PEGGY F. BARLETT
Dept. of Anthropology, Emory University
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1968 while studying at Grinnell College

“My experience in the Costa Rica program allowed me to confirm my interest in becoming an anthropologist, and the experience helped me get a fellowship to Columbia the following year. After exploring the possibility of doing my dissertation in the Andes, I settled on returning to Costa Rica to study the social and political effects of changing agricultural technology ("The Green Revolution in Costa Rica"). I am now a professor of anthropology at Emory University in Atlanta, and my dissertation has appeared as a book (Agricultural Choice and Change: Decision Making in a Costa Rican Community). I continue today to be very concerned about Latin American rural development, and several of my students have carried out research in Central America. While I was a student with ACM, I learned the value of fieldtrips and hands-on experiences; I will never forget being taken to a coffee beneficio by Bob Hunter, the director at that time. Today, I try to add fieldtrips to my courses in Atlanta and I have recently begun to offer a course called "The Anthropology of Coffee and Chocolate." My current interests revolve around environmental sustainability and cultural change toward a more viable industrial society. My deep respect for the knowledge of rural peoples in developing countries and my sense of the possibilities of service and social change were all nurtured by my nearly six months with the ACM Costa Rica program.”

DAVID BICKFORD
Ph.D. in Biology from the University of Miami
Herpetologist with extensive research in Papua, New Guinea
Participated in the program in 1990 while studying at Macalester College

“ACM was the first point in my development as a tropical field biologist. I first fell in love with the tremendous biological diversity and density of cool critters in the tropical rainforest in Costa Rica during my field project working in the la Reserva Forestal de Rio Macho. Just knocked my socks off. Being able to do an independent project in the playground of the tropical forest was perhaps the most exciting time for me as a scientist and a person. In fact, it still is - I recharge my batteries and get my most important and critical ideas about evolution IN the tropics, doing field work. It isn't too amazing to note that many of the truly controversial paradigm shifts in biology have come from the tropics. I expect that molecular biology might overshadow that, but for natural history - there is nowhere like the wet tropical forests. The ACM field experience was a springboard for me as an evolutionary biologist. There is no comparison between reading about something in a textbook and actually SEEING, HEARING, SMELLING, and FEELING it in the forest. Costa Rica offers a wonderful opportunity to learn about biology in the field and the great synergy of the immersion programs of language and culture is what makes this program really stand out. Applying for the ACM Field Research semester was one of the best decisions of my life.”

MARK BREMER, MS
Adjunct Instructor, State University of New York-Institute of Technology & Onondaga Community College
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 2000 while studying at Colorado College

“Living and studying in Costa Rica opened many doors for my future. Professionally, I gained valuable research experience that landed me a research internship at the Smithsonian and eventually a graduate degree. Personally, I gained Spanish language skills and several meaningful relationships that will last a lifetime.”
**JACOB BRENNER, PhD**  
Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Geography, Colgate University  
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1999 while studying at Lawrence University

“My semesters in Costa Rica with ACM were probably the most formative period in my life. My career as a geographer is largely made possible by perspectives on real life in another country that I gained during that year. The Latin American culture program made me a Latin Americanist and the tropical Field Research program made me capable of doing field research. I can’t think of another experience, career-wise, that has had a greater influence. Personally, I learned enormously about life for other people. I could not imagine being able to understand the change the world is undergoing without having lived it in another person’s shoes for a while. I am deeply indebted to my gracious host family for this, as well as to the broader ACM community for maintaining such a rich and stimulating social atmosphere over the years.”

**ROBIN CHAZDON**  
Ph.D. in Ecology from Cornell University  
Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, University of Connecticut  
Participated in the ACM Field Studies program in Costa Rica in 1976 while a student at Grinnell College.

“My experience as an ACM student opened the doors to the world of tropical biology and Latin America for me. I went during my sophomore year and had only had 3 semesters of Spanish. The immersion into Spanish was very effective; I have been a fluent Spanish speaker since. The course gave me exposure to the geographic, cultural, and biological heterogeneity of Costa Rica, stimulating me to pursue doctoral research in Plant Ecology in Costa Rica and to spend over thirty years of fieldwork in the wet tropical lowlands. I have always felt comfortable travelling throughout Latin America and have developed close professional and personal relationships with Latin Americans. I attribute much of my ease to my early experiences as an ACM student and to the early bonds that I formed with Costa Rican scientists and friends.

