

**Costa Rica Field Course: International Environmental Issues &  
Globalization (ESM/GEOG 301)**  
**3 units**  
**May 26– June 6, 2026**

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**Course website:** <http://www.earthedintl.org/Summer.htm>

### **Course description**

This course is an interdisciplinary synthesis of environmental issues within the broader context of globalization. Emphasis will be on local sustainability efforts in Costa Rica/Central America, and associated global-local connections. Specific topics include: Sustainable community development, free-trade, agriculture & land use, renewable energy, climate change, and environmental conservation/restoration of tropical ecosystems.

The course includes lectures, discussion, group activities, volunteer service-learning work, and associated field trips to sustainable businesses, organic farms, watershed conservation sites, renewable energy projects, private reserves, national parks, and/or community ecotourism projects.

Students that successfully complete this course will receive 3 units of ESM 301 or GEOG 301: 'International Environmental Issues & Globalization' from Cal Poly Humboldt. This course fulfills upper division General Education requirement in Area 4 (Social and Behavioral Sciences) for California State University campuses, as well as a requirement or elective for Environmental Science & Management, Environmental Studies, Geography and other majors at Cal Poly Humboldt. We encourage students to meet with their academic advisor to see how this course can count for your major and/or degree.

Costa Rica is an ideal location to study Environmental Issues and Sustainability because it is widely regarded as the environmental leader of Central America. Costa Rica has been a pioneer in areas such as sustainable development, ecotourism, and biological reserves compared to other countries in the region. Approximately 27% of the country's land surface is protected from development, but Costa Rica must still balance its dedication to environmental protection with providing commercial development that is needed to accommodate tourists and its citizens. Over 99% of Costa Rica's electricity comes from renewable sources. With an abundance of rivers and mountains, hydro-electric power provides most of its power needs. Costa Rica is also committed to the development of geothermal power sources.

Being in Costa Rica for this course is crucial to explore not only the overall topics related to Environmental Issues and Globalization, but to be able to observe case studies and local examples in Costa Rica and compare with other countries in Central America and across the globe. This will be particularly beneficial to students from the United States to see how these concepts compare to what they have learned about their country of origin.

## Course Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Define ecotourism and understand its history and relevance in Costa Rica
2. Cite examples of renewable energy in Costa Rica
3. Describe economic and socio-personal foundations of sustainability; as well as related ecological interactions
4. Explore local to global effects of climate change
5. Explain environmental issues related to globalization and sustainable development, in a 'developing' country context, and to Costa Rica/Central America in particular
6. Analyze challenges and successes of sustainability efforts for a specific case-study in Costa Rica/Central America
7. Articulate societal and personal solutions to achieving sustainability through synthesis of acquired knowledge.

## Prerequisites

No prerequisite is required, but successful completion of an introductory Environmental Science/Studies, Geography, Global Systems, or related course is highly recommended.

## Required Readings

Materials from various texts (such as those listed below) will be made available online via the course Canvas site. Additional handouts will complement the reading material.

- Booth, J.A., Wade, C. J., & Walker, T.W. 2009. Understanding Central America: Global Forces, Rebellion, and Change. (5th Ed.). Boulder, CO: Westview Press. [Chapter 4]
- Christie, I. & Warburton, D. 2001. From Here to Sustainability: Politics in the Real World. London: Earthscan.
- Edwards, A. R. 2005. The Sustainability Revolution: Portrait of a Paradigm Shift. B.C.: New Society Publishers.
- Franke, J. 2009. A Visitors Guide: Costa Rica's National Parks and Preserves, 3rd Edition. Seattle: The Mountaineers. [Section 1]
- Horton, L. R. 2007. Grassroots Struggles for Sustainability in Central America. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado.
- May, R. & Tamez, C. 2007, Spring. Eco-Ethics and Global Citizenship: A View from Central America. Reflections, Vol. 94, No. 1, p. 62-64.
- Miller, A. P. 2012. Ecotourism Development in Costa Rica: the Search for Oro Verde. Lexington Books. [Introduction & Chapter 3]
- Molina, I. & Palmer, S. 2007. The History of Costa Rica. San José: Editorial Costa Rica.
- Mulligan, M. 2015. An Introduction to Sustainability: Environmental, social and personal perspectives. Routledge Publishing. ISBN: 978-0-415-70644-5
- Schelhas, J. & Pfeffer, M. 2008. Saving Forests, Protecting People? Environmental Conservation in Central America. Altamira Press. [Chapters 1, 3 and 5]
- Wackernagel, M. & Rees, W. 1996. Our Ecological Footprint: Reducing Human Impact on the Earth. B.C.: New Society Publishers. [Chapter 2: Footprints & Sustainability]
- Wann, D. 2007. Simple Prosperity: Finding Real Wealth in a Sustainable Lifestyle. NY: St. Martin's Press. [Chapter 12: Energy Savings]

## Assignments & Grading

Grading Scale: A = 90-100%; B = 80-89%; C = 70-79%; D = 60-69%; F <60% (+ and – grades will be given).

