



Course Information

Field Studies: Central American History & Culture
HP 4393
Spring 2026

Instructor Information

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Course Description

This field-based course encourages students to explore the connections between theory and practice through direct cultural experience, critical reflection, and ethical engagement.

Students

will immerse themselves in the people, history, and culture of Costa Rica, engaging with guest speakers, readings, and community interactions to develop global awareness and intercultural empathy.

This course satisfies the General Education “**Windows: Global Perspectives**” requirement.

Learning Outcomes

This course will intentionally encourage you to further develop your ability to interpret and contextualize current events in light of historical, geographical, sociological, economic, and political contexts.

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Interpret and contextualize contemporary Costa Rican and Central American issues within historical, cultural, and political frameworks.
2. Communicate and interact cross-culturally with cultural awareness and respect.
3. Integrate Christian ethical reflection into cross-cultural experiences, emphasizing empathy, humility, and inclusion.
4. Reflect critically on their own cultural identity and assumptions in light of new experiences.

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to navigate and engage

confidently

within Costa Rican society—communicating appropriately with members of the host community, traveling independently, and participating fully in daily life. You will demonstrate an informed understanding of the historical, political, and cultural forces shaping Latin America

by writing critical reflections and incorporating diverse perspectives from readings, guest lectures, and community experiences. Finally, you will be able to contextualize Latin American faith perspectives within broader social and historical frameworks, deepening your capacity for

cross-cultural empathy and ethical reflection.

Course Materials

1. Palmer, Stephen and Ivan Molina, eds. *The Costa Rican Reader: History, Culture and Politics* (Duke University Press, 2004). Copies are available at QERC.

2. Personal journal to keep a record of your experiences.

Grade Determination

Component	Description	Points
Orientation Participation	LO1-4: Attendance and engagement during January in-person program	50
Cultural Experience Journal	LO1, 3-4: Weekly entries connecting experiences, readings, and reflection	100
Reflection Papers	LO1: 3–4 pages each, drawn from <i>The Costa Rican Reader</i> and class discussions	120
Cultural Engagement Projects	LO2-3: Community-based or intercultural service activities	100
Food and Culture Reviews	LO1: Short 250-word explorations of Costa Rican	40

	cuisine in cultural context	
Final Paper: <i>Stranger in a Foreign Land</i>	LO1-4: 9–11 page critical position paper integrating course learning	100
Final Presentation	LO1-4: 10-minute synthesis during wrap-up session	40
Total		550

Assignment Instructions

Orientation Activities (50 pts)

Most QERC orientation activities are designed to help students interact successfully with their host cultures and learn from those cultures. Orientation activities will also help students know how to make their study abroad experience work to their greatest advantage. Successful completion of orientation activities counts toward 50 of the final course grade.

Component Description Points

Orientation Participation

LO1-4: Attendance and engagement during January in-person program 50

Cultural Experience Journal

LO1, 3-4: Weekly entries connecting experiences, readings, and reflection 100

Reflection Papers (4 total)

LO1: 3–4 pages each, drawn from The Costa Rican Reader and class discussions 120

Cultural Engagement Projects

LO2-3: Community-based or intercultural service activities 100

Food and Culture Reviews (4)

LO1: Short 250-word explorations of Costa Rican cuisine in cultural context 40

Final Paper: *Stranger in a Foreign Land*

LO1-4: 9–11 page critical position paper integrating course learning 100

Final Presentation LO1-4: 10-minute synthesis during wrap-up session 40

Total 550

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Community Engagement (100 pts)

Home Stay Experience - you will participate in assigned homestays in San Gerardo. In addition to the assigned homestays, you are encouraged to continue visiting their host families from time to time over the rest of the semester.

Reading Reflection Papers (4 total, 30 pts each = 120 pts)

You will write four (4) 3-4 page Reflection Papers in response to primary source readings, community interactions, and discussions with guest speakers. Reflection paper topics will be tied to topics found in The Costa Rican Reader. You will select at least one reading from each section of the Reader for your reflection papers.

Structure your papers to answer the following questions. You do not need to answer each question every time, but should use these questions as a general guide for your responses:

- What central idea or argument is this document or artifact expressing, and what draws your attention or curiosity about it?
- How does the event or theme connect to its broader historical and cultural context—both within Latin America and globally?
- What parallels, echoes, or “whispers” of this history do you observe in your experiences in Costa Rica or Panama (through community interactions, guest speakers, or daily life)?
- In what ways does this reading or experience challenge or affirm your own cultural assumptions and worldview?
- What deeper insight have you gained about Costa Rican culture, society, or faith—and about yourself—through this reflection?
- Bonus: When relevant, how does this connect to the development and identity of San Gerardo de Dota?

