



THE SCHOOL
FOR FIELD STUDIES

Justice, Resilience, and the Environment

SFS 3821

Syllabus

The School for Field Studies (SFS)
Center for Ecological Resilience Studies
Atenas, Costa Rica

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

www.fieldstudies.org

© 2025 The School for Field Studies



COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that may present. In other words, the elephants are not always where we want them to be, so be flexible!

Course Overview

Justice, Resilience, and the Environment (JRE) explores the concepts of justice, conflict, and social change within the Costa Rican context. Costa Rica is renowned for its significant efforts in forest regeneration and biodiversity protection. Tourism campaigns to highlight the tropical wonders often obscure the struggle between human development goals and the rights of nature. We will examine the connection between postcolonial practices and current development strategies to better understand Costa Rica's efforts to protect people's rights while honoring the rights of nature.

This course assesses community attempts to resist existing structural and institutional arrangements and encourage social change to better meet human needs in balance with the environment. We will see how groups create accountability through grassroots knowledge and power in Costa Rica, locating theory in concrete examples. We will analyze key themes of resilience-building including indigenous land rights struggles, agroecological production, seed sovereignty, and agrotourism.

Working with community stakeholders, students will conduct first-hand analysis of social issues. They will develop skills essential to future advocacy, community organization and the insights necessary for social change. Projects will examine the significance of social research in struggles for social justice. Field experiences in this course include working with indigenous communities, regenerative farmers, and communities tackling waste management issues. Students will conduct quantitative and qualitative research to prepare written, oral, and visual presentations that reflect their understanding of justice and social change. This fieldwork will prepare students for a final directed research project on the intersection of social and environmental justice challenges.

Learning Objectives

The core skills students will learn in this course are critical thinking and analysis, field techniques, communication skills as well as collaboration and time management. The specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. Analyze the key stakeholders and historical events that have shaped Costa Rica's development and assess their influence on contemporary development strategies and rights protection.
2. To familiarize you with the concepts and methods of resilience as they relate to development, public policy making, environmental laws, and public attitudes towards human interaction with and dependence on the natural environment.
3. Recognize and respect alternative ways of knowing and communicating, including indigenous practices, rural practices and artistic expressions.
4. To critically analyze the complexities in environmental issues, including responsibility to future generations, the moral standing of both human and non-human species, sustainability in the context of human development, global environmental challenges, and environmental justice.
5. To critically assess alternative approaches to responsibility to nature through an environmental justice framework. To differentiate diversity-building and extractive practices in agriculture including social and environmental effects.
6. Examine the socio-economic and environmental effects of tourism on individuals and communities. Use data analysis to propose effective strategies for promoting regenerative tourism.
7. To formulate your own social and environmental justice ethic and to articulate and defend these ideas with clarity and consistency.

Assessment

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Field Lab	20
Field Exercise	20
Journal Reflections	10
Midterm Project	25
Final Essay	15
Participation	10
TOTAL	100

Field Lab: Community School Garden Co-Design (20%)

Gardens can teach individual and community resiliency in times of emergency, pockets of food insecurity, and the challenges presented by climate change. Through this FEX we focus on the role gardens play in providing access to food and building resilience among school-aged children. Our objectives include: Understand the role of gardens in enhancing food security and community resilience.

- Engage in a co-design process that considers the needs, challenges, and opportunities of the school and community.
- Use information from a needs assessment with a local elementary school currently developing a school garden.
- Emphasize accessibility, sustainability, and educational opportunities in the garden's design.
- Great and present a learning project for elementary students using the garden space on themes that the will help the student be involved in the garden space.

Field Exercise: Local tourism interest assessment (20%)

In rural areas, tourism can significantly contribute to sustainable local economic development. However, many tourists are unaware of or uninterested in the importance of supporting local producers and entrepreneurs. Our FLAB will evaluate tourists' awareness and interest levels regarding locally produced food and goods in Monteverde by conducting surveys. We will share our findings with "Hecho en Monteverde," an initiative establishing a local origin certification to help inform tourists of the benefits of buying local while traveling.

