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## LIFE IN THE FIELD: WHAT TO EXPECT

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THE SCHOOL FOR FIELD STUDIES 2
PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE
MEET THE 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 admissions@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 Himalayan Environment and Development 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.

SFS staff members typically meet students in Bangkok, Thailand a day or two before the first day of the semester to allow a buffer for travel delays. Students and staff will spend a night or two at a hotel in Bangkok together before traveling to Paro, Bhutan. The cost of this hotel stay and transportation is included in the cost of the program. More information about this will be provided to accepted students in the travel instructions sent by the SFS Admissions Counselor.

Students are not able to arrive to Bhutan early or remain in the country after the program. If you plan to arrive to Thailand before the set arrival date for personal travel, please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor.

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.

Your admissions counselor will provide more information about the visa process for this program 3-4 months prior to the start date and will guide you through this process. There will not be an additional cost associated with this visa.

Bhutan has very specific regulations for visitors to the country. The SFS visa will only cover you from the first day of the SFS program through the final day and students cannot arrive early or stay in the country past the last day of the program.

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 particular 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**

For logistical and programming purposes, SFS requires the following vaccinations:
• **Rabies Pre-Exposure Vaccination Series**: In response to the threat of rabies incidence in Bhutan, coupled with the rural and remote location of our program, SFS requires that all students obtain the rabies pre-exposure prophylaxis treatment from their health care provider, prior to the start of the program. The series is given over the course of 21 or 28 days (Day 1, Day 7, and Day 21 or 28), so plan accordingly. Students are required to upload documentation of their completed vaccination series via the Magnus Health Portal prior to departure for the program.

• **Malaria prophylactic medication**: In Bhutan, the majority of the program takes place at an altitude of 7,000 feet or above. However, two separate weeklong excursions will include travel to locations at an altitude of 2,000 feet or lower, which is in the range of malaria. Please discuss this with your travel doctor. If you plan to take malaria prophylaxis medication while in-country, please bring the appropriate amount of medication needed for two non-consecutive weeks of exposure, as it will not be possible to obtain this medication in-country. Please be aware that different types of malaria prophylactic medication require a certain number of doses before and after travel to lower altitude.

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 receive the following CDC-recommended vaccinations and prophylactic medication for travel to the program country:

- **Typhoid fever vaccination**: Recommended for most travelers to Bhutan, including those visiting smaller cities, villages, or rural areas.
- **Japanese encephalitis vaccination**: Recommended for travelers to endemic areas of Bhutan (i.e. locations at an altitude of 2,000 feet or lower) whose itinerary includes time outdoors in rural or agricultural areas. This vaccination series consists of two vaccinations administered 28 days apart, so plan accordingly.

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/](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/)

For more information on CDC-recommended vaccinations and prophylactic medication, including specific country and regional risk, please visit the CDC Travel webpage: [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/)

*Please note, the CDC will be most up-to-date with changing vaccination requirements for entry into the country.

**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 able to access potable drinking water at all times 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.
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 a number of 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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<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</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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<tr>
<td>Control</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>Equality</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 collectivistic or more individualistic than you are used to?</td>
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<td>Individualism</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...</td>
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Directness, Openness, Honesty

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?**

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 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 identity 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 identity(ies) 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 BHUTAN

Bhutan is known as *Druk Yul* or Land of the Thunder Dragon, where red and green chilies pepper most meals, Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product, and Buddhism is inscribed in the landscape. Located in one of the world’s ten biodiversity hotspots, Bhutan has incredible biological diversity. In Bhutan students will learn about culture, Buddhist philosophy, and environmental issues. Hiking across valleys and ridges and through villages, students will gain an intimate knowledge of the local environments and rural livelihoods. Students will develop skills in assessing environmental problems, defining research questions, conducting field research, and communicating results. They will gain an appreciation of the complexity of identifying and addressing conservation issues in a rapidly developing region.

