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PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE
MEET THE SFS ENROLLMENT TEAM

As you prepare for an SFS program, you will work with a few different folks at SFS Headquarters. So, here’s a quick guide for getting your questions answered!

General Questions? Our Enrollment Coordinator works with students as they submit materials through the SFS portal. You can contact them with questions about applying for SFS Financial Aid, submitting application materials, inquiries about which program is the best fit for you, or questions about the admissions process in general.

   Contact the Enrollment Coordinator at admissions@fieldstudies.org.

Program specific questions or questions about your enrollment in the program? Your SFS Admissions Counselor will be your main point of contact during the admissions and pre-departure process. They will help you through the application steps, conduct your interview for admission, support you through your enrollment steps, and guide you through all travel and visa logistics. You can contact your admissions counselor with any specific questions related to this program.

   Contact your admissions counselor at aglass@fieldstudies.org.

Questions about the billing process? Our student billing team works with students, schools, and families to coordinate payments for SFS programs. You can contact them with any questions about deposit payments, invoices, charges to your account, financial aid packages, billing deadlines, or loan paperwork.

   Contact the billing department at billing@fieldstudies.org.

Questions about medical approval or health and safety? Our Safety and Student Life team conducts the SFS Medical Approval Process for SFS students. You can get in touch with them to ask questions about immunizations, safety in the field, managing a medical condition during your program, dietary needs and preferences, and your Magnus Health portal.

   Contact the Safety and Student Life team at safety@fieldstudies.org.

Questions about learning accommodations? The Office of Academic Affairs coordinates with our staff and faculty in the field to assess options for learning accommodations. Students who have learning accommodations on their home campus should contact the Office of Academic Affairs after accepted to an SFS program, and prior to entering the field. More information can be found in the Academic Handbook for this program.

   Contact the Office of Academic Affairs at academics@fieldstudies.org.

Want to learn more about the SFS HQ team? Find the full list of the SFS team bios here!

Want to learn more about the people you’ll work with in the field? Find their bios here!

SFS ONLINE RESOURCES

We have many helpful resources on our website. Here are a few to save and reference:

   Admissions Overview
   SFS Blog
   Program Costs and Billing
   SFS Financial Aid
   Preparing for Departure

   Learn more about the SFS Center for Tropical Island Biodiversity Studies
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

Booking your flights
Students will work closely with their admissions counselor to arrange their travel and are responsible for the cost of these flights. **Students will receive specific travel instructions about 3-4 months prior to the start of their SFS program** – do not book flights before receiving these instructions.

Arrival to your program
SFS staff will meet students at the airport on the date and at the time specified in the travel instructions and will provide transportation to the Center. If you plan to arrive in country before the set arrival date for personal travel, please contact your admissions counselor.

You will book your flight only as far as Panamá City. Travel to and from Bocas del Toro will be arranged by SFS and the cost is covered by your overall program fees.

SFS is not responsible for reimbursing travel expenses for programs cancelled or rescheduled due to acts of war or civil unrest, strikes, weather, quarantine/epidemics/sickness, government regulations, or failure of equipment, power, or communications.

PASSPORT AND VISA

You must have a passport to enter all the countries where you plan to travel. Make certain that your passport is valid until six months after your intended departure. You must have your valid passport in-hand four months prior to the start of the program. If you will not be able to meet this timeline, please contact your admissions counselor.

Students do not need to apply for a visa in advance and will enter the country on a Tourist visa. Your admissions counselor will provide more information about 3-4 months prior to the start of your SFS program. There will not be an additional cost associated with this visa.

Non-US citizens may require a different visa process. Please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor to discuss.

MEDICAL PREPARATION FOR THE FIELD

SFS Medical Approval Process
As part of enrollment in an SFS program, students are required to complete the SFS Medical Approval Process. This review is designed to inform SFS staff of the medical and mental health needs or accommodations that may be required. The review is not meant to exclude, but to inform and allow support systems to be put in place. Should SFS have any concerns about accommodations for a physical or mental health condition, the student and the student’s physician or mental health provider will be contacted to discuss strategies for successful program participation.

The medical review process will be completed using a HIPAA-compliant online portal. Any forms required will be accessible via this portal and can be submitted electronically. Students will receive instructions for setting up their account after acceptance as part of the enrollment process.

**No student may enter the field until final medical approval is granted by SFS personnel.** This includes receipt and review of:

- **SFS Vital Health Record**: To be completed by the student through the Magnus Health Portal.
- **Physical Exam and Authorization Form**: To be completed by a physician, physician’s assistant, or registered nurse practitioner who is not related to the student.
- **Supplemental documentation from a medical specialist** if determined necessary by SFS. This may include information regarding counseling history and documentation of prescription medications.

As part of your medical review, you may be required to complete a phone call with one of our team members to discuss preparation and expectations for the program. The SFS Safety and Student Life team will contact you directly to schedule this call after submission of your Vital Health Record.

**Be certain to address any existing medical issues before arriving in country.** Students are responsible for informing SFS of any changes to their health status that occur after submission of the SFS medical forms. Inaccurate or incomplete information on
any of the SFS medical forms may be grounds for rescinding an offer of admission, recalling a student from the program, or restricting student participation in certain activities.

**Accommodating Students with Disabilities**
Students requesting physical and mental health accommodations should contact the SFS Safety and Student Life Department. Students requesting learning accommodations should contact the SFS Office of Academic Affairs, as outlined in the Academic Handbook for this program. SFS will work with students, home institutions, and physicians to determine the required level of accommodation and whether it can be safely and reasonably maintained on program. While SFS strives to make accommodations for most disabilities, due to the remote nature of the programs, there are varying levels of accessibility, services, and accommodations.

**Accommodating Dietary Needs and Preferences**
If you have a medically necessary dietary requirement, please contact the SFS Safety and Student Life Department. All dietary restrictions or preferences (e.g. gluten-free, vegetarian, vegan, etc.) should be noted on the SFS Vital Health Record and discussed with either your admissions counselor or the SFS Safety and Student Life Department. SFS can accommodate most dietary needs, but variety of food may be limited due to local availability, cultural practice, and cost.

**Insurance**

**Health Insurance**
Students on SFS programs are required to procure their own comprehensive health insurance, valid in the country (or countries) in which the program operates, for the full duration of their SFS program. SFS does not review individual insurance policies to ensure comprehensive international coverage; it is the students’ responsibility to ensure that the insurance coverage meets the following requirements:

- Valid in the program country or countries. Keep in mind trip itineraries for any personal pre- or post-program travel.
- Provides coverage for the full duration of the program, including any personal pre- or post-program travel.
- Covers more than only emergency medical care. Look for a comprehensive medical insurance plan that includes coverage for basic medical care, including non-urgent illness or injury (i.e. gastrointestinal distress, ear infections, ankle sprains, etc.), laboratory tests, and pharmaceutical needs.

**Students looking to obtain health insurance should keep the following in mind:**

- Most domestic health insurance plans do not provide comprehensive coverage for out-of-country medical expenses. Students should check with their policy provider on what services are available out-of-country.
- Students should check to see if their home institution provides international health insurance. Please note that home universities may have their own insurance requirements for participation in study abroad.
- Most insurance companies provide international coverage on a reimbursable basis, as most foreign public or private medical care facilities do not accept insurance for payment. Therefore, students should bring sufficient funds (i.e. a credit card with a high limit of at least $3,000) to pay for medical expenses up front, and then request reimbursement when they return home.

**Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation Insurance**
All SFS students are automatically enrolled in the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan through American International Group, Inc. (AIG). This insurance is effective for the duration of the program and does not cover personal travel before or after the program.

**Benefits of the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan include:**

- $350,000 for emergency medical evacuation
- $100,000 for emergency security evacuation
- $20,000 for repatriation of remains

The coverage provided by the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan is **NOT** the same as health, medical, or dental insurance. The plan covers the cost of transportation, accommodations, and medical care associated with an evacuation (e.g. life-saving support during transport in an air evacuation), in cases where the evacuation is deemed medically necessary. This insurance plan does not cover urgent or emergency medical care, basic medical care, laboratory tests, or pharmacy needs. **Therefore, students on SFS programs are required to supply their own comprehensive health insurance.**
valid in the country or countries in which the program operates, for the full duration of their SFS program as outlined in the previous section.

Medical Consultation
SFS recommends that students schedule a consultation with a travel doctor or physician at least 60 days prior to program departure to complete the **Physical Examination and Authorization Form** (available through the Magnus Health Portal) and review the following topics:

*Physical Conditioning*
Field work by its very nature is physically arduous: the days are long, the traveling seldom comfortable, and familiar comforts generally lacking. SFS programs involve some strenuous activities, including hikes over steep and uneven terrain, open-ocean swimming, long days in the rain, hot sun, or wind. All SFS programs involve multiple hours of standing or walking during field exercises as part of the academic program. We don’t require students to be Olympic athletes but consider that these programs require physical stamina, energy, and a positive attitude!

*Existing Medical Conditions*
Due to the rigorous nature of the program and stress of travel, existing and chronic health issues can be triggered or exacerbated while abroad, even if currently well-managed or in remission in the US. You should discuss all medical conditions with your physician and the SFS Safety and Student Life Department to see if this SFS program will be right for you. Consult with your physician and/or specialists and inform the SFS Safety and Student Life Department of any medical conditions that could lead to sudden illness, such as allergies to foods or insect stings, asthma, chronic heart conditions, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.

