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PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE
MEET THE SFS ENROLLMENT TEAM

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

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

Contact the Enrollment Coordinator at admissions@fieldstudies.org.

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

Contact your admissions counselor at aglass@fieldstudies.org.

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

Contact the billing department at billing@fieldstudies.org.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SFS ONLINE RESOURCES

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

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

Learn more about the SFS Center for Sustainable 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. If you experience travel delays, SFS will coordinate with you to arrange an alternate pick up schedule. If you plan to arrive in country before the set arrival date for personal travel, please contact your admissions counselor.

More information about this will be provided to accepted students in the travel instructions sent by the 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.

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

Non-US citizens may require a different visa process. Please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor to discuss. If you are a permanent resident of the U.S. or an international student returning to school in the U.S after the program, please be sure to have the necessary documentation for re-entry into the United States.

Yellow Fever Entry Requirement
If you are traveling from a country other than the United States, are planning to visit another country prior to the program, or have recently travelled internationally, you may need to receive a yellow fever vaccination prior to travel. The Costa Rican government requires proof of yellow fever vaccination if you are arriving from a country with risk of yellow fever including airport layovers in risk areas longer than 12 hours.

If you are traveling from a country other than the US, check the CDC website to see if you will be required to get the yellow fever vaccine. ([https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/yellow-fever](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/yellow-fever))
MEDICAL PREPARATION FOR THE FIELD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Physical Conditioning

Field work by its very nature is physically arduous: the days are long, the traveling seldom comfortable, and familiar comforts generally lacking. SFS programs involve some strenuous activities, including hikes over steep and uneven terrain, open-ocean swimming, long days in the rain, hot sun, or wind. All SFS programs involve multiple hours of standing or walking during field exercises as part of the academic program. We don’t require students to be Olympic athletes, but consider that these programs might 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 any critical medications (e.g. Epi-Pens, inhalers, glucagon, etc.). These medications should be carried on your person at all times.
- If you have asthma, even if you have not had any issues in recent years, it is strongly recommended to bring your inhaler (and a back-up inhaler, as these can generally not be sourced in country) on program. Past students have found that their asthma can be triggered by environmental conditions (e.g. humidity, heat, dust, elevation, allergies, etc.) of certain program locations. Keep in mind, you may be exposed to allergens or environmental conditions you have not been exposed to in the past.

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

Prescription and Over-the-Counter Medications

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

Make sure to consider the following:

- Insurance companies typically do not dispense more than a three-month supply of medication, so you will need to work with both your prescribing physician and insurance provider to request a “Vacation Override” or other means to procure a supply for 100+ days.
- Supply of controlled substances and steroid medications may have additional restrictions, so we recommend starting conversations as early as possible with your prescribing physician and insurance provider.
- In the event of unprotected sexual encounters or activity, please be aware that prophylactic sexually transmitted infection (STI) medication and emergency contraception are often difficult to obtain while abroad due to availability and legal implications. Consult with your physician about options for preparedness.
- Medical marijuana is prohibited on our programs due to host-country laws, Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and Transport Security Administration (TSA) restrictions. If you currently use medical marijuana, please discuss alternative options with your physician. Travel with some types of Cannabidiol (CBD) oil is also currently restricted by the FAA and TSA and may be restricted or illegal by host-country law.
While traveling, keep all medications in their original container and in carry-on luggage to avoid issues through border control and customs. List all medications on the SFS Vital Health Record and please alert the Safety and Student Life Department to any changes to your medication list, including dosage, as early as possible. It is highly recommended that students do not discontinue or alter the dose of certain prescription medications before or during the program. Please consult with your prescribing physician and the Safety and Student Life Department with any questions.

**Mental Health**

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

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

**Vaccinations and Prophylactic Medication**

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

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

- **Typhoid fever vaccination:** Recommended for most travelers to Costa Rica, including those visiting smaller cities, villages, or rural areas.
- **Malaria prophylactic medication:** Incidence of malaria near the field station and surrounding areas in Costa Rica is low. While cases in this region are rare, they do occur. Consult with travel clinic or medical provider regarding the advisability for malaria prophylaxis for travel to Costa Rica, including any personal itineraries.
- **Rabies:** In Costa Rica, rabies is transmitted via the saliva of mammals, including bats and other carnivores. Rabies is not present in canine populations in Costa Rica. The most effective way to avoid rabies is to avoid touching or getting too close to wildlife. Another precautionary measure is receiving the pre-exposure rabies vaccination prior to departing for Costa Rica. This vaccination series consists of three vaccinations administered over 21 to 28 days, so plan accordingly. The vaccination does not eliminate the need for getting a post-exposure vaccination if there is any potential exposure to rabies, which can include licks, scratches, bites, or close encounters with both domestic and wild animals. It does, however, reduce the number of post-exposure injections that are required and eliminates the need to administer rabies immune globulin, which is not available in country.

