



KIIS Costa Rica (Ecuador) Program, Summer 2024

IDST 350 / HON 300 Topics: Humans and Environmental Change in Costa Rica

Instructor: Prof. Luis M. Sierra

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Description: This interdisciplinary course uses three Costa Rica economic activities designed to generate foreign income: tourism, coffee and banana production, local agricultural activities, and ecotourism to examine how internal and external historical and social factors have shaped Costa Rican society. Historically in the neo-tropics, extractive activities like hardwood extraction, raw material exports, and agricultural goods have created a reliance on the income from these exports. The ecological impact of these activities has been well documented. Other activities like tourism, English-language call center for major American retailers, and agricultural commodities likewise seek to attract foreign investment—all these activities affect Costa Rica's environment just as oil and mining have reshaped the landscape and distorted some of Latin American nation's economies, export agriculture, and eco-tourism have their own social and environmental consequences. As we explore Costa Rica from a biological science-focused perspective, we encounter human and environmental elements that bring to life the consequences of being a small nation in Latin America.

This course is taught in English.

2. Overall KIIS Program Student Learning Outcomes:

KIIS Study Abroad Mission Statement:

KIIS provides high-quality education abroad programs for students from all diverse backgrounds that promote deep international learning, are integrated into the curriculum, and encourage critical and creative thinking. Our goal is to help students understand the wider world and develop personal and professional skills for lifelong enrichment. We strive to go beyond generalizations and cultural stereotypes to help foster a nuanced appreciation of the world in which we live.

Students participating on KIIS study abroad programs aim to:

- 1) Understand contemporary issues of their host country/countries (i.e. KIIS program location).
- 2) Develop skills to interact comfortably in a global setting.
- 3) Understand other cultures.

Prior to your KIIS study abroad program, and again at the conclusion of your program, KIIS will ask each student to a) answer a few multiple-choice questions, and b) write a short reflective essay (two paragraphs in length) related to the elements detailed above. There is no right or wrong answer, and your responses will not affect your grade in any way. The purpose of the exercise is to help KIIS measure the effectiveness of its study abroad programs.

3. Course Objectives and Specific Learning Outcomes:

Student Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students should be able to:

- Identify and explain the ways in which economic and social systems affect human-environment relations
- Gain an understanding of how Costa Rican history and culture have been, and continue to be, expressed in art, media, tourist destinations, food, rituals, public spaces, and politics.
- Relate topics in Costa Rican and Latin American history to current events
- Compare and reflect upon notions held about Costa Rica and Latin America before and ideas developed during the study abroad program
- Work effectively in small groups and improve oral presentation skills

Analyze and synthesize readings, observations and class discussions in short written papers

4. Major Topics covered in the Course: By exploring how coffee production works in Costa Rica, where the coffee is grown, why there, how did this come to be, we contextualize the human-environment dynamics, and we analyze the effect of our activities on those environments. In a similar fashion, Costa Ricans market their coffee as premium coffee. The environment, the type of cacao tree, altitude, and latitude all contribute to the unique characteristics of Costa Rican coffee. In this context what does fair trade and organic mean? Ecotourism presents opportunities to exploit the environment that Costa Rica offers with the aim of minimizing one's impact on the local environment while maximizing one's experience of its unique nature. Your readings on the environmental history of Latin America, and on Costa Rica seeks to contextualize many of the contemporary environments and places you will come across in Costa Rica. The Cloud Forests and the other neotropical environments will help orient students to the complex roots of contemporary Costa Rican culture. The course will facilitate students' exploration, observation, and analysis of Costa Rica's diverse environments through our travel around the country, via its eco-tourist attractions and research and cultural sites. We will explore several kinds of natural environments and outdoor activities, Bird-watch, and hike through secondary forests. We will work with local groups on a watershed clean up, explore how Costa Ricans grow food, and explore several ecotourism activities including several butterfly gardens, a coffee cooperative, and a reforestation project. Our main task during our time in Costa Rica is to assess these diverse environments, human-environment relations, and economic activities as we see them. Multiple professors bring their disciplinary perspectives to bear on common questions and concerns.

6. Required Readings and Materials: Readings

Prior to departure, students and professors will read one common text, which we will discuss on-site. All common reads will be made available at the April KISS Student Orientation.

Kurt Fauch, *For the Love of Rivers: A Scientist's Journey*, (Oregon State University Press, 2015).

https://www.amazon.com/Love-Rivers-Scientists-Journey/dp/0870717707/ref=asc_df_0870717707/?tag=hyprod-20&linkCode=df0&hvadid=312091458201&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18392366255372452361&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9015695&hvtargid=pla-492811677012&psc=1&tag=&ref=&adgrpid=63669393113&hvpon=&hvptwo=&hvadid=312091458201&hvpos=&hvnetw=g&hvrnd=18392366255372452361&hvqmt=&hvdev=c&hvdvcmdl=&hvlocint=&hvlocphy=9015695&hvtargid=pla-492811677012

Shawn W. Miller, *An Environmental History of Latin America*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

https://www.amazon.com/Environmental-History-America-Approaches-Americas/dp/0521612985/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=environmental+history+of+latin+america&qid=1658439190&srefix=Environmental+history+of+Latin%2Caps%2C99&sr=8-1

7. Graded Assignments: Assignments

Students begin their academic preparation for this study abroad program at the pre-departure KILS student orientation on April xx, 2024 (Bowling Green, KY). First, professors familiarize students with the Place as Text model (described above). Second, we discuss notions students hold about Costa Rica, environmental history, and begin to develop a (deeper) understanding of Costa Rican history and culture. Third, in groups of two, students self-select one of the following topics, which ultimately will serve as the basis for their on-site final oral presentation:

1. Understanding class in contemporary Costa Rica
2. The relationship between the Costa Rican past and present
4. Confronting Communication in Costa Rica society
5. The benefits and drawbacks of tourism in Costa Rican society
6. Food and culture in Costa Rican society

A. Writing Assignment #1 (due pre-departure)

Students will be provided an image (e.g. photo, artwork, graphic, etc.) and an accompanying question. Each student submits a one-page essay response by May at noon.