- Make sure to bring and carry on your person at all times any critical medications (e.g. Epi-Pens, inhalers, glucagon, etc.).
- If you have asthma, even if you have not had any issues in recent years, it is strongly recommended to bring your inhaler (and a back-up inhaler, as these can generally not be sourced in country) on program. Past students have found that their asthma can be triggered by environmental conditions (e.g. humidity, heat, dust, elevation, allergies, etc.) of certain program locations. Keep in mind, you may be exposed to allergens or environmental conditions you have not been exposed to in the past.

If you have a severe allergy or a family history of severe allergies, even if the reaction has been minor in the past, it is strongly recommended to bring two or more Epi-Pens with you on program. Due to the remote nature of the program, access to medical care can be delayed. In addition, you may be exposed to allergens that you have not been exposed to in the past, as well as the possibility of repeat exposures. Please contact the Safety and Student Life Department with any questions or concerns.

*Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications*
Students should bring enough over the counter (OTC) and prescription medication (including any prophylactic medication that may be recommended by your travel doctor or physician for travel to your program country) to last the entire duration of the program. This also applies to any personal travel that may be done before or after the program. If you are having difficulty procuring the full amount of medication, please alert the SFS Safety and Student Life Department immediately, as most medications cannot be replaced or refilled once in country, including common OTC medications. **It is important to note that it is illegal to send medications through the mail and this will result in confiscation, criminal charges, or deportation.**

Make sure to consider the following:
- Insurance companies typically do not dispense more than a three-month supply of medication, so you will need to work with both your prescribing physician and insurance provider to request a “Vacation Override” or other means to procure a supply for 100+ days.
- Supply of controlled substances and steroid medications may have additional restrictions, so we recommend starting conversations as early as possible with your prescribing physician and insurance provider.
- In the event of unprotected sexual encounters or activity, please be aware that prophylactic sexually transmitted infection (STI) medication and emergency contraception are often difficult to obtain while abroad due to availability and legal implications. Consult with your physician about options for preparedness.
• Medical marijuana is prohibited on our programs due to host-country laws, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and Transport Security Administration (TSA) restrictions. If you currently use medical marijuana, please discuss alternative options with your physician. Travel with some types of Cannabidiol (CBD) oil is also currently restricted by the FAA and TSA and may be restricted or illegal by host-country law.

While traveling, keep all medications in their original container and in carry-on luggage to avoid issues through border control and customs. List all medications on the SFS Vital Health Record and please alert the Safety and Student Life Department to any changes to your medication list, including dosage, as early as possible. It is highly recommended that students do not discontinue or alter the dose of certain prescription medications before or during the program. Please consult with your prescribing physician and the Safety and Student Life Department with any questions.

Mental Health
Studying abroad can be an exciting and energizing time for students. It can also present myriad challenges, including adjustment to a new culture and daily routine, unfamiliarity with the local environment, forming of new relationships, and a lack of familiar support systems. In addition, SFS programs operate in remote regions with delayed access to medical care and limited or absent mental health resources.

Students with mental health conditions should discuss any concerns with their physician, mental health provider, and the SFS Safety and Student Life Department prior to participation on an SFS program. Students who undergo regular counseling or therapy should verify that their mental health provider is available via phone, email, or other means of telecommunication while the student is abroad. Keep in mind that some mental health providers have jurisdiction restrictions when it comes to client communication. It is important to check-in with your mental health provider and see what availability they may have during your time abroad. SFS will also work with students to develop a set of coping strategies that can be utilized while studying abroad, in addition to preparing them for what to expect in their individual host countries. To read more about self-care while abroad, please see “Self-Care and Wellbeing.”

Vaccinations and Prophylactic Medication
SFS does not require any specific vaccinations or prophylactic medications for participation on program with respect to logistics or programming. However, SFS strongly recommends that all students consult the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and a travel clinic or medical provider to determine recommended vaccinations and prophylactic medication for travel to the program country. This consultation should consider medical history, personal travel itinerary (i.e. pre- or post-program travel, mid-semester break, etc.), and regional risk factors.

SFS strongly recommends that all students are up to date with routine vaccinations (i.e. MMR, Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, etc.) to protect themselves as well as vulnerable populations in country that may not have access to preventative vaccinations. SFS also strongly encourages students to consider the following:

• **Typhoid fever vaccination**: Recommended for most travelers to Panama, including those visiting smaller cities, villages, or rural areas.
• **Malaria prophylactic medication**: Malaria is present in provinces east of the Panama Canal and toward the border with Colombia. Recent transmissions have also been reported in the province of Ngöbe Buglé, adjacent to Bocas del Toro. While cases of malaria in Bocas del Toro have been rare, they do occur. Consult with travel clinic or medical provider regarding the advisability for malaria prophylaxis for travel to Panama, including any personal itineraries.
• **Rabies**: Rabies is transmitted via the saliva of mammals, including bats and other carnivores. Rabies is not present in canine populations in Panama. The most effective way to avoid rabies is to avoid touching or getting too close to wildlife. Another precautionary measure is receiving the pre-exposure rabies vaccination prior to departing for Panama. This vaccination series consists of three vaccinations administered over 21 to 28 days, so plan accordingly. The vaccination does not eliminate the need for getting a post-exposure vaccination if there is any potential exposure to rabies, which can include licks, scratches, bites, or close encounters with both domestic and wild animals. It does, however, reduce the number of post-exposure injections that are required and eliminates the need to administer rabies immune globulin, which is not available in country.

In addition, there are a number of non-vaccine preventable insect-borne diseases that are present in country. For up-to-date information on risk-factors, prevention, and treatment, please visit the CDC Travel webpage: https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/
Protection from Insects
Students should practice preventative measures to reduce the possibility of illness from exposure to insects:

- Take prophylactic medications where recommended
- Be aware of active times of day for insects in the region, and prepare accordingly
- Use a DEET-based insect repellent
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing
- Wear long-sleeved shirts, pants, socks tucked into pants, and fully enclosed shoes
- Use a mosquito-net at night, if needed
- Check yourself for ticks, both during outdoor activity and at the end of the day

Food and Water Safety
Water used for consumption and food preparation at SFS centers is filtered or boiled. Students are always able to access potable drinking water while on campus or on field trips. When off campus, students are encouraged to carry potable water from campus and consider safe drinking and eating practices. Remember:

- Water in many regions is often not potable, including ice, juices, and water for brushing teeth or showering. Be aware of how cups, plates, and utensils are cleaned or rinsed, as food or drink can be contaminated by utensils rinsed in non-potable water.
- If sampling street food, consider how it was prepared. Avoid raw or undercooked meat, fish, and shellfish or cooked food that has been allowed to stand for several hours at ambient temperature. Instead, eat food that has been thoroughly cooked, and is still steaming hot.
- If consuming fruits or vegetables, select options that can be peeled or appropriately washed.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk and milk products, including cheeses.

Altitude
If your program includes travel to higher altitudes (generally considered above 8,000 feet in elevation), please discuss preparedness, including the use of prophylactic medication and any implications considering your personal medical history (i.e. asthma, prior altitude-related illness, heart conditions, diabetes, etc.). SFS does not make recommendations on use of prophylactic medication for altitude. Please consult with your physician or travel doctor with any questions.

WATERFRONT
SFS Panama uses snorkeling as a tool for research and education. Swimming is a large component of the program and some academic work is completed in the water, so being comfortable in that setting is crucial. If you are a non-swimmer or if you are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with swimming in open water, please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor immediately.
IDENTITY AND CULTURE IN A NEW CONTEXT

On your SFS program, you will engage with people that come from a variety of cultural contexts. Most SFS students expect to encounter differences between themselves and those from the host country culture, but don’t realize that some of the most significant cultural differences they may face will be between themselves and members of their own student group. Reflecting on your own culture and identity before studying abroad with SFS can help you better navigate your experience abroad.

How do we define culture?
Culture is defined as the learned and shared patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and values of groups of interacting people. It is also a system for making meaning of things, and, as a result, we all wear cultural lenses or filters when we interpret a situation. Most of us are unaware of our own culture until we experience another.

Cultural Values
Each cultural group has a set of underlying values. These values affect our behavior and the way we perceive the behaviors of others. The table below lists several common U.S. values and prompts you to consider how other cultures or people might have values that differ. Of course, not everyone from the same cultural group shares the same set of underlying values in that culture. Therefore, it is helpful to think of cultural values existing along a continuum. By being open to and curious about another set of cultural values, we can connect with others more easily.

