



Educación para un Futuro Sostenible...Education for a Sustainable Future

Goucher College -Mount Holyoke College - Monteverde Institute

Global-Local Challenges to Sustainability: The Costa Rican Experience

Spring Semester 2009

Mount Holyoke College and Goucher College at the Monteverde Institute

Each spring semester, Mount Holyoke College and Goucher College will offer with the Monteverde Institute a unique learning experience about sustainable futures. The Monteverde Institute (MVI) is nestled in the Tilaran mountain range of Costa Rica in the cloud forest community of Monteverde. Established in 1986 as a non-profit educational association by Monteverde residents, the MVI blends international study and applied research with community development assistance to local Monteverde area communities.

A 15-week interdisciplinary program at the Monteverde Institute will examine the environmental, social, economic, and cultural challenges that arise from increasing global-local interaction in the specific context of Costa Rica and of Monteverde. How has Costa Rica's development path been shaped by both global and national forces, and how have these, in turn, affected the development of a specific community like Monteverde and its unique cloud forest environment? What does "sustainability" mean in light of rapidly growing ecotourism and disappearing species?

The emphasis of this program is on interdisciplinarity, experiential and place-based learning, and applied research informed by the needs of the community. Classes will include overnight field trips, site visits, and guest lectures by local grassroots activists as well as world-renowned scientists. Students will conduct their own independent research, in the social science or natural science area, and may have the opportunity to volunteer with a local organization independent of or in conjunction with their research project. The unique environment of this program provides students with a wealth of learning opportunities to analyze the challenges of sustainability and to search for solutions.

Curriculum

The program is open to all majors. All students will take four 4-credit courses. The three core courses include Spanish Language and Culture, Environmental Sustainability, and Development and Social Change in Costa Rica. For the fourth course in applied research students can choose between Field Methods in Tropical Ecology and Topics in the Social Sciences. All courses will be taught in English, except for Spanish Language and Culture.

We strongly urge students to have at least one semester of Spanish before joining the program.

Faculty members of the Monteverde Institute will teach the courses. A faculty member from Mount Holyoke or Goucher will serve as the resident director of the program, and will team teach, in collaboration with MVI faculty, the Field Methods in Tropical Ecology course or the Topics in the Social Sciences course.

Room and board: Students will stay with host families while in Monteverde; all meals, laundry services, and private room will be provided by host family unless otherwise indicated. During field trips students will stay in triple or quadruple occupancy lodging, with all meals included.

COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

Spanish Language and Culture

This course emphasizes language acquisition through conversation, grammar, and contextualized vocabulary acquisition with an emphasis on Costa Rican and Latin American culture. Students will be assessed and placed according to their level; advanced placement emphasizes Latin American literature, translation and writing. Additionally, students will receive assistance in developing research tools in Spanish and in translating their own writings.

Environmental Sustainability

Students will examine and analyze concepts of sustainability and their global and local interpretations and meanings as framed by global-local issues: climate change; ecotourism and economic development; environmentalism; human health; conservation and biodiversity. Emphasis is placed on contextualized examples of environmental, economic, social, political and cultural tensions related to sustainability, and will include field visits, exercises and guest lectures by local scientists and activists.

Development and Social Change in Costa Rica

This course examines the particular development path and processes of social change in Costa Rica with an emphasis on the post-World War II paradigm that gave rise to the social-democratic structure of Costa Rican society. Drawing on the body of literature from Latin American theorists, students will explore notions of exceptionalism, myth-making and myth-breaking, conservation and the “Green Republic,” and the rise of ecotourism in Costa Rica.

Topics in Social Sciences

Targeting social science majors, this course will be team taught by MVI and visiting faculty, with topics reflecting the expertise of visiting faculty and MVI’s thematic foci of water, ecotourism, land use planning and development, community health, and tropical

ecology and biodiversity. In addition, students will learn social science research methodologies applicable to their research projects.

Field Methods in Tropical Ecology

Targeting natural/biological science majors, this course will explore topics of tropical ecology (biodiversity, cloud forest ecosystems and others) in greater depth, with emphasis placed on learning research methodologies that can be used in field-based or laboratory research.

Program timeline

Note: Timeline and class hour distribution is subject to change through mutual agreement of faculty and to accommodate variations in field trips, day/overnight site visits, and other programmatic/curricular considerations.

| COURSE | Cred its | WEEKS | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | Total hours |
|--------------------------------------|----------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---|----|----|---|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | |
| Spanish and Culture | 4 | 20 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | BREAK | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 3 hrs | 6 hours lab | | | 56 (review, could be less?) |
| Environmental Sustainability | 4 | 1 hr | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | Independent research, exams, research presentations | | | 41 contact hours each plus independent research |
| Dev. and social change in Costa Rica | 4 | 1 hr | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | | | | |
| Topics in Social Change | 4 | 1 hr | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | | | | |
| Field methods in Ecology | 4 | 1 hr | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | 4 hrs | | | | | |
| Total contact hours/week | | 23 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | | 19 | 19 | 19 | 19 | | | | |