

Natural Resources Based Tourism in Bulgaria – Study Abroad / Service Learning Experience

WILD 5200/7200. International Issues in Wildlife Conservation (6 semester credit hrs)
(www.uga.edu/bulgaria)

May Session: May 12 – June 5, 2009

Instructors (1–2 instructors will participate in any given year)

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Course Description

This is a multidisciplinary course drawing on expertise from *wildlife ecology*, and *natural resources recreation and tourism*. This course is a unique opportunity to learn and gain perspectives from enthusiastic people in Bulgaria, the stepping stone between eastern and western cultures.

In today's *global society*, we must understand several approaches used to manage, conserve, and interpret natural resources for multiple purposes, including tourism. Increased *global understanding* will enable comparisons to the American approach, thus increasing students' *world view* and ability to incorporate new, innovative ideas, and provide suggestions for alternative approaches to other people.

Bulgaria is an ideal locale for comparative study for many reasons. Bulgaria was one of the first countries in the world to adopt and apply the *Guidelines on Biodiversity and Tourism Development* produced by the *Convention on Biological Diversity*. Further, there is a growing and diverse economy in Bulgaria. Bulgaria entered the European Union in January 2007, and continues to make the transition from almost 45 years as a communist-governed republic to a parliamentary republic based on the principles of democracy. Rural areas, in particular, have a declining population (> -5.1%) and a high (≥20%) unemployment rate. *Sustainable nature-based tourism* provides employment opportunities for people in rural areas.

There is a superb opportunity to use **Bulgaria's beautiful and well-preserved natural resources** to attract international tourists to rural areas and foster economic growth. However, for long-term economic return, such use must be wise and sustainable. Much of this course will **focus on problem-solving** – identifying problems associated with advancing sustainable nature- and culture-based tourism, then taking action by **working through a service project**. Through completion of a project that benefits a rural area and its goals of creating sustainable tourism, students will **become fully engaged in learning and giving** back to a community.

Prerequisites

All students in good academic standing are eligible to take this course. There are no specific prerequisites.

Course Objectives

- Increase students' world view –
 - Understand government organization and administration of programs for resource conservation, preservation, and use
 - History of peoples' association with the land (natural resources), including use and ownership patterns, conservation / preservation
 - *Compare & contrast these points between Bulgaria and the U.S. (positives, negatives, suggestions, etc.)*
- Examine a case study: development and implementation of the National Ecotourism Strategy and Action Plan for Bulgaria (http://www.ecotourism.bulgariatravel.org/docs/book_obrir_ENG.pdf); nature- and culture-based tourism strategy for Georgia, USA;

→ *Compare & contrast strategies & plans (positives, negatives, suggestions, etc.)*

- Identify special / unusual / rare resources
 - Likely to attract tourists
 - Need for monitoring and regulating impacts
 - Determine current use trends for nature-based tourism
- Identify current issues and problems associated with development of nature-based tourism in Central Balkans National Park
- Complete service projects that focus on identified problems and issues, culminating in presentations to community and university members.

Course Outcomes

- Enhanced perspective, knowledge, and understanding of international issues, cross-cultural communication, and natural resource conservation,
- Problem-solving through creative idea formulation and discussion;
- Contributions to a community through hands-on involvement with problem-solving and data collection.

Course Reading Materials and Texts

Brown, Jessica, Nora Mitchell, and Michael Beresford, editors. 2005. *The Protected Landscape Approach – Linking Nature, Culture and Community*. IUCN – The World Conservation Union.

Eagles, Paul F. J., Stephen F. McCool, and Christopher D. Haynes. 2002. *Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas: Guidelines for Planning and Management*. World Commission on Protected Areas, Best Practice Protected Area Guideline Series No. 8.

Mainka, Sue, Jeff McNeely, and Bill Jackson. 2005. *Depend on Nature – Ecosystem Services Supporting Human Livelihoods*. IUCN – The World Conservation Union, Gland, Switzerland.

National Ecotourism Strategy & Action Plan for Bulgaria (2004)

(http://www.ecotourism.bulgariatravel.org/docs/book_obrir_ENG.pdf)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulgarian-American_relations

Additional selected readings for the course will be posted as PDF files on the course website.

Course format

A combination of lectures (given by UGA instructors and guest lecturers from Sofia University; University of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Geodesy; Central Balkans National Park; and NGOs), discussion sessions, tours, field work, student presentations and community service.

Assignments and Activities

- 1) Journal (100 points): Students must keep a journal detailing all in-class experiences, to be submitted at mid-term and on the last day of class (see p. 4).
- 2) Service Learning Project (200 points): Student teams will participate in designing and conducting a project to benefit the Park and the community (see p. 4)
- 3) Service Project Report (100 points): Students will work in teams. Results will be presented in a formal report (3-4 pages) (see p. 5).
- 4) Attendance and Class Discussion (100 points): Punctual attendance at *all* class events and participation in class discussion are mandatory. During field studies, no student may leave the group without the consent of the faculty supervisor. Unless an absence is approved by one of the instructors or the Program Director, students will lose 10% of their final course grade for each day or part-day they fail to participate. Any unexcused absences or continued late arrival to program activities may, at the discretion of the Program Director, be grounds for dismissal from the program.