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<th>U.S. Values</th>
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<td>Change</td>
<td>In the U.S., it is common to value change and novelty over tradition and the ways of the past. Do you tend to embrace change and think towards the future, or hold onto tradition and value the past? How might this impact cultural views surrounding issues like climate change?</td>
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<td>Time and Its Control</td>
<td>Punctuality is valued highly in U.S. culture. Many U.S. Americans live very scheduled lives, abiding strictly by time commitments and tardiness is not accepted most U.S. contexts. In other cultures, human interaction is generally valued more than time commitments and timeliness. It may be acceptable to be 30 minutes late to a commitment if it means stopping to talk with an acquaintance on the street or spending time with family or friends. Do you feel the pull of time in your daily life? What are some ways that a cultural difference in perception of time might impact you while abroad?</td>
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<td>Equality</td>
<td>U.S. culture tends to emphasize equality over hierarchy and social status. While inequality in the U.S. certainly exists, there remains a culture of democracy, self-determination, and an expectation for equal treatment. Other cultures place a greater emphasis on hierarchy and social rank. Think of countries where there is not a democratic tradition and where it is expected to respect and honor the government, prevailing religion(s), and certain cultural beliefs. Think of how it may be different to be expected to honor certain members of society, such as a monarch or elders. In some cultures, foreigners, or specifically Westerners, may be regarded highly or given special treatment. Consider how you may need to adapt to your host culture, and how this might be different from what you are used to.</td>
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<td>Individualism</td>
<td>There is a common emphasis on the individual in the U.S. There is an idea that if you – personally – work hard, you can determine your future success. There are a lot of expectations put on the self in the U.S. Think about how commonplace it is to set personal goals or focus on enriching your personal knowledge and skills. Being unique and standing out is often desired and valued. In contrast, other cultures place a greater emphasis on a sense of belonging within a group rather than standing out. Instead of self-reliance, it may be more customary to rely on advice or assistance from others. It is often expected to help others and share knowledge and resources more so than in a more individualistic culture. Where does your culture fall into this continuum? How will you navigate being in a culture that might be more collectivist or more individualistic than you are used to?</td>
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<td>Directness, Openness, Honesty</td>
<td>In the U.S., there is a tendency to express opinions, thoughts, and dissent openly and directly. U.S. culture often values openness and candor about beliefs and emotions. Other cultures may have a more indirect communication style where it is not typical to express dissent or emotions directly and confrontation is avoided. In many cultures, it is important to avoid humiliation or embarrassment in what is called “saving face.” In these cultures, people tend to express disagreement or emotion in more subtle, indirect ways. Be cognizant of how you may want to adapt your communication style while abroad. Have you considered this cultural difference before?</td>
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Local Laws and Customs
When studying abroad, it’s important that you be prepared to take responsibility for your actions in a new place, as local laws and customs are likely different than the ones you are used to at home. The field staff will go into more detail about local laws and customs during SFS Orientation, but please consider the following:

- There might be country- or region-specific laws on alcohol consumption, smoking, behavior in public (e.g. public displays of affection, public intoxication, behavior at cultural sites, photography, etc.), carrying prescription medications, and many others.
- Appropriate clothing that is consistent with, and respectful of, local dress may be required. Some monuments and places of worship may require certain parts of the body to be covered.
- Non-verbal communication (such as body language and hand gestures) considered harmless in your home country may be inappropriate or culturally insensitive to people in other countries.
- Local events or holidays may occur where you are traveling, and some religious events or holidays require a heightened sense of cultural awareness or specific behaviors.

You can play an active role in keeping yourself safe and successfully adjusting to a new culture by learning about local laws and culture. It is always important to practice situational awareness and is even more so when in a new place.

Your Role in the Community
During your SFS program, you are a member of several communities.

- The first is the SFS community. We will foster a supportive, stimulating learning community where our actions and behaviors are governed by a set of common values we will define as a group.
- Second, you will be part of an international research and learning community. This comprises a professional staff, local contacts, community partners, elected officials, and SFS support staff.
- Third, you will be a temporary resident to the local community. There are many occasions when you will be expected to interact with the local residents in both academic and informal settings.

Note that it is a great privilege to study in another country and be welcomed into these communities. We want to ensure that we demonstrate an awareness of this privilege and respect for the country and culture. While we will be learning about the country and its people, each of you will be an ambassador of your own culture, country, and school. SFS is a place-based program and our campuses are permanent fixtures in the community. These communities are home to our staff members who live either on-campus or nearby year-round. This is distinct from a tour or casual visit to your host country and it is important to consider how your interactions with the local community can last beyond your time abroad. Behavior that is disrespectful, illegal, or contrary to cultural norms can degrade the relationship with the community and can impede healthy and meaningful interactions for your peers, SFS staff members, and future students. Thoughtful and purposeful interactions with the members of the local community will greatly enhance your study abroad experience!

Identity
As you plan to study abroad with SFS, consider how different aspects of your identity might be perceived in a new cultural context. All countries and communities have cultural values and societal norms that are woven into the fabric of their collective identities. These norms and values are important to these communities whether we agree with them or not. You will be a guest in your host culture(s), and it is not your role to change the culture or its values. Reflecting about your own identity will help you navigate this experience.

All aspects of your identities have the potential to be impacted, challenged, and strengthened while abroad. You may find that a part of your identity that is very important to you on your home campus is not as relevant amongst your peers at SFS. Or you may find that an aspect of your identity that is less significant to you at home is an important part of how people in your host culture perceive you.

Remember that you are part of a cohort and that your identity will vary from that of your peers. Each student’s background will inform their understanding of and response to a new situation. An important part of being a member of a team is supporting each other, even when you have differences of opinion or perspective.

The more open you can be to that varied experience, the more you will thrive and the better you will be able to support your peers, as well. We’re in this together!
For Your Consideration

No place is 100% free of discrimination and intolerance. Every country is shaped by its respective histories, and therefore attitudes towards gender identity, sexual orientation, racial and ethnic relations, and religious diversity can differ greatly from those in the U.S.

Your identities may grant and/or deny you power and privilege with local people, as well as your fellow peers.

You may find that people in your host culture are more direct and have less concern with political correctness than in the U.S. Keep in mind that local people may have never encountered a person like you. Therefore, what seems like discrimination may simply be curiosity.

Researching the country that you will be living in can help you prepare yourself for the situations you may encounter abroad. In specific, you may want to research the following topics of the country you will be living in:

- Current political and societal issues
- Minority, majority, and plurality racial and ethnic composition
- History of racial and ethnic relations
- LGBTQIA climate
- Religious breakdown
- Cultural norms

We encourage you to connect with your SFS Admissions Counselor if you would like to talk about your identity abroad. Another great resource is to connect with a student who has participated on the program before through the Alumni Contact list. Students on the Alumni Contact list have shared topics they feel comfortable talking about, which makes connecting with a student who identifies similarly to you very easy. You can find the Alumni Contact list on your “Resources” tab in your SFS portal after you are accepted to the program, or request that your SFS Admissions Counselor email this list while you are still in the application process. We encourage you to use alumni as a resource before departure!
LIFE IN THE FIELD:
WHAT TO EXPECT
ABOUT SFS PANAMA

Panamá is the great connector between two continents – a corridor that links the natural riches of North and Central America to South America. Few places on Earth can claim the density of species and ecosystem richness that this isthmus can. Among its reefs, mangroves, seagrass beds, estuaries, and rivers, this region boasts a variety of reef/game fish, turtles, and dolphins, as well as manatees, monkeys, and caiman. Our classroom in Panamá is the archipelago of Bocas Del Toro, a place where forest and shore come together and present almost limitless opportunities to study the ecology and conservation of both the marine and terrestrial resources.

It is the dynamic interface between forested islands and life-filled waters that will drive our learning of fragile habitats, natural resource use, and indigenous ways of life based on relationships that are deeply dependent upon a healthy environment. Student research will focus on identifying the status of key island systems, both natural and human; interrelationships of these systems; and the ecosystem pressures that threaten the delicate balance of archipelago’s island system.

The islands of the Bocas del Toro archipelago, located in the province of Bocas del Toro, remained extremely rural for over three centuries until the ‘discovery’ of green gold – bananas. The towns of Bocas, Almirante and Changuinola were the center of the banana industry.

The legacy of the United Fruit Company, present in the BDT region from the early 1880s until the late 1930s and again from 1950 to present day, operating as Chiquita Brands International in Changuinola, Bocas del Toro, can be felt in every aspect of life and has had unintended consequences for the people, flora and fauna of the region (Stephens, 2008). The United Fruit Company at one point was exporting more fruit to North American and European cities than any other place on the planet.

During the semester, students will focus on defining and examining the state of the islands’ species, habitats, and human communities through natural science and social science lenses.

Program Schedule

The weekly schedule will vary significantly throughout the program. After the first few days of orientation and organization, the program will include about 15 lectures a week, plus three to five other meetings (organizational, research/paper presentations, guest lectures) and fieldtrips. Academic scheduling is on a six day/week schedule with Saturdays usually reserved for community engagement. Throughout the program, one day a week is reserved for community engagement (usually Saturdays) and studying and relaxing (Sunday).

Mornings usually consist of lectures, both in the classroom and the field, and field trips. Afternoons are generally made up of academic and fieldwork. During the second and third weeks of the semester program, you will also have formal Spanish lessons three times a week in the afternoon for 3-4 hours per session. Some academic activities will occur at night, especially if it is very hot during the day.

During the last month of the program, the lectures and organized classes diminish in frequency and open space to allocate time for Directed Research (DR) projects. During DR, you will spend that majority of your time with your selected DR professor and classmates. Groups ranging in size from 4-8 students work side-by-side with a faculty member at various research sites to collect data. Additional meetings are scheduled to offer training sessions in the skills needed to complete the research. These include sessions on statistics, paper writing formats, spreadsheets and data manipulation, laboratory analysis and presentation preparation. Please be aware that you will receive a weekly schedule and will not always have access to a schedule for upcoming lectures or field trips. This is due to the variable nature of the weather and availability of guest lectures or fieldtrips. We ask that all students prepare to be flexible at all times as weather conditions and guest lecturer schedules can change at any moment. Unlike at your home institution, your classes may not meet at the same time each week.
### Sample Schedules

