

ACB Evaluation Executive Summary

Sustainability and the Environment Program, CIEE Study Center in Monteverde, Costa Rica

October 2011

The CIEE Sustainability and Environment Program in Monteverde, Costa Rica is a highly integrated program for study of tropical conservation and sustainability development to ensure future biodiversity and human welfare. The program combines field experiences, internships, home stays, contextualized coursework in sustainability, biological diversity and the environment, and supported Spanish language acquisition to maximize students' study of people, their impact on natural systems, and how environmental issues influence economics and society. The program is designed for environmental studies majors and seeks to integrate inquiry across the natural sciences, behavioral sciences, and humanities.

The quality of the program design to advance student learning is exceptional. All the program elements are highly integrated, and individual components within the fieldtrips are well scaffolded to enhance deep learning by students of core principals and the complexity of Costa Rican case studies. Further, the immersion in the community provided by the home stays and internships fosters higher levels of learning, as well as critical opportunities for cultural exchange. The CIEE staff members, all well-credentialed scientists, are extremely skilled with mentoring students throughout the program. As a particular strength, the program engages some of the leading researchers in the field of conservation biology -- the people who literally wrote the book -- to lead class activities or serve as internship mentors.

This evaluation, the first since the program was established in 2008, provides recommendations to build on the existing strengths of the program. While the evaluation team considers all of the recommendations included with this report important, we have identified the following as particular priorities for improvement of what is an already successful program:

- The instructors rethink the essential learning goals for each course and write learning goals that are more sophisticated, and more appropriate for advanced undergraduate coursework. (Recommendation #3)
- The Sustainability, Environment, Economy and Society (SEES) and Tropical Conservation Biology and Policy (TCBP) courses should be modified to include a more robust introduction to social science research methods in addition to the ecological methods. (Recommendation #4)
- The SEES and TCBP courses should draw more case studies from Monteverde to illustrate the core points, beginning early in the course. (Recommendation #5)
- The Spanish language classes should be reevaluated to more clearly articulate distinctions between language levels and intended learning outcomes. Upper division courses should be redesigned for language majors and minors to satisfy upper division credit hour requirements at their home institutions. (Recommendations #6-8)
- The Portland staff should reevaluate and update the marketing materials for this program as provided on the web in order to more accurately reflect the unique experience available through study in Costa Rica. The enrollment team should be prepared to discuss the special program design and understand its distinctions from the long-standing Tropical Ecology and Conservation program, also located in Monteverde. (Recommendations #17-18)

CIEE Action Plan

Sustainability and the Environment Program, CIEE Study Center in Monteverde, Costa Rica

Fall 2011

Overview

CIEE staff are pleased to provide this Action Plan in response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) report on the CIEE Monteverde, Costa Rica Study Center Sustainability and Environment Program. The report of the site visit will be received by members of the ACB at the Spring 2012 meeting.

The Action Plan outlines the key recommendations from the Evaluation and the specific steps CIEE plans to follow to address the recommendation. While the Action Plan is authored by CIEE, staff solicited input from the ACB team leader from the evaluation, Cheryl Matherly. The Action Plan should be read in light of the ACB Evaluation and with reference to the detailed description of the program available from CIEE. The "ACB Plan for Program Evaluation," the Evaluation report, the Action Plan, and program details are available at www.ciee.org.

ACB Recommendation

Rethink the essential learning goals for each course and write learning goals that are more sophisticated, and more appropriate for advanced undergraduate coursework.

Action

In conjunction with the Program Director and support from CIEE Academic Affairs, resident instructional staff will rewrite the expected learning outcomes for each academic course, in order to best capture the goals of the courses and to better align them with the academic experience level and expectations of the target and typical student participant in the program.

ACB Recommendation

The Sustainability, Environment, Economy and Society (SEES) and Tropical Conservation Biology and Policy (TCBP) courses should be modified to include a more robust introduction to social science research methods in addition to the ecological methods, and should draw more case studies from Monteverde to illustrate the core points, beginning early in the course.

Action

Resident staff, including the entire on-site instructional team for the SEES and TCBP courses will reconfigure these courses to incorporate an integrated and coordinated social science research method introduction, between the two courses. Likewise, these courses will be examined in order to identify opportunities to integrate local case studies into the curricula with the goal of using the local environment and reality as a tool for enhancing the subject matter learning in both courses, and providing a deeper context between the academic and experiential components of the program.

ACB Recommendation

The Spanish language classes should be reevaluated to more clearly articulate distinctions between language levels and intended learning outcomes. Upper division courses should be redesigned for language majors and minors to satisfy upper division credit hour requirements at their home institutions.

Action

The Resident Director will work with the Monteverde-based Spanish language class provider, CPI, to institute measures that will address this recommendation, including improved definition and distinction of classes by language level, in a way that aligns testing and placement with course design and learning outcomes. Discussions will also include identification of ways that advanced courses can be redesigned or enhanced to meet the typical requirements of common upper-level Spanish language courses in U.S. institutions.

ACB Recommendation

The Portland staff should reevaluate and update the marketing materials for this program as provided on the web in order to more accurately reflect the unique experience available through study in Costa Rica. The enrollment team should be prepared to discuss the special program design and understand its distinctions from the long-standing Tropical Ecology and Conservation program, also located in Monteverde.

Action

Portland-based marketing staff will work directly with the resident director to conduct an audit of the key marketing materials for the program, namely the CIEE website and catalog, and to revise the written and graphical content accordingly.

The Study Abroad advising staff in Portland will review this new information and discuss with resident staff to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the program, and how to adequately distinguish it, in theory and advising practice, from the Tropical Ecology program. Pre-departure materials and advising services will be reviewed and addressed/revised according to recommendations in this report and to conform to any revisions to marketing materials.