**CONTENTS**

**PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE** ................................................................. 4
Meet the SFS Team ................................................................................. 5
SFS Online Resources ........................................................................... 5
Travel Arrangements............................................................................. 6
  Booking your flights ........................................................................ 6
  Arrival to your program ................................................................ 6
Passport and Visa .................................................................................. 6
Medical Preparation for the Field .......................................................... 7
  SFS Medical Approval Process .......................................................... 7
  Insurance .......................................................................................... 7
  Medical Consultation ....................................................................... 8
Identity and Culture in a New Context .................................................. 11
  How do we define culture? ................................................................. 11
  Cultural Values ................................................................................ 11
  Local Laws and Customs ................................................................ 12
  Your Role in the Community ............................................................ 12
  Identity ............................................................................................. 12
  For Your Consideration .................................................................. 13

**LIFE IN THE FIELD: WHAT TO EXPECT** ............................................. 14
About SFS Turks and Caicos ................................................................. 15
  History of the Region ...................................................................... 15
  Geography and Ecology ................................................................ 15
  Extended Field Trip ........................................................................ 16
  Program Schedule ........................................................................... 16
  RAP - Reflection, Announcements, Physicality ................................ 18
  Center Hours .................................................................................. 18
  Community Interaction .................................................................... 19
  Special Religious Requirements ....................................................... 19
  Mid-Semester Break ...................................................................... 19
  Waterfront ...................................................................................... 20
Life at the Center ................................................................................... 22
  Setting .............................................................................................. 22
  Weather and Climate ..................................................................... 22
  Community Living .......................................................................... 22
  The Field Station ............................................................................ 24
  Food and Cuisine ............................................................................ 26
  Exercise and Recreation ................................................................ 26
  Technology and Communication ..................................................... 27

THE SCHOOL FOR FIELD STUDIES
PREPARING FOR DEPARTURE
MEET THE SFS 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 Marine Resource Studies
  - Semester Program
TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS

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

Arrival to your program
SFS staff will meet students at the airport on the date and at the time specified in the travel instructions and will provide transportation to the Center.

If you plan to arrive in country before the set arrival date for personal travel, please contact your admissions counselor.

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.

You will apply for a student visa for this program. 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. SFS will process the visas for participants as a group. **Please do not apply for this visa until you receive these instructions.**

Non-US citizens may require an alternate visa process. Please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor to discuss.
MEDICAL PREPARATION FOR THE FIELD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Insurance**

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

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

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

Students planning to SCUBA with SFS will also be required to hold Divers Alert Network (DAN) insurance. See “SCUBA Information” for requirements and instructions.

Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation Insurance

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

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

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

The coverage provided by the SFS Emergency Evacuation and Repatriation insurance plan is NOT the same as health, medical, or dental insurance. The plan covers the cost of transportation, accommodations, and medical care associated with an evacuation (e.g. life-saving support during transport in an air evacuation), in cases where the evacuation is deemed medically necessary. This insurance plan does not cover urgent or emergency medical care, basic medical care, laboratory tests, or pharmacy needs.

Therefore, students on SFS programs are required to supply their own comprehensive health insurance, valid in the country or countries in which the program operates, for the full duration of their SFS program as outlined in the previous section.

Medical Consultation

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

Physical Conditioning

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

Existing Medical Conditions

Due to the rigorous nature of the program and stress of travel, existing and chronic health issues can be triggered or exacerbated while abroad, even if currently well-managed or in remission in the US. You should discuss all medical conditions with your physician and the SFS Safety and Student Life Department to see if this SFS program will be right for you.

Consult with your physician and/or specialists and inform the SFS Safety and Student Life Department of any medical conditions that could lead to sudden illness, such as allergies to foods or insect stings, asthma, chronic heart conditions, diabetes, epilepsy, etc.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For more information on CDC-recommended vaccinations and prophylactic medication, including specific country and regional risk, as well as information about non-vaccine preventable insect-borne diseases that are present in country, 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.

**Animals**

There is a significant stray animal population on South Caicos. With limited funds, the problem is not a high priority for the local government. Locals generally do not care for their animals in the way you might at home in the US. There are two local non-profits whose mission is to protect and provide animal aid. We help our contacts at The TCSPCA and The Potcake Place, based in Providenciales, by once a year turning the CMRS into a temporary veterinary clinic for annual spays and neuters, sending sick animals to them (when space is available), and educating students about their programs that help visitors adopt TCI animals. **It can be challenging for students to navigate local customs when it comes to animal care and ownership, but it is important to remember that interactions with animals can have significant repercussions.** Students should not bring any stray animals back to the Center. Please take caution when near animals on South; there are wild horses and donkeys which are not accustomed to human interaction. Some of the stray (and owned) dogs can also be aggressive.

There are several friendly dogs that live at the center with us!
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 few 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?</strong> How might this impact cultural views surrounding issue like climate change?</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’s important that you be prepared to take responsibility for your actions in a new place, as local laws and customs are likely different than the ones you are used to at home. The field staff will go into more detail about local laws and customs during SFS Orientation, but please consider the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

All aspects of your 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 TURKS AND CAICOS

History of the Region
The TCI have a diverse history filled with indigenous populations, salt traders, and cotton and sisal plantations. The TCI have been under the British flag for most of the last 400 years. In 1972, the TCI became a British Dependent Territory; though the Parliament and Ministers are elected locally, the British government appoints a Governor, who holds ultimate authority.

The population of the TCI (approximately 31,500) is divided across many islands. Non-belongers represent about 60% of the population. Grand Turk is the seat of government and the second most popular tourist destination. Providenciales (or Provo) is the most developed for tourism, which began in earnest in the mid-1980s. The TCI welcome more than 250,000 visitors each quarter, and hotel construction continues at a rapid pace. The other islands, including South Caicos, host little tourism at the present time and are home to small-scale business and subsistence fishing.

Geography and Ecology
The TCI are a limestone archipelago lying at the southeastern tip of the Bahamian archipelago, approximately 575 miles (925 km) southeast of Miami and 100 miles (170 km) north of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and 888 miles (1,430 km) northwest of Puerto Rico. The total land area of the island complex is about 166 square miles (430 km2). The islands are ancient coral seamounts that have been periodically exposed and covered by changes in sea level. South Caicos lies at the southeastern edge of the Caicos Bank and is approximately 12 square miles (32 km2, maximum elevation = 157 feet; 48 m).

