship in the form of an internship paper;
- Articulate new learning from the internship experience in the form of an oral presentation;
- Show understanding of environmental movements in Ecuador and their activities, such as, but not limited to: environmental campaigns, planning environmental education programs, monitoring ecosystems, habitats and species, environmental activism, local peoples' and indigenous rights, and other related fields;
- Assess the challenges of specific environmental problems, such as deforestation, the petroleum industry in the Ecuadorian Amazon Region and its environmental impacts, mining in general, agroindustry and monocultures, environmental pollution in urban and rural settings, overfishing and over-tourism in the Galapagos Islands, introduced species in the Galapagos, and other challenges;
- Gain meaningful and practical experience in their chosen field.

Prerequisites

Two semesters of college-level Spanish

Language of Instruction

This course is taught primarily in Spanish, and English when needed. Students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content as well as the nuances of the program through expert lectures and their internship experience.

Instructional Methods

SIT's teaching and learning philosophy is grounded in the experiential learning theory developed by Kolb (1984; 2015) and informed by various scholars, such as Dewey, Piaget, Lewin, among others. Experiential learning theory recognizes that learning is an active process that is not confined to the formal curriculum; "knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (Kolb, 2015, p. 49). Learning involves both content and process. Learning is holistic and happens through various life experiences upon which students draw to generate new ways of knowing and being. Learning involves a community and is a lifelong endeavor. Learning is transformational. The suggested four step-cycle of a *concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation* embedded in the experiential learning model is not linear and might not always happen in that specific order, as any learning is highly context dependent. These stages of taking part in a shared experience; reflecting on that experience by describing and interpreting it; challenging their own assumptions and beliefs to generate new knowledge; and ultimately applying new knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes in a variety of situations and contexts are important for students to engage in to become empowered lifelong learners.

Assignments and Evaluation

At the end of the internship period, students are expected to present their work to the group. Assessment of both written work and the oral presentation is based on quality, academic scholarship, and adherence to the highest ethical standards.

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Participation in Synchronous and Asynchronous Activities (10%)

Students are expected to engage with the synchronous and asynchronous activities through participation in discussions, posting on the course discussion forum, and responding to any prompts assigned by the internship instructor. Engagement is key to personal, academic, and professional development during the internship.

2) (2) Progress Reports (10%)

The progress report should document the student's progress toward achieving their learning objectives during the internship. Students also document the challenges they face and how they try to deal with those challenges. Students submit two progress reports in the course of their internship experience, each worth 5%.

3) Internship Performance (35%)

This evaluation by the Academic Director and the internship supervisor assesses the student's internship experience, overall professional achievements, and self-growth.

4) Oral Presentation (10%)

In the presentation, you should provide a succinct and clear description of the internship

experience, a brief history of the organization where you interned, the activities undertaken, and key insights gained that are related to the core program themes. You should demonstrate effective management of the discussion with the audience and attend to the aesthetic elements of the delivery.

5) Final Paper (35%)

Students are expected to submit a 15-20 page final paper at the end of their internship experience. The final paper should include a title, list of acknowledgments, and an abstract. The paper should also have an introduction which describes the work and history of the organization and incorporates several references, detailed description of the activities accomplished, and strong and innovative aspects of the organization. The final paper must include thoughtfully articulated analytical writing that addresses positionality and ethics and connects learning at the internship to the broader themes of the semester program and/or the investigation of one or more specific questions. The paper should be well written, well organized, and aesthetically pleasing. A summary of the final paper assessment rubric will be shared with students in advance. (Example at the end of syllabus.)

Assessment of the Internship

Participation in Synchronous and Asynchronous Activities	10%
Progress Report	5%
Progress Report	5%
Internship Performance	35%
Oral Presentation	10%
Final Paper	35%

Attendance and Participation

Criteria for evaluation of student performance include participation in synchronous and asynchronous activities. Unjustified absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments

The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (internship). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an 'F' for the assignment.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A
90-93%	A-
87-89%	B+

84-86%	B
80-83%	B-
77-79%	C+
74-76%	C
70-73%	C-
67-69%	D+
64-66%	D
below 64%	F

Program Expectations

- Show up prepared, on time, and appropriately dressed for your internship. Comply with organization rules.
- Ask questions when in the field/office. Engage yourself in everyday life of the organization and initiate interaction.
- Have progress report assignments completed on schedule and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (those of your internship supervisor and colleagues, classmates, local constituents). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
- Course Communication: Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- Content Considerations: Some texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our virtual classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, the AD will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with the AD and/or seek help from counseling services.
- Virtual classroom recording policy: To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.
- Report to work prepared and appropriately dressed for your virtual internship. Respect organization rules.
- Follow proper guidelines for courteous communication in an online environment.

