Introduction to Costa Rica

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Introduction

During this class students will explore academic, historical, social, cultural, scientific, ecological and political themes, which will be supported by class discussion, readings and fieldtrips. Students will have the opportunity to enhance their linguistic skills while learning about social dynamics in Costa Rica. Every topic studied in and out of class will be directly related to the course’s main topic: “Costa Rica, the happiest country in the world”. The parameters used for this declaration are based on another major topic that will be studied throughout the semester: Life quality in Costa Rica. According to The Economist Magazine’s Economist Intelligence Unit, this measurement utilizes aspects such as growth production, work sources, physical and architectonic surroundings, mental and physical health, education, leisure activities, and social dynamics.

There will be a series on readings, movies, class discussions, conferences and five fieldtrips to different parts of the country, such that students can have the opportunity to experience in real life the topics discussed in class. Students will work with an anthology including a series of essays, reports and studies offering different perspectives of the Costa Rican identity. All work, including conferences and fieldtrips, will be in Spanish.

Learning Goals

1) Contextualize, from different perspectives, Costa Rica in its position of the happiest country in the world.
2) Learn about the country’s past and present history.
3) Approach the sociocultural experience in Costa Rica from an academic perspective.
4) Visit different locations in Costa Rica where the students will witness the class topics.
5) Debate on local current affairs and connect them to the students’ urban and rural experiences.
6) Discuss different specific topics directly with experts on such areas.
7) Develop tools of communication and critical thinking in order to discuss life quality in the country from the following perspectives:
   a) Expectations of your semester in the happiest country in the world.
   b) Nature and the environment.
   c) Formation of a positive national identity.
   d) Freedom and democracy.
   e) Family as an identity-forming core.
   f) Social guarantees and their influence in “Tico” living.
   g) New happiness patterns.
   h) Spirituality and happiness.
   i) Tolerance and racism.
   j) Social dynamics.
   k) Health systems.
Course evaluation (100 pts.)
The students will be assessed through the following activities:
1) City exploration essays (3x10 pts.; 30 pts.)
2) Neighborhood walk (2x5 pts.; 10 pts.)
3) Rural practicum journal (15 pts.)
4) Oral presentation (15 pts.)
5) Final exam (20 pts.)
6) Course participation (10 pts.)

Description of course assessment
1) City exploration essays: Every student will write 4 essays of 4 pages each in which they will share how they apply what has been learned in class to their daily living and to the social and academic activities they carry out during the program.

In order to appreciate and learn what living in Costa Rica is like, it is necessary to go out and get to know and experience everything the country has to offer: places and events you can observe and in which you can participate. The activities found below will provide more insights on the opportunities to experience an inclusive life in this country. Students can visit these places and be part of these activities either with assigned conversation groups or with host families or local friends.

The essays must be typed double-spaced and must indicate your name, course, date, essay number and activity. Four of the following activities should be chosen as the topics for the essays. Each topic below includes a list of guiding questions that might help to explore the place or activity. Students should feel free to combine answers and personal comments. It is important to remember to take a notebook along so to record as much information as possible. Deadlines will be announced in class.

1. “La feria del agricultor” (Farmers Market): Students should try to go with a family member, early in the morning on a Saturday or Sunday.
   a. What products did you see that you did not know before?
   b. Who are the sellers and the buyers?
   c. What are the prices like? High? Low?
   d. What was your favorite product?
   e. What is the history of the Farmers Market? (you will have to interview people in order to know this.)
   f. How is it different from similar activities in the US?
   g. What did really catch your attention? Why?
   h. What did you like the most? The least?
   i. What was the atmosphere like?
   j. Where do the products and farmers come from? How do geography and climate influence in the production?
2. A religious ceremony: most families in Costa Rica are Catholic, however there are many others who practice other religions. The students should attend a religious ceremony of any kind, preferably accompanied by a host family member. The student will be there as an observer who wants to learn about religion in this country. As such, it is important to be opened minded regarding what goes on in order to learn more of the host family and society in general.
   a. What was the place where the service took place like?
   b. Did you understand what the presiding person said?
   c. Was it similar to other services you have attended before?
   d. What was the assistants’ attitude during the service?
   e. What do you think of the role of Christianity in Latin America?

3. “La Asamblea Legislativa.” (The Costa Rican Congress): the sessions take place in the afternoons. Students should conduct previous research on what is being discussed.
   a. What were your expectations?
   b. What was the issue being discussed?
   c. Describe the debate. What was it like?
   d. What reactions did you notice in the audience?

