



The School for Field Studies Research Philosophy

The School for Field Studies (SFS) academic programs strive to provide students with a clear understanding of the value and management of natural resources within local contexts. While SFS' interdisciplinary study abroad programs comprise far more than the research students and faculty conduct, the SFS research philosophy is an important element that defines our work and sets SFS apart.

The academic team at each SFS Center designs and implements long-term strategic research plans in collaboration with their local stakeholders. These strategic research initiatives drive the research objectives of students' Directed Research (DR) projects on those programs. Thus, through their DRs, students put a face on environmental problems, discover their complexity, and learn about conflicts between local stakeholders and competing resource needs and uses. SFS programs provide students with an applied approach to addressing environmental problems through the practice of field-based skills and concepts, including socio-cultural and ecological field methods, and the development of research and communication skills.

SFS research differs from research with other study abroad programs by virtue of our longevity and deep commitment to specific communities, locations, and environmental challenges. Our permanent field centers allow SFS faculty to work with local and national stakeholders to pursue relevant, user-inspired research questions over the long term. SFS research and the corresponding program curricula emphasize the following:

- **A focus on environmental problem solving.** Students examine real-world environmental problems critical to local communities, enabling them to make demonstrable impacts after a session or semester of concerted effort.
- **Utilization of community-based approaches.** Faculty and students interact with local communities and agencies during the planning and execution of research projects to meet community-defined goals.
- **Interdisciplinary models.** Environmental problems need complex responses, requiring academic material that is presented in an integrated fashion from a range of disciplines and topics including biology, ecology, policy, management, ethics, anthropology, and socioeconomics.
- **Collaborative team efforts.** Students and faculty work together to jointly design and implement research and develop solutions to environmental problems. The focus is on *doing good science*, and understanding that good science is the foundation of sound environmental policies.
- **Experiential learning.** Students actively participate in designing and conducting research. They then take the knowledge they gain in the classroom and apply it to an actual environmental problem in the real world.
- **Emphasis on dissemination and scientific communication.** We encourage faculty and students to publish and present research in national and international forums, as our collaborative and applied research style makes our research relevant to those in and out of the local environment.