Journal Reflections (10%)

You will be assigned various reflection topics to write about in your JRE journal throughout the semester. Reflections may connect class concepts and readings to field experiences, your own lived experiences or other insights you want to explore. You will be asked to share your insights with the class, but the professor will not collect and read the entries. These notebooks are your space to process and develop ideas.

Midterm Project (25%)

Preservation of functioning ecosystems depends on the reorientation of food systems to ensure a resilient food chain from production to consumption. Current conventional food production systems based on mechanization and agrochemicals are neither environmentally nor socially sustainable. Costa Rica is experiencing challenges to local food sovereignty. Over 90% of the seeds used in Costa Rica are not certified by any producer, such as large agroindustry corporations. Most food is cultivated in monocultures and much of that is exported abroad.

Students will use the SFS campus and new green house to create projects that expand sustainable food production on campus and increase learning opportunities. Students will begin with project proposal development, moving through detailed design phases, and culminating in actual implementation of projects based on campus needs and personal interest/experience. Projects may include garden design, seed germination experiments, testing variables on crop productivity, inter-cropping, plants relationship in the food forestry system and food processing. Students are encouraged to incorporate local and traditional knowledge in their designs and sustainable food projects. The main aims of the project are for students to gain experience improving local production and enhance resilience through innovative ecological design.

Final Essay (15%)

The final JRE essay is a reflection on the themes of development, exploitation, and resilience in Latin America, as depicted in the Beehive Collective's artwork Mesoamérica Resiste. Students will connect the topics of social, economic and economic destruction and collective opposition illustrated in the artwork by identifying and analyzing themes of resistance through socioeconomic and environmental justice.

Participation (10%)

A student's ability to synthesize and share ideas is critical to the individual and classroom learning process. Participation in class and a general high contribution to group learning are expected at SFS. One's ability to be a strong member of a learning community will enhance the grade assigned at the end of the program. Evaluation will reflect your actual contribution to the analyses, not simply the amount of time you talk. Thus, making thoughtful contributions that build upon topics of discussion are an important element of participation.

Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

General Reminders

Honor Code/Plagiarism – SFS places high expectations on their students and we hold students accountable for their behaviors. SFS students are held to the honor code below. SFS has a zero-tolerance policy towards student cheating, plagiarism, data falsification, and any other form of dishonest academic and/or research practice or behavior. Using the ideas or material of others without giving due credit is cheating and will not be tolerated. Any SFS student found to have engaged in or facilitated academic and/or research dishonesty will receive no credit (0%) for that activity.

“SFS does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in any form. While participating in an SFS program, students are expected to refrain from cheating, plagiarism and any other behavior which would result in a student receiving credit for work which they did not accomplish on their own. Students are expected to report any instance of cheating or plagiarism by others.”

Deadlines – Deadlines for assignments are established to promote equity among students, to allow faculty enough time to review and return comments and grades before other assignments are due, and to avoid

clashes with other activities and courses. Therefore, deadlines are firm, and extensions will only be considered under extreme circumstances. When appropriate, the files should be placed in the assigned folder within the students drive on the server. Late assignments will incur a 10% penalty for each day that they are late. Papers submitted after 3 days of the dateline will not be accepted. Please plan to avoid such situations. Assignments will be handed back to students within one-week grading period.

Readings – Assigned readings will be provided in a packet before the course begins. It is important that you read all materials before class since the volume of the material in the class requires a brisk pace. You are expected to have read all the assigned articles. In some classes, students will be assigned to lead the group by highlighting important concepts and raising questions for the group to consider/discuss.

Content Statement – Every student comes to SFS with unique life experiences, which contribute to the way various information is processed. Some of the content in this course may be intellectually or emotionally challenging but has been intentionally selected to achieve certain learning goals and/or showcase the complexity of many modern issues. If you anticipate a challenge engaging with a certain topic or find that you are struggling with certain discussions, we encourage you to talk about it with faculty, friends, family, the HWM, or access available mental health resources.