SFS is partnered with the Ugyen Wangchuck Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research (UWICER), an international research and training facility in Bhutan, and the Bhutan Ecological Society (BES). SFS students and faculty will help UWICER and BES advance their research agendas in several priority areas. More information about Bhutan and the Strategic Research Plan can be found in the Academic Handbook for this program.

Program Schedule

SFS programs usually operate six days a week, Sundays off. In an effort to maximize the experience in Bhutan, Sundays are frequently filled with travel, optional cultural activities, and/or hiking. Please be prepared for limited down time!

During program time (six days a week) you will find yourself following a busy schedule. There is no real typical day we could describe for the program, as every day looks different on an SFS program. You may have class in the morning, a field exercise in the afternoon, then some homework. Or an all-day field exercise. Or a full day of classes, mixing lecture, discussion, and workshop. Some days may be spent partially in transit to a field site or other area of Bhutan. On SFS programs, students enjoy communal meals at the Center and breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served at typical mealtimes.

Students typically have free time after all program activities have concluded for the day (Monday through Saturday) and usually all-day Sunday, though Sundays are frequently used for travel to excursion locations. Students often spend this free time at the Center, studying, relaxing, watching movies or playing games together, or exploring the town of Paro. When festivals or other community or cultural events occur, students usually partake in these as well.

While SFS Bhutan is based in Paro, there will be opportunity for excursions to other areas of Bhutan during the program. Previous excursion destinations have included Thimphu, Punakha, Phobjikha, Haa, Bumthang, and Phuentsholing.

Please note that while we make every attempt to adhere to the schedule we’ve set, there are frequently changes, so we all must be flexible and patient when changes occur!

**Sample Days**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30-8:30am</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15-10:30am</td>
<td>Political &amp; Socioeconomic Dimensions of Env Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:45-12:00pm</td>
<td>Land Use, Natural Resources, and Conservation Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:00pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-2:15pm</td>
<td>Dzongkha Basic Conversation Lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30-3:45pm</td>
<td>Mountain Ecology Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
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</tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00-1:00pm</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-5:00pm</td>
<td>Forest Inventory Field Exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00-7:00pm</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.

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.

### Table: SFS Structure and Self-Care

<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>7:30–8:30 am Breakfast</td>
<td>7:30–8:30 am Breakfast</td>
<td>7:30–8:30 am Breakfast</td>
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<td>7:30–8:30 am Breakfast</td>
<td>7:00–8:00 am Breakfast</td>
<td>7:30–8:30 am Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15–10:45 am Mountain Ecology Lecture</td>
<td>9:15–10:30 am Land Use, Natural Resources, and Conservation Discussion</td>
<td>9:15–10:30 am Land Use, Natural Resources, and Conservation Lecture</td>
<td>9:15–10:30 am Land Use, Natural Resources, and Conservation Lecture</td>
<td>9:15–10:30 am Mountain Ecology Lecture</td>
<td>9:00 am–12:00 pm Hike to and visit monastery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>10:45–12:00 pm Land Use, Natural Resources, and Conservation Lecture</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00–2:15 pm Political and Socioeconomics of the Env't Lecture</td>
<td>Free time: Directed Research proposals due at the end of the day</td>
<td>1:00–5:00 pm Camera Trapping Field Exercise</td>
<td>1:00–5:00 pm Political and Socioeconomics of the Env't Student-Led Discussions</td>
<td>Free time at homestays</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:30–4:00 pm Religion and Culture Exercise: Shop for Cooking Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:30–7:00 pm Cooking class and dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
<td>Dinner at Homestay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Hiking and Camping Opportunities

Settled in the Himalayan mountains, Bhutan is home to many trails and there are plenty of hiking opportunities on the SFS program in Bhutan. In addition to hiking through various ecological zones and villages during field lectures and field exercises, students will also have opportunities to hike on optional organized day trips and free weekend days.

Semester programs include a 3-4 day supported trek during which students hike half-to-full days through shifting mountain landscapes, villages, and ecosystems to sites where staff have set up tents and dinner for the evening. This is not a backpacking trip, and camping equipment will be transported for students. The trek may include side ventures to nearby cultural landmarks such as ruins. While the hiking at altitude can be strenuous, the students and staff will be roughly divided into groups to accommodate varying paces.

