Human Ecology and Conservation in the Tropics

ENVI 3000 (3 Credits / 45 class hours)

SIT Study Abroad Program:
Panama: Tropical Ecology, Marine Ecosystems, and Biodiversity Conservation

Course Description
This course studies the relationships, challenges, and conundrums that exist between human use of the natural resource base and its conservation. Students study the roots and causes of deforestation, hunting, mangrove clearing, overfishing, hydroelectric dam building as well as projects, programs, movements, and initiatives aimed at addressing the social and environmental consequences of these. Through lectures from academics, researchers, and community leaders, students gain insight into and learn about the challenges local and regional populations face as they seek to conserve their natural resources. Students live with and learn from diverse populations when they engage in rural homestays with subsistence agriculturalists, fisher families, families living in protected areas, and in urban homes.

Course Objectives
Objectives of this course include:
- Introduce students to the major challenges to conservation and their intersection with human survival in Panama and in the tropics in general.
- Provide students the opportunity to become intimately familiar with current projects that impact the Panamanian natural resource base and their profound effect on local populations.
- Enable students to assess how global trends, national policy, and rural-urban dichotomies affect local resource use and decisionmaking.

Expected Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, students should have attained the following:
- An intimate understanding of the principle human and environmental factors that induce resource use, conservation and/or conflict in Panama.
- Greater awareness of the challenges local populations and resource users face when determining and making decisions over resource use.

*This syllabus is representative of a typical semester. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.
- First-hand experience and knowledge of the effects policy, consumption, and international factors have on local populations and the environment.

Course Structure and Readings
Readings
Students are responsible for all the required readings, and should be prepared to bring them to bear during program activities. The readings aim to help students place the classes in their context, to engage lecturers, to generate questions for class discussions, and to deepen students’ knowledge of particular topics.

Introduction to Panamanian History
Instructor: Professor Fernando Aparicio
Site visit: Panama Viejo

Introduction to Poverty, Culture and their Impact on the Ecology
Instructor: Dr. Olmedo Varela
Site visit: Boca La Caja
- MEF fact sheet on poverty in panama
- The Economist Series on Panama (read the three articles)

Political Systems and the Environment
Instructor: Dr. Osvaldo Jordán
Site visit: Bayano Watershed
- Readings assigned by professor

Subsistence Farming and Resource Use
Instructor: Ruben Gonzalez

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Site visit: Loma Bonita, Coclé; Chitré, Herrera; Purio, Los Santos

- Dagang A. 2004 A Summary of Agricultural Land Use and Land Tenure in the Republic of Panama. Proyecto de Reforestacion con Especies Nativas (PRORENA), Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, Panama. 26 p.

**Indigenous Populations of Panama and Resource Use**
Instructor: Professor Francisco Herrrera
Site visit: Naso Territory; Silico Creek, Comarca Ngabe-Buglé


**Transitional farming, coffee and, environmental challenges in the Panamanian highlands**
Instructor: Ruben Gonzalez
Site visit: Guadalupe, Cerro Punta (UNESCO Biosphere buffer zone)

- Readings to be assigned by professor

**Agricultural Technology Generation, Conservation, and Education**
Instructor: Ruben Gonzales
Site: EARTH University, Costa Rica

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Course Requirements

Assignments
Timely completion of all assignments is expected. Late hand-ins will be penalized. All assignments are evaluated according to organization, analytical quality, depth of understanding, argumentation, and presentation of evidence.

Course assignments consist of the following:

Community comparison 25%
Discussion questions (all sections) 30%
Group project 25%
Participation 20%

Participation is crucial to student success in this course and will be gauged based on student contribution to discussions, involvement during excursions, respect for the host culture, punctuality, cooperation, and flexibility. Attendance at all program activities is mandatory.

Grading Scales and Criteria
Grades are given both fairly and rigorously and in accordance with the system below. They will reflect a combination of absolute quality of performance, progress made, and the ability to take into account and assimilate the Academic Director’s and the teachers’ advice in assessing the work done. An “A” letter grade reflects exceptional work, perfect combination of academic competencies and personal research and analysis. It shows great ability to integrate field-based investigation and personal reflection into a structured and well-argued paper. A “B” letter grade reflects serious and methodical work as well as a substantial effort at analyzing and understanding cross-cultural issues. A “C” letter grade shows the work meets the requirements but needs more in-depth reflection and personal involvement. A “D” letter grade is insufficient and clearly reflects lack of work or serious deficiencies.

The grading scale for all classes is as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-83%</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>77-79%</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>74-76%</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-73%</td>
<td>C-</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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67-69%  D+
64-66%  D
below 64  F

Please see the SIT Study Abroad student handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, academic warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment, and the academic appeals process.

Please Note: Course contents, lecturers, and readings may be modified as needed. Should any change of class topics or lecturers may be necessary, students will be promptly notified.