The vegetation on South is a scrubby “coppice” plant community, dominated by plants that are well-adapted to the xeric conditions. Most shrubs are less than 6 feet (2 m) in height, cacti are abundant, trees are uncommon, and palm trees are relegated to a few ornamental plantings in Cockburn Harbour. The soil of South is generally poor and unable to support agriculture; however, it is likely that the original plant and soil covers of the island were much richer and that human activity has changed the ecosystem greatly.

The marine environment of South Caicos is almost pristine and ideal for learning and research. The offshore areas support a variety of marine habitats, including vast sea grass beds, coral reefs, mangroves, and sand flats. Coral reef habitats include patch reefs, barrier reefs, fringing reefs, and deep reefs. Underwater visibility often exceeds 100 ft. (30 m). Due in part to upwelling of nutrients from the deep ocean, the bank has supported extensive commercial conch and lobster fisheries in the past.

The Center for Marine Resource Studies has worked closely with the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) on a variety of projects including conch and lobster-related fisheries projects of local importance. At present, South Caicos is experiencing a growth in large-scale tourist developments, which are being completed and taking reservations. SFS is involved in the natural resource inventories that are an essential step in formulating resource management plans for several important resource-dependent sites. The TCI are at a critical point in their development, when decisions regarding fisheries...
development and management, tourism development, and national park design and management will play a pivotal role in the success of national development schemes.

Extended Field Trip
Though the majority of the research and academic work is conducted during the program is focused on the island of South Caicos itself, it is important for students to understand the socioeconomic and environmental situation of the rest of the Turks and Caicos Islands. To facilitate this understanding, students will participate in a three-day field trip to neighboring islands to explore the area and learn about the differing local cultures and livelihood strategies of the region.

The group will take a ferry to Middle and North Caicos to explore ecosystems different from those found on South Caicos (tropical forest, protected wetlands, and karst in the form of limestone caves). Students will visit local farms and historical sites on North Caicos and bat caves on Middle Caicos, among other sites. The group will then continue to the tourism capital of Providenciales (known locally as “Provo”) for one night. On Provo, students will survey tourists on the islands famous white sand beaches and at a variety of tourist sites. The research they undertake will allow them to both comprehend the impact that tourism and development can have on marine and small tropical island environments, as well as the various attitudes and values of foreign and local tourists.

Program Schedule
The weekly schedule on South will vary significantly from the beginning of the program to the end. The first week is filled with orientation and introductions to each of the courses and the program. After the first week and for the next 7-8 weeks, you will typically have 12-15 lectures a week plus 4-8 other meetings (organizational, research/paper presentations, guest lectures).

Academic and other program activities are scheduled 6 days per week, Monday through Saturday. Sundays are typically free days on which students can relax, explore South Caicos, and catch up on assignments. Throughout the entire program there will be morning meetings that everyone is required to attend. Afternoons are generally filled with field work or research.

Sample Day Schedule:
0700  Breakfast
0745  Morning Meeting
0800  Lecture (classroom or field)
0900  Lecture (classroom or field)
1000  Break
1020  Lecture (classroom or field)
1120  Lecture (classroom or field)
1230  Lunch
1400  Field Work
1830  Dinner
1930  Evening activities vary, but may include lecture/dive/snorkel/study/free time
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONDAY</th>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY</th>
<th>FRIDAY</th>
<th>SATURDAY</th>
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<tr>
<td>7-7:20am Breakfast</td>
<td>7-7:20am Breakfast</td>
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<td>7:40-7:55am Morning Meeting</td>
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<td>8am-9am Environmental Policy Lecture</td>
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<td>8am-9am Environmental Policy Lecture</td>
<td>8am-9am Resource Management Lecture</td>
<td>8am-12pm Waterfront (Snorkels &amp; Dives) &amp; Community Engagement &amp; Free time</td>
<td>8am-12pm Marine Ecology Field Exercise</td>
<td>8am-12pm Resource Management Field Exercise</td>
<td>8am-12pm Waterfront (Snorkels &amp; Dives)</td>
<td>Free time</td>
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<td>9am-10am Resource Management Lecture</td>
<td>9am-10am Resource Management Lecture</td>
<td>9am-10am Waterfront (Snorkels &amp; Dives) &amp; Community Engagement &amp; Free time</td>
<td>8am-12pm Marine Ecology Field Exercise</td>
<td>8am-12pm Resource Management Field Exercise</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Free time</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:20-12:20pm Marine Ecology Lecture</td>
<td>11:20-12:20pm Environmental Policy Guest Speaker: District Commissioner</td>
<td>11:20-12:20pm Environmental Policy Guest Speaker: District Commissioner</td>
<td>11:20-12:20pm Environmental Policy Guest Speaker: District Commissioner</td>
<td>11:20-12:20pm Environmental Policy Guest Speaker: District Commissioner</td>
<td>11:20-12:20pm Environmental Policy Guest Speaker: District Commissioner</td>
<td>11-11:20am Brunch</td>
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<td>12:30-12:50pm Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:30-6pm Marine Ecology Field Exercise</td>
<td>2-3pm Environmental Policy Lecture</td>
<td>2-6pm Waterfront (Snorkels &amp; Dives) &amp; Community Engagement</td>
<td>2-3pm Marine Ecology Lecture</td>
<td>2-6pm Resource Management Field Exercise</td>
<td>1:30-3:30pm Community Engagement at the Center</td>
<td>Free time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:4pm Environmental Policy Lecture</td>
<td>3-4pm Environmental Policy Lecture</td>
<td>3-4pm Marine Ecology Lecture</td>
<td>4-6pm Resource Management Field Exercise Dry Run</td>
<td>4-6pm Marine Ecology Lecture</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>4-6pm Volleyball Tournament</td>
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<td>4-6pm Environmental Policy Desk Exercise</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-9pm Tie-Dye Night</td>
<td>8-9pm Open Water SCUBA Classroom session</td>
<td>8-9pm Trivia Night</td>
<td>8-9pm Tobago</td>
<td>8-10pm Bonfire</td>
<td>Free time</td>
<td>Free time</td>
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</table>
**Directed Research Schedule:**
After you complete your exams and have your mid-semester break (more details later in this guide), the lectures and organized classes diminish in frequency and are replaced with blocks of time allocated to the Directed Research projects. Groups of 2-8 students work with staff members on specific projects relative to each faculty member’s expertise and geared toward student interests. Natural science and social science research projects will be available, and faculty work to organize students within the project areas. Come in with an open mind, as you may not receive your first choice of project. Meetings are scheduled to offer training sessions in the skills needed to complete the research. These include sessions on statistics, paper writing formats, computer spreadsheets, word processing, and laboratory analysis. You spend the last month or so of the semester focusing on your Directed Research.