Participation – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the course is mandatory, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and class activities, and simply get involved.

Course Content

Type - **L**: Lecture, **D**: Discussion, **FEX**: Field Experience, **FL**: Field Lecture, **LAB**: Lab/Workshop

No	Title and outline	Type	Time	Required Readings
1	Costa Rica’s social structure and development What historical, political, and economic factors have advanced and limited Costa Rica’s sustainable development model?	L; D	1.5	Sada, The Curious Case of Costa Rica.
2	Development: Comparing theories What underlying worldview paradigms form our relationship to animals, nature and ecological and social resources? Is development the best paradigm for the future we want?	L; D	1.5	Hopwood, Sus. Dev: Mapping Different Approaches Escobar, degrowth, post development, and transitions
3	Community Resilience Building How do we create regenerative societies from existing development frameworks?	L; D	1.5	Bendell, Deep adaptation Raworth, Why it’s Time for Doughnut Economics
4	CR Food Systems Examine the impacts of conventional agricultural systems & why they persist. Discuss the social, environmental and economic aspects of alternative include permaculture, agroecology and agroforestry. Are there policies and practices that can help shift from conventional to sustainable food production systems?	L; D	1.5	Haeger, Little, Amel, & Calderón, “Transformation Toward Sustainability on a Costa Rican Coffee Farm”

No	Title and outline	Type	Time	Required Readings
5	Manu Field Trip Discussion: Monoculture and culture, history of the creation of monoculture and culture in Latin American and Costa Rica, social and environmental impacts of monoculture.	FT	2.0	Vandermeer & Perfecto, Breakfast of Biodiversity, Chap. 1
6	DR Report Writing Familiarize students with the style and format expected for reports and DR	L	1.0	
7	School Garden Project Learn about school garden project, the co-design process and project planning	FEX	2.0	Wake, "Bringing schools to life through a co-design learning approach with children"
8	Finca Orgánica San Luis Farm tour to see and learn about organic production, farmer-to-customer food delivery, and Seed Plantea seed business	FT	2.0	Peschard, Keeping seeds in our hands
9	School Garden Project Work on educational project and presentation	FEX	2.0	
10	Indigenous Rights and Reality in CR Indigenous cultures in Costa Rica, concepts of nature and identity and conservation objectives and indigenous people's roles in land management. How can indigenous people protect their lands and cultures within existing frameworks?	L; D	1.0	Sylvester, O. et al. The Protection of Forest Biodiversity can Conflict with Food Access for Indigenous People
11	School Garden Design Continue with garden design and project presentations	FEX	2.0	Pollinator Garden School Garden Resources (uga.edu)
12	Quitirrisí Food Security and Culture Field Lecture – Indigenous food security How can indigenous people uphold principles of food as a commons, respect for land and its gifts, and feeding their community?	FT	2.0	Gálvez. "People of the Corn" Mares & Pena, Environmental and Food Justice Toward Local, Slow, and Deep Food Systems
13	Mastatal - La Iguana Chocolate Farm Discuss the social, environmental and economic aspects of alternative include permaculture, agroecology and agroforestry. How is climate change impacting food production and how are communities building resilience?	FT	4.0	Little & Blau, Social adaptation and climate mitigation through agrotourism: a tourism case study in Mastatal, Costa Rica
14	Debriefing on Mastatal Field Trip Reading Discussion: Social adaptation and climate mitigation through agrotourism	D	1.0	
15	DR Presentation Describe JRE DR direct research project	O	1.0	

