



THE SCHOOL  
FOR FIELD STUDIES

# Justice, Resilience, and the Environment

## SFS 3821

### Syllabus

The School for Field Studies (SFS)  
Center for Ecological Resilience Studies  
Atenas, Costa Rica

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

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## COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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

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

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

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

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## Course Overview

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Justice, Resilience, and the Environment (JRE) explores the concepts of justice, conflict, and social change within the Costa Rican context. Costa Rica is renowned for its significant efforts in forest regeneration and biodiversity protection. Tourism campaigns to highlight the tropical wonders often obscure the struggle between human development goals and the rights of nature. We will examine the connection between postcolonial practices and current development strategies to better understand Costa Rica's efforts to protect people's rights while honoring the rights of nature.

This course assesses community attempts to resist existing structural and institutional arrangements and encourage social change to better meet human needs in balance with the environment. We will see how groups create accountability through grassroots knowledge and power in Costa Rica, locating theory in concrete examples. We will analyze key themes of resilience-building including indigenous land rights struggles, agroecological production, seed sovereignty, and agrotourism.

Working with community stakeholders, students will conduct first-hand analysis of social issues. They will develop skills essential to future advocacy, community organization and the insights necessary for social change. Projects will examine the significance of social research in struggles for social justice. Field experiences in this course include working with indigenous communities, regenerative farmers, and communities tackling waste management issues. Students will conduct quantitative and qualitative research to prepare written, oral, and visual presentations that reflect their understanding of justice and social change. This fieldwork will prepare students for a final directed research project on the intersection of social and environmental justice challenges.

## Learning Objectives

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The core skills students will learn in this course are critical thinking and analysis, field techniques, communication skills as well as collaboration and time management. The specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To examine stakeholders and events in the historical development of Costa Rica and how they impact present day development strategies and rights protection.
2. To become acquainted with concepts and methods of resilience that apply to issues regarding development, public policy making, environmental laws, and public attitudes regarding human interaction with and reliance on natural world.
3. Recognize and respect alternative ways of knowing and communicating, including indigenous practices, rural practices and artistic expressions.
4. To critically analyze the complexities in environmental issues, including the responsibility to future generations, the problem of moral standing of human and non-human species, sustainability regarding human development, global environmental challenges, and environmental justice.
5. To critically assess alternative approaches to responsibility to nature through an environmental justice framework. To differentiate diversity-building and destructive practices in agriculture including social and environmental effects.
6. To identify the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism at the individual and community level and use data to recommend effective means of facilitating regenerative tourism.

7. To compare the development and resilience practices in Costa Rica with the Panama situation on during the international field trip.
8. To formulate your own social and environmental justice ethic and to articulate and defend these ideas with clarity and consistency.

All trips, discussions, materials, movies, and readings are part of the course so please come prepared to enjoy and learn throughout the program! You will learn and develop experimental design, interviewing techniques, basic descriptive statistics, proposal writing and communication skills.

## Assessment

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Assessment Item	Value (%)
Field Lab	20
Field Exercise	20
Reading Reflection	10
Midterm Project	25
Final Essay	15
Participation	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>

### Field Lab: Student Attitudes Towards Bats (20%)

Human activities are a serious threat for bats. Understanding the motivations and social perception of humans towards bats can be a powerful tool to develop conservation plans for these mammals that consider human impacts. Indeed, these assessments of the perceptions are important to creating awareness programs that address potential negative social attitudes. Surveys will be conducted with Costa Rican and SFS students about their attitudes towards bat before and after courses and interactions. Students will then compare the data and reflect on the significance of conversation education and awareness raising in relation to wildlife protection. This information will inform the CERES' ongoing community outreach and bat education project.