#### Sample Day 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:10-8:25am</td>
<td>RAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30am-10:30pm</td>
<td>Mangrove Ecology and Substrate Types and Structural Complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-12:15pm</td>
<td>Field Methods snorkel-Transects and Quadrats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-4:30pm</td>
<td>Spanish Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30-5:30pm</td>
<td>Optional time to stay in town to work on assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00pm-6:45pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Sample Day 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:10-8:25am</td>
<td>RAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30am-5:30pm</td>
<td>All Day Field Trip, Visits to Popa II, Bahia Honda communities - Snorkel, using transects and quadrats in mangroves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:00pm</td>
<td>Lunch in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Sample Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
<th>SUNDAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>Zapatillas DAY!</td>
<td>7:30-8:00am</td>
<td>8:00am-8:45am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td>7:30-8:00 Breakfast</td>
<td></td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:10-8:25am</td>
<td>8:10-8:25am</td>
<td>8:10-8:25am</td>
<td>NO RAP TODAY</td>
<td>8:10-8:25am</td>
<td>8:30-9:30am</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAP</td>
<td>RAP</td>
<td>RAP</td>
<td></td>
<td>RAP</td>
<td>Community Engagement Prep</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:30-9:30am</td>
<td>8:30-9:30am</td>
<td>8:30-10:30pm</td>
<td>ALL DAY TRIP TO ZAPATILLAS, Isla Bastimentos National Marine Park</td>
<td></td>
<td>9:30-12:30pm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPSV/CL Video Project Planning</td>
<td>EPSV/CL Video Project Planning</td>
<td>JKPR and TCE Lecture - Protected Areas, MPA Design</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:45am-11:45am</td>
<td>10:45-12:15pm</td>
<td>9:30am-12:30pm</td>
<td>PRM - Epiphyte and Bromeliad Walk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CL/Understanding Privilege, Power and Privilege in Conservation</td>
<td>Disease and Threats to Corals/Prep for Zapatillas trip</td>
<td>PRM - Epiphyte and Bromeliad Walk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30-1:00pm</td>
<td>12:30-1:00pm</td>
<td>12:30-1:00pm</td>
<td>TCE - Coral Reef Health in a Protected Area Snorkel</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:30-2:30pm</td>
<td>1:30-5:30pm</td>
<td>1:30-2:30pm</td>
<td>TCE - Coral Reef Health in a Protected Area/Zapatillas debrief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCE-Results Editing/Discussion Prep</td>
<td>Course Check-Ins/Mid-semester Evaluations</td>
<td>EPSV-Tourism in Protected Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45-5:30pm</td>
<td>2:30-4:30pm</td>
<td>3:45-5:45pm</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free/Work Time</td>
<td>Students explore trails, swim, snorkel and think about future project ideas</td>
<td>PRM-Bromeliad Lab and Frog Report/Zapatillas Debrief</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>7:00-8:30pm</td>
<td>Optional on-campus activity: TRIVIA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional on-campus activity: Documentary screening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**THE SCHOOL FOR FIELD STUDIES**
**A Note on SFS Structure and Self-Care**

SFS programs are highly structured and we encourage you to reflect on how the SFS program will differ from your daily life on your home campus. The 6-day per week academic model is distinct from a typical college campus, and allows time for fieldwork, travel, and cultural and community activities. SFS program policies additionally make the daily student experience on an SFS program different from most home campuses. The SFS program model and policies are part of what makes the SFS experience unique and are designed to help keep students safe, healthy, and create an environment where students can have a positive experience abroad. It’s important to consider how you will adjust to this shift in routine, especially as it relates to your ability to manage self-care while abroad. You can review “Self-Care and Wellbeing” later in this document for a further reflection on managing self-care while on an SFS program.

It’s important to understand that the structure and policies of SFS programs are designed to facilitate student, staff, and local community member safety and well-being, create an environment where students can have a positive experience abroad, and help students manage the rigors of SFS programs. Taking the time to fully consider and understand SFS structure and policies, as well as the reasoning behind it will help you to have a positive experience abroad and promote a healthy and productive environment for all those around you. Please review SFS Policies and Procedures to read through the SFS program policies, behavioral expectations, and information about disciplinary action when these expectations and policies are not upheld.

We encourage you to discuss any questions or concerns about the structure of your program with your SFS Admissions Counselor or SFS Safety and Student Life.

**RAP (Reflection, Announcements, Physicality)**

The Student Health and Wellness Manager (HW) alongside the Student of the Day will lead RAP together each morning. RAP begins with announcements from staff delivered by the SAM followed by asking students if there are any announcements for the group. Announcements range from changes to the schedule, updates to assignments, or clarifications on departure times. The student of the day will read the schedule for the day including who is on cook crew and what items will be needed throughout the day; ex. Be ready after lunch to get into boats with your boots and snorkel gear to head to the field!

After announcements, the student of the day engages the group in the physical activity of their choice. Sometimes this is in the form of a game, group stretching, or some kind of dance party. Whatever you decide to do as student of the day, the physical part of RAP is meant to awaken the senses, create community, laughter, and fun.

The Student of the Day can then move on to some kind of reflection or intention for the day. Many students lead mini-meditations or a space for students to discuss what they have enjoyed or what they would like to do in the future in Bocas. RAP can be as creative and fun as you imagine it to be.

**Community and Language**

One of the ways SFS is different from many traditional study abroad options is that our programs do not follow the traditional model of cultural and language immersion. Rather, we embrace understanding how culture influences and impacts environmental policies and practices. We encourage students to gain greater cultural competence in conservation as their time progresses in Bocas del Toro via community engagement and engaging in class discussions and readings.

**Think about how you will experience local culture on this program.** On an SFS program, you will live at a field station with your team, rather than in a homestay, local apartment, or university dorm. You and your cohort will spend much of your time together – living, working, and studying as a group. This means that you will not necessarily be eating local cuisine, speaking a local language, or navigating the local culture every day. However, we fundamentally believe that meaningful environmental research is only possible with the input of local people and in consideration of cultural history. We develop our research plans in collaboration with our community partners and stakeholders, but we do not consider it our role to make decisions on their behalf or to impose our ideas. An important part of every SFS program is to explore environmental issues within the context of the community and ecosystems we call home.

We will always take the lead from our community, so activities may vary term to term to reflect the needs and requests of our partners. On this program you might interact with the community by:

- Participating in community service trips to help local conservation groups and communities.
- Meeting with Ngäbe leaders to learn more about their culture and their efforts to promote their role in land management and sustainable natural resource use.
- Working with community leaders on environmental tourism programs.
• Hosting community lectures or workshops.
• Attending community festivals such as Días de Patria (November) and Carnaval (February) and developing sustainability or birding fairs in the park.
• Environmental education activities, playing sports like soccer, volleyball or frisbee, teaching children to swim, beach clean-ups, and creating content for talks with local fishermen and boat drivers about coral reef health and conservation, and many other activities.

**Consider your exposure to the local language through this program.** The language course is not intended to help you achieve fluency in the local language, but rather to give you a few tools to use to navigate the local culture and to communicate on a basic level with community members. If you have a goal to enhance your language abilities during your SFS program, it is important to take initiative: read a local newspaper, listen to local music, practice your skills when you have free time, and engage with local staff members.

In Bocas, English is commonly spoken as well as Spanish and several local languages.

The Spanish language component of this course aims to refresh your Spanish skills or give you a very basic foundation in the language if it is new for you. It is important to understand that this is not a language immersion program. Some basic understanding of Spanish will greatly facilitate all interactions with community members, and significantly enhance your research and personal experience in Panamá.

The courses are taught in English, but it is important to remember that several of our field exercises include speaking with community members in Spanish to collect data on which you will be evaluated. You will work in groups for these interviews, but it will be good to be prepared to exercise your language skills!

**Center Hours**
Due to the residential nature of SFS programs, there is a curfew set for when students are required to return to campus. We will present specific information regarding Center closing hours during Orientation at the beginning of our program.

**Special Religious Requirements**
If you have questions regarding a religious holiday which falls during program time, please contact your Admissions Counselor immediately upon acceptance. Schedules often involve complex coordination with many parties and reservations are often made months in advance.

**Program Breaks**
Please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor with any questions or concerns about program breaks. Dates for the breaks below are typically available 1-2 weeks prior to the start of the program and will be sent to students by email as soon as they are available. Students will make plans for activities and accommodations during program breaks together after arrival.

**Weekends Away**
**SUBJECT TO COVID-19 POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**
There will be two “Weekends Away” during the semester, when students will have both Saturday and Sunday off, and will spend the night away from campus. Students will have the option of departing for the weekend away on Friday night or Saturday morning and will be expected to return by curfew on Sunday. The center will be closed, and students are responsible for their accommodations during these weekends. The dates of the weekends away will be announced at the start of the semester.

**Mid-Semester Break**
The program includes a seven-day break during which time the Center is closed, and students are expected to travel on their own. This is a wonderful opportunity (and the only one during the program!) to do some independent travel in the region.

Before the mid-semester break and weekends away, staff will brief you on current health and safety concerns as well as necessary precautions for traveling in the host country and/or surrounding countries. You will be required to submit a rough itinerary prior to the break and are advised to travel in groups of two or more. The staff will be on call during this time and you will be given emergency contact numbers to carry with you. Mid-Semester Break and Weekends Away are characterized as “Non-Program Time.” You can read more about what this entails in SFS Policies and Procedures.
LIFE AT THE CENTER

Setting
Bocas Town is the hub of the archipelago and has a population of about 10,000. It is located 7 minutes by car from the field station. Bocas Town has a number of hotels and hostels, restaurants, bakeries, markets, parks, a bank, four ATM machines, a hospital, dentist, medical clinic, police and fire departments, bars, pool halls, beaches, and an airport providing daily service to and from Panamá City. Bocas del Toro can be accessed by airplane from Panama City (1 hr) or water taxi from the port of Almirante on the mainland (30 min.). Bocas del Toro residents are very open to receiving tourists, thousands of which visit yearly.

