

Life and Service in La Fortuna

*An eight-day, 1-credit study abroad program in Costa Rica
March 16 – 23, 2019*

I. Course Description

The University at Albany is committed to preparing its students to be globally engaged citizens and to serving our local and global communities. Undergraduate students complete thousands of hours of community service each academic year in the Capital Region and beyond. **Life and Service in La Fortuna** exposes these students to a new beyond: the Arenal Volcano region of Costa Rica, 75 miles from the country's capital, San José.

Life in La Fortuna

For eight days, students will immerse themselves in Costa Rican culture and broaden their cross-cultural understanding. Living with host families, they will improve their communicative Spanish and become acclimated to “tico” customs. Visiting a local farm, they will better understand Costa Rican agricultural practices which play a large role in the country's gross domestic product. Cooking classes and adventure-based activities round out the experience.

Service in La Fortuna

Nearly one quarter of Costa Rica's land area is protected – the largest percentage of any country in the world – and students will spend half of their week abroad volunteering at Proyecto Asis, an eight acre ecological reserve on the edge of the rainforest. Proyecto Asis is home to rescued monkeys, parrots, and sloths among other animals, and students will help take care of the animals by feeding them, cleaning their cases, and assisting in repairing or building new cages.

For the second half of the week, students will volunteer at a local elementary school. Projects at the school may include leading activities and craft projects with children and/or providing support to ongoing maintenance projects such as painting or refurbishing classrooms.

Life and Service

Through students' active engagement at both volunteer sites during the course of their stay in Costa Rica, they will develop a better understanding of life in – and the impact of service on – La Fortuna. From financially supporting local businesses and community members to spending time with animals and children, students will be able to temporarily engage themselves in a community other than the University at Albany's for the better.

II. Course Objectives

The primary objective for **Life and Service in La Fortuna** is for students to understand the impact of their service on meeting community needs abroad. The secondary objective is for students to gain a broader global perspective. The overarching purpose of the course is for students to foster a lifelong commitment to service and civic engagement both home and abroad.

III. Course Requirements

In order to receive a satisfactory grade, “S”, for this course, the following must be completed:

Engagement at Volunteer Sites: 50%

Students will spend anywhere from three to eight hours at the two service sites on a daily basis while in Costa Rica for a total of approximately thirty-two hours of service abroad. Their willingness to engage in at-times laborious tasks as assigned by service site coordinators is crucial. Failure to participate in projects will negatively impact students’ successful completion of the service program.

Reflective Journals: 25%

On a nightly basis while in Costa Rica, students are expected to spend anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour writing reflective journal entries about their experiences, highlighting the specific service-based tasks and cultural activities they were exposed to and/or participated in on that particular day. The completion of these journal entries will serve as a catalyst for students’ final essays to be written upon return to the University at Albany. Journals will not be evaluated for content but rather for completion and consistency. One journal entry per day of service while abroad will contribute 25% towards a student’s ultimate grade of satisfactory.

Final Reflective Essay: 25%

By April 5, 2019, students will be expected to submit (via e-mail) a final reflective essay to faculty leader, Leah Rotella. This final essay is an opportunity for students to reflect on their experience abroad. Students should respond to at least four of the six following questions:

- *How has the experience in Costa Rica changed you and/or affected your life?*
- *How have you impacted the organizations you worked with in La Fortuna?*
- *What does it mean – to you – to have a global perspective?*
- *What does civic engagement mean to you? Why is this important?*
- *What has this experience suggested to you about your strengths?*
- *How did the experience help you identify opportunities for personal growth?*

The content of students’ reflective essays may include anecdotes and/or experiences from students’ time spent at Proyecto Asis, the elementary school, or both service sites.

Minimum requirements for a satisfactory paper:

- 4-6 pages answering a minimum of four of the six questions outlined above
- Typewritten, double-spaced with 12 point Times New Roman font and one inch margins
- Thoroughly reviewed for grammatical, typographical, and spelling errors

Leah Rotella will evaluate students based on the above criteria and assign grades accordingly.