



FACULTY-LED
STUDY ABROAD

KIIS Costa Rica Program, Summer 2027

BIOL 475 Topics: Tropical Biodiversity and Conservation

Instructor: Sherry Harrel, Ph.D.

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Instructor's office hours: on site and by appointment

Syllabus subject to change

1. Course Description: This course introduces students to the extraordinary diversity of plants and animals, and their habitats of Costa Rica. Mainland habitats to be visited primarily include cloud and rain forests. We will explore the Arenal Volcano area of La Fortuna, tour the largest butterfly garden in the world in La Paz and hike in some of the most famous Costa Rican cloud forest. Emphasis of this course is on understanding biodiversity issues in the tropics and on conservation strategies needed to protect these dwindling resources.

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: 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.

4. Major Topics covered in the Course: This course will cover basic principles of biodiversity, tropical ecology, and conservation. Specifically, students will witness the differences between cloud and rainforests, dry forests and mangroves, and how the flora and fauna are adapted to the different biomes. Students will explore and experience the neotropical climates through hikes and tours, birdwatching, visits to butterfly gardens and a reforestation project. Students also will gain more insight on coffee, bananas, and cacao production and other agricultural influences on the environment.

5. Required Readings and Materials:

Prior to departure, students and professors will read one common text, which we will discuss on-site. To prepare for the learning experience in Costa Rica, sets of questions will be given to answer before the trip. All common reads will be made available at the April KIIS Student Orientation.

- 1) Kritcher, J. (2017) *The New Neotropical Companion*. Princeton University Press. ISBN: 978-0691115252
- 2) Readings of Peer-reviewed journal articles. Students will be given articles and assignments to read that will be relative to their experiences in Costa Rica.

6. Graded Assignments: Grading will be out of a total of 800 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

Pre-Trip Assignments		
Readings	Assessments of reading comprehension of course reading material. Discussions of books, articles and application to students' onsite experiences	200 points
During Trip Assignments		
Journal Entries	Daily entries that include descriptions of sites complete with notes on the flora and fauna observed, species richness and classification of the ecosystems visited.	200 points
Participation in all activities	WhatsApp assignments (including a scavenger hunt), lectures, discussions, tours, and field trips. Each unexcused absence will result in 50 points deducted from grade.	300 points
Final Reflection	Students will write a two-page final reflection about what they learned in their field experiences in the course and share it with the group during our last class.	100 points
Total		800 points

7. Generative AI Policy:

Generative AI is permitted/encouraged in some ways, with proper attribution, but prohibited in other ways.

Students are allowed, encouraged, and even required to use Generative AI in some ways but are prohibited from using it in other ways. Keep in mind that any content produced by generative AI can “hallucinate” (produce false information), so students are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of any AI-generated content. Examples of citing AI are available at: <https://libguides.wku.edu/stylewrite/ai>.

Students are permitted and encouraged to use generative AI in the following ways:

- Brainstorming: You may use generative AI to stimulate creativity, generate ideas, or brainstorm topics for papers, presentations, and discussions. The generated content must serve as a steppingstone, not a final product.
- Citation Assistance: AI tools can be used to manage, format, and organize citations and references, promoting adherence to academic writing standards and specific style guides required for individual assignments.
- Grammar and Style Checking: AI-powered writing enhancement tools may be used to help with spelling, grammar, syntax, and stylistic errors.
- Concept Understanding: Generative AI can be used to explain or simulate concepts taught in class, aiding in a deeper understanding.
- Research Assistance: AI can be used to conduct initial research, compile data, and summarize articles, books, or papers. It should not replace traditional research methods but rather enhance them.

You may not use generative AI in coursework in the following ways:

- Plagiarism: Using AI-generated content as your original work without attribution. This includes essays, papers, presentations, and exam answers.
- Data Manipulation: Using AI tools to alter data or create misleading information.
- Misrepresentation of Skills: Using generative AI to complete tasks that are meant to assess your knowledge and skills.
- Confidentiality Breach: Using AI tools that might violate KUIS/university policies or laws related to data privacy and confidentiality.

Metacognitive Reflection. In addition to a proper citation, the student should include the following statement with any assignment where generative AI is used for assistance.

“I used generative AI [INSERT NAME OF PLATFORM] for assistance in the following ways on this assignment: [INSERT WAYS USED, such as brainstorming, citation assistance, grammar and style checking, concept understanding, and research assistance, etc.].”

8. Attendance Policy:

KUIS 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:

KUIS 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 KIIIS Title IX, see <https://www.kiis.org/students/health-safety/title-ix-clery/>.

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