If the schedule allows, the program may coordinate a further overnight camping trip, for instance in the upper reaches of the Paro Valley.

### 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.

If 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.
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**

RAP is a daily meeting for all students, staff, and faculty. It is run by the Student of the Day (all students will rotate this responsibility). The Student of the Day will prepare and facilitate a reflection and physical activity to bring the group together and get energized for the day. (Bring your favorite ice breaker game ideas!) During RAP, the group will review the day's schedule, give updates, and everyone will have a chance to share announcements and ask questions.

**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.

**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.

On this program you might interact with the community by conducting interviews with community members such as monks or farmers, interacting with guest lecturers and our research partners, attending cultural festivals, volunteering at a local primary school, or by interacting with the local Paro community. 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.

**Consider your exposure to the local language through this program.** The Religion and Culture course is not intended to help you achieve fluency in the local language, but the language instruction provided in that course is designed 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 Paro and Thimphu, English is commonly spoken, especially by those working in local shops and restaurants. It is less common for people to speak English in more rural areas.

**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.

**Break Time**

Independent travel in Bhutan during the SFS program is not possible, and as such this program does not include any extended breaks or “Non-Program Time.”
LIFE AT THE CENTER

Setting
The SFS Center in Bhutan is located in the Paro Valley, a town located along the Paru Chhu (the Paro River) about one and a half hours west of the capital city of Thimphu and home to Bhutan’s only international airport. The Center itself sits in a more residential part of Paro, with the nearby rice terraces and roads offering opportunities for walks and runs. However, it is just about a 20-minute walk into the downtown area, which has basic amenities you might find in any town – a grocery store, a bank and post office, a produce market, some convenience shops, a few coffee shops and restaurants, textile stores, and an array of souvenir shops. Paro is home to a number of historic and cultural sites, including being just a short drive away from Tiger’s Nest monastery (Taktsang Lhakang). Since Paro is a small town, most students are able to settle in and get the lay of the land quickly!

Weather and Climate
Bhutan is the same latitude as Miami and Cairo, but can be considerably colder, especially in the mornings and evenings. The high elevation where we operate makes up for the low latitude. The climate varies widely depending on the elevation and the area. In the southern border areas, it is tropical, but the high Himalaya regions can always be cold! The SFS program will generally operate at an altitude of 7,200 ft, where the field station is located in Paro, but you’ll travel to areas up to 13,500 feet and down to 1,000 feet on expeditions.

Bhutan has four distinct seasons:

- **Summer** is from June to September and is the Monsoon season.
- **Fall** is from September through December, is a much drier time of year. The warm, humid monsoon season gives way to slightly cooler weather and eventually turns quite cold toward the end of November.
- **Winter** is from December through March and brings light snow and temperatures below freezing at night.
- **Spring** typically occurs from March to June and rainfall may increase as the months move closer to the monsoon season.

Regardless of the season, the sun at the high altitudes where we live, play, and work can be intense. Layers are incredibly useful for transitioning between cold shade and warm sun, including in fall and winter. Be prepared for rain, mud, sun, cool weather, and in some instances, snow. In the lower elevations, be prepared for warmer climates. The mountains always keep us guessing!

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. It will require patience, open-mindedness, resiliency, and cooperation. The benefit of this cohort experience 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 rotating kitchen crew duty to wash dishes and weekly cleaning of communal and personal spaces.
The Field Station

The SFS Center in Bhutan is a former hotel located in Paro, Bhutan sitting along the Paro River. The property itself does not sit on a terribly large piece of land and is composed of a few buildings. Students will be staying in hotels and homestays while traveling on expedition, as well as camping. Accommodations at the SFS Center in Bhutan as well as other field accommodations are not perfect and may be more basic than the accommodations students are used to on their home campuses – you may see spiders and other insects around, rooms are heated individually rather than centrally, and many rooms in the Center connect to the outside and can be drafty.