Southeast of Isla Colón lies Isla Bastimentos which is home to the Isla Bastimentos National Marine Park. This park covers an area of 13,226 ha and was primarily established to protect the abundant coral reefs in the region. The park also protects a swath of the island’s interior as well. The most spectacular coral reefs occur near Cayos Zapatillas (Zapatilla Cays), which lie to the south of Isla Bastimentos. The geology of Isla Bastimentos is similar to Isla Colón, with a hilly interior, mangroves on the west side and a 6 km beach (Playa Larga) on its east side. The remaining islands of the archipelago include Isla Solarte, Isla Carenero, Isla San Cristóbal, Isla Popa, and Isla Cayo Agua. Isla Popa has the largest Ngäbe population of any of the islands in the archipelago. An additional interesting site is the spectacular Bird Island, a protected nesting place for brown booby and red-billed tropic birds, among other species.

Just north and west of Isla Colón, across the Boca del Drago inlet, lies a region of Panamá’s mainland known as the Soropta Peninsula. This peninsula hosts a myriad of wildlife in its extensive primary forest, including howler, capuchin, spider and night monkeys, a striking array of reptiles and amphibians, and very high bird and plant diversity. Its geologic history has resulted in hilly topographical features consisting of swamps and ridges throughout the region.

Weather and Climate
Panamá has a tropical climate: generally, very humid year-round with temperatures in the high 80s to low 90s during the day (real feel 95-102°F) and mid to high 70s (real feel 80-85°F) at night. Bocas del Toro experiences much heavier and more frequent rain than the rest of the isthmus, so many characterize the seasons as “less wet” and “more wet”.

- **Rainy seasons** are from late May to early August and again from late November to mid-January.
- **Dry (or “less wet”) seasons** are usually from mid-August to early November and again from late January to mid-May.
- **Both Fall and Spring Semester students should be prepared for “less wet” conditions at the center.**

Note that on average, Bocas del Toro receives approximately 10.5 feet of rain per year and unlike in other tropical climates, Bocas del Toro does not usually experience rain only in the afternoon for a few hours followed by the sun coming out again. There are times when rain will last for days or for a week and there are times when we will experience no rain and multiple weeks of sun. During those rainy days expect slightly cooler temperatures, and during dry days or weeks, be prepared for very sunny and hot days!

A note about hurricane season: Though Panamá is on the Caribbean, it very rarely experiences hurricanes. Hurricanes originating off the coast of Africa are moved by prevailing winds and steering currents westward and northward.
A note about earthquakes: Earthquakes do occur in Panama. Information about how to stay safe during an earthquake will be presented during orientation.

Community Living
On an SFS program you are part of a team, living and working with a small community of your fellow students and staff.

This isn’t just having a roommate or a classmate. This experience is intensive and involves many hours spent together in close quarters and out in the elements. In addition to the communal living arrangements, a lot of the academic work is collaborative or group work. This experience will require patience, open-mindedness, resiliency, and cooperation. The benefit of this cohort model is that you will have a community to support you when the going gets tough and laugh with you along the way. Center life will be both rewarding and challenging and will require you to take responsibility for being an active participant at the center and a supportive team member to your peers.

Chores
The center relies on a group living model, where everyone on campus does their part. Students and staff alike are expected to do their own dishes and to engage in keeping our home beautiful. Specific chore responsibilities and schedules will be shared with students during orientation but may include cleaning and composting every day after each meal, general common area cleaning, and pool maintenance.
The Field Station
The Tropical Island Biodiversity Studies (TIBS) program is based on Isla Colón at a former hotel, with bungalows nestled among the palms. The Center is located approximately 2 miles Northeast of Bocas del Toro (Bocas Town) and is accessible by boat and car. The classroom sits nestled in the forest and the majority of common spaces are open-air.

Housing
Dormitory-style accommodations with an exterior door open to a small porch for each cabin. There are two sets of bunk beds per cabin. Each cabin has one bathroom with one shower and one toilet. Four students live together in each cabin. Each student will have space to store their belongings, but space is limited. You will be able to hang some items and fold and store all remaining items. Each dorm room has an air conditioning unit and one standing fan. AC units are only used on during certain times of day and must be turned off when traveling off-site as a means for conserving energy. Sheets are provided.

Laundry
There are laundry machines on-site. Laundry is cleaned once per week. Due to water shortages and power outages, some laundry days may be canceled. Please bring enough extra sets of undergarments to get you through at least two full weeks.

Other Facilities
The Center has a small, screened-in student lounge, a library/laboratory space, an outdoor student kitchen, an open-air classroom, a full kitchen for preparing meals, a screened-in dining area, a pool, and waterfront access for kayaks, paddleboards, and swimming.

The forest is our backyard and the ocean is our front!
Food and Cuisine
All meals are provided in the dining area and are prepared by local staff. Students will assist in breakfast, lunch and dinner setup and cleanup as part of rotating chore responsibilities. The kitchen staff will serve breakfast, lunch, and dinner Monday - Saturday. On Sundays, everyone is responsible for preparing their own meals or finding other dining options. Students will have access to the main kitchen, leftovers, basic supplies, and supplies for sandwiches. We make an effort to provide snacks such as fruit, drinks (tea and coffee), bread and spreads at designated times. Students have access to a refrigerator and shelf space to store snacks purchased in town. If you desire any food item beyond what is provided, you will need to travel to town to purchase your own supplies.

On special occasions, such as birthdays, we celebrate with cake or other treats!

Specialty Diets
SFS can accommodate most dietary needs and preferences, but students will find that the variety of food may be limited due to local availability, cultural practice, and cost. Additionally, when away from the Center, options may be further limited. For example, specialty food products high in protein, such as tofu, quinoa, dark leafy greens, and raw fruits and vegetables may not be readily available on campus and is dependent on availability. Rice and cooked vegetables comprise many alternative meals for students with specialty diets. Therefore, SFS recommends bringing snacks (i.e. protein powder, protein bars, nut butters, trail mix, etc.) to supplement dietary variety.

For students with a medically necessary dietary requirement, please refer to the “Medical Preparation for the Field” section of this guide.

Exercise and Recreation
While at the Center, student options for exercise and recreation are ample. Running, yoga, and swimming are popular. With direct access to the water across the street, students can kayak, swim, and paddle board.

Our open-air classroom doubles as a fitness class area for activities including yoga and dance.

Students can also get off campus and go for runs and walks to Paunch and Bluff beaches.
TECHNOLOGY AND COMMUNICATION

Computers
Students need to bring their own laptops with them for use during the program. A tablet alone is not sufficient, and Chromebooks or devices that rely on Internet connectivity are not recommended. Your laptop should contain Microsoft Office or have the ability to export and receive documents that are compatible with Microsoft Office. Your laptop also must have a USB port or a way to support a USB drive via an adapter.

Computer Care
Due to the varying weather conditions at our field stations, electronic devices are subjected to a much harsher environment than they normally operate in. Back up your data regularly onto a USB, external hard drive, or cloud in the event your computer fails during your program. Internet is not always available, so do not plan to rely on the cloud for storage!

Please be aware that the heat and humidity can be very hard on electronics and can cause serious damage to your devices. In particular, Apple products do not fare well in high humidity and are more difficult to repair or replace locally. PCs are more common in this region and local electronic repair centers are better equipped to handle PC repairs.

Given the conditions, students should take some precautions to give themselves the best chance of success. Here are some examples:

- Bring a waterproof or water-resistant case or a re-sealable bag for all devices (especially touch screens).
- Use moisture absorbing material in your case any time your laptop is not in use. (Rice is a good option and available locally!)
- Consider bringing a cooling mat, a laptop fan, and a spare battery and charger.
- Pay attention to your device function: if it’s working hard, give it a rest!
- Avoid exposing your device to direct sunlight, precipitation, dust, or other harmful elements (like sunscreen)!
- Consider purchasing personal insurance for your valuable devices.

For reasons listed above, SFS does not recommend that students bring Apple laptops to the program. Past students have either purchased less expensive PCs for the program or borrowed a PC from a friend or family member. Please ensure that the machine works properly. Do not travel with a computer that is prone to breakdowns or cannot maintain charge.

SFS has a couple dedicated student computers which are used primarily for sharing group data, documents, etc. In the case of a personal computer failure, these computers can be used by students for their work but must remain as a shared resource. Do not plan to use an SFS computer as your laptop for the semester – it is required to bring a personal laptop.

Electrical Appliances
Electricity in the dorm is the same voltage as in the US – 120V. Similarly, plugs are also the same as you will find in the US in the same 2 or 3 prong configurations.

It is helpful to bring adapters (to go from three-prong to two-prong cords – some outlets at the Center are three-prong and some are two-prong). We also recommend bringing a personal power strip, as there are a limited number of outlets per dorm room.

Internet
Wireless internet is available at the Center. Students are permitted to use the internet for academic and personal use in accordance with the internet policies outlined in the SFS Policies and Procedures. The internet has limited bandwidth and is shared amongst students and staff.

Part of living at a field station entails working with limited resources, including the Internet. You should expect internet connection to be slow and intermittent, so you should not expect to use the Internet in the same way you do at home. There will be times during the semester when you do not have access to the Internet. Limited access requires a good deal of patience, and you should get ready to unplug!

Things to think about:
- Set up WhatsApp and/or other messaging apps before you leave for your program
- Download offline playlists, as you won’t be able to stream music from Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, YouTube, etc.
• Bring an external hard drive with your favorite movies and shows, as you won’t have access to streaming platforms like Netflix, Hulu, etc.
• Set communication expectations with your family and friends at home – your schedule and access to internet will change often and you will not have access to video communication such as FaceTime/Skype/Zoom at the center.

Communication with Home

**Messaging Apps**
The most convenient and affordable way to communicate with your family and friends at home is via Wi-Fi-based messaging such as WhatsApp, iMessage, GroupMe, Facebook Messenger, and email.

Students are welcome to bring their personal smartphones to use on the Wi-Fi at the center. Please remember that many apps require a text or call verification code during the setup process, so we recommend that you install and set up any apps you intend to use prior to departure.