In addition, there are a number of non-vaccine preventable insect-borne diseases that are present in country. For up-to-date information on risk-factors, prevention, and treatment, please visit the CDC Travel webpage: [https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/)

**Protection from Insects**

Students should practice preventative measures to reduce the possibility of illness from exposure to insects:

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

**Food and Water Safety**

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

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

**Altitude**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We encourage you to connect with your SFS Admissions Counselor if you’d 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 COSTA RICA

The SFS Center for Sustainable Development Studies programs are focused on biodiversity protection; natural resources; protected area management efforts; development and promotion of environmentally friendly agricultural practices; ecosystem health; and visitor impact management plans for protected zones.

SFS is committed to presenting social and economic issues that affect the protection of the natural resource base, support the community in light of ongoing economic and social transformation, and engage students in the debate over sustainable development in general using Costa Rica as case study.

You will visit many varying ecosystems while in the field, which may include lowland tropical rainforest, tropical cloud forest, the rainforest on the Pacific coast, dry forest on the Guanacaste region, communities surrounding national parks, agroecosystems, farms, volcanoes, mangroves and coastal ecosystems.

Program Schedule
Academic scheduling is on a six day/week schedule. This is a very rigorous program and it will take a few weeks to fully adjust to your new schedule. Throughout the program, one day a week is reserved for studying and relaxing (typically Sunday).

Typical Week
Our weekly schedule in Costa Rica will vary significantly throughout the program as weather conditions and guest lecturer schedules can change at any moment. After the first few days of orientation and organization, the program will include about 15 lectures a week, plus three to five other meetings (organizational, research/paper presentations, guest lectures). The mornings are filled by lectures, both in the classroom and the field, and field trips. Afternoons are generally filled with additional academic work. Most of these activities take place in and around the Center, but many of them involve traveling throughout the Central Valley.

Sample Day
7:00    Eat breakfast
8:00    RAP (Reflection, Announcements, Physicality) – Group meeting
8:30    Field work and/or lectures
12:00   Lunch
13:30   Lecture
15:00   Field work and/or lecture
18:00   Dinner
19:00   Directed Research lecture/presentation/workshop/guest lecture

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

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

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

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

RAP is the kickoff meeting each morning 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.

**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.

**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 participating in language exchanges with local English language learners, planting trees, designing and maintaining a recycling program, teaching English, creating an environmental education class for an elementary school, and working with a local orphanage and nursing home. SFS has also been involved in local fundraising projects that include conducting bingo games, planning environmental fairs and participating in community sporting events. 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.** There is no language pre-requisite for this program, so students do arrive at varying levels of competency. If you have a goal to enhance your language abilities during your SFS program, it is important to take initiative: read a local newspaper, sit at the Spanish lunch table at meals, listen to local music, practice your skills when you have free time, and engage with local staff members.

In Atenas English is not commonly spoken, but some members of the community do speak English!

**Intersession Break**

Students participating in both summer sessions will have a five-day intersession break between sessions. During this time, the Center is closed and students are responsible for their own travel and accommodations. In the past, students have used this time to travel with friends, family, or other students.

Before the intersession break, staff will brief you on current health and safety concerns as well as necessary precautions for traveling in the host country and/or surrounding countries. You are advised to travel in groups of two or more and will be given emergency contact numbers to carry with you during the break. You should also plan to submit a rough itinerary, with phone numbers where possible, prior to the break.

Intersession Break dates are set and travel must be done within this established time frame. Individual early departures or late returns will not be permissible.
Students are not permitted to store personal belongings at the Center prior to or after program time, including during intersession break. Students must make appropriate arrangements for their belongings when not on program. Finca Huetares, located a short distance from the Center, offers secure and affordable overnight storage, usually at a cost of $5/night.

