

Credits: 3.00

**BSC 3931**  
**Special Topics in Biology: Tropical Ecology - Study Abroad in Costa Rica**  
**Natural Science Department**

**Instructor:** Dr. Teresa Restom Gaskill  
**Phone:** 727-341-4277 SP/Gibbs Campus SC 235B  
**Email:** Gaskill.teresa@spcollege.edu

**Academic Department**

Dean: Dr. Natavia Middleton  
Office: UP 203 (Seminole Campus)  
Phone: 727-398-8288

Academic Chair: Dr. Linda Gingerich  
Office: SS 177A  
Phone: 727-791-2538

**STUDY ABROAD APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

Approval for participation in the program is subject to the participant:

- being a college student with a high school diploma
- being in good academic standing at the time of application (cannot be on academic warning, probation or suspension)
- being enrolled for credit in an approved study abroad program course
- interviewing with program's lead faculty member
- being approved by the Center for International Programs-paying all deposits and fees according to the fee schedule

The program plan for this class (class meetings and activities, etc.) meets the requirement of 47 contact hours for the course.

**Requisites**

Prerequisite: BSC 2011 and BSC 2011L.

Corequisite: BSC 3931L. Please note that students who withdraw from lecture or lab will be withdrawn from the appropriate corequisite course (BSC 3931L).

**Course Description**

This course is an open format course designed to address the needs and interests of the students as well as provide an opportunity to focus on current biological science topics. Topics may vary from semester to semester but will be limited to a lecture or seminar series format. This course may not be repeated for credit towards major requirements.

**Course Content**

The following are topics that will be discussed during this course before and during the trip.

- Basic ecological concepts

- Coral reef ecology
- Sampling techniques and data collection
- Estuary ecology and mangroves
- Forest ecology
- Organismal biology: local flora and fauna found in Costa Rica
- Conservation of many of the ecosystems above

### **Major Learning Outcomes and Objectives**

1. All learning outcomes may vary from course to course

2. The student will develop an understanding of the special topic area field within the biological sciences by:

- a. explaining past and current advancements in the special topic area.
- b. identifying the relationship between the special topic area and the core principles learned in the biological science curriculum.

3. The student will demonstrate the ability to read, understand and communicate current advancements in the special topic area selected by:

- a. analyzing, summarizing and critiquing peer-reviewed scientific literature relevant to advances in the special topic area.
- b. presenting current data in an oral and or written communication format.
- c. actively participating in weekly discussions focused on the special topic area.

### **Criteria Performance Standard**

Upon successful completion of the course the student will, with a minimum of 70% accuracy, demonstrate mastery of each of the above stated objectives through classroom measures developed by individual course instructors.

### **Assignments and Grading**

Pre-trip exam = 25%

Paper discussions during the trip = 30%

Final Project = 25%

Participation = 20%

Assignments are due or to be taken on the date assigned. No late work will be accepted.

### **Representative Textbooks**

There is no required textbook for this course. All lecture material will be provided to the student through MyCourses and peer-reviewed articles will either be posted on MyCourses or obtained through SPC's online library.

### **Attendance**

The college-wide attendance policy is included in the Syllabus Addendum (<http://www.spcollege.edu/webcentral/policies.htm>). The policy notes that each instructor is to exercise professional judgment and define "active participation" in class (and therefore "attendance"), and publish that definition in each syllabus. For this class, in-country attendance is mandatory and will be used to determine active participation in the course. Assignments will not be permitted to be taken late

due to an absence. Tardiness **will not** be tolerated. We leave for trips promptly at varying times and will leave without you; therefore, it will count as an unexcused absence and will result in a zero for day. More than one unexcused or excused absence in-country will result in a non-participating grade (WF) entered into PeopleSoft. To ensure you know the start time each day, you will be told the night before the time to meet the next morning. For our pre-trip classes, you must be there on time and ready to take notes and participate in discussion. You are allowed to miss one pre-trip lecture due to an excused absence. An excused absence is one that is verifiable with written documentation. You are still responsible for all material covered during class. If you have more than one absence for the pre-trip lectures that are either excused or unexcused, you will be in violation of the attendance policy and a non-participating grade (WF) will be entered into PeopleSoft.