**Outreach Schedule**
Every Saturday afternoon the Center hosts children from the community who want to participate in swim lessons led by SFS students (many TCI youth are not comfortable in the ocean), as well as sports, games, arts and crafts, and more! More advanced swimmers join our Snorkel and Marine Research clubs, which teaches kids how to snorkel and then trains them in data collection methods so they can participate in various citizen science projects.

We also offer English and computer lessons based on individual requests from adult community members. The Center hosts three invitational dinners each year and invites the community to Directed Research presentations. These events are both festive and educational, giving the Center the opportunity to share the research that is being done with local residents.

**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**
Reflection, Announcements, Physicality. This is a format we use to lead our daily morning meetings! Each day there is a student of the day who will prepare a reflection (often a quote, sometimes a reflection activity or something similar) as well as a physicality (game, quick yoga session, stretching, dancing, etc.) to wake up our bodies and minds and get us ready for the day. The middle portion (A) is for announcements from staff.

**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 Interaction
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 teaching local elementary students how to read, participating in a homework club at the local high school, helping out with youth soccer practice, or assisting the local primary school with their project for the national science fair. 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.

Other engagement with the local community is primarily student driven. Students who take the initiative to involve themselves in local sports, church communities, etc. enjoy these rewarding experiences. Please remember that what is considered acceptable or appropriate varies from culture to culture and be sensitive to this when you are away from the Center or interacting with community members. The staff will brief you on this in more detail during Orientation.

English is the official language of the Turks and Caicos and is commonly spoken. Much of the local population also speaks Turks and Caicos Islands Creole.

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.

Mid-Semester Break
The program includes a five-day break during which time the Center is closed, and students are expected to travel on their own. This is a wonderful opportunity (and the only one during the program!) to do some independent travel in the region. Students will have transportation to Providenciales at the start of Mid-Semester Break and will arrange transportation back to South Caicos at the end. Final dates for this break are determined in the final few weeks before the start of the program and will be sent to you by your admissions counselor in advance of departure. Students will make plans for this break together after arrival.

Mid-Semester Break is characterized as “Non-Program Time.” You can read more about what this entails in SFS Policies and Procedures.
Waterfront
SFS uses SCUBA diving and snorkeling as a tool for research and education. Swimming is a large component of the program and some academic work is completed in the water, so being comfortable in that setting is crucial. Keep in mind that we will be swimming in deep water, around reef structures, in moving water, and around wildlife.

If you are a not a strong swimmer or if you are uncomfortable or unfamiliar with swimming in open water, please contact your SFS Admissions Counselor immediately to discuss this component of the program.

If you are not SCUBA certified for this program, you will experience no restrictions in terms of course content. Most of the fieldwork is accomplished in waters less than 20 feet (7m) deep, well within snorkeling range. In the Directed Research phase, some research projects may require scuba, but there are research options for snorkelers.

Sport Divers: SFS programs are NOT designed for people whose primary interest is sport diving. Faculty will often require that students snorkel instead of SCUBA dive because to allow for increased time spent in the water and ease of communication. South offers outstanding diving, but the focus of our logistical resources is on the academic and research program. Please reconsider attending this program if your primary interest is recreational SCUBA diving. The use of SCUBA and the sites chosen for dives are wholly based on the research needs of the Center.

Nighttime Waterfront Activities:
It is likely that you will have the opportunity to go on at least one optional night dive or night snorkel during your time at the Center, weather permitting. Night dives/snorkels may not be possible during a session. Divers do not need to have the Advanced Diver certification – the Open Water dive certification will suffice for participating in night dives if accompanied by a SCUBA Instructor. If night water activities are offered (diving or snorkeling), you will be unable to participate unless you bring the optional underwater lights listed in the recommended packing list. See Packing Guide.

SCUBA Information
SCUBA is part of the learning experience. Diving involves groups of 4-8 students and a Diving Master who go out in small boats to sites generally within a mile of the Center. SFS follows conservative diving table use. Weather permitting, semester students can expect to dive an average of 10-20 times during the program. Water activities are entirely dependent on the weather; therefore, please be flexible and prepared for scheduled activities to be changed or cancelled in the event of bad weather.

SFS SCUBA Certification Options:

- **PADI Open Water:** Students who plan to dive during the program may obtain their certification prior to arrival from a recognized organization such as PADI, NAUI, CMAS, SDI, or SSI, or may enroll in the PADI Open Water course offered at the SFS field station. Specific information and details about the SFS Open Water course will be sent 2-3 months before the program begins.

- **PADI Advanced Open Water:** The PADI Advanced Open Water course is also offered mid-semester for students previously certified or who have completed the SFS Open Water course. Students who are certified before arriving in the field will perform a SCUBA and rescue skills checkout with an SFS Diving Master before diving with the program. Additionally, a written exam on dive policy may be given at the discretion of the Diving Safety Officer.
Required Divers Alert Network (DAN) Insurance:
Neither healthcare plans nor SFS’ additional emergency evacuation policy will pay for treatment for decompression sickness or other diving-related conditions. Dive-related injuries and illnesses are extremely rare at SFS, but they can happen, and the costs of even basic treatment can be high. Recompression facilities are available in the Turks & Caicos Islands, but the cost of those services can easily exceed US $2,000.