4. A theater presentation, a national movie or a cultural event: it will be important to read any local newspaper a find out about potential activities.
   a. Describe the venue. What is it like? What is its history?
   b. What kind of people attended the presentation? What were they dressed like?
   c. What do you think of the people who sponsor events like these? Is the situation similar to those in the US?
   d. If you went to see a play, what aspects should be important to write down?
   e. What do you think of fine arts when compared to street art?

5. A soccer game: a local newspaper is a good resource to learn about soccer games. It is best to go with a family member or a local person who can tell you more about the national passion for this sport. Students should analyze not only the physical part, but also the cultural aspects.
   a. Who played? What was the game like, dynamic, boring, why?
   b. What was the fans behavior like?
   c. How do you compare that game to other sport events in the US?

6. “Parque Zoológico Simón Bolívar” (Simón Bolívar Zoo): inaugurated on July 24, 1921, it is located in the old and enigmatic Barrio Amón. The zoo was named after the South American revolutionary because of his efforts in the local independence movements; it was created to preserve endangered species and to be a local place for education and research. Today the zoo is administrated by la Fundación Pro Zoológicos (FUNDAZOO).
   a. What flora and fauna species did you see? Where do they come from? Why are they there?
   b. Describe the infrastructure and explain how it helps to the institution’s purposes.
   c. How would you describe the flora and fauna conditions, the way they are treated and the places where they are?
   d. Describe the kind of visitors. What are their comments, reactions and the way they use the facilities?
   e. Compare it to other zoos you have visited.
   f. Take a walk around and enjoy one of the most famous places in San José.
2) **Neighborhood walks:** Each student is required to walk around a local neighborhood at the beginning of their stay in San Jose and towards the end of their stay. A handout with a series of instructions is provided as guidance and the student is to write a reflection on their experience. This work is part of a larger study and as such, the student needs to sign a waiver form allowing their work to be part of this study. The information will be graded as part of the course grade as well as sent to Chicago.

3) **Rural practicum journal:** In this journal students will have to write at least 3 entries per week during their 4-week period of rural practicum. Such writings will be related to specific aspects of their rural experience, for example making comparisons between life in San José or the USA and those places where they will go to, impressions on the work they do in the rural communities, family life, social interactions, etc. It must be handed in on October 23.

4) **Oral presentation:** Every group will be given a specific topic related to a vital issue concerning Costa Rican identity, society and culture. Each group will prepare and present a class on the given topic.

5) **Final exam:** Students will be required to answer essay type questions on topics covered in class.

6) **Course participation.** The success of the course is a shared responsibility between students and professor. Therefore, it is important to contribute ideas, comment and ask questions, discuss ideas, enrich the dynamic by actively participating.

**Calendar (16 weeks-32 session)**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, August 25</td>
<td>Course introduction. Summer reading discussion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, August 27</td>
<td>Geography of Costa Rica. Video: Origen and geological characteristics of Costa Rica.</td>
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<td>Wednesday, September 3</td>
<td>Fieldtrip: IRAZÚ-GUAYABO.</td>
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<td>Friday, September 12</td>
<td>Independence Day activity</td>
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<td>Monday, September 15</td>
<td><strong>No class: National Holiday</strong></td>
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<td>Wednesday, September 17</td>
<td>History of Independence. Oral presentation group 1</td>
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<td>22 September - 18 October</td>
<td>Rural stay</td>
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<td>Monday October 20</td>
<td>Comparative exercise</td>
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<td>Wednesday October 22</td>
<td>Rural stay oral presentations</td>
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<td>Monday October 27</td>
<td>Costa Rican families in the 20th Century</td>
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<td>Wednesday October 29</td>
<td>Guest speaker: Jurguen Ureña. Cineforum.</td>
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<td>Monday November 3</td>
<td>Costa Rica of the 21st Century</td>
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<td>Wednesday November 5</td>
<td>Article: The Tico and the mask. Oral presentation Group 2</td>
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<td>Monday November 10</td>
<td>Debate: Is Costa Rica the happiest country in the world?</td>
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<td>Wednesday November 12</td>
<td>How did Costa Rica become a coffee growing country? Fieldtrip to Llano Bonito.</td>
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<td>Wednesday, November 19</td>
<td>Happiness, the environment and the Ticos ecological footprint.</td>
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<td>Monday November 24</td>
<td>Final exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday November 27</td>
<td><strong>Close of the semester. Thanksgiving Lunch</strong></td>
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Bibliographic Resources


La familia en Costa Rica, siglos XIX, XX y XXI:


Origen y características geológicas de Costa Rica:
http://historia.fcs.ucr.cr/hcostarica/materiales/origenycaracteristicas.htm