Remember that access to video chat will be limited based on Internet speed and availability!

**Phones**
Upon arrival to Panamá, SFS will provide you with a cell phone and Panamanian phone number able to place calls and text. You will receive one phone card from SFS but will need to purchase a separate calling card to place calls home. Phone cards are sold in various amounts ($5, $10, and $20) at the airport and all over Bocas Town. Students will be required to keep their cell phone charged and with minutes at all times during the program. These phones will be used to communicate primarily with fellow students and staff and will be used to contact students in the event of an emergency. You will be able to provide friends and family with your personal cell phone number, and they can call you without any charge to you (They will be placing an international call and will likely incur a charge!). Some former students have chosen to use the SIM card of your issued Panamanian phone in their personal smart phone. To do so, you will need to be certain that your phone is “unlocked” to be able to be used with multiple SIM cards.

**Mail**
It is not possible to send mail directly to the SFS Panama Center. Instead, if you have items sent, you may register with Bocas Island Express which charges $5.00 per pound to retrieve parcels. Due to the high cost of receiving items, SFS does not recommend receiving heavy items. You should plan to pack and carry with you everything you will need for the duration of the program. Please contact your admissions counselor with questions.

*If you have prescription medicines, make sure to bring enough for the entire session, as it is not legal or possible to receive these via mail.*
HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELLNESS IN THE FIELD

SFS Staff and Student Health and Wellness Manager
Due to the remote location of many SFS field stations, several SFS field staff are certified in Wilderness First Aid (WFA) and trained on how to respond in the case of an emergency. In addition, each SFS program is staffed with a full-time residential Student Affairs Manager (SAM) who is the primary medical responder and student support personnel on campus. The SAM is certified as a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) and in Mental Health First Aid; they also receive training in sexual assault first response. In addition to their role as a medical responder, the SAM also coordinates program logistics, engages students in community outreach, advises and counsels students on group dynamics and adjusting to life abroad, and conducts in-country risk assessment and management.

Orientation
Upon arrival to your SFS campus, all students participate in an orientation that provides information specific to the Center and country, including local community and culture, daily Center operations, and relevant risks and hazards. The goal of orientation is to:

- Familiarize students with SFS-wide and campus-specific policies and procedures
- Introduce students to potential risks and hazards inherent in the program and its location
- Introduce students to potential risks and cultural norms of the local community
- Build foundations for good group dynamics and a functional student community
- Introduce a sustainability contract
- Help students understand their role in conservation and community relations on campus
- Foster self-awareness

Prior to arrival on program, SFS recommends that students take time to understand the risks associated with travel in a foreign country as well as ways to increase their own personal safety. The following resources may be helpful to you in this research:

- Bureau of Consular Affairs: www.travel.state.gov
- U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/
- Diversity Abroad: https://www.diversitynetwork.org/page/publications

24-Hour Emergency Hotline
SFS maintains a 24-hour emergency hotline while students are abroad, and during their travels to the program. If a parent or guardian needs to urgently contact a student in the field, an emergency call can be made to this emergency hotline at 978.219.5113. When prompted, leave a message including your name and phone number. You can expect to receive a call back from the SFS Safety and Student Life Department within one hour. For non-emergency inquiries while a student is in the field, please e-mail safety@fieldstudies.org.

Medical Care on Program
SFS maintains a detailed Risk Assessment and Management Plan for each Center, which outlines country risks and response protocols, including local, national, and international medical facilities and their treatment capabilities. These plans ensure that SFS staff are always aware of the closest and most capable medical facility in their current vicinity and the protocols outline the best route for medical care access. If a student requires medical attention during a program, the Student Affairs Manager (SAM) on campus will assess the illness or injury and determine next steps (i.e. first aid, monitoring, medical attention, etc.). If a visit to a medical care facility is needed, an SFS staff member will assist in facilitating care and accompany the student to the appointment. Please be aware that there may be times when access to medical care may be delayed or unavailable, such as during travel or on expedition.

Students are responsible for all incidental expenses, including medical costs, transportation, accommodations, etc., incurred by all parties involved. Some medical emergencies or conditions, including injuries and illnesses that cannot be supported in the field, may necessitate medical withdrawal from the program. Final decisions on medical withdrawal are made by SFS.
Mental Health Support
SFS is partnered with Morneau Shepell to provide students with My Student Support Program (My SSP). This program provides 24/7 mental health and wellness support in the form of chat, phone, and video that connect students with Student Support Advisors. It also provides wellness tips and reminders that can be a helpful source of support while adjusting to new routines, roles, and responsibilities while abroad. The resource is accessible via the My SSP App, which can be downloaded for free in the App store or by visiting the My SSP website, https://us.myissp.com/Home/UniversitySearch. Students will have a full introduction to the resource during their in-country program orientation but are encouraged to download and explore the App or website prior to departure. It is helpful to complete the APP profile before departure and accept the push notifications.

This resource can be used for both immediate and ongoing consultations during a student’s time abroad. However, MySSP is meant to be a supplemental resource during the program. Students should work with the SFS Safety and Student Life Department and their home mental health provider to make a support plan to manage mental health while abroad.

Sexual Health and Wellness
When it comes to sexual health and wellness or relationships during your SFS program, please consider:

- The ramifications that a short-term relationship may have on a small residential campus or within the local community. These relationships can have long-term effects on local communities that can last beyond your time abroad.
- The current dialogue about and understanding of consent in the U.S. often does not apply in other cultures.
- If you decide to engage in sexual interactions during your program, use protection (e.g. condoms/dental dams).
- Prophylactic sexually transmitted infection (STI) medication and emergency contraception may not be available in the remote locations in which we operate.
- Students who feel subjected to sexual harassment should walk away from any situation that makes them uncomfortable without concern for being culturally inappropriate. Students should report harassment or assault to any SFS staff member or HQ representative with whom they feel comfortable.
- In the case of a sexual assault, SFS will make every effort to support a student. This includes access to medical care, the option to report to the local law enforcement, and identifying support systems and additional resources. Local laws, definitions, and legal implications often differ from those in the US. Different laws and limited availability of resources such as rape kits can be complicating factors in responding to a report of sexual harassment or sexual assault in foreign countries.

Self-Care and Wellbeing
Study abroad can be an exciting time for personal reflection and growth. However, the adjustment to new routines, relationships, and cultural environments, while away from your usual support systems, can be challenging especially if you do not take time for self-care. Self-care is an essential tool for maintaining good mental, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing during your time abroad. As you prepare for your SFS program, take time to consider how you might react to challenges that you encounter. Do you have self-care practices that you use at home during times of stress or transition? For example, do you journal? Create art? Exercise? Go for a long drive in the car? The ways you manage stress, take care of yourself, or find joy are your coping mechanisms. Consider that some of these outlets may not be available to you while you are abroad on an SFS program. For example:

- **Communication with support systems.** Limited internet connectivity, unexpected power outages, and busy academic and travel schedules can reduce the frequency and ease with which you are able to contact family, friends, pets, mentors, counselors, etc. If you currently talk to a mental health provider, and plan to stay in touch while abroad, this limited connectivity can pose a challenge. Similarly, talk to your family and friends to figure out the best communication plan (i.e. WhatsApp, calling card, etc.) and remember that you may not be able to be in touch as frequently as you are on your home campus
- **Social media.** Limited internet bandwidth can make it difficult to engage with others through pictures and videos over social media platforms. Upload speeds are significantly slower and, at times, not possible. This can be a source of stress for students who are used to constant connections, and can cause frustration, irritability, sadness, and anxiety. What other ways can you communicate with others about your study abroad experience? For example, setting an expectation with friends and family that you will update a blog might reduce a feeling of stress to provide social media updates in real time.
• **Privacy and time alone.** On campus, it may not be possible to find a private spot to rest and recharge daily. On a residential campus, there will be a lot of interaction with your peer group (i.e. sharing meals, attending classes, studying, recreational time, etc.). Think of ways that you can create some space for yourself when you are unable to physically distance yourself from others. Perhaps using headphones or stringing up a hammock can provide similar space.

• **Off-campus transportation.** Access to transportation may be limited and you will not be permitted to operate vehicles (including cars, motorboats, motorcycles, etc.) at any time while on program. Think about how this limited mobility might impact coping mechanisms that you use at home, such as taking yourself for a long drive.

• **Solo runs or hikes.** While the locations of most SFS campuses allow for regular exercise, it may look different from your normal routines at home. For example, SFS campuses do not have athletic facilities or equipment such as treadmills or weights. You will be required to use the buddy system when exercising off campus. (For more information about the SFS Off-Campus Policies in SFS Policies and Procedures). While away from the SFS center, it may not be feasible to find time or space for recreational exercise. SFS encourages students to be flexible with their exercise routines. Students are encouraged to bring compact workout equipment, such as resistance bands, for use during the program. Bringing downloaded exercise videos (i.e. yoga, Pilates, etc.), using apps that can be accessed offline, coaching one another through favorite workouts or playing a pick-up game of soccer or frisbee can be creative and fun ways to stay active.

When you do not engage in self-care during times of stress, you may be more apt to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms, which can include risk-taking behaviors such as increased alcohol consumption, inappropriate or unhealthy relationships, rule-breaking, or resistance to structure.

This phenomenon is articulated by psychologist Dr. William Glasser as “Choice Theory.” “Choice Theory” holds that behavior is driven by an attempt to fulfill five basic needs: security, love, power, freedom, and fun. If one or more of these behaviors is not being met, then you may be more likely to act out in other aspects of life. For example, if you feel “power” is not met due to a lack of autonomy in a new, unfamiliar environment, you may seek to increase levels of “fun” by drinking to excess when you may otherwise not. It is important to understand that these types of behaviors can have more serious repercussions while abroad, due to unfamiliarity with the local culture, environment, and local laws and customs. Risky student behavior can put you and others in dangerous or unsafe situations disrupt the ability of staff and students to perform research and/or have adverse impacts on the local community.