Medical coverage is available through the Divers Alert Network (DAN). DAN is a non-profit organization dedicated to dive safety and accident prevention and is a recognized leader in the field of dive medicine research. The cost of coverage for US-based divers is $75 per year (cost may vary by state).

For this reason, SFS requires all students who will be participating in SCUBA diving to purchase DAN insurance before the start of the program. You must bring proof of coverage with you to the Center upon your arrival. The South Caicos staff will verify your policy at the start of the program. You will not be allowed to SCUBA dive without proof of DAN insurance. See the following page for purchasing information.

How to purchase:
- By phone: 1-800-446-2671
- Online at: www.diversalertnetwork.org/scuba-dive-insurance

At a minimum, you must register for the DAN Master Plan (The total cost is $75, including a DAN membership), which provides coverage for all in-water injuries. Some US states only offer the more comprehensive plans due to state insurance regulations. Students are required to purchase the minimum available by state.

When you register for DAN insurance, include the SFS sponsor number: 030697

It is possible to buy a membership to DAN without purchasing DAN insurance, so you need to make sure that you have in fact purchased DAN insurance.

SCUBA Equipment and Gear:
The center owns an electrically driven Bauer Vertecon VTC13-E1 13cfm/6000psi with a Bauer Junior II as support. The center operates all compressed gas equipment at a maximum pressure of 3000 PSI. Only trained/certified members of staff operate the compressor. The center owns 100 80-cubic foot aluminum 6061 alloy cylinders. All cylinders are visually inspected annually and undergo a hydro pressure test every five years as required by US DOT standards.

The center provides weights for divers, so they do not need to bring any. Students are responsible for all other snorkel and dive equipment. See “Packing Guide” for full list. Note: there is NO rental of SCUBA or snorkel equipment on South Caicos.
LIFE AT THE CENTER

Setting
South Caicos is not a resort island – there are no swaying palm trees and very few amenities. It is a small (about 8.2 sq mi), arid island with many cacti and salt bushes. Virtually the entire South population resides in Cockburn (pronounced "Coburn") Harbour on the southwestern shore. The population is approximately 800-1,000, varying as individuals emigrate for employment and return for the lobster fishing season.

The number of cars and trucks on the island is growing, but many people still get around by foot. Cats, dogs, donkeys, and horses roam freely. Many locals carry their household water daily from a municipal supply. Basketball and soccer are the most popular local sports, although cricket is coming back to the islands as well. There are a few small stores that carry groceries and household items, two small souvenir shops, some small family restaurants, 14 churches, and one ATM. The island currently has two resorts, both of which are expensive and may shut down during the slow season (September – October).

Everything is imported, and most items are subject to a 30% duty. Prices therefore average nearly 200% of mainland U.S. rates. Many things that might be easily accessible elsewhere are not available locally on South and therefore can only be imported with two weeks’ notice. One of the most important aspects of Cockburn Harbour, from a resource management standpoint, is that it is the center of a thriving lobster and conch fishery in the TCI. In fact, the TCI are one of the largest exporters of conch in the world. Cockburn Harbour has three conch and lobster processing plants that export seafood in large quantities.

Weather and Climate
The climate in the TCI is, for the most part, hot and dry year-round. Due to the arid conditions, fresh water is in critically short supply, and special attention must be paid to water use. Temperatures vary little throughout the year from the mean of 80˚ F, although low temperatures dip into the low 60s between November and February. High winds are common between November and March and may cause rough seas early in the year. Rough seas may delay waterfront activities!

Wet season lasts from September through January, Dry Season lasts from February through August.

- Fall semester lands mostly in the “wet season”
- Spring semester lands mostly in the “dry season”

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 engage in keeping our home beautiful. Please be ready to contribute and pull your weight as part of a team!

Students and staff aid in unloading and stocking of food shipments. Student and staff teams assist with the clean-up at every meal. Every Sunday student and staff teams work together to cook meals, as it is the cooks’ day off. In addition to kitchen duties, you may also serve on a student committee concerned with greening the site, planning social events, or helping to organize academic activities.

Every week students and staff participate in a site clean-up, which helps to keep the site in good shape. Students will rotate responsibilities of cleaning the classroom and computer room, site maintenance, picking up trash around the grounds, washing vehicles, monitoring composting, and organizing the common spaces.
The Field Station
The Center is a modest former hotel previously known as the “Admirals’ Arms Inn” located on South Caicos in Cockburn Harbour. The Center is structured in the shape of a large U that opens to the south and west. The buildings sit on top of a 20-foot cliff facing the sea and provide a spectacular view of the sunset and starlit skies. Architecture is Caribbean style, mostly single level, with lots of open spaces, shade, and trade wind ventilation to keep things comfortable in the heat.

Housing
Each room sleeps four to six students in bunk beds and has an attached bathroom. The bathrooms each have a freshwater shower and sink and a saltwater toilet. The center is arranged in three wings extend from the main building, which houses dining room, kitchen, classroom, and computer room facilities. You will be sharing close quarters with about 50 other people (students and staff) at the center, so be prepared for close quarters!

Water Use
South Caicos receives very little rainfall each year, so fresh water is a precious commodity! The average Turks and Caicos Islander uses 7 gallons of water per day; the average American uses 90-150 gallons per day! To conserve this precious resource and to be in keeping with the local rate of consumption, the SFS Center uses captured rainwater for its fresh water supply. So, it’s good to expect to use water more sparingly than you might be accustomed to at home. You will receive specific instructions for water conservation measures during SFS orientation when you arrive at the center, but a few details are included below.

Drinking Water: There is always available drinking water at the center. The Center drinking water is runoff collected from the rooftops and a concrete catchment area. This water is stored in a cistern. It is pumped through a sediment filter (5-micron filter) and then chlorinated to 1-3 ppm. As a final step, drinking water is passed through another filter and an ultraviolet sterilizer. Drinking water in town is not recommended unless it is bottled.

Bathing: You will have the option to take a fresh cold-water shower once a week. Bathing in the ocean is common and there are outdoor saltwater showers for students to use at the Center. Many students acclimate well to full-time saltwater showers after the first couple weeks and some students choose to go the entire semester with only saltwater bathing! Because of the frequent ocean bathing and proximity to the ocean, we do ask that students use biodegradable bathing products at the center. See the Packing Guide for more information!

