



FACULTY-LED
STUDY ABROAD

KIIS Costa Rica Program, Summer 2025

BIO 475 Special Topics: Tropical Biodiversity and Conservation

Instructor: Agus Sofyan, Ph.D.

Email: agussofyan@upike.edu

Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

Course Description: This course introduces students to the extraordinary variety of plants, animals, and ecosystems of tropical regions. Students will observe and study the wide range of habitats and species in the natural regions of Costa Rica. Habitats to be visited vary from montane, valley, marine, and cultivation areas such as Arenal Volcano National Park, La Paz Waterfall Natural Park, National Park in Pacific Coast, Butterfly Farm, and Coffee, Sugarcane, and regional fruit or vegetable plantations. Emphasis is on understanding biodiversity issues in the tropics and on conservation strategies needed to protect these dwindling resources.

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.

Course Objectives and Specific Learning Outcomes: Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Apply ecological and evolutionary theory to the biodiversity patterns observed in Costa Rica.
- Compare and contrast the biogeography and species richness of the biomes and ecosystems in Costa Rica.
- Gain confidence in abilities to explore new places and concepts.
- Evaluate and prioritize conservation programs.
- Identify common flora and fauna of Costa Rica.
- Explore the importance of indigenous ecotourism and sustainable development.

Major Topics covered in the Course: This course will cover basic principles of biodiversity, tropical ecology, and conservation.

Required Readings and Materials:

1. Kricher, J. (2017) *The New Neotropical Companion*. Princeton University Press. ISBN: 978-0691115252
2. Install: **iNatural** app in your smartphone
3. Install: **Merlin** app (Bird identification app) in your smartphone.

Course Components/Assignments: Grading will be out of a total of 1,000 points, and will follow the grading scale below:

Pre-Departure Assignments		
Readings and Assessment	Assessments of reading comprehension of course reading material and watching lecture videos. Fill out and submit the assignment.	100 points
Assignments in Costa Rica		
Pretest	The Pretest will assess your ability to understand textbook reading, lecture video learning, and assignment studying in preparation for the study and exploration in Costa Rica.	100 points
Journal Entries	Daily entries that include reflections on course readings, class discussions, and field experiences.	100 points
Participation in all activities	Students are expected to attend all lectures, tours, and field trips. Each unexcused absence will result in 50 points deducted from grade.	400 points
Oral Presentation	Students are expected to give a 10 – 15 minutes oral presentation and reflection about the trips and the course in general.	100 points
Post-Test (Final Exam)	The final exam will assess your ability to integrate readings, discussions, and field experiences in making defensible inferences about the natural world.	200 points

Grading Scale: Grading will be out of a total of 1,000 points, and will follow the grading scale below:

A = 900 – 1000 pts,
B = 800 – 899 pts,
C = 700 – 799 pts,
D = 600 – 699 pts,
F < 600 pts

ONSITE SCHEDULE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
MAY 18	MAY 19	MAY 20	MAY 21	MAY 22	MAY 23	MAY 24
Assignment is DUE by 11PM to: agussofyan@upike.edu				Arrive in San Jose (SJO); travel to La Fortuna, Arenal Volcano, Stay at Volcano Lodge & Springs ORIENTATION	Arenal Volcano Hiking at El Silencio, Stay at Volcano Lodge & Springs CLASSES BIO 303 & BIO 490 PRETEST	Breakfast at Volcano Lodge & Springs -Travel to La Paz to move into homestays ORIENTATION
MAY 25	MAY 26	MAY 27	MAY 28	MAY 29	MAY 30	MAY 31
La Paz Morning hike Community Cloud Forest La Paz Rural Homestays tour	La Paz Microorganisms in Rivers and Basins Lecture CLASSES	La Paz Visit to local school - Proyecto Comunitario CLASSES	La Paz Local Farms Tour CLASSES	La Paz Sustainable Farm visit CLASSES	La Paz Visit to local school - Proyecto Comunitario CLASSES	La Paz Morning hike to see Quetzales & other birdwatching Sport Activities with host families
JUNE 1	JUNE 2	JUNE 3	JUNE 4	JUNE 5	JUNE 6	JUNE 7
La Paz Spend time with Host families	La Paz Mariposario (Group 1) CLASSES	La Paz Mariposario (Group 2) Sugar Cane Production Lecture CLASSES	La Paz Visit to Trapiche Arias CLASSES	La Paz Hike to La Danta -All day	Travel to Monteverde - Hotel Las Ardillas Hike Hanging Bridges ORIENTATION	Monteverde Hike Cloud Forest Reserve
JUNE 8	JUNE 9	JUNE 10	JUNE 11	JUNE 12	JUNE 13	JUNE 14
Monteverde Morning Hike -Travel to Manuel Antonio	Manuel Antonio Hike at the National Park	Manuel Antonio Hike at the beach CLASSES	Manuel Antonio Morning Hike -Travel to La Paz	La Paz Visit to Trapiche Conversatorio Protección y Cuidado de Recursos Naturales CLASSES	La Paz Feria del Agricultor CLASSES	Reforestation Project with Host Families
JUNE 15	H	JUNE 17	JUNE 18	JUNE 19	JUNE 20	JUNE 21
La Paz Spend time with Host families	La Paz Visit Coffee Farm CLASSES	La Paz Hike El Refugio CLASSES	La Paz Visit Coffee Factory Lecture CLASSES	BIO 303 & BIO 490 POST-TEST La Paz Hike to Reserva el Azahar CLASSES	Travel to San Jose - Fly home	

Departure
 Excursions
 Free Days
 Classes
 Tests / Assignment Due Date

*Please note: This itinerary is not final. While the dates will not change, calendar events above may change. Students should not make independent plans without first contacting the Program Director.

NOTE:

1. Please prepare for the study abroad by reading the PPT, watching the LECTURE VIDEOS, and doing the ASSIGNMENT (Please use BLACK or BLUE PEN to fill out the answers on the assignment. Scan your assignment and save it in PDF file for submission.
2. THE ASSIGNMENT (100 points) is due by 11PM, SUNDAY, MAY 18TH! Submit the assignment (PDF file) via email to: agussofyan@upike.edu
3. PRETEST will be given on the first day of class on site. It is worth 100 points.
4. POST-TEST (FINAL EXAM) will be given on the last day of class on site. It is worth 200 points.
5. Daily entrees (Daily journal) will be checked or graded once a week. It is due every Saturday at 5PM.

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.

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 Assistant Director, Maria Canning, or 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 Assistant Director, Maria Canning, or 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.

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.