No	Title and outline	Type	Time	Required Readings
16	Extractive Economies and Gender The role of gender in colonialism and development, gender perceptions of work and care, national and regional protection mechanisms, and past and present gender roles in Costa Rica. How do historical gender expectations influence development today?	L; D	1.5	Patel & Moore, "Cheap Care" Shiva, "Everything I Need to Know I Learned in the Forest"
17	Regenerative Tourism in Costa Rica Measuring environmental and social impacts of tourism, local determination and tourist responsibility. How can communities have more control to ensure local benefits? What is the role of tourists as consumers of place, culture?	L; D	2.0	Higgins-Desbiolles, Introduction: Socialising Tourism Honey, M. (2008). "Off the Beaten Path"
18	Monteverde Field Trip Visit Monteverde Reserve with a focus on community conservation and ecotourism. Visit sustainable coffee farm. Introduction to Monteverde Institute's work on community-driven development projects.	FT; GL	4.0	
19	FEX Data Management Enter Monteverde Survey Data Discuss FLAB assignment	FLAB	1.0	
20	Midterm Project Preparation Activity introduction and students select projects	O	1.5	
21	Casa del Alto Community directed tourism Agrotourism's role in cultural preservation	FT	2.0	
22	Final Exam Essay Apply resilience and community action principles to topics. Discuss <i>Resiste Mesoamerica</i>	D; L	1.5	Mesoamérica Resiste Beehive Design Collective (beehivecollective.org)
		Total	50.5	
	UMN Instructional Hours*			

*[UMN defines](#) an instructional hour as a 50-minute block. SFS syllabi are written in full 60-minute hours for programming purposes. Therefore 50 full hours = 60 UMN instructional hours (for four credit courses) and 25 full hours = 30 UMN instructional hours (for two credit courses).

Reading List

1. Adger, W. N. Social and ecological resilience: are they related? *Progress in Human Geography* 24(3): 347-364. 2000.
2. Beder, S. Costing the Earth: Equity, Sustainable Development and Environmental Economics, *New Zealand Journal of Environmental Law*, 4, 2000, 227-243.
3. Gálvez, A. "People of the Corn" in *Eating NAFTA: Trade, food and the destruction of Mexico*, Oakland: University of California Press. 2018.
4. Gawande, A., Costa Ricans Live Longer Than We Do. What's the Secret?, *New Yorker*, Aug. 23, 2021,
5. Higgins-Desbiolles, F. Introduction: Socialising Tourism in *Socialising Tourism: Reimagining tourism's purpose*, (eds. HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES, F., DOERING, A., CHEW BIGBY, B.)
6. Hopwood, B., Mellor, M., & O'Brien, G. (2005). Sustainable Development: mapping different approaches. *Sustainable Development*, 13, 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.244>
7. Hunt, C. A., Durham, W. H., Driscoll, L., & Honey, M. (2015). Can ecotourism deliver real economic, social, and environmental benefits? A study of the Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 23(3), 339-357.
8. Mares, T. & Pena. D. (2011). Environmental and Food Justice Toward Local, Slow, and Deep Food Systems.
9. Patel, R. and J. Moore, *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, Univ. of California Press, 2017.
10. Peschard, K. and Randeria, S. (2020). 'Keeping seeds in our hands': the rise of seed activism, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47:4, 613-647, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1753705
11. Raworth, K. (2017) *The Doughnut Economy: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-century Economist*. London: Random House Business Books.
12. Sada, M.J., The Curious Case of Costa Rica, *Harvard International Review*, Sept. 17, 2015.
13. Shiva, V., "Everything I Need to Know I Learned in the Forest", *Yes! Magazine*, Dec., 2012.
14. Singer, P., All Animals Are Equal. *Philosophical Exchange* 1, (1974), 103-116.
15. Sylvester, O., et al. The Protection of Forest Biodiversity can Conflict with Food Access for Indigenous People, *Conservation and Society* 14(3): 279-290 2016.

Suggested readings:

1. Baatz, A., Climate change and individual duties to reduce GHG emissions. *Ethics, Policy and Environmental*, 17(1), 1-19.
2. Banerjee, J and E. Duflo. *Poor Economics*, Chapter 1, 2011.