Laundry: Due to limits on freshwater use, washing machines are not available for student use. Students will hand wash laundry during their time on South. The Center provides buckets and equipment designed for hand washing. (Breathing Mobile Washer: www.breathingwasher.com) Students dry clothes using outdoor clothes lines. There is a local laundry business where students can wash clothes using a machine for roughly $8-$10 per wash. It will cost extra to use a dryer.
Pool and Swim Zone

Swim Test: Prior to engaging in any waterfront activity (whether swimming, snorkeling, or SCUBA-diving), all students are required to perform a swim test. The swim test will include a 100m swim in the swim zone and 10 minutes treading in open water. If a student does not pass the swim test, they will be required to wear a life vest at all times while in an SFS boat, in the water, and engaging in waterfront activities.

Pool: The pool at the center is a saltwater pool, with a maximum depth of 9 feet. The pool is treated with chlorine. Open Water SCUBA course students will practice skills in the pool and on Saturdays we do swim lessons with local kids. The pool is generally open for student use, and there are some lounging areas around the pool as well.

Swim Zone: The swim zone at the west side of the property is about 100m long and has a rocky shore entry. The water in the swim zone reaches about 8 feet deep at the buoy marker boundary. There are lots of really interesting things to see while snorkeling in our own backyard! An abundance of fish, eels, lobster, conch, sometimes octopus and squid, and the occasional eagle ray! After completing the night snorkel checkout, students can do night snorkels in the swim zone until 9PM with a buddy and a light.

Swim lane: We have a buoy marked swim lane on the other side of the jetty that is about 50 meters long for lap swimming.

Other Facilities

The Center has a small computer room for writing final reports and data analysis. The computer room and the classroom are the only areas in the Center that have air conditioning, to preserve electronic equipment.

There is a facility in the center that stores the SFS compressor and dive tanks. The Center has a small fleet of boats, most of which are kept alongside a pier at the west end of the property. There are wooden snorkel and dive gear lockers next to the pool to house your personal equipment.

Also at the center we have a small pool, a conch wall with benches to sit and look at the ocean (expect some great sunsets!), the swim zone and swim lane right in our “backyard,” an open air dining area with student coffee maker/electric kettle, microwave, toaster, and a fridge to keep snacks.

Extending from the dining area is a breezeway hangout space with benches and hammocks, a central open area for meetings and activities. There is an academic library in the classroom and a library of some fun reading in the computer room. Students will each have a cubby for belongings in the common space, in addition to room storage.
Food and Cuisine
All food is imported to the Center on an island freighter which only delivers food to South every two weeks. Our two local cooks prepare three meals a day Monday through Saturday (program days), and on Sundays (non-program days) the staff and students will cook together to make brunch and dinner.

SFS works to ensure that balanced meals are prepared, but unlike large college dormitory kitchens, usually only a single entree, with a vegetarian alternative, is prepared for each meal. Be prepared to eat canned fruits and vegetables, as fresh produce arrives on the boat every two weeks. If you have any good recipes that can be increased to serve 40+ people, please bring them to share. Despite the location of the Center, fresh seafood is not readily available.

There is one refrigerator and area for food storage onsite for student use. Since you spend so much time in the water during this program, you will be very active each day and you may want to eat more frequently than you normally do. Bringing snacks from home, or budgeting extra spending money to purchase snacks locally, is a very good idea.

At CMRS, two snacks are also provided at 10AM and 4PM Monday through Saturday. 10 o’clock snack is often goldfish, Cheez-Its, pretzels or a similar crunchy snack, and fruit such as apples and oranges. For 4 o’clock snack, the cooks often prepare a baked treat such as brownies, cookies, or Rice Krispie treats, popcorn, or cheese and crackers.

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. Many students use the swim zone and swim lane for lap swimming or snorkeling!

Students also often form workout groups to do yoga or group bodyweight workouts. There is a pull-up bar and some benches, and some students get creative by using rocks as weights. Some students have also led dance, Zumba, yoga, and other fitness classes in the open patio space at the center. SFS has about 10 yoga mats available for student use at the center – you are welcome to bring your own as well!

Many students find going for runs (with a buddy) in the morning before breakfast and before it gets too hot is a good way to stay active. There is also a community playground at the recreation complex (roughly a 5-minute walk from CMRS) that has some bodyweight exercise machines, and there is also a turf field where some students play pickup soccer or frisbee.
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 semester – it is required to bring a personal laptop.

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

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.

We also strongly recommend a surge protector.

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 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 – many require a text or call verification and it’s a good idea to test out using these with your family/friends before you travel!
- 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 (we have a few at the center), 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.
• Though SFS does its best to update its library accordingly, you should plan to rely on the databases and online library available to you through your home institution during your SFS program. SFS does not provide additional access to any e-library resources from our Centers. Before arriving in-country for your SFS program you should make arrangements with your home school to have remote access to your library’s online journals, as you will use this very often during your program. Make sure you know your remote library log-in and password, understand your home school’s policy on accessing library materials remotely, and configure your laptop to access your school’s online libraries and e-journals before you arrive in the field.

Communication with Home

Messaging Apps
The most convenient and affordable way to communicate with your family and friends at home is via Wi-Fi-based messaging such as WhatsApp, iMessage, GroupMe, Facebook Messenger, and email. Students are welcome to bring their personal smartphones to use on the Wi-Fi at the center. Please remember that many apps require a text or call verification code during the setup process, so we recommend that you install and set up any apps you intend to use prior to departure.

Remember that access to video chat will not be permitted at the center due to Internet speed and availability!

Phones
Personal Cell: Most students put their cell phones on airplane mode when they arrive and rely on wifi based messaging and calling for the duration of the program. Some students have had success arranging an international calling plan with their cell phone provider. It is possible to buy a local SIM card to use with your personal cell phone, but keep in mind that your phone must be unlocked to use it with a local SIM card.

Pre-paid Option: Some former students have purchased a local cell phone ($100) with pre-paid minutes through Digicel or Lime (the local carriers) to use during the program. Plans exist with local services that can be purchased for $5.00-10.00/day.