Please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor with any questions or concerns about program breaks.

**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.
LIFE AT THE CENTER

Setting
The SFS Center for Sustainable Development Studies is located at the top of a hill overlooking the Rio Grande and the Central Valley of San Jose and is surrounded by small orange and mango orchards. The immediate neighborhood surrounding the Center, called La Presa, includes about 200 people.

Most people in the area are farmers. Despite some steep slopes, the soil is relatively fertile and produces fruits (mangoes, oranges, lemons, avocados, and papayas), coffee, sugar cane, herbs, vegetables (green beans, coriander, celery, and peppers), basic grains (beans and corn), and fodder for cattle. In addition, over 100 hectares in the community have been reforested in the past three years.

La Presa is part of the community of Barrio Los Angeles on the outskirts of the town of Atenas. Atenas is in the province of Alajuela, west of San José, approximately 700 meters above sea level. The town of Atenas, located about 5 kilometers away from the Center, is relatively small but has a medical clinic, ambulance service, supermarkets, several restaurants, a couple of banks and ATM’s, a post office, a marketplace, many stores, Internet cafés, and good public transportation to and from San Jose.

Weather and Climate
The weather at the Center is hot and humid during the day and cooler and breezy at night year-round, with moderate temperatures and plenty of sun even in the rainy season. The altitude is 2,000 feet above sea level, with annual precipitation of 85 inches and an average year-round temperature of 80° F - coolest temperatures are about 60° F and highs reach about 90° F.

Rainy Season is May through November, Dry Season is December through April.

All summer students should be prepared for rainy season conditions at the Center, including rain and sometimes thunderstorms in the afternoons and evenings.

As part of this program, we may travel both to higher elevations where it can get as cool as 40°F and damp at night and to the lowlands where it can be as warm as 100°F.

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

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

Chores
The center relies on a group living model, where everyone on campus does their part. Students and staff alike are expected to do their own dishes and to engage in keeping our home beautiful. Keeping our space clean is especially important in the tropics as mold and insects thrive under tropical conditions!

During the program, students will have assigned groups for chores. Several hours are scheduled each week for a thorough site clean-up, and every other week there is a house cleaning. Specific chore responsibilities and schedules will be shared with students during orientation but may include general cleaning duties, farm work, and meal preparation.
The Field Station
The center is set on a working Rainforest Alliance Certified small farm. While primarily an orange and mango orchard, there are many varieties of fruit trees, an organic gardening project, a chicken coop with about 60 chickens and ducks, and a pig hut and run.

Housing
The dormitory building houses the student rooms, a small library with course resources and casual reading materials, a small computer room, a lab area, an indoor classroom with a projector, a student lounge area (including a TV with an HDMI cable to plug into laptops and a stereo), laundry facilities, and a covered wraparound porch complete with colorful hammocks.

The dormitory rooms each house up to four to six students and are furnished with bunk beds, desks, hanging space for clothing, and individual shelving areas. Students receive individual room keys and have access to lockers to store valuables.

The bathrooms in the dormitory building are shared bathrooms with cold-water showers (2 gender-specific multi-stall bathrooms and one gender-inclusive bathroom open to all students with one sink, one shower, and one toilet).

While the program is on the road, staff and students will stay in biological stations, small hotels, or cabins.

Laundry
The Center has two clothes washers, a dryer, and lines for sun drying. SFS does not supply laundry detergent but does supply dish soap for student use. Students can buy laundry detergent in town.

Other Facilities
The small library in the main dormitory building houses primarily reference books and guides as well as an extensive collection of English-language novels and travel guides for students to use during the program.

In addition to the dormitory building, there are two other large buildings at the center, the main house and the kitchen and dining building. The main house is home to faculty and administrative offices, equipment storage, and some study and meeting space.

The kitchen and dining building is next to the main house and is where everyone eats meals, posts announcements, takes coffee breaks, and has occasional meetings. A few steps down from the kitchen building is the small kidney shaped pool with several shaded tables and the pizza oven – be ready for a few make-your-own pizza nights!

In addition to the traditional buildings, the center also has an outdoor classroom, several small gardens, composting infrastructure, a pollinator garden, staff cabins (casitas), a small network of hiking trails, a small basketball court, and a soccer field complete with nets and lights for nighttime games.
Food and Cuisine
All meals are provided in the dining area and are prepared by local staff.

