

Ecotourism Development in Costa Rica

PS 354
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Introduction

This class will examine the effects of ecotourism on the El Coco community of Northwestern Costa Rica. The first week of the course will examine the public policy aspects of the development of Ecotourism in Costa Rica. The second two weeks of the course will provide an intensive in-country experience with the ecotourism stakeholders from both the public and private sector. Students will design and implement a number of projects in Costa Rica to assist El Coco in the development of its ecotourism industry. The final week of the course will examine the effects of the service projects completed in Costa Rica.

Specific Course Objectives

The specific objectives of this course center on the four traits that characterize service-learning:

1. Commitment to community partnership.
2. Learning and academic rigor.
3. Intentional, reflective thinking.
4. Practice of civic responsibility.

From these objectives, this course will have the following specific learning goals:

Students will:

1. Learn the theories that underlie ecotourism development and why it is an effective development strategy for countries like Costa Rica and their application in an active learning environment.
2. Evaluate the obstacles to poverty alleviation in Guanacaste, and how ecotourism fits into that scheme?
3. Learn about and assist our community partners in enhancing their commitment to sustainability.

4. Provide thoughtful strategies to improve the life chances of our community partners.
5. Develop leadership and critical thinking skills.

To achieve these goals, students will utilize the CARC cycle described below.

Meaningful Service-Learning: The CARC Learning Cycle¹

For most of you this will be your first service-learning coursework. As such, you should familiarize yourself with the basic concepts of service-learning.

1. Contemplation. What are the challenges, needs, and expectations of the service experience? What can I bring to the group and our community partners.
2. Action. The on-site work to be done with our community partner.
3. Reflection. This is the lens through which you think critically about the experience, deeply considering how the action intentionally links to specific learning goals.
4. Commitment. This is the disciplined effort to act on your belief in the communal necessity of service and in the benefits it affords.

Contemplation

Each of us has many strengths and weaknesses. In order to prepare for the trip, spend some time considering the following questions.

1. What will I learn about the gifts and dreams of the people I encounter?
2. What might it be like to “be in the shoes” of the people I encounter?
3. How might this experience affect me?
4. How might this experience influence my view of community?
5. What will I discover about the causes and possible solutions of problems I will encounter during this experience?

¹ Adapted from Duncan, Dawn and Joan Kopperud. 2008. *Service-Learning Companion*. Wadsworth: Boston.

6. What talents can I bring to our community partner?

7. Action

Each day the group is in Costa Rica, there is a planned service experience, However it is very important that students are flexible in their work assignment as priorities and needs can change rapidly.

It can be expected that all activities will likely fall into one of these three categories.

1. Physical labor-This includes beach cleanup and other environmental and sustainability focused projects.
2. Intellectual work-This includes among many possibilities; policy work, development of a business plan, and translation.
3. Social and Emotional support-This includes support for both our community partners and team members. Remember that you will be working in sensitive areas that strongly impact people's livelihoods. As such, it is necessary to behave in a respectful and supportive manner at all times.

Reflection

One of the most important components of a service-learning experience is reflection which will help us to contact our service to the course's learning goals.

Here are some suggestions for successful reflection.

1. Reflect on your service while experiences are still fresh in your mind.
2. Be observant. How successful was the project that day? What was the reaction of our community partners?
3. Reflect from someone else's perspective. What would our community partner think of our project?
4. Explore your intellectual, emotional, and analytical thoughts about the experience.
5. Make connections to course content, previous learning and other life experience.

Commitment

Once you have performed the service, how will you stay connected to our community partner?

1. Assisting with the next group of students going to Costa Rica. One way to show your commitment to our community partners is by spreading the word to other students and meeting with and assisting next year's group.
2. The formation of a Wilkes University club so members can continue their commitment to community partners.
3. Continued reflection and service at other service-learning sites.

Course Assignments and Grading

Paper (25%)

Students will write a five page paper addressing their expectations for the trip.

Reflection Journal (50%)

Students keep a daily journal of their experiences while in Costa Rica. This journal should reflect the student's experiences and impact of their individual effort on the group project.

Final Exam (25%)

Students will write a final exam that requires them to combine the in-class instruction they received with their in-country experiences.

