Introduction to Service Learning: Communities, Conservation, and Development in Costa Rica
NR185, RM188, ENVS 150
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Course Goals: This course will introduce students to: a) the foundations of community development, sustainability, and ecotourism, b) the fundamentals and principles of service learning, c) the methodologies of participatory rural research and rapid rural appraisal. Course material will be delivered in a service learning context that engages student in reciprocal learning relationships with community members and organizations in the buffer zone of Costa Rica’s Corcovado National Park.

Course Objectives: In this course you will:

1. Become “mindful” travelers as guests in a rural Costa Rican community.
2. Learn and practice skills of cross-cultural communication.
3. Learn and apply the tools of rapid/participatory rural appraisal in a community service partnership.
4. Use the principles of community development to evaluate development prospects in rural areas.
5. Become engaged learners by working collaboratively with community partners on projects that meet the needs of local residents.
**Class Format:** This course will be taught as a service-learning course conducting community-based research. Service-learning is a form of experiential education in which the academic content of the course is significantly reinforced and informed by a service activity (or activities). These service activities typically address the need of a partner group such as a household, community group, or governmental organization. Educational research has shown that this engaged form of learning is highly effective at bringing to life academic content from the classroom, and transforming theoretical concepts into real-world everyday applications.

During this course students will work on a project that has been identified as important and necessary by our community partners and that will provide planned benefits to the community. As critical reflection is an important aspect of service learning, course instructors will actively guide and support critical thinking exercises and activities.

Traditional classroom sessions including lectures, seminar discussions, case studies, participatory activities, and guest speaker presentations will be part of the learning experience. These experiences will be held in Vermont (pre-trip and post-trip class sessions) and in Costa Rica. Finally, part of the learning experience will come from course assignments and graded activities (see below), and will include journal writing, assigned readings, data collection, and community studies.

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


- Chapter 1: Introduction to Service-Learning


- Chapter 2: Introduction to Critical Reflection


- Chapter 1 – Everyone reads for pre-trip class session #2.
- Chapter 2 – Natural Capital
- Chapter 3 – Cultural Capital
- Chapter 4 – Human Capital
- Chapter 5 – Social Capital
- Chapter 6 - Political Capital
- Read Pp. 13-32, Skim Pp. 32-71


- Chapters 1, 2, and 4 (The rest is optional)

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. A good journal goes beyond just description (e.g. ‘I woke up, and ate rice and beans, then walked to town to work in the school’). We would like to see a deeper analysis that makes a connection between the academic content and your day to day experiences. Critical reflection and analysis is an essential tool in service learning. You should set aside at least 30 minutes a day for journaling while you are in Costa Rica.

   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 but are not limited to:

   - 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
   - Your answer to questions posed by the instructors
   - Discussion questions from readings
   - Comparison of the day’s activities to a course reading
   - A post trip journal entry that summarizes what you’ve learned from the experience

2. **Test** on the pre-trip readings, which you will take when we first arrive on the ground in Costa Rica. 3.5 weeks prior to departure you will receive a study guide with questions based on each of your assigned readings; a selection of these questions will be used to create the test. **The study guide questions are written exactly as they will appear on the test.**
3. **Assignments on Pre-Trip Readings**: In addition to the test, you will have a few short assignments based on your pre-trip readings. These include:

- A written response to the discussion questions at the end of Chapters 1, 3 (due pre-trip class session #2) and 5-8 (due pre-trip session #3).
- Additional short reflection assignment based on last year’s community profile - TBA (due pre-trip session #3).
- Based on the Chambers and Flora Readings, please create an original indicator of community development for each of the forms of community capitals that can be used in the community of Guadalupe.

4. **Community Capitals**: We will be reading five additional chapters from the Flora & Flora book while in Costa Rica. You will work in groups of three people. Each group will be asked to **lead a discussion on one of the five** chapters. In leading a discussion, your group should:

- Take 15 minutes to verbally summarize to the class central ideas of the capital you are assigned. **Do not** summarize the whole chapter. Instead, you should a) define the form of capital you are presenting, b) give some examples from your chapter, c) speculative on some examples from Guadalupe, and d) discuss what generally happens in a community like Guadalupe when this form of capital increases or decreases.

- Take 30 minutes to lead a discussion about the influence of your capital on community development. To facilitate this discussion, you will need to prepare a set of discussion questions. You may also create debate scenarios, engagement activities or other techniques to involve the larger group in the discussion.

At the end of the discussion the class will select one of the prepared discussion questions, and each person in the class will then write a reflective response to this question in her/his journal.

5. **Community Profile and Service-Learning Presentation/Paper**:

As a community partner, you will work as a group to prepare a profile of the community that is targeted for the people of Guadalupe. You will begin the project by reading the community profile prepared by the 2014 class. From there you will conduct your own rapid rural appraisal to a) ground truth (confirm) the accuracy of previous information, b) describe any changes you observe that deviate from last year’s findings, and most importantly c) dig deeper into the community using different methods and asking different questions of community members.

This year, we will also be adding a new tourism development dimension to our community profile. Depending on the needs of the community, we will explore indicators of tourist visitation, tourist behavior, tourist satisfaction, and potential economic, social, and environmental impacts of tourism development.
Paper: Then, you will create a profile and description of the community of Guadalupe. The profile should contain a) an introduction and overview, b) a description of the RRA methods/tools you used to collect data/information about the community, c) a robust description of the community (this will be the core of the paper), d) an evaluation of the community development prospects for the town, and e) a reflection of the service-learning experience in which you reflect upon --- ‘what we have learned about yourselves, about the academic topic we’ve been studying, the community we worked with, the social issues in the region, the impact we have made in the community, and what you would do differently next time?’.

Presentation: You will then prepare and deliver a 30 minute presentation (once we are back in Vermont) describing: your service learning experience and reflections, the RRA methods/approach you used to create your community profile, and most importantly the community of Guadalupe. We encourage you to make use of photos, videos, stories, interview transcripts, etc.

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.

Class Participation (Engagement, collaboration, “mindfulness,” etc.) 25
Journal 25
Test 10
Pre-Trip Reading Assignments 10
Community Capital Presentation 5
Service Learning Final Project 25

Class Schedule

Pre-trip class session 1 - January 26 (7:00 to 10:00):

- Group Introduction – Student Led Ice-breaker
- Introduction to Costa Rica and Development
- Syllabus Overview
- Intro to service-learning and reflection
- Skill assessment exercise
- Discuss potential projects
- Assignments for Next Week

Pre-trip class session 2 - February 2 (7:00 to 10:00):

- What to bring
  - Skills Assessment
- Class Participation/Expectations
  · Introduction to Community development
  · Introduction to Community Capitals
  · Introduction to methods of rapid rural appraisal
  · Introduction to Indicators
  · Mindful Travel (Slimbach – Intro, Chapter 1 and 3)b
  · Study Guide

Pre-trip class session 3 - February 9 (7:00 to 10:00)

- Service-Learning and Cultural Competency (Slimbach Chapter 5-8)
  · (Intro to community of Guadalupe and local cultural norms)
- Risk Management
  SOS CARDS
  Health and Safety Guidelines
  Machismo
  Behavior and Expectations
  Snakes
- Logistics and more questions (hotel- Taxi)