Our meals consist of some of the traditional local dishes based on rice, beans, vegetables, plantains, and fresh fruit as well as some meat and fish options. Meals are prepared by a team of cooks and rotating groups of students who help to help to prepare, serve meals, and clean. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are served on the same schedule every day except Sundays.

On Sundays, everyone is responsible for cooking their own meals (with access to the main kitchen, leftovers, basic supplies, and supplies for sandwiches). Students also frequently visit other dining options in town on free days.

The center typically has snacks available such as fruit, drinks (fresh juice, tea, and coffee), cookies, bread, and spreads available all day until the kitchen closes in the evening. Students will have access to both refrigerated and room temperature storage for personal snacks in the dorm kitchen.

Specialty Diets
SFS can accommodate most dietary needs and preferences, but students will find that the variety of food may be limited due to local availability, cultural practice, and cost. Additionally, when away from the Center, options may be further limited. For example, specialty food products high in protein, such as tofu, quinoa, dark leafy greens, and raw fruits and vegetables may not be readily available on campus. 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
There are several options for exercise and physical recreation at the center and in the area. There are a few yoga mats and some light free weights available in the dorms. Many students will go for a run or walk through the neighborhood using the buddy system. The area is hilly, so there are good options for a workout! At the local community center, there is usually Zumba one night a week at a low cost. Additionally, we have a well-maintained soccer field (with lights for nighttime games) and a small basketball court at the center and the group will often coordinate soccer and basketball games. Students and staff often also facilitate workout classes for each other in the outdoor classroom!
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 solely on the cloud for storage!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part of living at a field station entails working with limited resources, including the Internet. You should expect internet connection to be slow and intermittent, so you should not expect to use the Internet in the same way you do at home. There may be times during the program 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

Using your own cell phone: It is possible to buy a SIM Card from one of the cell companies in Costa Rica and use it in your current cell phone. Cell phone plan options usually include pre-paid or pay-as-you-go. With the local cell phone chip you will be able to make local calls, and depending on the plan you choose you will be able to make international calls (although the cost for international calls may be high). Every student’s phone and cell provider is different, so it will be important for you to do some research to buy the correct chip for your particular phone and understand the payment options and obligations for the plan you choose. International phone coverage from your home carrier is often expensive and less reliable than this option.

Please keep in mind that many of the places we will visit/stay will not have reliable cell service, so, even if you do plan to purchase a local SIM card, you should still plan to disconnect a bit from your phone on this program.

Center Landline and Calling Cards: The Center has one telephone located in the dorm that students may use to make outgoing collect or phone card calls. All outgoing calls must be either collect or with a calling card. International calling cards can be purchased locally. **Note:** Prepaid calling cards purchased in the US do not work in Costa Rica. In addition, 800 numbers to the US are considered international calls in Costa Rica and are charged as such!

Mail

Make sure your friends and family know the Center address and remind them that letters sent to Costa Rica should be marked AIRMAIL. The average one-way delivery time for airmail to Costa Rica is 5-14 days, delivery time is 14-16 weeks for ground. Postage from Costa Rica to the U.S. currently costs about $1.50 per letter.

Letters can be sent to students at the following address:

Student Name  
Centro de Estudios sobre Desarrollo Sostenible  
Apartado 150-4013  
Atenas  
Costa Rica  
Central America

**SFS does not recommend mailing packages to the center** as they are usually held in San Jose and will require pick-up in your free time. Fees can be very costly and pick-up logistics can be very complicated – so it may be several weeks before you are able to retrieve a package. **As such, please plan to bring all necessary items with you.** If you have prescription medicines or medical equipment, make sure to bring enough for the entire session, as it is **not** legal or possible to receive these via mail.
HEALTH, SAFETY, AND WELLNESS IN THE FIELD

SFS Staff and Student 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
- U.S. Department of State Travel Advisories: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories.html/
- Diversity Abroad: https://www.diversitynetwork.org/page/publications

24-Hour Emergency Hotline

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

Medical Care on Program

SFS maintains a detailed Risk Assessment and Management Plan for each Center, which outlines country risks and response protocols, including local, national, and international medical facilities and their treatment capabilities. These plans ensure that SFS staff are always aware of the closest and most capable medical facility in their current vicinity and the protocols outline the best route for medical care access.

