

TROPICAL ENVIRONMENTS AND SOCIETY

Field Experience at La Selva Biological Research Station, Costa Rica

Saturday March 9th, 2024-Sunday March 17th, 2024

Course Instructors:

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Brief Program Description:

La Selva is a world-class 1600-hectare Costa Rican research facility comprising both primary and secondary growth tropical Caribbean humid lowland forest. Founded in 1968 by the Organization for Tropical Studies, La Selva affords us the opportunity to experience the incredible biodiversity of a tropical rainforest environment first hand while also taking advantage of the rich history of scientific inquiry that has occurred, and continues to occur, there. We will also have an opportunity to see some of the environment surrounding La Selva, which encompasses a diverse and ever shifting mosaic of land use, ranging from small farms and pastures to commercial-scale monoculture of bananas and pineapples. Course instructors will guide group research and independent exploration activities with the aim of fostering deeper understanding of the challenges and threats to tropical ecosystems. This includes topics such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and land use transformation, as seen through the local lens of La Selva and its surroundings.

Learning Goals and Objectives:

1. Develop a foundation of knowledge in topics that enable appreciation and exploration of tropical environments.
2. Engage in hands-on, inquiry- and/or curiosity-driven research activities in groups and individually that provide exposure to different methodologies, approaches, or techniques.

Assessment:

This course is a self-contained, 1 credit experience. The breakdown of assessment is as follows:

- 25% Participation
- 40% Research Activity
- 25% Nature Journaling Pages
- 10% Reflection Piece

For the **Participation** component, students are expected to attend and contribute to all program activities, including group and individual research projects. For the **Research Activity** component, students are expected to prepare a short verbal and/or visual presentation on some facet of the course research projects and exploration projects that can be shared with other students and course instructors. For the **Nature Journal**

component, students are expected to practice observations and communication skills through nature journaling in a personal journal. For the **Reflection Piece** component, students are expected to prepare and submit a short (~1 paragraph) summary of an experience from our visit. Such reflection pieces could also take other forms, e.g., a posting to a social media platform. See further details under 'GRADED WORK and INSTRUCTIONS' at the end of this document.

In our view, the unique aspect of our program is that we are based at a research facility: in alignment with this research-oriented foundation, we want student participants who embrace the opportunity to ask questions about La Selva's forests and surroundings, and who seek to answer those questions. Costa Rica has countless opportunities for tourism—indeed, it is a popular destination for many spring breaking college students. Our program is different in the sense that we will be immersed in the rainforest: *you will sweat, your boots will get muddy, and you may experience some bug bites, just like the scientists and researchers who work at La Selva! But hopefully you will see these as worthwhile investments for the intimate, first-hand knowledge you will gain from the experience.*

Integrity and Behavior:

As with any Rutgers course, students are expected to adhere to all elements of the Rutgers Academic Integrity Policy—please see: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu> for the current version of this policy as well as academic integrity resources.

We want everyone to have an amazing and transformative experience while recognizing that we are guests of Costa Rica and ambassadors of Rutgers. Since you are all adults, we expect you to exercise an appropriate degree of self-discipline. Please work with us to ensure a safe, healthy, and respectful environment for everyone. Please also be courteous and mindful of the staff at La Selva—they do a tremendous amount of work to host us, so let's do our part to assist them whenever possible.

Course Materials:

A printed course manual will be provided prior to the trip, and additional materials may be posted to the Canvas course site (La Selva has internet access). Student participants should also have a notebook.

Trip Logistics:

Student participants should arrange to arrive in San Jose, Costa Rica (Juan Santamaría International Airport; airport code SJO) before noon on Saturday March 9th, 2024. Participants will be provided with one or more suggested flights prior to departure but are free to select other flights.

We will depart from the airport for La Selva as a group via shuttle in the afternoon (the ride to La Selva is approximately 2-2.5 hours from the airport). We will return via shuttle to San Jose on Saturday March 16th, 2024; departing flights should be arranged for Sunday March 17th, 2024.

Overnight hotel accommodation for Saturday March 16th will be arranged.

More information, including an orientation on La Selva, instructions about travel, safety, and conduct, and a daily schedule of activities, will be provided during one or more virtual meetings to be scheduled for January/February 2024.

Students with Disabilities:

Rutgers University welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs, including study abroad opportunities. In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, a student with a disability must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: <https://ods.rutgers.edu/students/documentation-guidelines>. If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus's disability services office will provide you with a Letter of Accommodations. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. To begin this process, please complete a registration form available from <https://webapps.rutgers.edu/student-ods/forms/registration>.

While we will do whatever possible to accommodate any student who wishes to participate, there may be some practical constraints related to the services and facilities available at La Selva. Note that La Selva has many maintained, paved trails that provide access to lodging, dining, research, and education facilities, and staff and guides have experience assisting visitors with disabilities. If you have any specific concerns, please contact one of the instructors in advance so we can make any arrangements necessary to facilitate your visit.

GRADED WORK and INSTRUCTIONS**Participation (25%, 25 pts):**

Attendance and contribution to all program activities, including group research and individual exploration projects during the entire trip. Of course, we recognize that issues may arise that preclude participation (e.g., if you feel ill), so just let one of the instructors know if that's the case. Instructors will assign attendance (and other grades) after our return. Attendance grade will be posted on Canvas after the trip.

Research Activity (40%, 40 pts):

This grade is based on the Course Research Project (30%, faculty-led) and your independent Exploration Project (10%). These projects will be done and presented to the class at La Selva. The Course Research Project is a group project, while the Exploration Project can be done individually or in groups of 2-3 students (but grades will be assessed individually). The grade will be based on all components of the research activity - presentation and uploaded summary. Your uploaded summary of these should include components such as research question or similar, methodology, results, and discussion of

results; we encourage inclusion of figures, photos, videos, etc.. **Upload presentation file to Canvas for both the Course Research Project and Exploration Project before we leave La Selva**, check with instructors what formats are OK. Grades will be posted on Canvas.

Nature Journaling (25%, 25 pts):

Recording nature observations in text, numbers, and visual drawings in travel journal, including any responses to prompts given by instructors. An introduction to nature journaling and art supplies will be provided by the course instructors. **Select at least 1 page of your nature journal (more are OK to post) and post to Canvas under the Nature Journaling Discussion, then respond to at least 3 other students and their pages with constructive and detailed feedback. This needs to be completed before we leave Costa Rica, since we intend the activity to stimulate interaction and engagement to enrich the experience for everyone.** In your response, avoid comments like 'nice', 'beautiful' or 'ugly' - be specific about what you like and why, explain what inspires you from their work, and explore their methods and ideas together. Grade will be based on effort, participation, quality of your response to others, and exploration of nature journaling overall, not how 'nice' your journaling page looks like. You may upload more than 1 page to share with other students and get their feedback, but you will not get a higher grade for posting more pages.

Reflection Piece (10%, 10 pts):

Prepare and submit a short summary of a select experience from your trip (~1-3 paragraphs, 100-200 words, not more). Such reflection pieces could also take other forms, e.g., a posting to a social media platform, a video, etc. (blog entry with photographs, TikTok, Instagram, etc.). **For all formats, a copy of the work (or link to a publicly viewable website in a document you submit) should be uploaded to Canvas no later than 1 week after we return from La Selva.** This reflection piece should be different from what you may need to write if you received a travel award or scholarship (this only applies to a few students).

Final Grades will be based on: A (90% or higher), B+ (85-89.9%), B (80-84.9%), C+ (75-79.9%), C (70-74.9%), D (60-69.9%), F (under 60%). Instructors reserve the right to raise the final grades for exceptional work and participation in components of the class.