Center Student Phones: The Center has a student telephone (through a local cell phone provider) to which you will have access for incoming calls. You will not be able to make outgoing calls on this line (even with phone cards). The staff will provide this number for you after you arrive to the center. Keep in mind that it is much cheaper for family and friends to call the TCI student phone, than it is for students to call the USA from the TCI. The Center has four local cell phones (without international calling) that are available for student use. These phones are used in the case that student is planning to go into town and will need to make a call back to the Center or staff.

Mail
You are welcome to give the Center address to your friends and family and ask them to send you letters. However, we ask that you please tell your friends and family to avoid sending packages to the Center. Please plan to pack and carry with you everything you will need for the duration of the program. If you absolutely need a package sent to you, please contact your Admissions Counselor.

Letters sent from the Center to the US, and vice versa, usually take a few weeks to arrive, although it can take much longer. You can buy stamps locally at $1 per stamp. Please advise family and friends not to send mail in the last month of the program, as it will not arrive before you leave.

Letters should be sent to the following address:

Student name
The School for Field Studies
P.O. Box 007, South Caicos
Turks & Caicos Islands
British West Indies

Please note that it is illegal to mail prescription medication over international borders. Do NOT attempt to do so.
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 vehicles (including cars, motorboats, motorcycles, etc.) at any time while on program. Think about how this limited mobility might impact coping mechanisms that you use at home, such as taking yourself for a long drive.

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

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

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

**Managing Social Drinking**

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

If you do choose to consume alcohol, 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 and Storage Space
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 during travel and to keep your belongings organized at the center. 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! Dive gear is best packed in a sturdy duffel bag. Special “dive bags” are expensive and merely label the contents as valuable to others, so they are not recommended.

You will have little storage space in your room; therefore, you should pack as efficiently and lightly as possible. Each room of 4-6 students will have one small closet with about 2 feet of width to hang clothes as well as a shelving unit with about 5 shelves. There is also a plastic storage bin for every student. Most students choose to leave their clothes in their suitcases or put them in a storage bin, which are kept under bunk beds when not being accessed. Each room also has a table, chair, and bulletin board. Dive and snorkel gear can be stored in the wooden dive lockers near the pool. Each student will have an individual cubby in the computer room, which has a lock on the door, so you may choose to store your laptop and school supplies there to free up space in your room. We advise against storing snacks and beverages in the rooms, as this can attract critters, so take advantage of the fridge in the dining area to keep your room clutter and critter free! In general, bring only what you need – field life is about simplicity and efficiency!

Wear and Tear
Bear in mind that clothing gets heavily used, dirty, damp, and will be washed in saltwater on this program. Clothing items that resist dirt and dry quickly are good for this reason. The Center also relies heavily on bleach for sanitation, so it is important to bring only clothes that you won’t mind being bleached. In general, you should expect to bring clothing home from the program a bit more faded and worn than it started! Many students choose to leave behind much of their clothing and some of their gear to be donated when they depart. Some previous students have even purchased a new wardrobe of “field clothes” from secondhand stores and planned to leave it all behind after the semester is over. Anything left behind will be donated to the South Caicos community.

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. You will spend a lot of time in a bathing suit on this program but wearing it to class won’t be appropriate!

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 require biodegradable soaps, shampoos, and conditioner. Conventional soaps and shampoos can have a significant impact on the environment. As you consider biodegradable options, remember that not all soaps and shampoos labeled "natural" are biodegradable. Brands that are typically biodegradable include Jason’s Natural, California Baby,
Kiss My Face, Nature Gate-Rainwater, Dr. Bronner’s, Tom’s of Maine, Desert Essence and some Aveda and Garnier products. You can purchase castille soap (like Dr. Bronner), which works for all types of washing (including laundry), at the Center to save you space and weight in your luggage. We regularly stock Peppermint, Tea Tree, Lavender, and Citrus formulas (8 oz. - $10, 16 oz. - $15). We also offer a limited supply of biodegradable shampoo and conditioner from Stream2Sea (6 oz - $10).

Please bring ONLY marine-safe sunscreen: sunscreens should only contain titanium oxide or zinc oxide as their active ingredients. Read the label and please do not bring sunscreens that contain oxybenzone, as this chemical is very damaging to coral and other marine life. Brands like Caribbean Solutions, Stream2Sea, Badger, Raw Elements, and Coral Safe are all good options. The Center’s store sells bottles of SPF 20 and 30 Stream2Sea (3 oz. - $10).

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: the following packing list does not suggest amounts, so pack according to your own needs!
PACKING LIST: REQUIRED ITEMS

Clothing

- **Shorts** - Shorts that are easy to clean, protect your upper legs, and dry quickly are best (such as board shorts or athletic/running shorts).
- **Light-weight casual wear** - Sarongs, sundresses, etc.
- **T-shirts and tank tops** - Past students have suggested loose-fitting, quick drying “performance fabrics” over cotton.
- **Casual long pants** - for protection from insects in the evenings
- **Long-sleeved, lightweight shirts** for sun and insect protection in the field
- **Lightweight rain or spray jacket** – good for boat rides at night
- **Rash guards** - preferably long-sleeved, for water activities. SFS logo long-sleeved rash guards are available for purchase at the Center for $45.
- **Sweatshirt** - Nights are cool from November through April.
- **Bathing suits** - at least 2, but alumni would recommend several
  - 2-piece suits are okay, but pack at least one one-piece suit to be worn during community days (or plan to wear a rash guard over a two piece).
- **Pajamas** or other suitable, lightweight sleeping attire
- **One or two nice outfits** for scheduled meetings/events with local officials, and research presentations.
- **Socks**

Footwear

- **Sneakers** – for running, participating in local sporting activities, and exploring the trails around South Caicos
- **Sandals** – at least one sturdy pair (brands like Teva, Chaco, Keen) that can withstand the rocks and sharp thorns around the island.
- **Flip Flops**