Evaluation

Based on 500 total points:

A (93–100%); A- (89.5– 92.9%); B+ (87–89.4%); B (83–86.9%); B- (79.5–82.9%); C+ (77–79.4%); C (73–76%); C- (69.5–72.9%); D (59.5–69.4%); F (below 59.4%)

- A – recognizes **excellent** work that stands out in comparison with that of other students at UGA and elsewhere; would attract the interest and appreciation of others; is both completely presented and innovative; would be described as superior and outstanding.
- B – acknowledges **good**, competent, proficient treatment of assigned material. Includes writing that is coherent, internally consistent, professionally presented (grammatically correct, etc.), and insightful. A grade of B is reserved for students who exceed adequate performance and show considerable promise for being highly effective.
- C – acknowledges **average**, adequate work that is acceptable in the knowledge reflected but is either flawed in its presentation or lacking insight, or both. If effective study habits and adequate amount of time (~2 hrs per each 1 hr of class contact time) are applied, a C is achievable in this class.
- D – acknowledges work that is inadequate, **below average**, but passable. This work is the minimal necessary to pass.
- F – work is **unacceptable** and below the minimum necessary to pass the course. Reserved for a few individuals who fail to put any measurable effort into participating and completing the work associated with this course. An F, and likely other penalties, is assigned to any work that is in opposition to UGA’s policies within “*A Culture of Honesty*.”

Assignment Deadlines

Assignments will be penalized -10% of total possible score per day it is late. Penalty begins 1 min past due date & time.

Policy for Make-up Assignments

There will be no make-up assignments. An Incomplete may be approved under extenuating circumstances such as significant illness or injury, or immediate family emergencies. Documentary evidence that explains the absence must be provided.

Academic Honesty

All academic work must meet standards contained in UGA’s “A Culture of Honesty” (see *UGA Policy on Academic Honesty*: <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>). Students are responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing **any academic work**. Penalties for academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to), award of an F for the course, suspension, notification placed on the student’s transcript of their violation of UGA’s Academic Honesty Policy, and expulsion from UGA. Ignorance of the policy is not an acceptable defense. Any cases of dishonesty will be reported to the UGA Academic Policy Panel.

UGA Policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs

See attached policy that will be applied to students enrolled in this course.

The course syllabus is a general plan; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Assignments and Activities

Journal (100 points)

Students will be required to keep a journal detailing all in-class experiences, including lectures, field trips and interpretation by hosts, discussion sessions, and other meetings. Include salient points of these experiences, personal observations about people we meet and sites we visit, and special notes about likes and dislikes of each experience, including lodging, food, transportation, etc. The principal purpose of the journal is to record facts and write your thoughts and impressions about each experience you have each day. Relate your journal entries to your readings and to your experiences in similar situations in the U.S. We will set aside 1 hour towards the end of each day for reflective journal writing; however, your journal should be with you at all times so you can note certain facts or experiences immediately. The journal will be collected at the mid-point of the course and evaluated (25 May 2009, 9 AM). A final evaluation of your journal will be made at the end of the course. Due date: 3 June 2009, Wednesday, 5 PM.

Evaluation and maximum points for each:

- 10 pts Daily entries are made;
- 30 pts Complete facts and thorough description included for each day’s scheduled activities;
- 30 pts Thoughtful reflections provided at the end of each day that relate to course readings;

20 pts Comparisons made between similar events in the U.S. and Bulgaria;
10 pts Writing is legible.

Service Learning Project (200 points)

Each 2-4 person team will select a project from the following list or propose a project that must be approved by the instructors. See pp. 32-35 of National Ecotourism Strategy & Action Plan (2004).

- 1.) development of, and producing interpretive signs for trail system
- 2.) providing a protocol for monitoring a species relative to levels of human disturbance; testing the protocol experimentally (re: monitoring biodiversity; conservation)
- 3.) development of a web site for marketing a particular attribute of the community and/or Park
- 4.) development of brochures that market an attribute of the community and/or Park
- 5.) developing a survey for visitors to gain insight into strengths and weaknesses of the community relative to their tourist experience
- 6.) development of a tourist package of activities in and around the community, encouraging multiple-night visits by tourists (e.g., competitive cluster model)
- 7.) designing a trail for day hikers
- 8.) designing a nature center for visitors
- 9.) outlining teaching modules for a nature center for visitors
- 10.) providing recommendations for accommodating specific types of tourists (e.g., family groups, older groups, adventure seekers, history enthusiasts, equestrian tourists, birders, mountain bikes, etc.)

Evaluation and maximum points for each:

- 50 pts Excellent plan designed and chronicled
- 50 pts Frequent and thorough communication with community contact person (people)
- 50 pts Enthusiastic participation in implementation of project
- 50 pts Thorough instructions provided to contact person (people) in an informal oral presentation and written draft, enabling the project to be used and refined in the future

Service Project Report (100 pts)

During the last week of the program, a final report of each team's project will be written from their draft. The team will elaborate on the plan that it designed, chronicled, and carried-out within the community. Successes and achievements of the team's work will be provided, as well as details of difficulties and obstacles the team encountered. Each team will provide recommendations for future work on this and/or similar projects that will assist the community in reaching its goals.

The report will be written in a computer lab on the campus of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" or University of Architecture, Civil Engineering, and Geodesy, Sofia. An oral presentation of the report will be given to our community hosts (date: 25 May 2009) and in Sofia, as well as the final written report given to hosts in Sofia and course instructors (date: 2 June 2009).

Evaluation and maximum points for each (achieved if each is excellent):

- 10 pts Introduction to the project, including why the project is needed (justification)
- 10 pts Description of the project location
- 20 pts Description of methods used to complete the project
- 20 pts Description of results of the project
- 30 pts Commentary on successes, failures, obstacles encountered, and suggestions for further work
- 10 pts Writing quality and grammar