Assignment	% of grade	Points
Pre-departure assignments on Canvas (4 plus prep for 5 min. oral presentation in Costa Rica)	25%	50
In-person quiz on pre-departure assignments	5%	10
In-country assignments & journaling (6)	30%	60
Research paper (topic determined in-country), with a final due date to Instructor 3 weeks after student returns to U.S.	25%	50
Participation/Attendance	15%	30
Total	100%	200

## Course Requirements

### Pre-Departure Assignments (25%)

There will be several assignments on Canvas prior to departure for Costa Rica to cover preliminary course material. There will be readings and associated assignments on Canvas during the week prior to the start of the course (May 18-22). The Canvas site should be available by late-April, so you are welcome to complete the assignments at any time prior to their due dates. See Canvas site for assignment details and due dates.

### In-Country Assignments & Journaling (30%)

In-country assignments will consist of six journal entries in which students will reflect on course material (such as lectures, field trips and readings). Journaling assignments will be given during the course. Each student will need to bring a notebook/journal to use for these assignments. A short quiz will be given on the second day of the trip covering your understanding of the pre-departure assignments.

### Research Paper (25%)

Each student will complete an independent research paper on a topic approved by one of the instructors. This topic should be directly relevant and related to course material. The final research paper will be due to the instructor three weeks after the student returns to U.S. and can be submitted electronically to the instructor via the Canvas site. The paper will receive a penalty of 10% per day that it is submitted late. More details about format requirements will be given at a later date. This assignment will include a proposal (initial proposal; 5 pts + revised proposal; 5 points = 10 points) and final paper (40 points).

### Participation & Attendance (15%)

This segment of the course is probably the most important. Participants are expected to attend all class sessions for all course functions including group activities, field study trips, service-learning activities, guest presentations, etc. Unexcused absences will result in the final grade for any course being lowered accordingly. Your participation grade includes being on-time to all course activities, maintaining a positive attitude throughout, actively engaging in all activities, and being attentive and respectful to all speakers (including fellow students). Behavior such as talking while a speaker is talking, being on a cell phone during inappropriate times, repeated tardiness and not staying with the group will impact this portion of your grade.

## Campus Policies and Resources

Visit the **Syllabus Addendum** website (<https://academicprograms.humboldt.edu/content/syllabus-addendum>) for information about campus policies, procedures and resources for students. The site includes links such as Add/Drop Policy, Resources for Students with Disabilities, Academic Honesty Policy, Attendance and Disruptive Behavior Policy, Financial Aid, Emergency Procedures, and Counseling and Psychological Services. Students are responsible for knowing the policies and procedures related to the above topics. Please take the time to read through the information on this website.

**Academic Dishonesty and Plagiarism:** Any assignment submitted by you and that bears your name is presumed to be your own original work that has not previously been submitted for credit in another course unless you obtain prior written approval to do so from your instructor. Cheating and plagiarism are very serious matters and will be treated as such. See the following link for more information: <https://studentrights.humboldt.edu/academic-honesty>

**Use of Artificial Intelligence:** Use of AI to summarize reading assignments or compose answers is not allowed. AI may be used to help find resources for the Research Paper, develop an outline, and critique your writing. It may not be used to write the text of the paper itself. AI use must be disclosed in a descriptive statement included in the paper. If AI was not used, that should be stated as well.

## Program Policies & Protocols

For safety, health and logistical reasons, students are required to abide by all course policies for the duration of the course. As such, all participants must sign a participation agreement form upon arrival in-country agreeing to do so. Policies are available at: <http://www.earthedintl.org/Policies.htm>. We highly recommend reviewing those policies in detail prior to departure. NOTE: Please pay special attention to Health (Covid) Protocols, which are available here: <http://www.earthedintl.org/Policies.htm#Health>.