### Field Exercise: Seed Saving and Food Sovereignty (20%)

Preservation of functioning ecosystems depends on the reorientation of food systems to ensure a resilient food chain from production to consumption. Current conventional food production systems based on mechanization and agrochemicals are neither environmentally nor socially sustainable. Costa Rica is experiencing challenges to maintain local food sovereignty. Over 90% of the seeds used in Costa Rica are not certified by any producer, such as large agroindustry corporations. Seeds are instead bought, sold, and traded by farmers, seed cooperatives and small-scale producers. However, legislation has been proposed to require registration and, in effect, the privatization of seeds. This proposed restriction in the trade or sale of unregistered seeds threatens farmers' rights to save and trade their seeds. We will visit Finca Orgánica San Luis to better understand how they are preserving ecological and cultural diversity through seed saving. This farm has started a seed business that sells organic, open-pollinated seeds adapted to local climate issues. We will explore how farmers work to preserve access to local seeds that have evolved with the environment and people as an act of resistance against proposed legislation that would require registration and, in effect, the privatization of seeds in Costa Rica.

We will plant and monitor seeds at the Center greenhouse and collect data on best conditions for propagation, resource needs, and care to ensure we create diversity and produce healthy food on

campus. Pairs of students will connect concepts from the collective art piece *Resiste Mesoamerica* to the experiences and theory covered in the first section of *JRE*. This reflection will tie topics like environmental protection, collective action, economic solidarity and seed sovereignty with themes we cover at Finca San Luis, Enraizadas and Semillas Plantae.

**Reading Reflection (10%)**

You will select one assigned reading during the semester and write a one-page reflection. Reflections may include a summary of key points and should contain your own assessment, analysis and/or insights on relevant points. You should also connect these points to our class topic. You will be asked to briefly share your insights with the class on the day the reading is assigned.

**Midterm Project: Community Gardens Assessment (25%)**

We will work with an Atena food security organization to collect data about community members’ opinions and ideas to collectively create a prospering community garden. We will present our findings to community stakeholders.

**Final Essay (15%)**

The final essay offers students an opportunity to reflect on the reported benefits and actual community impacts of ecotourism following our extended field trip to Osa Peninsula. Students will write an essay addressing whether improving well-being for residents, supporting biodiversity conservation using concepts like regenerative tourism, localization and environmental justice. Students will work in groups to create tools that could be used to invite/require tourists to participate in positive social and environmental practices in Osa, based on their observations on the field trip.

**Participation (10%)**

A student’s ability to synthesize and share ideas is critical to the individual and classroom learning process. Participation in class and a general high contribution to group learning are expected at SFS. One’s ability to be a strong member of a learning community will enhance the grade assigned at the end of the program. Evaluation will reflect your actual contribution to the analyses, not simply the amount of time you talk. Thus, making thoughtful contributions that build upon topics of discussion are an important element of participation.

**Grading Scheme**

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A	95.00 - 100.00%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

**General Reminders**

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**Honor Code/Plagiarism** – SFS places high expectations on their students and we hold students accountable for their behaviors. SFS students are held to the honor code below. SFS has a zero-tolerance policy towards student cheating, plagiarism, data falsification, and any other form of dishonest academic and/or research practice or behavior. Using the ideas or material of others without giving due credit is

cheating and will not be tolerated. Any SFS student found to have engaged in or facilitated academic and/or research dishonesty will receive no credit (0%) for that activity.

*“SFS does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in any form. While participating in an SFS program, students are expected to refrain from cheating, plagiarism and any other behavior which would result in a student receiving credit for work which they did not accomplish on their own. Students are expected to report any instance of cheating or plagiarism by others.”*

### **Class Courtesies**

- Arrive at class on time.
- Come to class ready to participate.
- Create space for all students to participate and respect all opinions.
- Do not use computers or other electronic devices for reasons other than note-taking. If internet access is too great of a temptation, do not bring devices and computers to class.
- If you cannot come to a class due to illness or other serious issues, inform the professor or HWM. Email or check with professor later to find out what you have missed.

**Deadlines** – Deadlines for assignments are established to promote equity among students, to allow faculty enough time to review and return comments and grades before other assignments are due, and to avoid clashes with other activities and courses. Therefore, deadlines are firm, and extensions will only be considered under extreme circumstances. When appropriate, the files should be placed in the assigned folder within the students drive on the server. Late assignments will incur a 10% penalty for each day that they are late. Papers submitted after 3 days of the dateline will not be accepted. Please plan to avoid such situations. Assignments will be handed back to students within one-week grading period.