I went on to pursue a Ph.D. in Ecology from Cornell University, studying understory palms at La Selva Biological Station in the Atlantic lowlands. After starting my faculty position at the University of Connecticut in 1988, I became interested in studying the process of secondary forest regrowth in wet tropical regions, and once again returned to La Selva where I am now involved in a long-term project on vegetation dynamics in secondary and mature forests. I am also starting a similar project in the Osa Peninsula with several Costa Rican collaborators.

As a mentor, I encourage all students to study abroad and to immerse themselves in other cultures and biological worlds. My faculty mentors at Grinnell, Laverne and Lenore Durkee, played a major role in inspiring me to pursue a career in fieldwork and tropical biology and I am forever grateful for the wonderful opportunities that the ACM course offered me during my most “impressionable” years. To date, I have trained 11 graduate and 2 undergraduate students; all have conducted their research in Costa Rica. I am strongly committed to helping Costa Ricans protect and manage their precious biological heritage, to restore forests, and to improve their own livelihoods and education.”

**RANDALL EDGELL, MD**  
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1995 while studying at Grinnell College

“I have many great memories of the time I spent in Costa Rica and certainly the weeks I spent in Cahuita were the best. Since leaving Costa Rica I have gone on to medical school, specialized in stroke neurology, and I am currently training in some of the procedural aspects of the field. I’m living in Albany, NY (which is no Costa Rica, let me tell you!).”
**STEPHANIE JAROS, MA**  
M.A. in Sociology from the University of Washington, M.A. in Social Sciences from the University of Chicago  
Doctoral candidate at the University of Washington, in the Department of Sociology  
Participated in the program in 1998 while studying at Grinnell College

“I believe my experience can best be summed up as inspirational. My work down south was the first time I truly felt useful as a researcher, carrying out research that was bigger than me but somehow, made better by my hard work and by that of my team members. Also, I got my first true idea of just how research can go wrong and, in spite of the best-laid plans, can be taken off track by external forces I never dreamed would have anything to do with my research. As a result, I learned the best lesson of social research – what I want to learn and what others want to teach me are often two different things and the only way to make the best of it is to change my perspective, not that of those who are being kind enough to share their lives with me. I heard a lot of stories from friends who studied around the world and although I admit my bias, the ACM Field Research Program is the only one I know of that truly challenges its students...and I managed to love every second of it.”

**WARREN JOHNSON, PhD**  
Staff Scientist, Laboratory of Genomic Diversity, National Cancer Institute, NIH  
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1982 while studying at Oberlin College

“As a Junior at Oberlin College, I spent a semester abroad in Costa Rica as part of the ACM program. It remains one of the most memorable and formative experiences of my life and was crucial in helping me down my career path. I have many memories of that time, but perhaps one of the most illustrative was a trip to Volcan Arenal with fellow students: one who kept pointing out the interesting geology, one that kept commenting on the plants, and a third that had a keen eye for all of the birds. We spent that night on the top of Volcan Arenal with an Italian vulcanologist, and I, as the mammalogist, wondered at the sight of the howler monkey several thousand meters above the tree line. In Costa Rica, I had the opportunity to greatly improve my very rusty Spanish, to learn from fellow students from a wide variety of backgrounds and interests, to learn and feel a part of a different culture, and to have my first taste of field research. The mix of academic study, full immersion with local families, and publishable research is what sets the program apart from others. I have been many places since then, but can truly say that the ACM program helped launch my career in international research which I continue today.”

**R. JOHN KANTNER, PhD, RPA**  
Department of Anthropology & Geography, Georgia State University  
Participated in the program in 1988 while studying at Colorado College

“My experience in the ACM Costa Rica program still stands out as one of the most influential years in my life. I discovered my passion for archaeology and anthropology during that year, a passion that I still pursue today as a university professor. Perhaps just as importantly, I learned a tremendous amount about myself, for my time in Costa Rica taught me that I can achieve any goal I set my mind to, whether it was learning Spanish, traveling through the countryside alone, or climbing Chirripo to view both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. I still read my diary from the ACM program, recalling all the fond memories from years ago.”
MEREDITH LEVY
Community Organizer
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1990 while studying at Grinnell College

“Since my time in Costa Rica and college, I have been working primarily as a community organizer. First, in Minnesota with the Land Stewardship Project, where I worked as an organizer with family farmers. I then pursued dual masters degrees in "Agriculture, Food, and the Environment", and in "Urban and Environmental Policy" at Tufts University in the Boston, Massachusetts area. I now work in community development doing participatory planning and organizing with low income residents in Somerville, Massachusetts. I’m glad to hear the ACM Costa Rica program is still running and vibrant! Those four months were absolutely seminal in my own career development, and the memories from that period are as vivid as if they happened last year.”