**Managing Social Drinking**

If drinking alcohol is part of how you socialize with friends, this will remain an option to you during your time abroad at local restaurants and bars in your free time. According to the SFS Alcohol Policy, SFS maintains dry campuses, and alcohol consumption is not permitted at the field station. More information about this policy can be found in SFS Policies and Procedures.

If you do choose to consume alcohol, we ask that you do so in moderation. Situational awareness and understanding of local cultures are important factors in reducing risk in certain situations. In some cultures, alcohol abuse is a systemic problem in the community. Therefore, over-indulgence of alcohol by SFS students can be viewed negatively by the community. It is always important to demonstrate respect and gratitude towards the local community by maintaining respectful behavior.

Excessive consumption of alcohol can reduce your vigilance, lessen your awareness or response to cultural nuances or faux pas, and possibly lead to black outs, injury, assault, abuse, reckless behavior, and impaired judgement and decision making. To mitigate these risks, it is important to consume alcohol in moderation, pay attention to how much you consume, hydrate, make sure you do not drink on an empty stomach, keep an eye on your drink at all times, do not accept drinks that you did not see being opened or prepared in front of you, maintain a buddy system, and practice bystander intervention.

This topic will be covered more in SFS Orientation during the first week of the program. Students who anticipate challenges managing alcohol consumption abroad should discuss with the SFS Safety and Student Life department prior to departure and can continue to seek support from their Student Affairs Manager (SAM) during their program.
PACKING GUIDE
PACKING TIPS

How to Read the Packing List
You will see two sections of the packing list. The first section includes required items that are necessary for the program. The second section is comprised of suggestions and recommendations from previous students and staff in the field. Remember that everyone’s needs, and preferences are different, so some of these items may not be essential for you!

Luggage
SFS does not have a specific policy regarding how much luggage students should bring for their program and does not have a preference regarding wheeled or non-wheeled luggage. Alumni recommend using packing cubes to save space and keep your belongings organized. Remember that you’ll need to navigate one or more airports with your luggage, so make sure you bring only what you can maneuver yourself!

Storage Space
You will have limited storage space in your room; therefore, you should keep extra items to a minimum—pack as efficiently and lightly as possible.

Wear and Tear
Bear in mind that clothing gets heavily used during this program. Bocas is REALLY wet—everything will get moldy at some point and clothes remain wet for long periods of time. We recommend light cotton and polyester/spandex-blended items that dry quickly. Heavy cottons do NOT do well here.

Culture and Clothing
Modesty while experiencing another culture is always wise and culturally sensitive, however around the field station itself you do not need to be as modest as you do when you interact with the wider community. A minimum of 3-inch seam is required of all shorts worn in town. More conservative dress is required when visiting local schools, churches, and government buildings. Shoulders must be covered when working in the kitchen in accordance with health code regulations.

Consider your impact!
As you pack, please consider the impact of the products that you bring with you to your program. Think about both the ingredients and packaging of what you bring. Plastic waste, for example, is incredibly detrimental to the ecosystem and waste management in remote locations is quite difficult. Consider replacing bottled products with products that come in bars or jars, such as shampoo and deodorant.

We highly encourage biodegradable soaps, shampoos, and conditioner. Conventional soaps and shampoos can have a significant impact on the environment. As you consider biodegradable options, remember that not all soaps and shampoos labeled “natural” are biodegradable. Brands that are typically biodegradable include Jason’s Natural, California Baby, Kiss My Face, Nature Gate-Rainwater, Dr. Bronner’s, Tom’s of Maine, Desert Essence and many others. Importantly, using products with no sodium lauryl sulfates (SLS) or SDS is a great way to care for the environment while you are on program.

Please bring ONLY marine-safe sunscreen: sunscreens should only contain titanium oxide or zinc oxide as their active ingredients. Read the label and please do not bring sunscreens that contain oxybenzone, as this chemical is very damaging to coral and other marine life. Brands like Pipette, Caribbean Solutions, Stream2Sea, Badger, Raw Elements, and Coral Safe are all reef-safe options.

To keep your single-use plastic/paper consumption to a minimum, think about bringing a reusable shopping tote, metal straw, cloth napkins and other items.

Finally, remember that it is not necessary to go out and purchase an entire new wardrobe for this program. Think sustainably! Can you borrow some items? Can you find some items second hand? At the end of the day, dress comfortably and to bring clothes that make you feel good.

Note: this packing list does not always suggest amounts, so pack according to your own needs!

PACKING LIST: REQUIRED ITEMS
Clothing

- **Casual and athletic shorts** (for running, taking walks, or going about town)
  - Note that very short shorts, ex. 1-inch inseams, are not appropriate. Longer shorts must be worn in the indigenous communities especially during any academic or community engagement field outing.
  - Jean shorts and lightweight athletic shorts are great for Bocas.

- **Long, lightweight pants for the field** (2-3 pairs)
  - Loose, fast-drying cotton or nylon pants are ideal; zip-offs and roll up pants can be useful in the field.
  - You are required to wear long pants in the forest to protect yourself from biting insects (mosquitos, spiders, ants etc.) Note: mosquitoes can bite through leggings and tights.
  - It is recommended to bring at least one or two pair of loose-fitting pants other than your field pants to protect from biting flies and mosquitoes at night (Ex. wide-leg, flowy pants).

- **Long-sleeved, lightweight shirts for the field** (2) for protection against insects, sun, and cooler temperatures.
  - We highly recommend Columbia sportswear style PFG shirts, which keep you cool and protected in the heat while in the forest. You are required to wear long-sleeved shirts in the forest to protect yourself from biting insects (mosquitos, spiders, ants etc.)

- **Short-sleeved shirts and/or tank tops**
  - Please bring enough to last you for at least 10 days.

- **Lightweight jacket or sweatshirt** (1) and/or sweatpants (1)
  - It can get chilly at higher elevations (ex. Boquete) or if a storm comes through and the temperature drops. If you plan on traveling over the break or after the program, consider bringing warmer clothing with you.
  - Also, if the A/C is running in the evening, you may want to wear a sweatshirt if your roommates prefer a cooler climate.

- **Light raincoat** (1)
  - Think dryness, not warmth; a waterproof shell that is also breathable is the most effective. An umbrella is also very effective for walking around town and for unexpected rainstorms.

- **Nice clothing for town and for going out at night**
  - To wear in town; for example, evenings out in Bocas (for restaurants or going out dancing), or for interviews with community members. Students in the past suggest bringing a few dresses or dress pants or skirts.

- **Swimsuits or Swim shorts/trunks/boardshorts** (3-4 sets)
- **Socks** (including longer socks to go with rubber boots and ankle socks for exercise)
- **Underwear** (bring enough for at least two weeks)
- **Pajamas**

Footwear

- **Rubber boots**
  - These can be bought in town or borrowed at the center, please note that the Center has limited sizes and larger sizes can be difficult to find in town.
  - Rubber boots are required when we are in the forest due to the presence of venomous snakes.

- **Sneakers or running shoes**
- **Flip flops** for shower and casual wear
- **Athletic sandals**: Teva-, Chaco and Keen are popular

Gear

- **Hat(s) - for sun and rain**
- **Sunglasses** - Polarized lenses work best, especially when we are out on the water
- **Bandanas, sport headbands, Buffs** - highly recommended, especially if you have long hair!
- **Quick-Dry Towels** (recommended brands: dock and bay, REI, TJ Maxx), face cloth, bath towel, and beach towel.
- **Day pack**
- **Dry bag/backpack** for all excursions on the boat or in the forest - items will get wet.
- **Waterproof wristwatch** (necessary for snorkel field work)
- **Headlamp or flashlight**
- **2 Water bottles** of at least 1 liter each. You will be carrying a water bottle most of the time, insulated bottles are best
- **Plastic or stainless-steel container for food storage** (will be used on field trips and especially during DR)
• **Dive Mask:** Check for a good fit and solid strap construction and bring an extra strap – your local dive shop can help with this prior to arrival. Neoprene replacement straps are available for purchase at the center.
  o **If you need corrective lenses**, you’ll find it easier to get a supply of disposable contacts for the program rather than investing in a mask with prescription lenses. You will be required to remove your mask underwater during review skills and training, so disposable contacts are the best option. If you are unable to wear contacts, you should purchase a prescription mask because you will need to be able to see underwater!
  o **Full face masks are not recommended** in our environment and students have had difficulty using this type of equipment during field exercises.
  o **Recommended mask, fin, snorkel brands:** ScubaPro, TUSA, Cressi, Mares and Aqualung (Equipment purchased from US Divers company is not recommended due to poor quality and construction).

• **Snorkel:** Make sure you have a full-sized adult snorkel that fits comfortably for you and does not restrict air flow.

• **Full Size Fins:** You will use these almost daily, sometimes in strong currents, do not opt for “travel size” Alumni recommend fins with straps, sized to fit over dive booties rather than full foot fins
  o Bring spare replacement straps and clips

• **Hard or soft-soled diving booties or similar wading/diving shoe** – make sure the booties fit in your fins!

• **Long-sleeved rash guard** (2-3) – These are worn on every snorkel. **SFS branded rash guards are available for purchase at the center for $37. Note that not all sizes are available at all times.**

**Personal Items and Toiletries**

• **Toiletries:** These can be purchased in town however, if you are very particular about the brands that you use, there is not a wide selection available in Bocas, so you will not have the same selection that you are used to at home.