Housing

The student rooms house 2-4 students and have bunk beds, a desk, and storage spaces. Each student room has a private bathroom attached with showers, sinks, and western style toilets (you’ll encounter many squat toilets during your time in Bhutan).

Laundry

There are a few washing machines available to students at the field station in Bhutan as well as clothes lines for drying. Detergent is provided for students.

Other Facilities

The field station also has a classroom space, terraces, kitchen and dining area, staff housing and office space, small greenhouse, and common spaces for students to relax and study. A selection of academic and leisure books, board games, and digital movies are available for student use. WiFi is available in common spaces but can be slow and experience outages. Read more about Internet connectivity in Technology and Communication.

Food and Cuisine

All meals will be provided to students either on campus or at restaurants. During the week, breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served at the Center; on Sundays, the chefs prepare brunch and dinner. Be prepared to eat a lot of rice, and many interesting varieties of it. Vegetables include potatoes, cabbage, carrots, broccoli, green beans, cauliflower, fiddle heads (young fern fronds), and chilies, among other temperate crops. Cheese, butter and milk are also a staple element of the Bhutanese diet. Vegetarian sources of protein that are often served at the Center include dal (lentil soup), chickpeas, and other legumes. Eggs are available at breakfast nearly every day. Occasionally the Center chefs whip up more Western dishes such as pasta. Both vegetarian and non-vegetarian options are served at the Center and at restaurants.

Snacks available to students at the Center between meals typically include tea, milk tea, crackers, cereal, juice, fruit, bread, and condiments. If you have any favorite snacks from home, please be sure to bring them. A variety of snacks can be purchased locally, though variety is limited and healthier snacks like nuts and dried fruits can be expensive. Other snacks found in town include fruit, chocolate, candy, and potato chips. Energy bars are rare.

Specialty Diets

SFS is able to 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. 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
The field station in Bhutan does not have a gym or any advanced exercise equipment. Students can run along roads that are close to the Center and hike up nearby paths. There is a gym in Paro that students have joined in the past that is approximately $30 USD/month. Students often find time to do group or individual work outs (yoga, Zumba, floor exercises, etc.) during down time at the Center. The staff may rig up a volleyball net depending on the availability of open common areas nearby.

Music is highly encouraged for those so inclined. While large instruments can be difficult to travel with, students may consider bringing smaller instruments (such as a harmonica). There is a guitar at the Center available for student use.

For students interested in art while in Bhutan, it is good to note that premium art supplies are not available locally in Paro. Students who enjoy art are often drawn to the handmade paper and beautiful fabrics of Bhutan. In the past, students have enjoyed using local supplies at craft nights on campus to create keepsakes and gifts for friends and family back home, such as paintings, cards, scrunchies, sewing projects, and other creative pursuits.

Staff and students also coordinate events throughout the semester depending on interest, such as Nerd Nights, a talent show, movie and board game nights, trivia nights, birthday celebrations, and theme cooking nights.
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.

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 or external hard drive 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!

SFS has a dedicated classroom computer which is used for lectures and sharing group data, documents, etc. Do not plan to use an SFS computer as your laptop for the semester – it is required to bring a personal laptop.

Electrical Appliances
The voltage in Bhutan is 230V, 50 cycles, AC (in U.S. it’s 110V). Almost every electrical charger will have a range of usable voltage printed on it; check your chargers and appliances for this usable range before packing. Bhutan uses the standard Indian round pin sockets (see image below). These adapters may be purchased in Bhutan. The Center is equipped with universal power strips, but you may wish to have an adapter/converter for travel.

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 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 may 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.