SCOTT LINNEMAN
Ph.D. in Geology, University of Wyoming
Assistant Professor of Geology and Science Education at Western Washington University
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1982 while studying at Carleton College

“The ACM Costa Rica program was an important part of my development as a globally aware citizen and scientist. My ACM advisor, Andrea Borgia, and I published several papers on the research I conducted on Arenal volcano during my stay in 1982. I went on to study volcanoes in Turkey, Mexico, the U.S. Cascades, and the U.S. Aleutians. I recently spent a year in South Africa on a US Fulbright Fellowship.”

JUDITH MAGNAN
Coordinator for Academic Services, ACM Costa Rica Program and Official Translator, Ministerio of Exterior Relations and Culture
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1985 while studying at Grinnell College

“My participation on the ACM Spring program meant so many different things to me all at once: the fulfillment of my dream of observing monkeys in the wild, the opportunity of living for two months in the incredible dry forest next to the Pacific Ocean in the Santa Rosa National Park, the intense learning experience of carrying out field research, the academic challenge of producing a meaningful report on my findings, the exciting leap from classroom Spanish to achieving the ability to truly communicate in the language, the beginning of a lifelong awareness of the magic of Latin America, and a whole new way of viewing the world. My continued work with the ACM has enabled me to help other students to cross that bridge into Costa Rica’s amazing natural environment, the essential world of multicultural understanding and life-changing personal and academic growth.”
KENT MESSER
Ph.D. in Resource Economics from Cornell University
Research Associate at Cornell University and Associate Director of Cornell's Lab for Experimental Economics and Decision Research
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1993 while studying at Grinnell College

“I would say that the ACM Field Research Program both changed and enhanced my life. The opportunity to conduct first-hand, field research on a topic of my choice was extraordinary, especially for an undergraduate program. In the ACM program, I interacted with interesting colleagues and lived with wonderful host families who have become lifelong friends. The ACM program is a tremendous opportunity to experience a beautiful country and meet wonderful people. The best way I can articulate my experience is through a brief story about my time in the ACM program. The challenges I faced in adjusting to a new culture and trying to conduct research in a setting of rural poverty and environmental degradation has shaped my life profoundly. Likewise, the skills I developed while adapting to the situation and the insights I gained through my research have also permanently changed and enhanced my life. Though it has been 10 years, I still frequently look back fondly at my time on the ACM Field Research Program in Costa Rica.

In the spring of 1993, I was in my junior year at Grinnell College majoring in cultural anthropology. I was eager to participate in the ACM Program, because I was interested in studying tropical rainforest deforestation from the perspective of the poor rural farmers who were in the process of clearing the rainforest to establish agricultural fields for cultivation or cattle ranching. My field study occurred in a small community called La Colonia Puriscalena on the eastern slope of the Talamanca Mountains (about 1.5 hours from Limon). The community was a collection of separate farms of recent migrants from the highly-deforested Puriscal region of central Costa Rica. As my San Jose host mother said, these farmers were “Los Olvidados” (the forgotten ones) of Costa Rica who did not share in Costa Rica’s prosperity and who continued to live a subsistence agricultural way-of-life.

Being several miles from the nearest passable road and sleeping on the floor in a home without running water, electricity, or telephone I found myself challenged by my new living conditions and resulting isolation. As I tried to make progress on my research, I recall days of shear frustration as I walked miles in the hot humid climate to distant farms to conduct interviews which felt like they yielded little information – just another meal of rice and beans. Meanwhile, I felt powerless as I watched the rainforest slowly being torn down and saw numerous malnourished children and others needing special medical attention.

Things began to change for me as I forced myself into social opportunities and to open up more to those around me. I began to play soccer with the children each day at the local school, which not only gave me some much needed social interaction, but also helped me gain access into the homes as the children were very happy to take me to their homes and introduce me to their family. On the research front, I began using a technique called visual anthropology, where I visited each of the homes with a hand-held slide projector and asked for their reaction to a number of photos that I had taken during my time in the community (the photos capture scenes of planting of crops, burning of forest, the condition of the local road, water wells in the community, rainforest animals, and, of course, the people of the community). This technique enabled me to better focus my research discussions and learn about how the community members felt about the situation around them. Not only was I able to learn that they often saw fire as a positive thing which transformed the potentially dangerous rainforest (full of snakes and bugs) into potentially productive agricultural land (at least for the short term), but I also learned of the various family connections and politics of the community. All of these things were critical to my research, which eventually was awarded Honorable Mention in Grinnell’s Phi Beta Kappa Scholarship Competition.

