Course Objectives: This course will explore the forces and processes of social change in Costa Rican communities given the rise of nature based travel to this Central American destination. We will consider the processes of how communities involved in service sector enterprises relate to the general concepts of sustainability, including environmental, social and economic impacts. From a conceptual and operational point of view, we will explore the concept of sustainability/sustainable development [development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs], with an emphasis on community-based sustainable development.

Specifically, we will:

1. Gain an understanding of ecotourism/green tourism/nature-based tourism – its ideologies, practices, and pitfalls.

2. Observe sustainable development strategies and initiatives in Costa Rica, and evaluate and critique them within competing notions of sustainability.

3. Explore the relationship of tourism and ecotourism to international development issues.

4. Gain an understanding of the natural history and ecology of Costa Rica, especially tropical rainforests.

5. Gain an understanding of non-governmental organizations engaged in environmental conservation and protection of biodiversity in Costa Rica.

6. Gain a better awareness of ourselves and our own culture through exposure to “otherness.”

Nature of the Learning Experience

Class Format: Much of the learning in this class will be accomplished through onsite experiences in Costa Rica: site visits to National Parks/Preserves, community stays, ecolodge facility tours, guided rainforest tours, demonstrations, and all the other day-to-day experiences of
international travel. Traditional classroom sessions including lectures, seminar discussions, case studies, participatory activities, and guest speaker presentations will also be part of the learning experience. These will be held in Vermont (2 pre-trip class sessions, and 2 post-trip class sessions) and in Costa Rica on the beach, on the bluff overlooking the palm plantation, in the cloud forest, or at the Indigenous reserve. Finally, part of the learning experience will come from course assignments and graded activities (see below), and will include journal writing, assigned readings, site evaluations, and community studies.

Because of the nature of the course, attendance and active participation in all class meetings are essential. Sharing your knowledge, feelings, and skills with others in the class will enrich the course immeasurably. Also, it is important that you provide continual feedback as to the degree to which the class is meeting your needs; changes can be made if necessary to meet the individual learning needs of class participants. This is especially important given the broad and diverse nature of participants and the fields we are investigating.

Readings: The required readings for this course are drawn from:

Read Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 5 of Martha Honey’s book before you arrive in Costa Rica. You will be tested on the content on the third day of the trip. See the Martha Honey study guide posted on the website.


Course reading packet available on line prior to departure:

Read and summarize in a brief 1 paragraph abstract the following 5 articles before arriving in Costa Rica:


Bring the following 4 articles with you to Costa Rica. We will split you into four groups, and your group will be responsible for presenting 1 of the following:


Assignments: Because this course seeks to provide you with an opportunity to experience directly the work of sustainability, ecotourism, and community development, assignments are a significant part of the course. You should think of these exercises as a chance to field test what you read in your reading assignments and what we discuss in class, and as a case study by which you gain a better understanding of these fields.

1. **Journal/Field Notes**: A journal is a place to practice personal or expressive writing; an individual record of educational experience that allows you to think about and process your experiences as they happen.

We will use the journals in class to start discussions, to focus attention upon topics, to draw connections between readings and class discussions, to summarize discussions, and to respond to field trips or guest speakers. Some specific examples include:

- Pre-trip impressions (*an entry to be completed before you leave or on the plane*)
- Notes and reflections from the guest speakers or guides that we will spend time with
- General reflections about your daily experiences
- Your answer to the “Question of the Day” posed by the instructors
- Discussion questions on the 4 readings
- A post trip journal entry that summarizes what you’ve learned from the experience

We have posted an example of an ‘A’ journal on the website for you to see the type of detail we expect, and the thought processes that went through the mind of an engaged student from one of our past trips.

*Journals will be due 10 days after our return on January 27. We will scan them and return them to you so you may use them as you work on your group projects and final assignment.*
2. **Test** on the chapters from Martha Honey’s book. See the study guide posted with the readings on the course website. You will take the test at some point during the first few days of the trip in Costa Rica – probably on the slopes of the Arenal volcano.

3. **Brief of selected readings in course packet**: You will need to read the 1) Lovins et al, 2) Burns, 3) Emery & Flora, 4) Ekins, and 5) Matarrita-Cascante et al. articles before arriving in Costa Rica. You will then write a one-paragraph summary of each article. Your writing should summarize the main points of the reading without getting lost in the details. In other words, they should answer the question: Why did the author(s) bother to write what they did? These summaries will be due in San Jose on the first day of the trip.

4. **Other Readings**: We will be reading the other four articles while traveling in Costa Rica. You will work in groups of 4 people. Each group will 1) summarize the article for the rest of the class and 2) lead a discussion about each reading among the class. You will also be asked to write a discussion question. Students will write a response to this discussion question in their journals.

5. **Ecotourism Site Assessments**: You will use the 4 criteria from the Lovins article (increase productivity of natural resources, biological inspired production, solutions-based business models, and reinvest in natural capital) to evaluate four ecotourism sites that we visit during our stay in Costa Rica. These may be included in your journal.

6. **Costa Rican Communities**: We will ask you to split up into 4 groups of 4 people. Each of the groups will be assigned one of four communities that we will visit while in Costa Rica: 1) Arenal/La Fortuna region 2) Monteverde region, 3) the Quepos/Manuel Antonio region, and 4) the Osa Peninsula.

   Your task is to act like reporters and “tell the story” of the region you have been assigned. What are the economic, social and environmental issues facing the region as it develops its ecotourism potential? As these communities try to cope with the pressures of contemporary globalization and change, what are its strengths and what are its weaknesses? How can these communities leverage their opportunities into positive developments, and what are the constraints holding them back? Given these considerations, what is the future outlook for development/sustainable development, ecotourism, and community based conservation in the community?

   In “telling the story,” it is imperative that you not accept the experiences and presentations in Costa Rica at face value. One objective of the class is to teach you how to look at communities in a way that goes beyond the obvious. But, in addition, the real challenge in this assignment is to also find ways to get people tell you things they might not have otherwise told you. Once you have developed the story, you should present it in a graphic-rich form of either short video documentary, interactive powerpoint presentation, or website.

   *This project will be due 3 weeks after we return from Costa Rica on February 4.*

6. **Final Assessment**. You will be given a choice of two options for your final class assignment – either a research paper, or a take-home essay test.
**Research paper:** Identify a topic related to this course (Costa Rica, sustainability, eco-tourism, community development, etc.) that you are especially interested in. Research it in depth and write a research paper, properly documented. Be sure to have the instructor approve your topic as soon as you have decided on it.

**Take-home test:** You will be given four essay questions and be asked to answer *three* out of the four. Each essay question should be answered in no less than three double-spaced pages. The questions will be purposefully broad, and will call on you to draw from your experience and reading/research to effectively answer them.

*The final paper or test will be due on February 28.*

**Grading and Expectations:** Each class participant is expected to participate and become actively involved in all class sessions, contributing to the growth of other class members as well; to read all class handouts and reading assignments; to complete required assignments, journal entries, etc. on time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstracts and Article Presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecotourism Site Assessments</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper or take home test</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rican Communities Project</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Post Trip Dinner:** We will hold two class session in February. The first class will discuss term paper ideas and other course wrap-up details. During the second class session, we will provide a pizza dinner and then each group will present to the class the Costa Rican communities final project.