

Panama

Tropical Ecology, Marine Ecosystems, and Biodiversity Conservation

Experience one of the world's most ecologically diverse countries. Explore the critical environmental and social issues affecting its preservation.

Coursework

Please note: This program will have credit distribution and/or other curriculum changes beginning in the fall 2012 semester. Please visit www.sit.edu/PNE for details.

Tropical Ecology, Marine Ecosystems, and Biodiversity Conservation Seminar

ENVI 3000 / 4 credits / 60 class hours

An interdisciplinary course conducted in Spanish and English with required readings, relevant educational excursions, and a strong field component. Through academic field study and experiential learning processes, students learn about the ecology and biology of a range of tropical terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Students also have the opportunity to examine the ecological, international, and sociocultural factors affecting tropical biodiversity conservation in one of the world's most biodiverse countries. Lecturers are drawn from institutions such as the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, the University of Panama, and EARTH University in Costa Rica.

Seminar topics typically include:

Terrestrial Ecosystems

Community ecology; conservation biology; forest-canopy ecology; mammal ecology; forest dynamics; botany; ecology of insect-plant relationships; bird behavior and ecology.

Marine Ecology

Marine ecosystems and biodiversity; ecology and conservation of coral reef communities, mangrove biology, and wetland ecology; sea turtle biology and conservation.

Conservation in the Tropics

Challenges to/for international protected areas and national parks; poverty and the environment; community forestry; indigenous cultures and natural resource use; industrial and sustainable agriculture; marine resources harvesting and conservation; ecotourism and conservation.

Educational Excursions

The program engages in seven weeks of field study, including courses at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Bocas del Toro and Barro Colorado Island; a birding ecology

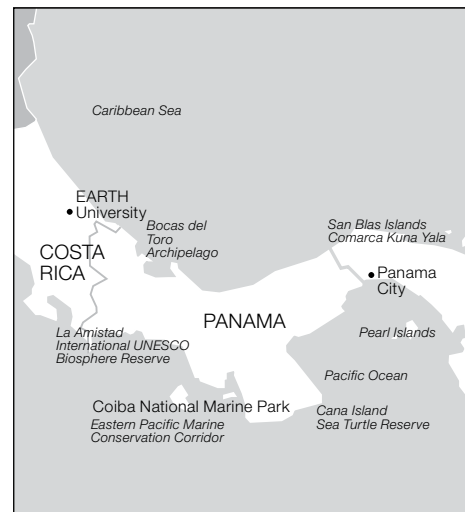
course at one of the Audubon Society's "world's top 10" birding sites; a wetland ecology course at a wetland categorized of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands; a terrestrial ecology course in a UNESCO Biosphere World Heritage Site; a sustainable agriculture excursion at EARTH University in Costa Rica, the foremost sustainable agriculture college in the hemisphere; a sea turtle ecology and conservation course; a field stay at a sustainable coffee farm in La Amistad International Park buffer zone; visits to an organic agroforestry chocolate farm and to an industrial banana plantation.

Intensive Language Study: Spanish

SPAN 1000–4000 / 4 credits / 60 class hours
Emphasis on speaking, reading, and writing skills through classroom and field instruction. Based on in-country evaluation, including oral proficiency testing, students are placed in intensive beginning, intermediate, or advanced classes, with further language practice in homestays and field visits.

Environmental Field Study Seminar

ENVI 3500 / 4 credits / 60 class hours
A course in field research methods in both the natural and social sciences. This course focuses on learning how to collect, analyze, integrate, and report ecological data to further understand complex issues involving terrestrial and marine ecological conservation. Field studies include designing research projects; writing research proposals; interviewing; surveys; mapping; and maintaining a field journal. Specific ecological field study methods may include micro- and macrohabitat analysis; biotic sampling and analysis; fauna and flora identification; biodiversity monitoring; population analysis; and water analysis. The course provides an introduction to the Independent Study Project, field study ethics, and the World Learning/SIT Human Subjects Review Policy.



Credits 16

Duration Fall/Spring 15 weeks

Program Base Panama City

Language Study Spanish

Homestay Panama City, 4 weeks

Rural Visit/Homestays Protected-area community, indigenous community, subsistence agriculture community, rural village in Costa Rica, Pacific coast community

Other Accommodations Hostels, farmhouses, cabins, or small hotels

Independent Study Project 4 weeks

Prerequisites Previous college-level coursework and/or other significant preparation in environmental studies, ecology, biology, or related fields, as assessed by SIT. There is no language requirement.

Independent Study Project

ISPR 3000 / 4 credits / 120 class hours
Depending on student interest, research can be conducted in cloud forest highlands, coral reefs, lowland forests, mangroves, rural villages, indigenous communities, or other sites within Panama. **Sample topic areas:** community resource management; regeneration of canopy emergents in primary forest; sustainable fisheries; coral reef organisms; mangrove health; nontimber forest products and local use; sustainable agriculture; agroforestry; ecotourism for resource conservation; ethnobotany.