### **Classroom environment and behavior**

1. The college has an official policy on academic honesty and proper classroom behavior. If there are any questions, please refer to the brochure, "Academic Honesty and Student Behavior: Expectations of Students at SPC" (also available online). I take this subject very seriously and will not tolerate academic dishonesty or inappropriate/disruptive behavior in the classroom. College policy states that a first offense (cheating, plagiarism, etc) is given a "zero" for the assignment with no possibility of replacing the score. In addition, on the first offense, a form is filed with the Academic Integrity Committee. This does not go onto the student's transcript, but should a second offense occur, the student is then subject to expulsion from school.
2. All electronic devices (cellular phones, laptops, iPods, etc.) are to be turned off before the class starts. Use of these devices during all scheduled class activities is only allowed for class use only as requested by the professor. During unscheduled classroom activities or in the vans, you are allowed to use your devices.
3. Be on time. If you are late, we **will** leave without you and it will count as an **unexcused absence**. You will receive a zero for that day. Please review the attendance policy as to not violate it.
4. This is a field course where every day you will be outside. The weather will be hot, buggy, and wet. You will be on your feet all day and you need to be in good, physical condition to be able to participate in the activities. We walk for many hours sometimes over rough terrain and will be snorkeling. Be aware and agree to these conditions if you wish to participate in this course.
5. Field clothes are expected to be worn on all classroom relocations. This includes proper shoes (either closed-toed, fins, or sandals depending upon activity), sunscreen, hats, appropriate swimwear and bug spray (if needed). Points will be deducted for each activity that a student is not prepared.
6. All participants must stay hydrated. You must bring a refillable water bottle with you (BPA free) and either purchase water at the grocery store or fill with tap water. Costa Rica's tap water is safe to drink.
7. Since this is an environmental awareness course, please be mindful of your impact on the ecosystem. Put trash in its proper place and recycle when you can!!!! Points will be deducted if littering of trash or cigarette butts occurs.
8. You are representing SPC on every classroom relocation. You must be on your **best behavior** which includes language used (no profanity), not talking while I, another student, or our guide is talking, respecting each other and everyone we come into contact with, wearing appropriate clothing and

swimwear, staying with the group at all times, and abstaining from possession and/or consumption of any type of intoxicants between event departure and return times, and removing yourself from the company of anyone indulging in intoxicants. Violations will result in the following disciplinary action (but not limited to): receiving a zero in the course, returning immediately from Costa Rica at your own expense, and reimbursement to the college of funds expended on your behalf. *(In addition, you will be reported to your site Associate Provost for further disciplinary action.)*

9. Smoking is only allowed in designated areas and not during scheduled classroom activities.

### **Course Schedule**

Pre-trip class meetings:

Pre-trip class meetings: MWF 9 AM to noon, 5/13 to 5/24

Travel dates: May 27 – June 4, 2024

Please see itinerary for in-country schedule

Post-trip Final Project: due by 6/14 11:59 PM in MyCourses

### **Special Accommodations**

If you anticipate requesting of the Learning Specialist an accommodation for a documented disability, it is important to notify the International Programs office as soon as possible that you plan to make a request. Please also make an appointment with the Learning Specialist on campus to make your request as soon as possible. The Learning Specialist can be reached at 791-2628 or 791-2710 (CL), 341-4758 (SP/G), 394-6108 (SE), 712-5789 (TS), or 341-4532 (AC).

The "Addendum to Syllabi" is an *important part of your syllabus* and can be accessed by using the following link. Please take the time to read this addendum --  
<http://www.spcollege.edu/webcentral/policies.htm>

**The instructor reserves the right to make changes where necessary to the schedule and assignments. Changes will be announced in class and/or MyCourses. (Students need to check MyCourses regularly for course information and are responsible to note any changes.)**

### **Packing List**

- Snorkel gear – mask, fins, and snorkel
- Bathing suit
- Beach towel
- Closed-toed shoes
- Sandals, hiking shoes
- Sunscreen (w/out oxybenzone)
- Mosquito repellent
- Sunglasses
- Shirts
- Shorts
- Sleepwear

- Toiletries
- Hat/visor if you want one
- Undergarments
- Socks
- Field notebook
- Camera w/ charger
- Pencil/Pen
- Laptop if you would like to take it w/ charger
- Reusable water bottle
- Money for grocery store and restaurants
- Cell phone charger
- Passport