If a student requires medical attention during a program, the Student Affairs Manager (SAM) on campus will assess the illness or injury and determine next steps (i.e. first aid, monitoring, medical attention, etc.) If a visit to a medical care facility is needed, an SFS staff member will assist in facilitating care and accompany the student to the appointment. Please be aware that there may be times when access to medical care may be delayed or unavailable, such as during travel or on expedition.

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

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

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

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

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

- **Communication with support systems.** Limited internet connectivity, unexpected power outages, and busy academic and travel schedules can reduce the frequency and ease with which you are able to contact family, friends, pets, mentors, counselors, etc. If you currently talk to a mental health provider, and plan to stay in touch while abroad, this limited connectivity can pose a challenge. Similarly, talk to your family and friends to figure out the best communication plan (i.e. WhatsApp, calling card, etc.) and remember that you may not be able to be in touch as frequently as you are on your home campus.

- **Social media.** Limited internet bandwidth can make it difficult to engage with others through pictures and videos over social media platforms. Upload speeds are significantly slower and, at times, not possible. This can be a source of stress for students who are used to constant connections, and can cause frustration, irritability, sadness, and anxiety. What other ways can you communicate with others about your study abroad experience? For example, setting an expectation with friends and family that you will update a blog might reduce a feeling of stress to provide social media updates in real time.
- **Privacy and time alone.** On campus, it may not be possible to find a private spot to rest and recharge daily. On a residential campus, there will be a lot of interaction with your peer group (i.e. sharing meals, attending classes, studying, recreational time, etc.). Think of ways that you can create some space for yourself when you are unable to physically distance yourself from others. Perhaps using headphones or stringing up a hammock can provide similar space.

- **Off-campus transportation.** Access to transportation may be limited and you will not be permitted to operate motor vehicles (including cars, 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, 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 TIPS

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

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

Storage Space
You will be sharing space and will have limited storage in the dormitory, so consider that when you pack. It will be perfectly acceptable to re-wear clothes and you will have access to laundry regularly. Past students have found packing cubes to be helpful for travel and very useful for keeping your items organized in the dorms as well!

Wear and Tear
There will be limited selection and very few opportunities to acquire additional gear once you are in Costa Rica, so it is important to plan to bring what you need with you! Before you depart, make sure all equipment is in good shape: check for leaks, broken straps, jamming zippers, etc. In addition, any equipment or shoes that have dried dirt on them need to be thoroughly washed off prior to packing or you may be delayed when passing through quarantine in Costa Rica.

Additionally, remember that this is life in the field! The items you bring with you to the program will likely be heavily worn, get dirty and wet, acquire stains, and fade in color. Don’t bring anything to the program that you’re not ready to use and perhaps lose! Good quality secondhand items are a great option.

Consider labeling your clothing before arrival – with all students sharing the same laundry facilities, labels go a long way towards helping individuals keep track of their clothing!

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

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

We highly encourage biodegradable soap, shampoo and conditioner. Conventional soap and shampoo can have a significant impact on the environment. As you consider biodegradable options, remember that not all products labeled “natural” are biodegradable. Brands that are typically biodegradable include Jason’s Natural, California Baby, Kiss My Face, Nature Gate-Rainwater, Dr. Bronner’s, Tom’s of Maine, Desert Essence and some Aveda and Garnier.

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.
PACKING LIST: REQUIRED ITEMS

Clothing

- **Casual Shorts** (short shorts are not appropriate.)
- **Athletic shorts**
- **Long, lightweight pants** (Loose, fast-drying cotton or nylon pants are ideal; zip-offs are very useful.)
- **Long-sleeved, lightweight shirts** for protection against insects, sun, and cooler temperatures
- **Short-sleeved shirts or tank tops**
- **T-shirts** for hiking and field work
- **Wool or fleece sweater or sweatshirt, and sweatpants** (It can get cold in the evenings and at higher elevations on some field trips.)
- **Rain jacket or poncho** (for dryness, not warmth; a waterproof shell that is also breathable is the most effective). An umbrella is also highly recommended for hiking in the rainforest. You may also want to consider bringing rain pants.
- **Nice clothing** to wear in Atenas or San José, on an evening out, or when conducting surveys. Most women wear skirts, long pants, or sundresses, while most men wear jeans/slacks and a casual collared shirt.
- **Casual clothing** for days at the center but not performing field work
- **Work pants/clothes to get dirty**
- **Swimsuit**
- **Socks** (some cotton, some wool-50/50 combination with polypropylene and wool work well, especially for hiking—don't forget to bring some high (knee-length) socks for use with your rubber boots!).
- **Underwear** (Women should remember to pack sports bras for field work.)
- **Pajamas:*** Bathrooms are open air in some of the places in which we stay, and are shared between students, volunteers, and guests, so pajamas should be appropriate for use in these spaces.