SIT Policies and Resources

Please refer to the [SIT Study Abroad Handbook](#) and the [Policies](#) section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as [Library resources and research support](#), [Disability Services](#), [Counseling Services](#), [Title IX information](#), and [Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#) resources.

Course Schedule

Module I: Critical Global Issue in the Ecuadorian Context

In this module, students get an introduction to the theme of the program while examining the critical global issue in the context of the program country and how it relates to their internship experience.

The aim of this module is to provide students with an introduction to the environmental & conservation context of Ecuador, including the main regions and ecosystems, and the impacts on the socio-economic realm both at local and Country levels. The most important environmental problems will be revised, and their specific environmental impacts. An analysis of the most active NGOs will be undertaken, including their skills and capacity to conduct science research, conservation, and social actions on the ground. Emphasis will be given to some concrete campaigns/actions developed by NGOs which should provide practical examples for students to choose their topics and develop their internship experiences.

Session 1: Deforestation, Ecosystem Transformation, and Historical Origins

This session studies the main causes and the historical context of deforestation in Ecuador, including ecosystem fragmentation, and ecosystem transformation due to human activities, such as agroindustry, cattle ranching, agricultural practices in general, and urban development. The most important environmental, social, and economic impacts will be discussed to create a general understanding of this specific problem.

Session 2: The Petroleum & Mining Industries in Ecuador, History and Current Impacts

For this session, a critical analysis of the petroleum and mining industries will be undertaken, their historical origins, and their current environmental, social, and economic impacts in Ecuador. The most important examples will be studied in the context of the local human communities and their ecosystems in general. The main social movements will be analyzed including the Amazonian Indigenous groups against petroleum, and the Andean communities fighting metal mining, such as copper, gold, silver, and other mining activities.

Session 3: Biodiversity Loss & Conservation Actions

This session analyzes the most important cases of flora and fauna depletion to gain an understanding of the current biodiversity loss problem in Ecuador. The main conservation actions of NGOs working in this topic will be discussed, including science research and their specific on-the-ground techniques to palliate or reverse the extinction processes. The Galapagos case regarding the negative impact of introduced species will be analyzed, as well as human population growth and overfishing problems due to an increasing tourism industry in the Galapagos Archipelago.

Session 4: The Increasing Urban Environmental Problems in Ecuador

For this session, the exponential growth of the most important cities of Ecuador will be studied, including their main urban environmental problems, such as air pollution, mobility, noise, security, and the increasing encroachment of surrounding agricultural and natural areas. The case of Quito will be analyzed, plus the current proposal actions and future programs planned by the Quito Municipality.

Required Readings:

- Astudillo, Pedro X., Santiago Barros, David C. Siddons & Edwin Zárate. (2017). *Influence of habitat modification by livestock on páramo bird abundance in southern Andes of Ecuador*. Studies on Neotropical Fauna and Environment, DOI: 10.1080/01650521.2017.1382122
- Baynard, Chris W, James M. Ellis, Hattie Davis. (2012). *Roads, petroleum, and accessibility: the case of eastern Ecuador*. GeoJournal DOI 10.1007/s10708-012-9459-5
- Joslin, Audrey. (2019). *Translating Water Fund Payments for Ecosystem Services in the Ecuadorian Andes*. International Institute of Social Studies Development and Change 51(1): 94–116. DOI: 10.1111/dech.12542
- Juen, Leandro et. al. (2016). *Effects of Oil Palm Plantations on the Habitat Structure and Biota of Streams in Eastern Amazon: Effect of Oil Palm on the Structure of Stream*. River Research and Applications.
- Rudel, Thomas K., Diane Bates, and Rafael Machinguishi. (2002, ed. 2019). *Ecologically Noble Amerindians? Cattle Ranching and Cash Cropping among Shuar and Colonists in Ecuador*. Latin American Research Review, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2002), pp. 144-159.