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

Students are welcome to bring their personal smartphones to use on the WiFi 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
Students are provided with local cell phones to use for the duration of the program. This phone is primarily intended for in-country communications with peers and SFS staff, and students are responsible for adding a minimum amount of phone credit on a monthly basis to make outgoing calls within Bhutan. However, these phones can make and receive international calls as well. Receiving calls from within or outside Bhutan is at no charge to the recipient; additional credit for outgoing international calls is at students’ own expense.
**Mail**

Mail can be sent to students during the program at the following P.O. Box:

```
NAME
The School for Field Studies
Post Box 1308
Tsendona, Luni Gewog
Paro 12001
BHUTAN
```

Mail should go through USPS (not FedEx or DHL), and priority mail envelopes tend to work best. Receiving mail to Bhutan can be unpredictable, and even letters may get lost or take a long time to arrive. Please tell friends and family to avoid sending packages, as processing time is very slow, and you may have to pay a very steep tax on the value of your package. If you have prescription medicines, it is imperative that you bring enough for the entire session, as you will not be able to receive this through the mail. You should plan to pack and carry with you everything you will need for the duration of the program.

If you do end up needing to receive a package, please have the sender of the package contact the SFS Admissions Counselor for Bhutan for additional instructions to ensure receipt.

Students are welcome to send postcards and letters from Bhutan. However, it can still take a month or more for mail to arrive at its international destination.
HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELLNESS IN THE FIELD

SFS Staff and Student Affairs 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](http://www.travel.state.gov)
- U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories: [https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/](https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/)
- Diversity Abroad: [https://www.diversitynetwork.org/page/publications](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 Affairs staff to support them with their personal health and wellness challenges during their time abroad.
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 or send a weekly email 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, motor boats, 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
In personal rooms, each student will have access to a private and lockable dresser with hanging space and cubby-like shelves.

Wear and Tear
Make sure all equipment is in good shape before leaving – check for leaks, broken straps, jamming zippers, etc. It’s good practice to clean off hiking gear or other items that are exceptionally dirty or have mud caked on. This can cause issues when going through security and customs.

Culture and Clothing
Compared to the U.S., Bhutan is a country where attire tends to be more formal and modest. For example, Bhutanese citizens are required to wear the traditional dress in workplaces, businesses, and in education. Students should keep this in mind when dressing for class. SFS students do not need to wear the traditional Bhutanese dress to most class sessions, but consider that professors are not accustomed to students wearing sweats, pajamas, athletic clothing, or overly revealing clothing in an educational setting and students should dress nicely for class. In this case, “nice” doesn’t mean overly formal – you are welcome to wear your regular “street clothes” that make you feel like you, such as jeans, T-shirts, sweaters, etc. to class, in town, and at the Center. However, students should try to wear appropriate clothing without obvious rips, stains, or offensive graphics.

In public (e.g. town, meetings, guest lectures, visits to villages and monasteries, research presentations etc.) students should wear short or long sleeves and long pants or a long skirt. Most students have enjoyed purchasing and wearing the traditional Bhutanese dress (kira for women and gho for men) which is always very appreciated by the Bhutanese people and is well received at formal events. Students can purchase traditional clothing in the first few days of the program. A kira costs approximately 2000 Ngultrum (Nu – the Bhutanese currency) and a gho approximately 3000 to 4000 Nu.

Be advised that the following items are not appropriate to wear in public or in communal campus spaces during our program:
- Tight clothing, including leggings or yoga pants. Leggings with shorts or a skirt over them are okay for exercising and class.
- Tank tops
- Short shorts
- Skirts with hem above the knee. Long skirts are best and what Bhutanese women wear!
- Shirts that are tight, have a low v-neck or back, or cut-out style. Neither bra straps or midriff should show.

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 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. Bronners, Tom’s of Maine, Desert Essence and some Aveda and Garnier products.
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.

Note: this packing list does not suggest amounts, so pack according to your own needs and how frequently you plan on washing your clothes.