Footwear

- **Hiking Boots** Please note: sneakers (even field runners!), Vibrams, and/or hiking sandals are NOT acceptable alternatives.
- **Rubber boots** – Please note: It is REQUIRED that students wear knee-high, thick rubber boots in the field as protection from snakebites. Pick rubber boots with a solid sole and nice traction. If you have large feet, bring boots with you; if you have smaller feet these can be bought in town or borrowed from those left by past groups.
- **Sandals with a heel strap (e.g. Chaco/Teva)** – these will be useful for walking around while not in the field or during field trips when you have an opportunity to swim in a water hole or river and where water footwear is mandatory
- **Sneakers or running shoes**

Gear

- **Headlamp:** Lightweight, long-lasting, with new or spare batteries
- **Rechargeable batteries and recharger** or enough batteries for length of program: Bring enough for your camera, flashlight, etc.
- **Watch:** water-resistant with a stopwatch function
- **Brimmed hat** for protection from rain/sun
- **Medium-large plastic (Tupperware-type) sandwich container** for packing lunches - meals in the field happen quite often. These can also be easily purchased in Atenas.
- **Daypack** (for field work and to carry your notebook and water). You will be taking several overnight trips into the field, possibly including camping trips, so bring a sturdy water-resistant backpack of adequate size. You may want to consider purchasing a rain cover for your backpack, although garbage bags also work well for lining a backpack to make it waterproof.
- **A small to medium backpack or tote** for your clothing and gear on overnight trips
- **2 Water bottles of at least 1 liter each**
- **Lightweight garden gloves**
- **Umbrella**—small and packable-this is very important in the rainy tropics. These can also be purchased in Costa Rica.
Personal Items and Toiletries

- **Personal first aid kit**: You know your own special needs. During field trips we carry first aid kits for emergencies. Otherwise, you will have to purchase medicine or supplies at one of the local pharmacies. You can bring over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen, acetaminophen, cold medicine, Pepto Bismol, etc. You should also have a bee sting kit (if necessary), Band-Aids, antiseptic cream, little scissors, aspirin, lip balm, sunscreen, motion sickness medication, any items for personal needs, etc. Some students also bring ear drops or earplugs to prevent swimmer’s ear. Any OTC medication or first aid item that you may use on a regular basis can be found in Costa Rica at a slightly higher cost.

- **Biodegradable Soap and Shampoo**: At the Center we have been converting to constructed wetland water treatment, which means that our water returns to the environment. On some field trips, conventional soaps and shampoos can have an impact on the environment. If you wish to wait until you arrive in Costa Rica to purchase your toiletries, Bioland is a Costa Rican company specializing in organic, biodegradable products, and the brand is carried at the local supermarket.

- **Tampons/sanitary pads and other toiletries**: This can also be purchased in Atenas, although at higher prices than in the US. Women may also consider alternatives to disposable tampons and pads (the Diva/Moon Cup, cotton “glad rags,” etc.), all of which should be purchased in the US.

- **Glasses or contact lenses**: Consider bringing an extra pair of glasses and plenty of contacts. To replace your contacts in Costa Rica you will have to pay for a complete eye exam and wait at least a month to receive the lenses. Glasses take a week. Also, make sure to bring enough contact solution to last the entire program – it’s very expensive to purchase in Costa Rica.

- **Sunscreen, Minimum SPF 15 required**, although we recommend SPF 30 or greater. Sunscreen can also be purchased locally in the grocery stores and general stores in Atenas.