After the spring semester, I continued to visit and work with the community as I received a Peace Corps Preparatory Program Grant from Grinnell College. During this time, I worked on establishing a three-way grant-funded project between the Colonia Puriscalena, an environmental NGO (Iriria Tschock) and the Central American School for Animal Husbandry (located in Atenas). The project sought to establish new sustainable agricultural projects using the Colony as its pilot test area. In this project, I was able to use the knowledge and connections that I had gained during my research period, ‘while establishing links between Costa Rican groups that would sustain the projects long after I left the country.

My experiences in the ACM program have had a profound impact on my academic and professional development. Most notably has been the decision to switch from the study of anthropology to economics. The field research time, where I sought to understand the factors of tropical deforestation, helped me identify critical economic questions that had a large influence on rural farmers’ decisions about whether to clear the rainforest. I did not find that anthropology alone was adequate to understand these questions, so I began to seek more information about economics. During my final year at Grinnell, I took Professor Willis’ course on Political Economy of Developing Nations, and subsequently began a formal study of economics in my Masters Program in Environmental Policy at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and finally, at Cornell University, where I received a Ph.D. in economics with a specialization in environmental and resource economics.

My experiences in Costa Rica and the questions and growth that resulted during that period have continued to affect me as I seek to gain a greater understanding of the experience. I realize that I still have more to do to transform my academic training into the type of environmental impact that I have sought ever since my challenging and rewarding time in the hot hills of La Colonia Puriscalena, where I watched the rainforest burn, played soccer with the malnourished children, and hopefully gave a little back to the local community.”
MARK MYERS
Assistant Professor, Department of Biology, University of Northern Iowa
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1995 while studying at Kenyon College

“As a junior at Kenyon College, I participated in ACM’s Field Research program. I considered a number of study abroad programs before choosing ACM. What appealed to me about the ACM program at the time was that it allowed me to pursue independent research at a single site over several months, rather than "touring" many sites for just a few days at a time with larger groups of students, as was typical of many other programs. The educational "pay-off" of this approach, both in terms of biological insights gained from the many hours spent in the field and in terms of the language skills and cultural experiences gained from living in a small, rural community, was huge. My experience in Costa Rica was a strong influence in my decision to pursue a graduate degree in Conservation Biology, and many of the experiences and contacts I made laid the groundwork for future projects in Costa Rica.”

LISA NAUGHTON, PhD
Ph.D., University of Florida-Gainesville
Chair, Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development Program, Assistant Professor, Geography Department, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1984

“My ACM semester in Costa Rica forever changed me and deepened my understanding of tropical ecology and Latin American society. I enrolled in the semester to fulfill my dream to "be Jane Goodall." Thanks to the guidance and mentoring of my ACM field biology professor (Dr. Chris Vaughan), I did indeed spend two months studying squirrel monkey behavior. I loved the research, but after witnessing rapid deforestation and uncontrolled tourism development, my career interests shifted. From that semester on, I pursued a career in applied conservation research, mainly in tropical countries.”

NICOLE NEMETH, DVM, PhD
APHIS Science Fellow, Wildlife Disease Program, National Wildlife Research Center, USDA/APHIS
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1994 while studying at Grinnell College

“My experience with the ACM program was paramount to forming my career interests. In addition, it allowed me the opportunity to grow and develop in my personal life. First, the program immersed all of us students from the United States, many of us on our first real international experience, into a new and exciting world. It was extremely well-organized and carried out; the staff created an ideal atmosphere for learning and developing, and the Costa Rican families that allowed us into their lives were also extremely supportive. While I was gently being introduced and becoming more and more comfortable with the Spanish language and Costa Rican culture, geography, climate, etc., I was also provided my choice of, and access to, a wonderful mentor for my research in ecology/conservation biology. As ACM students, we were allowed time and provided guidance in developing and carrying out our own independent research project, and this for me was a very important achievement. I always look back to ACM as the first step toward a research career. ACM helped me realize that I wanted to attend veterinary school, followed by graduate school. I also gained valuable skills in working with others on my project, and in the living situation in the field. My interest in wildlife conservation has grown from my ACM experience into a variety of research angles on wildlife and zoonotic diseases. In addition, because of the wonderful base the ACM experience provided me, I remained in Costa Rica for an additional three years beyond ACM to further gain experience in the field of wildlife conservation and ecology. I was also able to continue to work with my ACM mentor/research advisor after completing the ACM program, which has also been a valuable and rewarding relationship.”
MICHAEL PIGNONE, MD, MPH  
MPH in epidemiology from the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill, MD from the University of California - San Francisco  
Assistant Professor of Medicine and Medical Researcher  
Participated in the program in 1987 while studying at Duke University  

“The ACM program has had a profound effect on my career. The research I did in Costa Rica served as the basis for my undergraduate honors thesis and helped me decide to pursue a career in academic medicine. My language training has allowed me to continue to serve Spanish-speaking patients here in the US throughout medical school, residency, and as a faculty member now at UNC.”

