Program: SFS Tropical Island Biodiversity & Conservation Studies, Fall

Emily’s Majors: Environmental Studies; Communication Sciences; Digital Studies Certificate

Academic Life: We lived and learned at the center in Bocas Town on Isla Colon. Our bedrooms, dining area, lab, student lounge, pool, and classroom were all on the same property. The classroom is on a dock over the water overlooking the bay where we often saw dolphins, birds, fish, and stingrays. We spent multiple days a week out in the field, whether in the rainforest or snorkeling in the nearby coral reefs. The program involved a lot of group work and research done in collaboration with others. We also conducted directed research projects during the final three weeks of the semester on a project of our choosing.

Memorable Moments: The time spent in the field and various field trips are the most memorable experiences from my program. Almost every day we took boats to islands throughout the archipelago to conduct research in the rainforest or to go snorkeling in shallow coral reefs.

Advice for Someone Considering SFS: Be ready to get out of your comfort zone! You’re going to be hot and sweaty, jumping into open ocean and duck diving down to look at substrates. You’re going to be venturing through rainforests filled with spiders, howler monkeys, and poison dart frogs. But it’s all amazing and an incredible experience.

Benefits of Study Abroad: Studying abroad in Bocas and participating in a field study program has given me an advantage in my fields because I am not a science-y person nor have hard science majors, so it helped me learn more about research processes and the hard science behind things. Learning about the culture and different ways of life has helped me learn more about communities around the world and I think that can help me in my future career endeavors.

“I was able to immerse myself into the local culture through the field trips, fieldwork, and living in the community.”