3. Cafer A, Green J, Goreham G. A community resilience framework for community development practitioners building equity and adaptive capacity. *Community Dev.* 2019;50(2):201–216. doi:10.1080/15575330.2019.1575442
4. Hardin, G. The Tragedy of the Commons, *Science*, Vol. 162, No. 3859 (13 December 1968), pp. 1243-1248.
5. Colbert, E. “A Reporter’s Field Notes on the Coverage of Climate Change”, *The Yale Environment 360*, March 11, 2009.
6. Hawken, P. *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2017.
7. King, C.A. Community Resilience and Contemporary Agri-Ecological Systems: Reconnecting People and Food, and People with People. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*
8. *Syst. Res.* 25, 111-124. 2008.
9. Klein, N. No is Not Enough, Chapter 4, *The Climate Clock Strikes Midnight*, 2017.
10. Koepfel, D. *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World*. Hudson Street Press, 2008.
11. Magis K. Community resilience: an indicator of social sustainability. *Soc Nat Resour.* 2010;23(5):401–416. doi:10.1080/08941920903305674
12. Mann, Charles. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York, Knopf, 2006.
13. Mann, Charles. *The Prophet and the Wizard: Two Remarkable Scientists and Their Dueling Visions to Shape Tomorrow's World*, 2018, New York, Knopf.
14. McCrea R, Walton A, Leonard R. A conceptual framework for investigating community wellbeing and resilience. *Rural Soc.* 2015;23(3):270–282. doi:10.1080/10371656.2014.11082070
15. McDonough, W., & Braungart, M. *Cradle to cradle: Remaking the way we make things*, London: Vintage, 2009.
16. MacLennan, M. and Perch, L., Environmental justice in Latin America and the Caribbean: Legal empowerment of the poor in the context of climate change, *Climate Law* 3, 283–309, 2012.
17. National Academy of Sciences, “Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change”, 2010.
18. Patel , Raj & Moore, Jason. *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. 2018.
19. Paterson, B. Ethics for Wildlife Conservation: Overcoming the Human–Nature Dualism, *BioScience*, Volume 56, Issue 2, 1 February 2006, Pages 144–150.
20. Peschard, K. & Randeria S, ‘Keeping seeds in our hands’: the rise of seed activism, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47:4, 613-647, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1753705
21. Pollen, M. *The Botany of Desire*, Chapter 4 Potato, Random House, 2002.
22. Purdy, J., Our place in the world: A new relationship for environmental ethics and law. *Duke Law Journal*, 62(4), 857-932.
23. Raworth, K. (2017) *The Doughnut Economy: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-century Economist*. London: Random House Business Books.
24. Sachs, J. *The Age of Sustainable Development*, Colombia Press, 2015, Chapters 1 and 2

25. Schmeler, M., Vetter, A., and Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The Future is Degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. London: Verso.
26. Schmidt, D. and Willcott, E., *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, Oxford University Press, 2011.
27. Sen, A. "Development as Capacity Expansion", *Readings in Human Development*, 2003.
28. Steiner A, Markantoni M. Unpacking community resilience through capacity for change. *Community Dev J*. 2014;49(3):407–425. doi:10.1093/cdj/bst042
29. Van Tassell, D. The Paradox of Ecotourism in Costa Rica: Can Economic Development and Environmental Preservation Co-Exist?, *Development Review of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 2 December 30, 2006.
30. Vandermeer, J. and Ivette Perfecto, *Breakfast of Biodiversity: The Political Ecology of Rain Forest Destruction*, Chapter 11, 2013.
31. Vaneekhaute LE, Vanwing T, Meurs P, Abelshausen B, Jacquet W. Community capitals of a Paramaca Maroon village in pictures: a photovoice study on community resilience in the context of large-scale gold mining. *Community Dev J*. 2019;54(2):233–253. doi:10.1093/cdj/bsx036
32. Weisman, A. *Countdown*. Little, Brown and Company, 2013.
33. Wise, S. *Animal Rights, Animal Wrongs: The Case for Nonhuman Personhood*, Foreign Affairs, April 28, 2015.