• **Personal first aid kit:** You should bring over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, acetaminophen, cold medicine, immune system boosters you might take such as Airborne or Vitamin C, yeast infection kits, allergy medicine, electrolyte packs etc. You should also have an epi pen (if necessary), Band-Aids, antiseptic cream, lip balm, sunscreen, personal hand sanitizer and motion sickness medication like Dramamine or gin gins (enough for the duration of your time in Bocas), supplements you regularly take, and supplies for any other personal needs, etc.

• **Glasses or contact lenses.** Consider bringing an extra pair of glasses and lots of solution (solution can be bought in town).
  o Please bring enough contacts for the duration of your trip. It is difficult to source contacts within Panama. Additionally, contact lens cases are difficult to find in Bocas.

• **Biodegradable Soap and Shampoo**

• **Sunscreen** (Reef Safe) - Recommended brands include Pipette, Badger, and Stream2Sea. SPF 30 or greater. The typical student uses 2 bottles of sunscreen for the semester.

• **Insect repellent** - Panama has its fair share of bugs including and most commonly, biting ants, chitra (sand flies) and mosquitos. However, with proper repellent and clothing you can avoid these pests and their bites.
  o Brands such as ‘SAWYER’ with 20% picaridin seem to work best in Bocas and are not as harmful to skin as DEET. If you choose to bring DEET, please bring in concentrations less than 35%.
  o You might consider natural repellants (e.g. I coconut oil and lemongrass/citronella oil).

• **Anti-itch cream or gel**

• **Menstrual Care:** Tampons and pads can be purchased locally, though there is less variety in brands than in the US. Diva Cups or other similar feminine products reduce waste and are convenient when working longer hours in the field or while out on field trips.

• **Dramamine** - If you are prone to motion sickness, please be sure to bring enough for the duration of the semester. We are in vehicles and boats often.

• **Record of international travel immunizations** - This can aid in diagnosis and/or treatment should you get sick.

• **A stuff bag for dirty laundry**

• **Your University Student ID**

**For the Field and Classroom**

• **Computer:** Students are required to bring their own personal laptops (contact your SFS Admissions Counselor if this will not be possible for you). Refer to the “Technology and Communications” section to review laptop requirements.

• **Protective case** for your computer
- **Waterproof side spiral notebook** (1-2) - Notes will get wet in the rainforest. Ideal size for field notebook is 4 x 6” or 4 ¾ x 7”, avoid 8 ½” x 11” (Websites for waterproof materials: [http://www.kooters.com/fieldbook.html](http://www.kooters.com/fieldbook.html), [http://www.riteintherain.com/](http://www.riteintherain.com/)).

- **DuraRite/ Rite in the Rain Top Spiral waterproof notebook** - Recommended size 4 ¼” x 7”, 4x6 is okay. Note: *This is different from the above notebook (the cover is white and it will read DuraRite Waterproof – you can find it on the Rite in the Rain website or Amazon)*

- **Pencils**, or waterproof pens.

- **USB flash drive** (consider bringing more than one). Faculty provide readings and assignments on USB flash drives.
PACKING LIST: ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED ITEMS

These items are not required but come highly recommended by alumni and staff!

- **Trail shoes/Hiking boots** for travel after program or for hiking
- **Laptop Accessories** e.g. a portable surge suppressor, carrying case, and security cable or lock
- **Small dry bag** for your phone, money, and identification
- **Binoculars** – Ideal magnifications for field binoculars are 7 x 35 or 8 x 40 mm.
- **Set of XL twin sheets and blanket** - sheets are provided for you at the Center but they were used by former students. If you prefer new sheets, you are welcome to bring your own sheets.
- **Camera** - Underwater cameras are highly recommended (ex. GoPro, Olympus T4, Sealife or other). If taking photos underwater, remember to purchase a floating wristband in case you drop it while snorkeling
- **Rechargeable batteries and recharger** or regular batteries
- **Mosquito Net** for independent travel - the doors to student rooms have magnetic mosquito nets, if you would like a bed net, they are available at the center
- **Things to do/share**: Personal journals, travel games like Bananagrams, Bluetooth speakers, portable musical instruments and music books, frisbee, movies etc.
- **Standard notebooks** for classes (can be purchased in Bocas town)
- **Books or reading device** (ex. Kindle) for pleasure reading to enjoy and share during free time.
- **Pocketknife** - be sure to pack in checked luggage.
- **Small sewing kit**
- **Ziplock bags or re-useable waterproof snack-sized bags** - for personal items
- **Umbrella**—small and packable (can be purchased locally)
- **Earplugs, Eye mask**. Very important if you are a light sleeper
- **Panama Guidebook**. Several are kept in the SFS library as well
- **Spanish-English dictionary** (Optional, we have several in the SFS library)
- **Personal telephone calling card**: AT&T or Verizon or unlocked cell phone (buy SIM card and minutes in Panama)
- **Washcloths/loofahs** are helpful for getting sunscreen/bug spray off after field days
- **Favorite snacks** from home, especially if you have any gluten allergies.
- **Spork or a set of eating utensil, a reusable stainless-steel straw and cloth napkins** to reduce waste
- **Emergen-C/Airborne**
- **Electrolyte powder** for hydration
- **Rain pants**
- **Neoprene mask strap cover**
- **Packing cubes** for packing and for organization in your room
- **Optional swim gear**: In addition to the gear listed above, consider the following items - given how cold you tend to get in the water. In general, most students find that a long-sleeved rash guard is sufficient for the instructional portion of our program. The water is generally fairly warm (80-85 degrees), but if you are working for long stretches (>1 hour) in the water, you may get a little cold, especially if you are working in the rain or under overcast skies.
  - **Dive/swim leggings** - protects arms and legs against stinging organisms,
  - **Neoprene wetsuit top**- useful if you are prone to cold and protects arms against stinging organisms,
  - **Neoprene wetsuit bottoms**- useful if you are prone to cold and protects legs against stinging organisms
  - **A dive skin or shorty or a full wetsuit** (2-3mm). We do not recommend purchasing a wetsuit that is more than 2-3mm. - useful if you intend to do a marine DR and if you are very prone to cold, also protects against stinging organisms. Please note, very few students select this option.
A NOTE ON FAA AND TSA REQUIREMENTS

When packing, please make sure to check Federal Aviation Association (FAA) and Transport Security Administration (TSA) for the latest prohibited items, which may include electronic cigarettes, vaping devices, medical marijuana, or cannabis-infused products, such as Cannabidiol (CBD) oil. You can find this information at [https://www.faa.gov/](https://www.faa.gov/).

Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping Devices
The FAA prohibits these devices in checked bags. Battery-powered E-cigarettes, vaporizers, vape pens, atomizers, and electronic nicotine delivery systems may only be carried in the aircraft cabin (in carry-on baggage or on your person).

Over forty countries have banned or have some restrictions on the use, sales, or importation of vaping devices, including SFS host countries of Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Chile, and Panama. It is therefore critical to check your host-country laws before possessing, purchasing, or using electronic cigarettes or vaping devices while in country. Keep in mind that some countries do not have written law or policy regarding vaping devices but may target individuals using these products based on lack of recognition of their use and purpose.

Medical Marijuana
Possession of marijuana and cannabis-infused products, including some Cannabidiol (CBD) oils, is currently illegal under federal law. Federal authorities do not recognize medical marijuana laws or cards from U.S. states where it is legal, so travelers with any amount of medical marijuana can be arrested and detained in U.S. airports. Similarly, marijuana is illegal in most countries. Students with a U.S. state-issued medical prescription cab be arrested, prosecuted, and deported if in possession of any illegal substance, including marijuana and cannabis-infused products. Students should note that products containing or made from hemp with overt labeling may not be permitted on international flights, and host-country laws may vary in the way they are interpreted and enforced by local authorities. Alternatively, travel with clothing, jewelry, and bags made of hemp material is acceptable.

SFS does not allow possession of any drugs or medications that are illegal, as defined by U.S. federal and host-country laws. **The SFS Drug Policy prohibits possession or use of marijuana for the full duration of the SFS program, including free time and weekends away.**
We can’t wait to meet you and look forward to having you join us in the field!

Stay engaged with SFS while you prepare for your program:

- Keep up with the SFS News from the Field blog
- Follow SFS and SFS Turks & Caicos Islands on Instagram: @thesfs/@thesfs_panama

Didn’t find what you were looking for? Check the following resources for more information:

- **Financial Planner for your program**: all program costs, including expected out-of-pocket costs, information about currency, and money exchange
- **Academic Handbook for your program**: information about the environmental issues of the region, SFS’s approach to grading and assessment, transcripts, academic policies, using research data for a thesis
- **Travel Guide for your program**: specific information about booking flights, arrival to the program. Emailed to enrolled students 3-4 months before the program.
- **SFS Policies and Procedures Manual**: behavioral, administrative, medical, operational, and financial policies
And if you’re looking to pass the time, try your hand at this SFS-themed crossword!

**Life in the Field**

**Across**
1. porch or tree hangout spot
2. puts the S in STEM
3. variety of life
4. stamped and signed from far away
5. large scale impact studied at every center
6. rain or waves won’t stop me
7. pl. might cause an itch
8. solution for mid-afternoon grumbles
11. in the lab or in the field
12. substitute for night vision
13. meal staple
14. can’t leave home without it
15. carries all the things you’ll need in the field
16. solar consequences

**Down**
1. neighbors, partners - the people you’ll meet
2. pl. of every center
3. variety of life
4. stamped and signed from far away
5. large scale impact studied at every center
6. rain or waves won’t stop me
7. pl. might cause an itch