**Readings** – Assigned readings will be provided in a packet before the course begins. It is important that you read all materials before class since the volume of the material in the class requires a brisk pace. You are expected to have read all the assigned articles. In some classes, students will be assigned to lead the group by highlighting important concepts and raising questions for the group to consider/discuss.

**Content Statement** – Every student comes to SFS with unique life experiences, which contribute to the way various information is processed. Some of the content in this course may be intellectually or emotionally challenging but has been intentionally selected to achieve certain learning goals and/or showcase the complexity of many modern issues. If you anticipate a challenge engaging with a certain topic or find that you are struggling with certain discussions, we encourage you to talk about it with faculty, friends, family, the HWM, or access available mental health resources.

**Participation** – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the course is mandatory, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and class activities, and simply get involved.

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## Course Content

Type - **L**: Lecture, **D**: Discussion, **RP**: Role Play, **FL**: Field Lecture, **LAB**: Lab/Workshop

No	Title and outline	Type	Time	Required Readings
1	<p><b>Costa Rica's social structure and development</b>            What historical, political, and economic factors have advanced and limited Costa Rica's sustainable development model?            Costa Rican culture &amp; the pursuit of sustainable development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental policy and social justice.</li> <li>• Costa Rican social system and development</li> <li>• Costa Rica's main social and env. dev. issues</li> </ul>	L; D	2.0	<p>Sada, The Curious Case of Costa Rica.</p> <p>Recommended:            Gawande, Costa Ricans Live Longer than Us. What's the Secret?</p>
2	<p><b>Where are we coming from? Depleted resources and degrowth</b>            What underlying, systemic paradigms cause us to deplete our ecological and social resources without replenishing them?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intergenerational</li> <li>• Cost/Benefit analysis</li> <li>• Externalities</li> </ul>	L; D	1.5	<p>Bader, Costing the Earth</p> <p>Optional: Schemelzer, The Future is Degrowth</p>
3	<p><b>Where are we going? Resilient futures.</b>            How do we create regenerative societies from existing development frameworks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degrowth</li> <li>• Circular economy</li> <li>• Transformative framework</li> </ul>	L; D	1.5	<p>Hopwood, Sus. Dev: Mapping Different Approaches</p> <p>Raworth, Why it's Time for Doughnut Economics...</p>
4	<p><b>Manu/El Progreso Farm</b>            Social and env. impacts of multinational monoculture production. Monoculture and agroecological farming practices.</p>	FL	2.0	
5	<p><b>Agroecology and Justice</b>            Why does Costa Rica continue to rely on conventional agriculture and what are the costs?</p> <p>Role Play – producer, labor, and community</p>	D; RP	1.5	<p>Film: Luxury at what Cost: Pineapple Production in C.R.</p>
6	<p><b>Social and Ecological Resilience</b>            How can people create local solutions to protect their rights to have basic needs met while supporting a healthy environment?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the relationship between the devaluation of nature and classes of people</li> <li>• Movements of resilience and resistance</li> </ul>	L	2.0	<p>Adger, Social and ecological resilience: are they related?</p>

No	Title and outline	Type	Time	Required Readings
7	<b>Local Food Harvesting and Preparation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn about food species on campus</li> <li>Harvest food from campus and local sources</li> <li>Prepare and preserve food</li> </ul>	Lab	2.0	
8	<b>Visit Rodney's Farm</b>	FL	2.0	
9	<b>Finca Orgánica San Luis</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organic production</li> <li>Enraizadas farmer-to-customer food delivery</li> <li>Seed Plantea seed business</li> </ul>	FL	4.0	Peschard, Keeping seeds in our hands
10	<b>DR Agenda Presentation</b>	L	1.0	
11	<b>Community Resilience</b> What strategies are community members using to create social ecological resilience?	FL	6.0	Little, Enhancing food security through localized community currency
12	<b>Agriculture and the Circular Economy</b> How can we feed the world's population in a just way? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand challenges around monocultures</li> <li>Importance of whole food systems</li> <li>Evaluate challenges and solutions to securing food supplies</li> </ul>	L; D	2.0	Shiva, Shiva: Everything I Need to Know I Learned in the Forest.  Gálvez, People of the Corn
13	<b>Community Gardens- Midterm project</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interview Atena residents about interest in a community garden.</li> <li>Gather and share data on interest in project, perceived benefits, roles, and challenges of the project</li> <li>Present in report as final outcome</li> </ul>	Lab	4.0	
14	<b>Concepts of gender in development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The role of gender in colonialism and development</li> <li>Gender perceptions of work and care</li> <li>National and regional protection mechanisms</li> <li>Gender roles in C.R., past and present</li> </ul> Ethical Issue: How do historical gender expectations influence development today?	L; D	1.5	Patel & Moore, "Cheap Care"
15	<b>Mastatal/La Iguana Field Trip</b> <b>Social and Environmental Justice</b> How do we ensure environmental justice for communities of color, low incomes and in the global south as well as future generations?	FL	4.0	Carruthers, D. V. (2008). Environmental justice in Latin America: Problems,



