ATENAS, COSTA RICA

SPENCER JASTROW

Program: SFS Sustainable Development Studies, Spring

Spencer’s Majors: Environmental Studies, Political Science

Academic Life: We lived on a small campus comprised of other SFS faculty and students. Campus had a small dormitory, farm, kitchen, and a soccer and basketball courts. Classes consisted of traditional lecture and discussion sessions but also heavily integrated numerous field trips and other participatory, hands-on activities. Due to the small group of people (31) and involvement of the professors, individual consultation was readily assessable and well-received.

Fieldwork Abroad: We had a week-long directed research project where we split up into smaller groups. Our group went to Carara National Park to study how the bordering highway affects bird habitat and bioacoustics. The directed research project had both important policy and environmental implications about road infrastructure.

Memorable Moment: We were camping in Santa Rosa National Park, a tropical dry forest, and I happened to wake up at 4:30am so went to the top of a nearby large hill to watch the sunrise over several volcanoes and the valley around me. It felt like a symphony, watching and hearing each group of animals announce to the world of their waking, like a new group of instruments entering and adding to an entity greater than the sum of the individual members.

Advice for Someone Considering Study Abroad: Having some proficiency in a language makes the experience more beneficial, but don’t let that limit you on locations. I definitely recommend studying in a developing or “non-western” country. The socioeconomic differences are perhaps more educational than any coursework and will better help you understand your role and place in the world and how your actions can impact people across the globe.

“Fieldwork is a good way to learn a lot more about a specific topic, and help make you feel like you’re contributing to your host country.”

Spencer among the tree tops in the Monteverde Cloud Forest in Costa Rica.