Recommended Readings:

- Ansell, Felicity, David P. Edwards¹, and Keith C. Hamer. (2011). *Rehabilitation of Logged Rain Forests: Avifaunal Composition, Habitat Structure, and Implications for Biodiversity-Friendly Programs REDD1*. BIOTROPICA 43(4): 504–511 2011.
- Pesantes, A., Carpio, E., Vitvar, T., López, M., & Menéndez-Aguado, J. (2019). *A Multi-Index Analysis Approach to Heavy Metal Pollution Assessment in River Sediments in the Ponce Enríquez Area, Ecuador*. Water, 11(3), 590.
- Venturina, Eric M., Francis A. Drummond^{a,b}, Aaron K. Hoshide^c, Alison C. Dibble^a, and Lois B. Stack^b (2017). *Pollination reservoirs for wild bee habitat enhancement in cropping systems: a review*. AGROECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS 2017, VOL. 41, NO. 2, 101–142.

Module II: Making the Most of Your Internship

This module occurs prior to the start of the internship and will prepare students for the demands and expectations of an internship, strategies for success, and academic requirements.

Session 1: Setting the Stage

This session reviews objectives for the internship. Students meet with the academic director following confirmation of their internship placement and discuss expectations, timeframes and other logistics, structural components of the final internship paper, content, layout, and general guidelines.

Session 2: Positionality and Internship Ethics/Awareness

1. What do you bring to your role as intern that may influence how you perceive and engage in the internship experience?
 - a. Stereotypes and preconceptions about interning in Ecuador
 - b. What are your motivations? How do you imagine your role?
2. Introduction to Work Culture in Ecuador
3. Introduction to Internship – visit and develop understanding of context and position in field/country
4. Ethics in Internships: This is an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the ethics of engaging in internships in an international context in general and in Ecuador in particular.

Session 3: The Internship Learning Agreement

Central to a successful internship experience is development of the Internship Learning Agreement. The academic director will work with students individually and as a group to review the purpose of the Internship Learning Agreement. The academic director will discuss student strategies for collaborating with the internship supervisor to design the contents of the Internship Learning Agreement in adherence to internship learning objectives and in collaboration with the internship supervisor at the host organization. The Agreement also helps to ensure a clear understanding of the objectives of the internship among the student, academic director, and internship supervisor.

Once internship placements are confirmed, the students, together with the academic director will review objectives for the internship and discuss expectations, learning agreements, timeframes and other logistics, structural components of the final internship paper, content, layout, and general guidelines.

Required Readings:

Sweitzer, Frederick and King, Mary (2013). *The Successful Internship: Personal, Professional and Civic Development in Experiential Learning (4th Edition)*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole Chapters 1-5.

Recommended Readings:

González-Merizalde, M., Menezes-Filho, V., Cruz-Erazo, J., Bermeo-Flores, A., Sánchez-Castillo, C., Hernández-Bonilla, T., & Mora, S. (2016). *Manganese and Mercury Levels in Water, Sediments, and Children Living Near Gold-Mining Areas of the Nangaritza River Basin, Ecuadorian Amazon*. Archives of Environmental Contamination and Toxicology, 71(2), 171-182.

Harari, R., Harari, F., Gerhardsson, L., Lundh, T., Skerfving, S., Strömberg, U., & Broberg, K. (2012). *Exposure and toxic effects of elemental mercury in gold-mining activities in Ecuador*. *Toxicology Letters*, 213(1), 75-82.

Module III: The Internship Experience: Review and Reflection

This module occurs after students have begun their internship. Critical, guided reflection will play a key role in student development and learning during the internship. Students will keep an internship journal in which they respond to the questions/issues listed below. Journaling should be done daily, keeping in mind the learning objectives. Students will submit two progress reports on their successes and limitations toward achieving learning objectives. Students will also meet with their instructor and other internship students for reflection and discussion during the internship.

