

## *Lehigh in Costa Rica Summer Internships in Tropical Forest Conservation and Sustainable Development*

*June 20<sup>th</sup> to August 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 (approximate)  
Information Session: Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> 5:10 pm ST-131*

### **General Description:**

The Lehigh in Costa Rica Program has operated study abroad courses for over 20 years. The close association developed between Lehigh's faculty and a variety of Costa Rican NGOs (non-government organizations) has allowed us to expand our program to include two additional initiatives: 1) A 7-week summer internship program in tropical forest conservation and sustainable development, and 2) A summer environmentally-oriented "summer serve" project. Both activities are closely tied to sustainable development as described below.

The approximate date for the 7-week internship is June 19<sup>th</sup> to August 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017. Students from **ALL** of Lehigh's majors and colleges are considered and Spanish fluency is **NOT** required for many internship sites. Financial support is available in a variety of forms (see below).

### **Sustainable Development in Costa Rica**

Costa Rica is an ideal location to study sustainable development because it has been woven into the fabric of Costa Rican society and constitutes the core of Costa Rican development strategy. Costa Rica has made progress in the area of prosperity and social equity. Remarkable progress has also been made in the environment through extensive preservation of large tracts of land. In fact, about 26% of Costa Rica has been preserved as national parks, reserves, and conservation areas. Most of these tracts are owned by the National government but many are also held by private individuals and conservation trusts. Tourism has been an important industry in shaping the economic development of Costa Rica (it represented ~10% of GDP in 2010). Much of the growth of tourism is linked *specifically* to "ecotourism" which attracts visitors to the country largely based upon its rich ecosystem and biotic diversity. In many regions of Costa Rica, ecotourism is the instrument that connects conservation to economic development. Thus, progress in conservation has the potential not only to protect biological diversity, but to synergistically expand economic activity through ecotourism.

Although Costa Rica has had remarkable success with respect to forest management, many undisturbed tracts exist as fragmented, isolated "islands" in a landscape that has become degraded by agriculture, tourism, or urbanization. One of the most pressing conservation goals in Latin America is to reconnect many of these tracts of land with intact biological corridors via the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor which stretches from southern Mexico through Panama. Conservationists are actively involved in preserving and reforesting critical sections of this biological corridor. The resulting new forest patches will help to improve forest



connectivity and will directly contribute to the establishment of new habitats for a variety of animal species. Reforestation is also part of a broader effort to engage local landowners as part of the solution by developing market-based incentive programs which will provide income to them for reforesting degenerated landscapes and protecting existing forests on their farms. Reforestation efforts will eventually attract ecotourism to the region which will stimulate economic development.

The conservation activity described here has impacts well beyond Costa Rica. Because reforestation sequesters CO<sub>2</sub> (a “greenhouse” gas), it has implications for global climate and for the development of global scale policies to “offset” or mitigate anthropogenic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The conservation activities described here are also easily transferred throughout Central America (and beyond) to link critical conservation and economic development goals inherent in the concept of sustainable development.

### ***The Programs’ Objectives***

The goal of program is to augment classroom education currently available to students in environmental science or environmental studies with practical on-the-ground experience in sustainable development projects. Students will work on projects related to conservation, particularly in the area of building and/or maintaining biological corridors. The sustainability and integrity of Costa Rica’s environment is crucial to the ecotourism strategy of sustainable development for which Costa Rica is well known. These programs are designed to address the following educational goals:

- Allow students who lack the time or financial resources for a semester-long study abroad program to participate in international learning experiences.
- Create international opportunities specifically tailored to students with an academic background or general interest in the environment and/or international development.



- Demonstrate the inherent interdisciplinary character of “sustainable development” studies by emphasizing the connections among environmental conservation, economic development, and social/economic equity.
- Provide students with an appreciation for the environmental aspects of sustainable development in rural Latin America and expose students to issues related to conservation and preservation of biotic and ecosystem diversity.
- Expose students to Latin American culture and reinforce Lehigh’s connection with various NGOs in Costa Rica.

### ***The Experience***

Interns will begin the program on the Lehigh campus by participating in several seminars that will be conducted during the preceding spring semester. These seminars highlight the basic principles of sustainable development as well as relevant academic content related to

development economics, community participation, field work methods, the political economy of poverty, and project management, as well as the polity, economy, society, and culture of Costa Rica. Students in this internship program may also participate in a module containing instruction in ecosystem ecology, conservation, and environmental policy relevant to their impending activities in Costa Rica.

After arriving in Costa Rica, students will spend approximately 5 weeks in internships with NGOs focused on various aspects of forest conservation related to sustainable



development. In many cases, students will live in the local community through family homestays. The specific internship will be selected for each student according to their particular interests and their Spanish language proficiency (some will require a high level of fluency while others may not). Students will be placed at one of the following institutions which we have utilized since 2011 or have been associated with during our 20 years in Costa Rica with the winter study abroad courses (note

the attached hyperlinks for each):

[Centro Cientifico Tropical \(esp. Los Cusingos\)](#)

[Osa Conservation](#)

[FUNDECOR](#)

[University of Georgia, San Luis](#)

[Children's Eternal Rainforest](#)

The last 10 days of the internship program consist of a “Summer Serve” environmental community service project. This feature will allow new students (not involved in the previous 5-week internship) to participate in the program. During 2012, “Summer Serve” students established a permanent forest survey plot near the University of Georgia’s Costa Rica campus in San Luis. This site will be a crucial ongoing research plot that will help assess the success of the Pájaro Campana Biological Corridor.



During 2013 and 2016, “Summer Serve” students worked on reforestation and infrastructure

improvement projects at Osa Conservation and constructed a community biogas production facility near San Luis. The biogas facility will help meet the energy needs of the community while improving water quality in the associated watershed. A unique community service project is developed annually; potential projects for 2017 are currently under

consideration.



### ***Financial Support***

Over the past 5 years, most of our participants have received some form of financial support. Depending upon whether a student qualifies, the bulk of the cost of the internship (including airfare, accommodations, local transportation, project supplies, and a stipend) will be covered by the **Lee Iacocca International Internship Program**. Other more modest support packages may be available through the **EI-STEPS Summer Internship/Research Program** or through other entities. Students who do not qualify for financial support are billed according to the specific costs associated with each internship (*approximately* \$4200 for the 7-week internship inclusive of airfare, accommodations, local transportation, project supplies, etc.).

### ***Application***

The deadline to apply for the Lehigh in Costa Rica summer internship program is **December 30, 2016**. Applications can be made online [here](#). No deposit, application fee, or any other obligation is required to apply. Complete applications will automatically be considered by the Lee Iacocca International Internship Program or the EI-STEPS Summer Internship/Research Program (or other programs) at that time. **Students who anticipate participating without financial support must also apply online and adhere to the December 30, 2016 deadline.**



### ***More Information***

There will be an information session on Tuesday November 29<sup>th</sup> at 5:10 pm in ST-131. If you would like more information about the Lehigh in Costa Rica summer internship program, please contact the program director, Professor Morris ([dpm2@lehigh.edu](mailto:dpm2@lehigh.edu)) or the Lehigh Study Abroad Office. If you e-mail Prof. Morris, he can enroll you in the Lehigh in Costa Rica Course Site which has additional information and resources.