Cultural Food Reviews (4 total, 10 pts each = 40 pts)

A vital part of cross-cultural learning is exploring food. Throughout your time in Costa Rica, eat broadly and intentionally—sampling authentic dishes both at QERC and in the community. Write four 250-word reviews that describe your meals and interpret them in cultural context.

Each review should:

- Describe 3–4 dishes (appearance, taste, preparation, ingredients, and setting). [Here is a list of common Costa Rican foods you may encounter.](#)
- Reflect on who eats this food, where, and why—considering historical, cultural, geographical, and economic influences.
- Compare the experience to your own culture’s cuisine. Was it good? Would you eat it again? Why or why not?

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- Use this resource if helpful: [How to Write a Food Review](#)

To capture a range of experiences, complete one review from each category below (approximately every three weeks):

- San Gerardo de Dota – Home of a Resident
- San Gerardo de Dota – Comida de QERC
- Soda, Truckstop, or Bar
- At the Beach – Comida de Playa

- Panamá – Comida Típica de Panamá
- The Best Place You Ate
- The Worst Place You Ate
- The Most Unique Food You Ate

Cultural Experience Journal (100 pts)

Keeping a Cultural Experience Journal is essential to your ability to do high-quality work on all the other assignments, both in this course and all the others you will be engaged in this semester. Keep a daily journal that records your experiences in Costa Rica. At a minimum, it should document:

- what you did today (hiked, talked, ate, learned, etc.),
- what you saw/observed (plants, animals, people doing things, etc.),
- what you thought,
- how you felt,
- the tentative meaning that you assigned to the day's experiences, and
- what is occurring in you (a record of what is emerging in your understanding today).

Stranger in a Foreign Land Paper (100 pts)

The course culminates in a 9-10 page critical position paper valued at 100 pts. The position paper requires you to form, develop, and support a thesis in response to your readings, guest speakers, and experiences in Costa Rica and Panama that synthesizes the learning experience in

light of the meaning you have made of being a stranger in a foreign land. To be successful, you

must integrate information developed from your reading, journals, discussions, community interactions, and observations with some deep reflection on Christian ethics (at minimum, let's use the Golden Rule as a shorthand guiding principle for that) and your choice of three of the following framing concepts:

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1. Hospitality
2. Wealth and Poverty
3. Social Hierarchy
4. Communication Challenges
5. Folk Culture and Customs
6. Lostness and Culture shock
7. Cultural Evolution and Adaptation to Place
8. Enclave vs. Inclusion

Finally, project how what you have learned through your experience will help you empathize and relate to "strangers" in your land from now on.

Be sure to use specific examples from your readings and experience, citing your sources appropriately. Additional details will be provided in Canvas.

Course Policies and Guidelines

- Attendance: Required for all orientation, wrap-up, and synchronous sessions.
- Late Work: Assignments must be submitted by deadlines posted on Canvas.

- Inclusion and Respect: Students are expected to engage with humility and openness in all cultural and interpersonal interactions.
- Academic Integrity: Plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in disciplinary action consistent with university policy.
- Accessibility: Students requiring accommodations should contact Disability Services as early as possible.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Coursework

While the SNU academic community embraces the exploration of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence (AI), we value the integrity of the learning process and the discerning use of technologies to advance, not detract, from learning gains.

- The use of AI text generation tools within versions of ChatGPT, Grammarly, and others is not allowed unless expressly permitted by the course instructor.
- The use of paraphrasing tools such as Quillbot, Spinbot, and others to paraphrase or copy information from sources without proper acknowledgment of sources is not allowed unless expressly permitted by the course instructor.

Inclusion and Respect

Southern Nazarene University values each person created in the image of God. Therefore, we also desire to be a community that reflects representation of diversity. We care about inclusion and equity through the refining of our character, the way we create culture, and the way we serve Christ. Our University values reconciliation through God's love. In light of this commitment, we endeavor to foster a supportive environment of dignity and inclusion in which all stakeholders, regardless of their perspectives and individual differences, are treated respectfully and engage in charitable discourse.

Disability Statement

The mission of Disability Services is to provide and coordinate support services that enable students with disabilities to receive equal access to all aspects of university life. Students needing assistance with a learning, physical or psychological disability that may affect his or her academic progress are encouraged to contact Disability Services. Students with temporary injuries (such as a broken limb, concussion, or surgery recovery) can receive services and accommodations through Disability Services temporarily. Location and contact information can be found on the [Disability Services](#) website.

Institutional Guidelines and Services

Students and faculty of Southern Nazarene University should be familiar with the [SNU Institutional Guidelines and Services](#) not listed in this syllabus.

Schedule

An updated schedule with deadlines and submission links will be available in Canvas.