PACKING LIST: REQUIRED ITEMS

Clothing
- **Pants**: synthetic blends that dry quickly are best. You’ll want rugged pairs for trek and field work, as well as casual pants (e.g. jeans). You’ll also want some comfy pants for the dorm. Waterproof pants may be helpful during this program as well.
- **Shorts**: for time spent at the Center, in town, or exercise. Shorts should be on the longer side (approximately to the knee or 1-2” above). Students may wear shorter shorts for exercise only when paired with leggings underneath.
- **Tops & Outerwear**:
  - T-Shirts: synthetic or merino wool are great for chilly nights, wet weather, and field days. Cotton shirts are nice for non-fieldwork days but please keep them loose-fitting with no midriff exposed.
  - Long-sleeved shirts: light fabric for working in the field and in the sun, and heavier ones for warmth and protection. Capilene or wool is a great option.
  - Formal top (optional if you plan to purchase and wear the traditional Bhutanese formal outfit – gho or kira).
  - Light wool or fleece sweater: you will likely use this layer every single day. Cotton sweaters/sweatshirts work well at the Center.
  - Heavy wool or fleece sweater
  - Winter coat (down or synthetic – not just for field excursions, but also for down time at the Center or in town)
  - Waterproof (NOT just water resistant) hooded rain jacket
- **Underwear and socks**: 4-5 pairs of wool or synthetic (not cotton) hiking socks (a pair of synthetic liner socks may help cut down on blisters). Past students have also recommended a pair of synthetic/quick-dry underwear for the trek.
- **Pajamas** that are appropriate for shared dormitories.
- **Cold weather gear**: Wool or fleece hat and scarf and gloves or mittens for cooler weather and high elevation hikes

Footwear
- **Hiking boots**: waterproof highly recommended as field work will be done in wet environments. Be sure to break in your boots in before the program.
- **Casual shoes and/or sneakers** (durable, close toed, and good in the rain)
- **Rubber sandals** or **flip flops** for around the center

Gear
- **Sun hat** - baseball or wide-brimmed (the sun is intense at high elevations)
- **Sunglasses**
- **Headlamp** (or handheld flashlight).
- **Wristwatch** - preferably water-resistant

Personal Items and Toiletries
- **Toiletries**: Basic items such as toothpaste, soap and shampoo can be purchased in Bhutan. Do bring special items or favorite brands if you need them. We encourage you to bring biodegradable items to consider your environmental impact.
- **Feminine Hygiene Products**: You can purchase basic feminine hygiene items (pads) in Bhutan, but if you prefer a certain brand, please bring along. Tampons may be difficult to find, so if you prefer this product, please bring enough to last the duration of the program. You might also consider using a menstrual cup as an alternative to reduce plastic waste.
- **Personal First Aid Kit**: with anti-itch creams, Neosporin, Bacitracin, Tylenol, ibuprofen, Pepto Bismol, Band-Aids, tape, tweezers, anti-histamines, etc. You will find this to be useful.
Any necessary over-the-counter medications or prescriptions (in sufficient supply for full duration of program and any additional personal travel): These medications will not be available at the field station and are difficult to find locally. SFS cannot provide these medications. This includes Tylenol, Benadryl, motion sickness meds (and ginger candies/chews), **cold and cough medicine** and anything for flu, and anti-malarial and altitude sickness medication (if you choose to bring these – see the Health and Safety section). It is also recommended to bring a course of antibiotics (like Cipro and/or a Z-Pak) to treat sickness in the field (under the advice of a doctor). Probiotics and vitamin C are helpful as well. Please also note that roads in Bhutan are extremely curvy, so it is recommended to bring motion sickness medications, even if you normally do not experience motion sickness. Ginger chews are highly recommended for non-medication relief of motion sickness.

For the Dormitory

**NOTE:** In the dorms and at hotels, sheets, towels, a pillow and a blanket will be provided. There are mirrors and dressers in each room.