Gear

- **Sunglasses** - Salt (from the ocean/air) can corrode sunglasses, so it’s best to bring several inexpensive plastic pairs.
- **Hat and/or visor** with brim for sun protection
- **2 Nalgenes, canteens, or plastic quart/liter bottles** – insulated bottles are highly recommended!
- **Backpack** - a standard-sized day pack will suffice
- **Small dry bag**
- **Alarm clock** - if you don’t have an alarm feature on your phone/watch
- **Headlamp** or small, lightweight flashlight and batteries (bring extras). Batteries are expensive, so rechargeable batteries are recommended. The Center can recharge AA, C, and D batteries.
- **Dive Mask**: Check for a good fit and solid strap construction and bring an extra strap – your local dive shop can help with this prior to arrival. Neoprene replacement straps are available for purchase at the center.
  - If you need corrective lenses, you’ll find it easier to get a supply of disposable contacts for the program rather than investing in a mask with prescription lenses. You will be required to remove your mask underwater during review skills and training, so disposable contacts are the best option. If you are unable to wear contacts, you should purchase a prescription mask because you will need to be able to see underwater!
  - **Full face masks are not recommended** in our environment and students have had difficulty using this type of equipment during field exercises.
- **Snorkel**: Make sure you have a full-sized adult snorkel that fits comfortably for you and does not restrict air flow.
- **Full Size Fins**: You will use these almost daily, sometimes in strong currents, do not opt for “travel size” Alumni recommend fins with straps, sized to fit over dive booties rather than full foot fins
  - Bring spare replacement straps and clips
- **Hard-soled diving booties or similar wading/diving shoe** – make sure the booties fit in your fins!
- **Underwater slate** - at least 6x6 or comparable size. Alumni recommend a flat slate over a wrist model.
- **Pencils** - at least 2 spares to use with your underwater slate.
- **Mr. Clean Magic Erasers** – the best way to clean your underwater slate!
- **Dive clip** to attach equipment to your BCD, also available at the Center shop.
• **Waterproof watch**: will need to withstand the pressures of diving if you plan to SCUBA.
  o Bring extra watch batteries as there is nowhere to buy or repair watches on South Caicos!
• **Wetsuit**: When performing work in water at 77-82°F for 45 minutes to 2 hours, it is possible to become hypothermic. A wet suit is also very important as protective barrier against biting and stinging marine organisms. The maximum thickness you should bring is a 5 mm- we are in the tropics!
  o **For those who plan to snorkel only**: Fall and spring snorkelers may consider bringing a 1-3 mm “shorty” wetsuit depending on sensitivity to cold.
  o **For those who plan to SCUBA dive**: Fall divers should also consider a 1-3 mm shorty, depending on tolerance for cool water. Spring semester students should strongly consider bringing a full-length, 1-3 mm thick wetsuit.

**SCUBA Specific Gear: Required for Divers ONLY**
Students will have the option to order the **SFS Dive Gear Package** prior to the program. **This package will include the items indicated with an * below.**

If you do not order the SFS Dive Gear Package, you will need to bring the following items with you to the program as well as a service receipt for your SCUBA equipment (BC, regulators) completed within the last 12 months. If your equipment is newer than 12 months, you may bring the sales receipt in place of the service receipt.

• **Dive Computer*** (with at least 75% battery power): There will be no opportunities to repair a dive computer that fails, so bring a backup battery and O-ring that you can change yourself as there are no facilities on South Caicos where this can be done should there be a problem. Because of the lack of repair facilities, even students with a dive computer should bring dive tables from their dive certification organization.
  o A dive computer that provides depth, time, and no-decompression limits is mandatory. Some of these computers can be purchased with sensors that also provide information about tank pressure, which is acceptable.
  o If your dive computer does not have these sensors, you will need a submersible pressure gauge (SPG): The SPG displays tanks pressure and is required equipment unless the information is displayed by the dive computer and sensor combination.
• **Buoyancy Compensator*** (“BC”): Try on the BC before purchasing it to ensure a good fit! You should stand sideways in front of a mirror and make sure that there is no gap between your shoulder blades and the BC. You may even want to consider connecting the BC to a tank before trying it on.
• **Primary (second stage) and secondary (second stage = octopus)*** - first stage must have a yoke connection, or you must bring a DIN to yoke adapter.
• **Alternate air source retainer***: Retains second stage regulator close to the body. Helps prevent damage to the reef and to your equipment and is important for safety.
• **Console retainer***: Retains the console close to the body. Helps prevent damage to the reef and to your equipment and is important for safety. Retractors are available for purchase at the Center ($15).
• **Underwater knife*** or cutting tool specifically intended for diving.
• **Compass***: Either wrist mount, BC mount, or (preferably) on your console mounted with a retractable clip.
• **Save A Dive Kit** – when purchasing your equipment, ask the dive shop to put one of these together for you. This should include fin straps, mask straps, spare computer batteries, mouth pieces and bulbs for your flashlight.

**Notes for divers:**
• SCUBA tanks and weights are provided at the Center
• DO NOT bring weights to the program with you! If your BCD does not have integrated weight pockets, you must bring a weight belt.

**Personal Items and Toiletries**
• **Insect Repellant** - An effective repellent that contains 10%-35% DEET is recommended. Students might also consider a natural repellent – those containing lemon eucalyptus oil work best. DEET-based bug spray can be purchased locally but is more expensive than at home.
• **Anti-itch cream** - Benadryl Gel and Calamine lotion work well
• **Marine-safe waterproof sunscreen** with a minimum SPF of 25. - See note about impact in “Packing Tips.”
• **General toiletries**: students often end up paying extra baggage charges by over-packing in this area. There is a decent selection of pharmacy and toiletry items available locally, including at our own Center!

• **Biodegradable soap, shampoo, and conditioner** - See note about impact in “Packing Tips.”

• **Prescription medications** (packed in your carry-on!) to last the entire length of the program. All prescriptions must be cleared through the Dive Safety Office before diving, as some medications contraindicate diving activities. Please note that this will not be possible (or legal) to receive prescription medications via mail!

