



**Sustainability and Conservation in Costa Rica:
Exemplary policies and practices**

LE-803

4 credits

Updated Spring 2022

I- Course Content

Based on theory and field experiences, this course explores how to achieve long-term sustainability through policies and practices which focus on climate change mitigation; protection and restoration of ecosystems, and the enablement of local businesses and local communities to operate profitably in the present while envisioning a more eco-friendly future. The syllabus analyzes why Costa Rica's environmental credentials have been extraordinary. Already, more than 95 percent of Costa Rican energy is produced from renewable sources, and its forest cover now stands at more than half part of its territory, after having reverted decades of deforestation. This biodiversity-hotspot nation has also adopted one of the most consistent and ambitious plans to achieve a zero net emissions economy by 2050, in line with the Paris Climate Change Agreement. This background places Costa Rica as the perfect arena to learn about sustainability while exploring its impressive biodiversity and getting immersed in its cultures.

II- Learning outcome

Students will get insight into Costa Rican economical activities, conservation history and political dynamics in order to better visualize how several human societies and cultures relate to nature. The student will be able to discuss and explain some of the most important socio-ecological challenges for Costa Rican societies in the present. Students should be able to present, describe and analyze the topics covered in lectures and syllabus. The syllabus has been selected to help students actively understand the complex interplay between environmental, social, and economic factors in different settings around Costa Rica. Students who satisfactorily complete this course will be able to analyse and discuss topics such as:

- Resilience, conservation and restoration of tropical ecosystems
- Agroforestry and sustainable agro-ecological production
- Elementary knowledge of tropical animals, plants and other living organisms
- Sustainable ecotourism
- Environmental policies in Costa Rican history
- Sustainable and alternative energy production
- Decarbonization, carbon sequestration and carbon footprint reduction
- Climate change mitigation
- Community-based sustainable development
- Women empowerment and sustainability
- Traditional ecological knowledge and indigenous people
- Novelty and innovation to cope with socio-ecological challenges

III- Teaching

The course is divided into two sections. The first section consists of a self-study period (4 weeks). The second section consists of a teaching period in Costa Rica (16 weeks) with obligatory attendance to lectures, seminars and several academic day excursions and one overnight field trip.

Self-study section. This part of the course aims to provide a broad overview over fundamental topics for understanding Costa Rican agrarian past and deforestation history. Students must read three selected chapters from the course book and submit a reflection text based on this reading (Please read the document “Self-study guide”).

Study at campus in San Isidro, Costa Rica. This section includes six seminars, sixteen lectures, several day excursions, and one overnight field trip (four nights). Students must participate both in seminars (1 obligatory oral presentation in group), in the day excursions and in the overnight field trip (4 reports) and attend at least 80% of all teaching activities in order to qualify to take the final exam. You will get a detail study guide

Teaching plan

Part I	Understanding the agrarian economy	Self-study period
Part II	Governing the agrarian economy	Week 1-4
Part II	Contesting environmental conservation	Week 5-8
Part III	Negotiating resource conflicts	Week 9-12
Part IV	Decarbonization and resilience to cope with climate change challenges	Week 13-16

IV- Evaluation

Exams and other submissions must be written in English.

Reflection text (Self-study period)	10%
Seminar participation and oral presentation in group	15%
Academic day excursions reports	15%
Academic field trip report (Overnight field trip)	20%
Final Exam	40%

Evaluation scale:

90 - 100%	A	Excellent
80 - 89%	B	Good
70 - 79%	C	Fair
Less than 70%		Failed

Self-study reflection text

The specific instructions and reflection questions are found in the self-study guide document. The reflection text must be an individual work written either in Spanish or English. Submission deadline and other submission details: Look at the self-study guide document.

Seminars and oral presentation

Seminars will be focused on specific innovative and/or exemplary policies and practices which have been applied in Costa Rica. Each student will be part of a group in order to prepare an oral presentation on a specific case study about sustainability and innovation in Costa Rica. The basic goal for seminar group presentations is helping students to get insight

in the process of social, political, technological and scientific construction of sustainable practices. Students are supposed to participate in the discussion.

Academic day excursions

Students will write a report on three different communities/ projects we will be visiting. These communities have different biocultural backgrounds (migrants, indigenous, women from rural areas and landless peasants). These visits will allow us to better understand the cultural dimension of sustainability and development in rural areas in the tropics. Prior to these visits, we will issue in a seminar how to best write an academic field trip report. More instructions are found in the study guide document.

Overnight field trip

The overnight field trip (four nights) combines a practical and theoretical approach. The area was once a traditional agricultural area in uncontrolled growth and experienced a massive deforestation pressure 40 years ago. However, the area managed to revert deforestation through its transformation into one of the most famous eco-tourist attractions in the world. In this local community, policymakers and local community members have proven how economic and regulatory policies can achieve sustainable development by incentivizing the preservation and restoration of forests, while promoting economic growth and social welfare. There are several academic goals for this trip. First, students will study the extraordinary biodiversity in this area. Among other things, a night hike will be organized in order to explore the tropical jungle and contact some of the most interesting animals that are most active after sunset. Secondly, some basic conditions in ecosystems in tropical forests will be explained and students will learn how tropical forests are regenerated and how tropic. Finally, students will experience and practice how to conduct small-scale farming making use of agroecological methods in tropical areas. All these learning activities will provide a ground to understand how small communities can diversify livelihoods and enhance resilience by being better prepared to anticipate and adapt to natural disasters, economic shocks and climate change. Students will write a report on this experience (Detailed instructions can be found in the study guide document).

Final exam

During the final seminar students will get instruction and guidance about the final exam. In this 2 days take-home exam, students will answer two general questions that cover the learning outcomes for this course. Date: Last week of the course. (Detailed instructions can be found in the study guide document).

V- Syllabus

Course book

Fletcher, R., Dowd-Uribe, B., & Aistara, G. A. (Eds.). (2020). *The Ecolaboratory: Environmental Governance and Economic Development in Costa Rica*. University of Arizona Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvxw3pvp>

Available as an e-book at [this link](#)

Other readings

There will be several additional articles to read in pdf format. The detailed reading list schedule will be published at [this link](#)