No	Title and outline	Type	Time	Required Readings
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justice framework to access natural resources in the context of equitable development.</li> <li>Social movement organization and action for just futures</li> </ul>			promise, and practice. MIT Press.
16	<b>Regenerative Tourism in Costa Rica</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measuring env. &amp; social impacts of tourism</li> <li>Local determination</li> <li>Tourists' responsibility</li> </ul> <p>How can communities have more control to ensure local benefits? What is the role of tourists as consumers of place, culture?</p>	L; D	2.0	Higgins-Desbiolles, Introduction: Socialising Tourism
17	<b>Tourism and environmental ethics in Osa</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Impacts of tourism in community</li> <li>Indigenous rights and tourism</li> <li>Developing locally determined tourism options</li> <li>Ethical Issue: What are the benefits and challenges of tourism development for various social groups?</li> </ul>	L; D	1.0	Hunt, et al., Can ecotourism deliver real economic, social, and environmental benefits in Osa?
18	<b>Field trip to Osa</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Visti OsaWild to learn about local tourism development.</li> <li>The intersection of tourism and agriculture</li> </ul> <p>Indigenaety and cultural resources in the face of tourism</p>	FL	6.0	
19	<b>Quitirrisí Food Security and Culture</b> Field Lecture – Indigenous food security	FL	4.0	
20	<b>Indigenous rights and resilience</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous cultures in Costa Rica</li> <li>Concepts of nature and identity</li> <li>Conservation objectives and indigenous people's roles in land management</li> </ul> <p>Ethical Issue: How can indigenous people protect their lands and cultures within existing frameworks?</p>	L; D	1.5	Mares & Pena, Environmental and Food Justice Toward Local, Slow, and Deep Food Systems  Sylvester, O. et al. The Protection of Forest Biodiversity can Conflict with Food Access for Indigenous People
21	<b>Final Project</b> Apply resilience principles to issues experienced in Osa Peninsula	D; LAB	2.0	
	<b>Total hours</b>		<b>50.5</b>	

## Reading List

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1. Adger, W. N. Social and ecological resilience: are they related? *Progress in Human Geography* 24(3): 347-364. 2000.
2. Beder, S. Costing the Earth: Equity, Sustainable Development and Environmental Economics, *New Zealand Journal of Environmental Law*, 4, 2000, 227-243.
3. Gálvez, A. "People of the Corn" in *Eating NAFTA: Trade, food and the destruction of Mexico*, Oakland: University of California Press. 2018.
4. Gawande, A., Costa Ricans Live Longer Than We Do. What's the Secret?, *New Yorker*, Aug. 23, 2021,
5. Higgins-Desbiolles, F. Introduction: Socialising Tourism in *Socialising Tourism: Reimagining tourism's purpose*, (eds. HIGGINS-DESBIOLLES, F., DOERING, A., CHEW BIGBY, B.)
6. Hopwood, B., Mellor, M., & O'Brien, G. (2005). Sustainable Development: mapping different approaches. *Sustainable Development*, 13, 38-52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.244>
7. Hunt, C. A., Durham, W. H., Driscoll, L., & Honey, M. (2015). Can ecotourism deliver real economic, social, and environmental benefits? A study of the Osa Peninsula, Costa Rica. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 23(3), 339-357.
8. Mares, T. & Pena. D. (2011). Environmental and Food Justice Toward Local, Slow, and Deep Food Systems.
9. Patel, R. and J. Moore, *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*, Univ. of California Press, 2017.
10. Peschard, K. and Randeria, S. (2020). 'Keeping seeds in our hands': the rise of seed activism, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 47:4, 613-647, DOI: 10.1080/03066150.2020.1753705
11. Raworth, K. (2017) *The Doughnut Economy: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-century Economist*. London: Random House Business Books.
12. Sada, M.J., The Curious Case of Costa Rica, *Harvard International Review*, Sept. 17, 2015.
13. Shiva, V., "Everything I Need to Know I Learned in the Forest", *Yes! Magazine*, Dec., 2012.
14. Singer, P., All Animals Are Equal. *Philosophical Exchange* 1, (1974), 103-116.
15. Sylvester, O., et al. The Protection of Forest Biodiversity can Conflict with Food Access for Indigenous People, *Conservation and Society* 14(3): 279-290 2016.

