



THE SCHOOL
FOR FIELD STUDIES

Directed Research SFS 4910

Syllabus

The School for Field Studies (SFS)
Center for Himalayan Environment and Development Studies
Paro, Bhutan

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

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COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that may be present. In other words, the elephants are not always where we want them to be, so be flexible!

Course Overview

The aim of Directed Research is to provide students the opportunity to apply ecological, biological, and/or social-scientific methods to field research projects that address local environmental issues. This course prepares students to experience the research process, and distinguish hidden assumptions in scientific approaches. We will also investigate the ways that various methods and theories differentiate (or do not) fact from interpretation, cause from correlation, and advocacy from objectivity. Through the Directed Research projects, students will contribute to a growing body of scientific research that informs local and national conservation and resource management decisions.

Each student will join a faculty-led team that will carry out field research, data analysis, and communication of results in one or across several of the following disciplines: ecology, natural resource management, and human geography. The Directed Research course is designed to build on the information students have learned in the topical courses, as well as Directed Research lectures and workshops specifically designed to assist students in understanding the scientific process, hypothesis testing, and results presentation in written and spoken formats (see below for these courses).

Center Research Direction

SFS Bhutan is operated in partnership with the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research (UWICER) and the Bhutan Ecological Society (BES). The research efforts of the SFS Bhutan Center aim to contribute to the mission and goals of both UWICER and BES. The research focus of UWICER seeks “...to understand and uncover the ecological, socio-economic and policy dimensions of biophysical systems and their impact on human ecology” focusing on the key areas of sustainable forestry, conservation biology, water resources and socio-economics. BES research is aimed at understanding the interplay between development and environment and pays particular attention to issues such as demographic changes, climate change, energy, food, water, forests and urban landscapes.

Learning Objectives

The core skills students will learn in this course are field techniques, analytical methods, communication skills and critical thinking, as well as team work and time management. The specific objectives of the course are the following:

1. Understand the process of designing a field research project
2. Conduct field data collection
3. Manage, interpret and analyze data sets
4. Communicate research results to diverse audiences

Assessment

You will present your DR projects in the standard scientific formats of a peer-review style report and a conference style presentation. You will also be graded on your data management and your positive contribution to the class. Comprehensive details of all assignments will be provided separately, see below for the general descriptions and expectations.

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Select research mentor	
Draft project proposal	10
Final project proposal	15
Final project report	30
Data management	10
Project presentation	20
Peer evaluation	15

Project Proposal: The project proposal has two elements: a *Literature Review* and a *Project Summary*.

1. Literature Review

The main objective of the *Literature Review* is for students to familiarize themselves with previous research and publications in the area of their chosen Directed Research project. The literature review should draw upon a literature base (where possible) to firstly review the current status of research in the field and then to build a setting and justification for research that still remains to be done. The *Literature Review* should include:

- A full literature review: A critical evaluation of knowledge in subject area
- An exploration of the DR project status within the literature: Highlight knowledge gaps and how the proposed project fits within the current literature

2. Project Summary

The main objective of the *Project Summary* is for students to develop a detailed outline (framework) for their Directed Research. The DR *Project Summary* must include the following items:

- Aims/Hypotheses: A list of questions that the student would like to answer as a result of the research project they will design.
- Materials & Methods: A detailed description of the methods to be used in their study and why these methods will be used over other potential methods. This should include sampling design, as well as the physical data collection methods to be employed.
- Predicted Findings & Importance: A list of 'predicted findings' and implications for each

Final Report: The final report is written in the style of a peer-review submission to a journal in the appropriate field. The report will have a word limit of 3500-4000 (excluding references). You will have ample opportunity for guidance from your DR supervisors throughout the DR period and especially during DR data analysis week. The analytical tools for research workshops in the DR course (and complementary classes in other courses) are designed to prepare you for producing the results section and improve the quality of your work.

Presentation: You will present a subset of your DR work in a conference style presentation of 10 min length with additional time for questions. Unless the scope of your DR project is very small, you should not attempt to squeeze in everything from your final report into this presentation. Making sure that you are within the time limit is a very important skill and so thorough rehearsal is important.

Data Management: It is important to record and store research data in a manner that is useful. You will need to provide (as applicable) Excel sheets with your research data in a format that is intelligible to someone else. You may need to provide both raw and manipulated data you used to create figures, tables and to run statistical tests. You need to annotate your spreadsheets (use text boxes if appropriate) so that an outsider can understand what the data are. You may be required to provide field notes on your findings for review.

Directed Research Skills: Your Directed Research Skills will be graded throughout the DR course by your supervisor. Your final grade will depend upon your attendance to all DR activities, active involvement and competencies in field data collection, data interpretation and group participation/support.

Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	<60.00%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

DR Reminders

Plagiarism: Using the ideas and material of others without giving due credit, is cheating and will not be tolerated. A grade of zero will be assigned if anyone is caught cheating or aiding another person to cheat actively or passively (e.g., allowing someone to look at your exam). All assignments unless specifically stated should be individual pieces of work. In the case of DR project write-ups, careful referencing is of essence.

Deadlines: Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated for several reasons: they are a part of working life to which students need to become accustomed and promote equity among students. Deadlines allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. **All DR related assignments must be delivered by deadline.**

Participation: Participation in all components of DR is mandatory because your actions can significantly affect the experience you and your classmates have as well as the outcome of the project. Therefore, it is important that you are prompt and prepared for all aspects of DR, bring the necessary equipment, and simply get involved and make the most of the experience.

Course Content

DR Coursework Component:

The coursework component of the DR is designed to prepare the students to conduct scientific research. The lectures are delivered in conjunction with the topical courses, so that students are well prepared to work with their faculty mentor on meaningful research.

L: Lecture, FL: Field Lecture, FEX: Field Exercise, T: Test, D: Discussion or Breakout Session.

	<i>Lecture Title and Description</i>	<i>Type</i>
DR01	DR Course Introduction Students will be introduced to the DR topics, process, including deliverables and dates.	L
DR02	Project Development & Proposal Faculty will lay out expectations of student proposals and students and faculty will form discussion groups to further DR proposals	D
DR03	Introduction to Science & the Scientific Method This discussion with familiarize students with the process of science, both in theory and in practice	L/D
DR04	Introduction to Scientific Writing & Reading Explore the difference between primary and secondary sources; expectations and standards of practice; describe expectations for paper	L/D
DR05	Qualitative & Quantitative research Introduction of data collection methods and when each is appropriate, as well as a discussion of student's current experiences in scientific data collection.	L/D
DR06	Statistics A brief introduction to basic statistical theory and use of statistical software	L
DR07	Effective Scientific Communication Skills Students will understand the importance of practicing scientific communication skills and start to think about how to address different audiences.	L
DR08	Research Ethics Introduce students to the ethical considerations involved in research (e.g. human subject's protection, data integrity and management).	L
DR09	Risk & Time Management in DR	L

DR Research Component:

The rest of the DR course is made up of research time, which includes: data collection; synthesis; and dissemination.

Research Component Activity	Days Allocated
Preliminary Data Collection	2
Data Collection Students work within their DR group to go into the field to collect data	11
Data Synthesis Students work closely with their faculty mentors to analyze their collected data and write up their findings in a structured scientific paper	4
Research Dissemination Students prepare, practice, and then deliver presentations for both internal SFS and community audiences.	3
Total	20 days