

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

Internship Dates: June 20 to August 10, 2018 (approximate)

Information Sessions: December 5 @ 4:10pm ST-131 & January 23 @ 4:10pm ST-131

General Description:

The Lehigh in Costa Rica Program has operated study abroad courses for over 25 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 20 to August 10, 2018. 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 2015). 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 CO₂ (a “greenhouse” gas), it has implications for global climate and for the development of global scale policies to “offset” or mitigate anthropogenic CO₂ 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 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 25 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 will 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. Unique community service projects are developed annually; potential projects for 2018 are currently under consideration.



Financial Support

Over the past 6 years, most of our participants have received some form of financial support. This year financial awards are available through the ***EI-STEPS Summer Internship/Research Program***. Other forms of financial aid may also be available through the Study Abroad Office. The cost of the program for full fee-paying students is *approximately* \$4200 for the 7-week internship including airfare, accommodations, local transportation, project supplies, etc..

Application

The deadline to apply for the Lehigh in Costa Rica summer internship program is ***February 23, 2018***. If you intend to apply for support from the EI-STEPS program for an internship in Costa Rica, please contact Professor Morris (dpm2@lehigh.edu) for specific details about preparing the application.

More Information

There will be information sessions on Tuesday December 5 at 4:10 pm in ST-131 and Tuesday January 23 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) 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.