Grades

Grades in this course will be based on the following scale:

- 4.0 93-100
- 3.5 87-92
- 3.0 80-86
- 2.5 76-79
- 2.0 70-75
- 1.5 66-69
- 1.0 60-65
- 0 Below 60

Paper Guidelines

- All papers must be submitted in hard copy form (no file attachments).
- ABSOLUTELY no late assignments will be accepted.
- Papers must be typed, double spaced, and in a reasonable font.

Class Policies

Class Attendance

The best plan is to come to class everyday. If however you miss due to illness, family issues, etc, you will need to provide documentation in order for the absence to be excused. Missing class on the day an assignment is due or we have an exam, will require a high level "excuse" complete with documentation. In general, excuses given a within 24 hours of the assignment's due date or exam time, ie you call an hour before the final exam and tell me you are sick, will in most cases not be excused. Now that I have said that, excuses presented IN ADVANCE, are more likely to be looked upon favorably.

Plagiarism

Copying material from another source or using another's ideas without appropriate acknowledgment is plagiarism. This and other forms of academic dishonesty will result in an automatic grade of F for the course and will be reported to the Dean of Students for further action. It is up to the student to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. Ignorance of the rules is NOT an acceptable excuse. Please see the Political Science Handbook and/or page 57 of the Wilkes Student Handbook for the university's definition of plagiarism which will be adopted for this class.

Cheating

Cheating on an exam is using an material while taking an exam that does not come from your own head. All materials, books, notes, papers, cell phones, pagers, etc, must be under your seat for the duration of the exam. Anyone caught cheating will be given an F for the course and reported

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

Course Schedule

| Date | Subject | Reading Assignment | Service Work | Course Work (instructional hours) |
|---------|---|--------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| June 11 | What is Ecotourism? | Miller Ch 1 | | In-Class lecture (2) |
| June 12 | Ecotourism as Development Strategy | Miller Ch 2 | | In-Class lecture (2) |
| June 13 | Costa Rican History | Miller Ch 3 | | In-Class lecture (2) |
| June 14 | The Development of Ecotourism in Costa Rica | Miller Ch 4 | | In-Class lecture (2) |
| June 15 | Ecotourism in Costa Rica | Miller Ch 5 | | In-Class lecture (2) |
| June 18 | Arrival in Costa Rica | | | |
| June 19 | Transfer to El Coco | | | Orientation talk (2) Meeting with environmental NGO (2) |
| June 20 | Service project in local high school | | Sustainability and recycling project | Small group sessions with high school students (2) |
| June 21 | Service project in local high school | | Sustainability and recycling project | Small group sessions with high school students (2) |

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| June 22 | Service project in local high school | | Sustainability and recycling project | Small group sessions with high school students (2) |
| June 23 | Service project at Playa Del Coco | | Beach clean-up | Presentation by Environmental NGO (2) |
| June 24 | Service project at Playa Del Coco | | Beach clean-up | Class meeting to prep for meeting with the El Coco Chamber of Commerce (2) |
| June 25 | Work with El Coco Chamber of Commerce on Ecotourism development plan | | Assist El Coco Chamber of Commerce with Ecotourism action plan | Presentation by El Coco Chamber of Commerce (2) |
| June 26 | Work with El Coco Chamber of Commerce on Ecotourism development plan | | Assist El Coco Chamber of Commerce with Ecotourism action plan | Debrief session on work with Chamber of Commerce (2) |
| June 27 | Work with El Coco Chamber of Commerce on Ecotourism development plan | | Assist El Coco Chamber of Commerce with Ecotourism action plan | Debrief session on work with Chamber of Commerce (2) |
| June 28 | Create green space on the boulevard leading to Playa del | | Sustainability Project | |

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| | Coco | | | |
| June 29 | Create green space on the boulevard leading to Playa del Coco | | Sustainability Project | Debrief on Sustainability Project (2) |
| June 30 | Visit to Rincon de la Vieja | | | Tour of Rincon de la Vieja addressing biodiversity (4) |
| July 1 | Transfer back to San Jose | | | San Jose history and culture (4) |
| July 2 | Depart Costa Rica | | | |
| July 3-4 | No Class | | | |
| July 5 | Lessons from Costa Rica | Miller Ch 6 | | In-Class lecture (2) |
| July 6 | Final Exam | | | |