LISA PRICE  
MSEd from Northwestern University, Middle School/High School English Teacher at Uruguayan American School  
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1996 while studying at Colorado College  

“Prior to going to Costa Rica with ACM, I had always loved to travel and explore international cultures, and a prior family trip to Costa Rica had already locked in my love for the “Land of the Ticos.” However, my experience with ACM Costa Rica changed the course of my life. Not only did it begin a life-long passion for salsa and Latin dancing (which led to meeting my Uruguayan husband in a salsa class in Montevideo), it also instilled in me an intense belief that cultural exchange and awareness are essential for the improvement of global relations. Simply traveling as a tourist for a week to another country does not equate to the experience of truly knowing a culture through the language and sustainable relationships with people in the community and the day-to-day happenings. To understand the nuances of a culture is to appreciate on another level the differences and the offerings and also to reflect on the idiosyncrasies of one’s own culture. The time spent in another country allows space away from one’s normal home in order to gain perspective and humility. We learn to appreciate our own country from an outsider’s perspective. One international living experience, while it will not provide knowledge about every other country in the world, will offer essential understanding of universally shared core values, as well as a sense of empathy and openness to the world outside our own. This passion for the importance of cultural exchange and social empathy has anchored itself inside me, and I have ever since been on a quest to promote and educate. This desire to educate coupled with my ACM Costa Rica experience inspired never-ending thirst for international living has since led me to Uruguay first on a Fulbright Scholarship and then later to teach at the American School in Montevideo. I see myself moving further towards the diplomacy and international relations arena in order to continue promoting the global necessity for educational and cultural exchange. It is critical that in this day and age we strive for global leaders who understand the essence of multiculturalism.”

N. THOMAS SISK, PhD  
Professor of Ecology, Graduate Program Director, Director, ForestERA Project, Northern Arizona University  
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1982 while studying at Colorado College  

“The ACM experience was my first introduction to what research was all about. It opened my eyes to discovery – the realization that I could use my education to learn something new that was both fascinating in itself and useful to others changed my life. The people I met during my ACM semester in Costa Rica are still with me all these years later – remembering their faces brings back some of the most important lessons I ever learned.”
CHRISTOPHER VAUGHAN, PhD
Incoming Director, ACM Costa Rica Program; Adjunct Professor, Department of Forestry and Wildlife Ecology, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Retired Director, International Program for Wildlife Conservation and Management, Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica
Participated in the ACM Costa Rica program in 1969 while studying at Grinnell College

“When I embarked on my journey to ACM Costa Rica in 1969, I had no idea how life-changing the experience would be. A fellow student and I drove from California to Costa Rica in a dilapidated car to experience the change slowly. Sleeping in the desert in N. Mexico, seeing my first wild seals near Mazatlan, feeling overwhelmed by the enormity and culture of Mexico City, observing the colorful markets of Oaxaca, cringing at the submachine gun toting Guatemala border crossing guard, navigating the soccer war between El Salvador and Honduras, feeling powerless in light of real poverty in San Salvador—children sleeping in cardboard boxes, parched earth and sequia in Nicaragua—all this was preparing me for the ACM Costa Rican experience. After the border crossing into Costa Rica, I remember the exuberance of the vegetation, smiling people and the many, many potholes! When we arrived at our destination, ACM provided me with the ultimate education in experiential learning- a structured program with a study site and advisor for ensuring correct and timely field data collection to complete university requirements. But the ACM experience also allowed me time to think outside the normal university setting, interact with the friendly ticos, explore and observe tropical nature on a daily basis and how many humans were impacting nature while a few were trying to conserve it with a multitude of ideas. While in Costa Rica with ACM, I decided that my mission in life would be to try to understand and work with local institutions and communities to conserve/manage tropical nature. Once this decision was made, my life became very focused, meaningful, and challenging. I am continuously learning from nature, people and literature/documentaries and it is a pleasure to work with the younger generation and expose them when possible to an ACM type of experiential learning.”