• **Personal first aid kit**: Any medications and supplies you need on a regular basis.
  - Please note that the Center has a first aid station with basic supplies only (band aids, tape, antiseptic). We do not have oral medicine for distribution. Selection is limited and very expensive locally, so you should bring over-the-counter oral medications like Ibuprofen, Acetaminophen, cold medicine, allergy medication, Pepto Bismol and other medicines for digestive issues, etc. with you to the program. You should also have Band-Aids, antiseptic cream, little scissors, lip balm, and any items for personal needs (like Dramamine for motion sickness). Many students also bring ear drops or earplugs to prevent swimmer's ear.

• **Period Care**: These can be purchased locally, although at much higher prices than in the US and with a limited selection. We suggest that women bring enough tampons or sanitary napkins to last the duration of the program. We encourage you to find the most environmentally friendly, biodegradable options, and look into alternatives such as the Diva Cup: [www.divacup.com](http://www.divacup.com).

• **Extra prescription glasses and/or contacts** - If you wear contacts be sure to bring enough solution to last the duration of the program, as they are not available to purchase locally.

For the Dormitory

• **Small personal fan** - particularly important for the warmer fall semester. Small clip-on fans can be rented at the Center for $5 with a $15 deposit.

• **Quick-Dry Towels** (recommended brands: dock and bay, REI, TJ Maxx), face cloth, bath towel, and beach towel.

• **Bed sheets** – standard twin size, fitted and flat – and pillowcases. A pillow will be provided.

• **Lightweight sleeping bag** or another lightweight blanket

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 8 GB or more capacity

• **Notebooks** for 3 classes (for class notes and research data)

• **Writing utensils**: Pencils, pens, highlighters, colored pencils, small manual pencil sharpener.

**PACKING LIST: ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED ITEMS**

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

• **Underwater camera** – used as part of your coursework for the Marine Ecology class. They only need to be waterproof to 30 feet/10 meters for use in class assignments, but divers may want a camera that can go to greater depths. Many students recommend a waterproof GoPro camera. Please note that aside from your ecology assignments and DR video, cameras can only be used on recreational dives/snorkels.

• **Camera**: (Many students use GoPros) Remember to bring extra memory cards! As part of your Directed Research project, you will be required to produce a video. Many students just use their waterproof camera.

• **A mesh bag for your gear**: Please ensure that this bag is large enough to hold your snorkel gear (mask, fins, booties, and snorkel). This can be purchased at the Center shop (small - $20; large $25)

• **Primary underwater flashlight** for night dives & snorkels: A standard dive light with adjustable strength is best – different circumstances and visibility conditions will call for different amounts of light. LED lights are suggested as they burn longer and can double as a flashlight on land. The center shop has a limited number of underwater lights for sale ($25). These lights require 4 - AA batteries that are not provided.

  - **Optional secondary dive light**: Divers only. Can be a smaller light used as a backup.

• **Swim Leggings**: non-cotton, worn in the water to help protect against jellyfish stings.

• **Casual Leggings**: to wear around the Center
- **Things to do during nights at the Center**: movies, board games, decks of cards, musical instruments etc.
- **Sporting equipment**: There is a volleyball court, basketball court, soccer field, cricket ground, and a fitness center on South. Frisbees, basketballs, soccer balls, beach volleyballs, and footballs will get plenty of use and are not always available locally.
- **Small personal reading lamp**: many students use a headlamp!
- **Small sewing kit**
- **A stuff bag for dirty laundry**
- **Earplugs/Eye mask** – you’ll be sharing space with other students, so these are important if you are a light sleeper!
- **Ziplock bags or reusable silicone bags** – great for keeping dust and damp out of personal items.
- **Index cards for flash cards** (or plan to use quizlet if you prefer)
- **Lotion** for dry skin
- **Ear drops**
- **Eye drops**
- **Tiger balm or other muscle rub**
- **Hair oil**: Argan oil or Goldwell hair oil is recommended by alumni!
- **E-reader and/or paperback books to read and share** – there is a small library on the island as well
- **Personal music player**, headphones, and bluetooth speaker
- **Spare pair of sunglasses**
- **External hard drive** to back up laptop or for storing movies
- **Bandanas, sport headbands, Buffs** - highly recommended, especially if you have long hair! – available in the SFS store
- **Hair detangler or leave in conditioner** for those with medium length to long hair
- **Emergen-C/Airborne**
- **Electrolyte powder** for hydration
- **Packing cubes** for packing and for organization in your room!
- **Tupperware container** - especially if you have dietary restrictions or are accustomed to frequent snacks!
- **Banners, posters, and flags from your home school** – students come from colleges and universities all over the country, so it is fun to have each represented at the Center. They must be made to hang outdoors and withstand wind/rain, so no paper please!
- **Snacks**: Any snack food that you like to eat frequently and may not be available locally. You can purchase snacks on South, but there is a limited selection and the prices will be higher than you are used to in the US.
- **Collapsible fishing pole**, if you are interested in fishing, though most locals use a line for fishing rather than a pole.
  - **Note**: Spear guns are illegal in the TCI and will be confiscated by the TCI government; do NOT bring them!
  - **Fishing licenses are required in the TCI, $30 for 30 days.** They can be purchased locally, and students must adhere to local laws.
- **Waterproof container** to hold spare parts, glasses, medications (inhaled/Epi Pens), etc. while diving. This could be the “Save a Dive Kit” for keeping spare equipment parts.
- **Neoprene mask strap cover** - especially for long hair! SFS logo neoprene straps available to purchase at the center
- **Pencil sharpener**
- **Surge protector** for personal electronics (camera, fan, etc.)
- **Extra Long phone charger**
- **Something white**: tie-dye is a popular activity and happens at least once per semester!
- **Costume or Holiday Items**: for example, fall students might want to bring something for a Halloween costume (or you can get creative and make one when the time comes 😊)

**Optional Supplies for the South Caicos Community**: Schools here have limited equipment for hands-on science, art, and physical education. If you would like to bring items as donations, you certainly may and the SAM will help you distribute in an interactive, fun, respectful way. You will learn of other ways to give back to the community once you are at the Center. All board games and sporting equipment that are given to CMRS will be used by community members during engagement activities on Saturdays, by older residents at the Wellness Center, and by elementary school students during Physical Education classes and clubs. Anything you bring and donate to the field station will be used by the larger South Caicos community.
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 / @the_sfs_tci

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, 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!

![Crossword Puzzle]

**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