- **Sleeping bag:** Warm sleeping bag (at least 20°F rating) for the camping trip and to supplement bedding provided if you tend to get cold.
- **Towels:** Even though towels are provided for the most part, you should bring one shower towel and one face towel/wash cloth to use during the trek or just as back up. Quick dry is best!
- **Sleeping pad:** (Therma-rest or cell foam pad for camping)

For the Field and Classroom

- **Day pack** for field work and trek with waterproof pack cover; anywhere between 18-30L should suffice!
- **Duffel bag** for overnight excursions
- **Waterproof stuff sacks or sturdy plastic bags** – gallon-sized Ziploc bags work well
- **Notebooks, pens and pencils** (can be purchased locally)
- **Tupperware/Rubbermaid container** for packed lunches (can be purchased locally)
- **Water bottles** – 2 bottles of 1L capacity, or 1.5-2.0L bag. Camelbaks are nice for the trek.
- **USB memory stick.** Recommend at least 1 GB. You will use this to share work and to take your work and photos home with you at the end of the program (there tend to be a lot of pictures to take home).
- **Computer.** Students are **required** to bring their own personal laptops (contact your SFS Admissions Counselor if this is a problem). Please refer to the “**Technology and Communications**” section of this document to review laptop requirements.
- **Small gift for day-stay:** There may be an opportunity for a day stay with a local family. If this occurs, it’s good to bring a gift. We recommend that the gift be modest and represent home (it’s great to bring pictures from home—the families love it). Great gifts are calendars, locally made items (maple butter, nice candy), picture frames, a CD, etc.

**PACKING LIST: ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED ITEMS**

You will find a list of suggestions and recommendations from previous students and staff in the field below. Remember that everyone’s needs and preferences are different, so some of these items may not be essential for you!

- **Gaiters** to keep the mud and rain out during trek and field work
- **Rubber boots:** fairly light, calf height, rubber (rain) boots with good tread. Do not plan to purchase in Bhutan; they are of poor quality. (There are 1-2 field activities that involve walking into the river where you may find these useful, or during rainy weather).
- **Swimsuit** to use at the hotel in Bangkok or if you are interested in visiting the hot stone baths in Bhutan during the semester!
- **Formal outfit** (eg formal pants and top, or long skirt or dress): If bringing a skirt or dress, they should be knee or floor length for nice occasions. Most students will purchase a kira or gho for formal occasions, however!
- **Camera**
- **Small bag for around town**
- **A small botanical hand lens** (10x) is recommended for those interested in plants and invertebrates.
- **Pocketknife** (do NOT carry this in your carry-on luggage)
- **Umbrella** (can be purchased locally)
- **Journal** (can be purchased locally)
• **Games** to play during free time
• **Snacks:** There will be opportunities to purchase snacks throughout the program (including healthy options in Thimphu, which we go to occasionally!). While snacks will be available, students are encouraged to bring a few emergency snack bars, especially if they have dietary restrictions. Energy bars are a rare find in Bhutan!
• **Baby wipes** (can be purchased locally)
• **Hand sanitizer**
• **Trekking poles** (only if you use these at home for health reasons)
• **Binoculars**—preferably 8 x 40, but anything in the 6 x 30 to 10 x 40 range is fine. Make sure they are properly aligned before you leave.

**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.

**Tobacco in Bhutan**

Tobacco use is highly restricted in Bhutan, and the sale of tobacco is prohibited in the country. Tobacco products may be imported for personal consumption, but still fall under various restrictions. Students accustomed to smoking cigarettes or using tobacco products should research country-specific laws and may wish to discuss with their SFS Admissions Counselor and/or SFS Safety and Student Life.

**Medical Marijuana and Hemp**

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 card 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 Bhutan on Instagram: [@thesfs/@thesfs_bhutan_la](#)

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

- **Financial Planner for Bhutan**: all program costs, including expected out-of-pocket costs, information about currency, and money exchange
- **Academic Handbook for Bhutan**: 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 Bhutan**: specific information about booking flights, visas, 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
5. neighbors, partners - the people you’ll meet
7. pl. might cause an itch
11. large scale impact studied at every center
14. rain or waves won’t stop me
16. solution for mid-afternoon grumbles
17. in the lab or in the field

Down
1. porch or tree hangout spot
2. puts the S in STEM
3. variety of life
4. stamped and signed from far away
6. lasting, balanced, a goal for our future
8. substitute for night vision
9. meal staple
10. can’t leave home without it
12. carries all the things you’ll need in the field
13. solar consequences
15. abbv. daily meeting