

HNRS 301 Global Engagement – Belize Global Environmental Stewardship and Education

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Spring Semester 2010 – Tuesday 6:00–9:30 P.M.

Belize: May 11-22, 2010

Estimated Cost: \$2500 (covers all travel, including room & board)



COUNTRY INTRODUCTION

Belize, a small Mesoamerican country, is rich in physical and cultural diversity. Historically, the Mayan civilization dominated and flourished in this area from AD 250 to 900 (the Classic period). Today, approximately 310,000 people of mixed racial and ethnic origin call Belize home. Belize, while close to New Hampshire in size, has a highly varied physical landscape including a 185-mile barrier reef (second in size to Australia's Great Barrier Reef), as well as numerous subtropical forests. Realizing the environmental impacts associated with development as well as tourism, the country now protects more than 40% of its territory in conservation reserves. Challenges to environmental stewardship and sustainability, however, persist from deforestation, rapid coastal development, increasing poverty, and the recent discovery of oil deposits. Additionally, Belize's barrier reef reserve system is under threat due to unsustainable tourism activities in addition to changing global ocean conditions.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Designed to immerse you in Belize's diverse culture and environment, this course offers an opportunity to engage in internationally-focused investigations and hands-on service learning projects within a national park and surrounding local schools. The focus of our study and work will be on environmental challenges present in Belize today. Background readings, discussions and reflective writing assignments will take place both on campus and in Belize. These assignments will focus on investigating past and present environmental issues and opportunities in this ethnically and ecologically rich country. In addition to our focus on environmental challenges and opportunities, we will examine the roles and responsibilities of those who hope to embody the ideal of global citizenship and environmental stewardship.

REQUIREMENTS

Prior to traveling abroad, our class will meet regularly during the spring semester to examine past and current societal and environmental issues in Belize. Readings, discussions, assignments, language lessons (while Belize is officially an English speaking country, Spanish is also spoken widely), selection of and research on a focused-learning topic, and guest lectures will take place throughout the term. During the travel portion of the class, students will be required to keep a field journal, conduct focused observations that relate to their fields of study, and participate in a group service learning project. Selected observation topics will serve as a basis for discussion and reflective writing throughout the course experience.

TRAVELS IN BELIZE

The town of San Ignacio in the Cayo district will serve as our home base. Nestled in the lush and mountainous rainforest, this beautiful area is often referred to as the heart of Belize's ecotourism trade. Students will stay (in pairs) with a host family in San Ignacio except for overnight group trips to the Noj Kaax Meen Elijio Panti National Park. For the majority of our time in Belize, students will be learning and working in this newly-constructed national park to help assist predominately Mayan village staff with environmental projects. These projects will involve rapid environmental surveys and infrastructure development. Additionally, we will be designing (and implementing) environmental education programs for community schools and groups.

These experiences will afford unique opportunities to interact with and learn from local citizens about life in and the environment of Belize, and to explore our role in contributing to what we perceive as "positive change" in others' lives. San Ignacio will also serve as the jumping-off point for travels to surrounding ancient Mayan cities such as Xunantunich and Caracol. For the final days in Belize, we will head back to Belize City and out to the Cayes and the barrier reef system. Here, we will examine global climate change and its impact upon coral reefs in Belize and around the world.