### Suggested readings:

1. Baatz, A., Climate change and individual duties to reduce GHG emissions. *Ethics, Policy and Environmental*, 17(1), 1-19.
2. Banerjee, J and E. Duflo. *Poor Economics*, Chapter 1, 2011.

3. Cafer A, Green J, Goreham G. A community resilience framework for community development practitioners building equity and adaptive capacity. *Community Dev.* 2019;50(2):201–216. doi:10.1080/15575330.2019.1575442
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5. Colbert, E. “A Reporter’s Field Notes on the Coverage of Climate Change”, *The Yale Environment 360*, March 11, 2009.
6. Hawken, P. *Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming*. New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2017.
7. King, C.A. Community Resilience and Contemporary Agri-Ecological Systems: Reconnecting People and Food, and People with People. *Systems Research and Behavioral Science*
8. *Syst. Res.* 25, 111-124. 2008.
9. Klein, N. No is Not Enough, Chapter 4, *The Climate Clock Strikes Midnight*, 2017.
10. Koeppel, D. *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World*. Hudson Street Press, 2008.
11. Magis K. Community resilience: an indicator of social sustainability. *Soc Nat Resour.* 2010;23(5):401–416. doi:10.1080/08941920903305674
12. Mann, Charles. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus*. New York, Knopf, 2006.
13. Mann, Charles. *The Prophet and the Wizard: Two Remarkable Scientists and Their Dueling Visions to Shape Tomorrow's World*, 2018, New York, Knopf.
14. McCrear R, Walton A, Leonard R. A conceptual framework for investigating community wellbeing and resilience. *Rural Soc.* 2015;23(3):270–282. doi:10.1080/10371656.2014.11082070
15. McDonough, W., & Braungart, M. *Cradle to cradle: Remaking the way we make things*, London: Vintage, 2009.
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17. National Academy of Sciences, “Adapting to the Impacts of Climate Change”, 2010.
18. Patel, Raj & Moore, Jason. *The History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. 2018.
19. Paterson, B. Ethics for Wildlife Conservation: Overcoming the Human–Nature Dualism, *BioScience*, Volume 56, Issue 2, 1 February 2006, Pages 144–150.
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21. Pollen, M. *The Botany of Desire*, Chapter 4 Potato, Random House, 2002.
22. Purdy, J., Our place in the world: A new relationship for environmental ethics and law. *Duke Law Journal*, 62(4), 857-932.
23. Raworth, K. (2017) *The Doughnut Economy: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st-century Economist*. London: Random House Business Books.
24. Sachs, J. *The Age of Sustainable Development*, Colombia Press, 2015, Chapters 1 and 2

25. Schmeler, M., Vetter, A., and Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The Future is Degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. London: Verso.
26. Schmidtz, D. and Willcott, E., *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works*, Oxford University Press, 2011.
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28. Steiner A, Markantoni M. Unpacking community resilience through capacity for change. *Community Dev J*. 2014;49(3):407–425. doi:10.1093/cdj/bst042
29. Van Tassell, D. The Paradox of Ecotourism in Costa Rica: Can Economic Development and Environmental Preservation Co-Exist?, *Development Review of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 7 No. 2 December 30, 2006.
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