- **Insect repellent and anti-itch cream**: An effective repellent that contains 10%-35% DEET is recommended – preparations containing higher concentrations of DEET carry greater toxicity with little additional benefit. You might also consider natural repellants (e.g. Natrapel). Anti-itch cream/lotion/gel may also be helpful (e.g. After-Bite can’t be found in Costa Rica). Conventional and natural repellants can also be purchased in Costa Rica.

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

- **University student ID card**

For the Dormitory

- **Bedding**:
  - Lightweight sleeping bag/ thicker blanket other than a bed sheet to be used for cooler nights at the center (preferably synthetic, rated for warmer weather)
  - 1 set of twin sheets and a pillowcase.
  - Pillows are provided, but you may still want to bring your own pillow.
  - SFS will provide a mosquito net for your bed

- **2 Towels**: Towels will mildew during rainy season unless hung in the sun every day. You should bring thin, quick dry towels.

- **Hand towels**: Bring a personal hand towel for use in the dormitory bathrooms (the Center does not provide paper towels in the dormitory bathrooms)

- **Travel alarm clock**, or other device you can use as an alarm clock

For the Field and Classroom

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

- **Protective case** for your computer

- **USB flash drive** with at least 2.0 GB of storage capacity

- **Calculator** with basic statistical functions

- **Notebooks**, other school supplies as needed (can also be purchased in Atenas)

- **At least one waterproof notebook/journal** (very useful in the field), waterproof pen or pencil, (Website for waterproof materials: http://www.riteintherain.com) and consider a small binder with about 50 pages

- **Spanish-English dictionary** - we have many in the center library which you are welcome to use
PACKING LIST: ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED ITEMS

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

- **Binoculars.** Ideal magnifications for field binoculars are 7 x 35 or 8 x 40 mm. Bushnell, Swift, Vivitar, and Nikon make good, reasonably priced binoculars. SFS Costa Rica will provide some binoculars for use while on field trips. If you decide to bring your own, make sure it is waterproof.
- **Camera**
- **Sunglasses**
- **Casual shoes** for use in town and around the Center
- **Songbooks, poetry, personal journal, Hacky Sack, portable musical instruments, etc.**
- **Books or E-Reader** for pleasure reading – the library at the Center also has a collection of novels for students to borrow.
- **Pocketknife.** Swiss Army Spartan and Tinker are good models. Be sure to pack in checked luggage!
- **iPod or another MP3 player.** Please bring some of your favorite music for individual or group listening and dancing.
- **Movies to watch during free time** – the dorm TV has a DVD player and a HDMI cable.
- **Collapsible chair** (e.g. Crazy Creek style) for use during field lectures
- **Flip flops for use when showering** (highly recommended!)
- **Small sewing kit**
- **Earplugs and eye mask.** Very important if you are a light sleeper!
- **Personal power strip** for use in your dorm room
- **Guidebooks for Costa Rica** (Lonely Planet is a perennial favorite) - guidebooks can be found in our library
- **Ziplock bags or re-useable waterproof snack-sized bags** - Bring a few for personal items.
- **Soccer cleats** – we have a soccer field at the Center, and many past students recommend bringing cleats if you already have them at home. It is common that soccer games are scheduled between staff on students on a weekly basis.
- **Yoga mat** – the center also provides 6-10 yoga mats for student use
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/.

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

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

Medical Marijuana
Possession of marijuana and cannabis-infused products, including some Cannabidiol (CBD) oils, is currently illegal under federal law. Federal authorities do not recognize medical marijuana laws or cards from U.S. states where it is legal, so travelers with any amount of medical marijuana can be arrested and detained in U.S. airports.

Similarly, marijuana is illegal in most countries. Students with a U.S. state-issued medical prescription can be arrested, prosecuted, and deported if in possession of any illegal substance, including marijuana and cannabis-infused products. Students should note that products containing or made from hemp with overt labeling may not be permitted on international flights, and host-country laws may vary in the way they are interpreted and enforced by local authorities. Alternatively, travel with clothing, jewelry, and bags made of hemp material is acceptable.

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

Stay engaged with SFS while you prepare for your program:

- Keep up with the SFS [News from the Field](#) blog
- Follow SFS and SFS Turks & Caicos Islands on Instagram: [@thesfs](#)/@thesfs_costarica

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

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

Life in the Field

Across
3. 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. abbr. daily meeting