Internship observations: *How is the professional environment different from what you are used to? What are you learning about working collaboratively in this environment? How do you find yourself reacting to and adjusting to workplace practices that are different from what you are accustomed to? How does it feel to be a intern in this environment? Why?*

Theory and Practice: Digging Deeper: *How does the work of your internship site connect to important program themes? How has the experience at your internship challenged or affirmed the arguments in a reading or lecture from this semester?*

Skills and Experience: *What insights to this field have you gained through your internship? What skills are most valuable for this internship site and what opportunities have you had to improve your skills in this area? What has challenged you and how are you handling those challenges? How do you see this experience preparing you for future opportunities?*

Learning Goals: *How much progress have you made toward your learning goals? What experiences or activities have contributed to your ability to meet them? Are you learning something important you didn't anticipate and would like to add to your Learning Goals at this time?*

Recommended Reading:

Sweitzer, F. and King, M. (2013). *The Successful Internship: Personal, Professional and Civic Development in Experiential Learning (4th Edition)*. Belmont, CA: Brooks/Cole (select chapters).

Module IV: Processing and Maximizing the Internship Experience

The final module occurs toward the end or after the internship and focuses on ways of processing and articulating the internship as well as equipping students with practical tips and strategies for making the most of the experience personally, academically, and professionally. Students will reflect on the internship experience and process the learning that occurred in a safe and supportive context. The internship may have been a different experience than expected, may challenge the student's expectations of interning in a new environment, and may change the

student's perspective of life projects or professional goals. The module discusses ways of acknowledging both the successes and failures of the internship, with an emphasis personal reflection, and setting realistic goals for the future.

Additional seminar content will include:

1. Processing the conclusion of the internship experience
2. Closure with colleagues and supervisors
3. Articulating the experience through an oral presentation
4. Next Steps: How to include your internship on your résumé, how to frame the internship in a cover letter, and other ways to build on this experience.

RUBRIC: Internship Paper	
Category	Possible Considerations
Title / Acknowledgements / Abstract/Technical Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The title is succinct and captures the essence of the internship experience -The acknowledgements are complete and professionally written -The abstract clearly summarizes the internship experience and learning outcomes -Table of contents, In-text citations, and reference list or bibliography are done correctly and completely -There are no mistakes in writing & grammar, spelling & punctuation -The paper is clean, legible, well-formatted, professional in appearance, and aesthetically pleasing
Contextualization and Organizational Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Important themes and background information are provided so reader understands the field in which the internship organization operates -The history and work of the internship organization, how its work relates to the program theme, and how it fits into the context of other similar organizations are all accurately described -The organizational structure, including division of responsibilities and the goals, objectives and activities of the organization are well elaborated -Care is taken not to harm by criticism, nor evaluate -The community served by the organization is described in sufficient detail
Internship Focus/Objectives/Justification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The paper specifies the focus area of the internship within the organization's broader work -The objectives of the internship are clearly presented and appropriate; how the objectives relate to the program theme and/or Critical Global Issue are clearly described. -The student's internship tasks/duties at the organization are presented and justified.
Information Acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -How information was gathered in order to compose the final internship paper is explained in a clear and accurate manner and supporting materials are included in appendices (if applicable) -A clear and complete description of the work undertaken is given, including dates and hours worked (put in an addendum).
Positionality and Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The paper acknowledges the intern's views, values, beliefs and other aspects of their personal background that influence their worldview. - The paper demonstrates ongoing self-reflection throughout the internship experience in relation to their positionality. -Human Subjects policies and ethical guidelines are adhered to and thoroughly discussed -Appropriate consideration is given to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality of participants, in keeping with human subjects protocols and the approved internship learning agreement -The internship strengthens relationships and contributes to mutual trust between the author, the organization and its clientele in ways that are respectful, culturally appropriate, and collaborative -The internship project is responsive to host organization and/or host community needs, as applicable

Critical Reflection on Internship Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The description of tasks and responsibilities is clear. -The paper examines the extent to which objectives were achieved, how objectives changed or evolved over the course of the internship experience. -Key professional lessons learned through the internship experience are described with specific examples -A personal evaluation of performance in the internship is included with suggestions of how it could have been improved. -Ways in which student identity may have shaped their insights of the internship experience are described
Analysis of Critical Issues/Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The manner in which the organization and its work are linked to the core themes of the program is described. -Analysis is given by comparing and contrasting the theory of the work/field studied throughout the semester with the practice of the work at the specific internship site. -Clear articulation of how the intern's knowledge and understanding of the core themes of the program were enhanced through the internship experience.
Conclusions & Recommendations for Future Interns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The main insights and lessons learned through the internship experience are detailed -Recommendations of opportunities or projects for future interns are described.