B. Digital Scavenger Hunt (on-site)

There is much to learn about Costa Rica history and culture by personal exploration during program activities and any free time students may have. Students will be given a list of specific situations, stores, foods, experiences, etc. that they are expected to locate over the duration of the study abroad program and document them by photo or video.

C. Writing Assignment #2 (on-site)

In a two-page essay, students respond to questions(s) that combine common class

reading and on-site observations and reflections. Details will be shared prior to program departure.

D. Writing Assignment #3 (on-site)

In a two-page essay, students respond to question(s) centered on their self-selected reading and on-site observations and reflections. This third short written assignment directly prepares students for their end-of-program Final Oral Presentation

E. Oral Presentation (on-site at program's end)

In groups of two (formed at the April's pre-departure orientation), students craft and lead an oral presentation to the class at program's end that will last 30-45 minutes. The oral presentation combines preliminary investigations students make before program departure, common and self-selected readings, and on-site observations and reflections. Around two days before your oral presentation, each group will meet with the instructor to discuss your preparations, including a) your central argument, b) how you intend to organize your presentation, c) the readings you have selected, and d) the ideas and questions you have formulated to help generate class discussion. Students should not plan to rely on PowerPoint, Prezi or the like.

F. Final Photo Reflection

Near the program's end, the instructor will provide students with one final question. To respond, each student will need to select one photo s/he has taken over the course of the study abroad program and write a one-page essay that speaks to the question and self-selected photo.

8. Attendance Policy:

KIIS program participants are expected to be punctual to and in attendance at all classes, presentations, meetings and required excursions, and to remain with the program for the full academic period. Unexcused absences from classes and/or mandatory meetings will result in a lowering of the student's final grade, as will excessive tardiness. Multiple unexcused absences could result in expulsion from the program. Any absence from an academic class session must be excused for medical reasons.

9. Disability Accommodation:

KIIS will make every reasonable effort to provide accommodations for program participants with special needs or disabilities, but we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Be aware that many foreign countries do not have comprehensive legislation comparable to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). As a result, businesses and other establishments operating in foreign countries may not be able to provide accommodations.

If you have a disability accommodation need, we recommend you contact your KIIS Campus Representative, <https://www.kiis.org/about-kiis/contact-us/campus-representatives/> early in your program selection process so that s/he has time to discuss any specific needs, including which KIIS programs may be best suited. You also are welcome to contact KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning, maria.canning@wku.edu, to discuss your disability accommodation needs (e.g. housing, transportation, excursions, class schedule, etc.).

Immediately after acceptance, notify KIIS Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, Haley McTaggart, haley.mctaggart@wku.edu, if you have a special need or disability that might

require any form of accommodation abroad. Failure to notify KIIS may prevent you from participating on your KIIS program.

If you require any accommodations abroad, you must provide KIIS Admissions and Enrollment Specialist, Haley McTaggart, an accommodation letter from your home campus' disability accommodation office that lists the accommodations you are eligible to receive. Please do not request accommodations directly from your KIIS Program Director or other KIIS Faculty; the KIIS Office will notify your KIIS Program Director and/or Faculty after we have received your above accommodation letter.

In some cases, you may need to make arrangements for a caregiver to join you on your KIIS program, should your physician, campus disability accommodation office, or KIIS make such a recommendation or require it.

10. Title IX / Discrimination & Harassment:

Recent attention to gender discrimination and sexual harassment at colleges and universities reminds us of the importance of adhering to standards of ethical and professional behavior. KIIS Study Abroad is committed to supporting and encouraging safe and equitable educational environments for our students, faculty, and program directors. Students, faculty, and program directors are required to be civil and treat each other with dignity and respect. As such, harassment and/or discrimination of any kind will not be permitted or tolerated.

Sexual misconduct (sexual harassment, sexual assault, and sexual/dating/domestic violence) and sex discrimination are violations of KIIS policies. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to a) KIIS Assistant Director, Maria Canning (+1-859-200-1000) or KIIS Executive Director, John Dizgun (+1-270-227-2288), b) WKU's Title IX Coordinator, Ena Demir (270-745-6867 / ena.demir@wku.edu) or WKU's Title IX Investigator, Michael Crowe (270-745-5429 / michael.crowe@wku.edu). Please note that while you may report an incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a KIIS program director and/or faculty member, KIIS program directors and faculty are considered "Responsible Employees" of Western Kentucky University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator.

If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center, <https://www.wku.edu/heretohelp/> at 270-745-3159.

For more information on KIIS Title IX, see <https://www.kiis.org/students/health-safety/title-ix-clery/>; additional Title IX resources can be found here <https://www.wku.edu/eeo/titleixbrochure2020.pdf>.

Everyone should be able to participate on a KIIS program, attend a KIIS event, or work in a KIIS environment (e.g. KIIS office) without fear of sexual harassment or discrimination of any kind. Be respectful of each other.