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Introduction: This interdisciplinary course seeks to provide a unique educational experience for students to examine the relationship among economic, legal, biological, geological, marine and environmental processes and concerns. Using Belize as our focus, we will study the special environment and ecosystems there (barrier reef and tropical rainforest) and examine the ways in which this environment is threatened and protected. Belize contains not only a diverse range of ecosystems, flora, fauna and geology, but also an equally wide range of policy responses in an attempt to protect and conserve the natural environment as well as cultural heritage sites related to the Mayan culture. We also will examine the tourism industry in Belize from financial, marketing and sustainability perspectives. We will begin our exploration of these topics in four three-hour pre-departure classes at Rider during the Fall 2015 semester. We will continue our studies in Belize in January 2016 and will meet once during the Spring 2016 semester for three hours for debriefing and student presentations of their research projects.

Course Objectives:

- Examine the relationship among economic, legal, biological, geological, marine and environmental processes and concerns.
- Understand the unique environments and ecosystems of Belize.
- Evaluate the ways in which the natural environment is threatened and protected by business and regulatory practices.
- Understand the tourism industry in Belize from financial, marketing and sustainability perspectives.

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance, Participation and Homework: Attendance is mandatory at all pre-departure classes and at all scheduled activities in Belize. Students who fail to attend all of these classes and activities will NOT receive credit for the course. You are expected to have read, and be prepared to discuss, all assigned readings. You must also complete the written homework assignments for each class session. Your attendance and participation in all scheduled classes and activities and your homework will constitute 20% of your course grade.

2. Written Report and Presentation: To prepare for the trip, you will be divided into groups, with each group responsible for researching one aspect of our itinerary and sharing their findings with the entire class. Each student group must draft a 3-5 page written report of their findings, and will make a 15-minute presentation to the entire class. Your written paper will constitute 5% and your oral presentation will constitute 5% of your course grade. Presentations will be on November 6th and December 4th.

3. Trip Participation, Personal Reflection Paper and Journal: While in Belize, you will keep a daily journal in which you will reflect upon your experiences and respond to directed questions that we will pose (see sample journal guidelines). You will also be expected to participate in all discussions. At the end of each business/science/cultural site visit, as appropriate, you will complete a Site Visit Questionnaire (see guidelines below). Upon the conclusion of the travel portion of the course, you will complete a Personal Reflection Paper (see guidelines below). Your journal, personal reflection paper and participation will constitute 25% of your course grade. Journals and Reflection Papers will be due on February 15th.
4. Research Paper or Science Project. You are responsible for either: (a) drafting a 12-15 page (typed, double-spaced) research paper on a topic related to the course content; or (b) completing a science project related to the course content. The appropriate instructor must approve all research paper/science project topics. Your paper or project will constitute 35% of your course grade. Research papers/projects will be due on March 28th. You will also present your findings to the class during our post-trip class on April 8th. Your oral presentation will constitute 10% of your course grade.

**Course Logistics:** While in Belize, we will experience different accommodations and modes of transportation including airplanes, boats, buses and walking.

Please also be aware of a few important characteristics of the travel associated with the class that should be considered in light of each student’s individual medical and physical conditions. First, during the trip there is significant, although not overly strenuous, physical exertion as a part of the daily routine. Students will be walking, hiking, swimming, and climbing (light). While most of this activity is not strenuous, even the most moderate activity can be significant given high temperatures. Furthermore, while on the water, students should be aware that the boat may experience moderate seas. You may want to take medication appropriate for travel at sea.

Students will be expected to respect any natural environment we will be traveling through.

**Schedule of Classes**

First Pre-Departure Session: (Newman) Friday, September 25th: 6:00-9:00 PM **Introduction to Belize:** History, Government, Economy and People; Conservation in Belize

Reading Assignment:


Young, Colin. (March 2008). “Belize's Ecosystems: Threats and Challenges to Conservation in Belize.” Tropical Conservation Science. [http://tropicalconservationscience.mongabay.com/content/v1/08-03-03-Young.htm](http://tropicalconservationscience.mongabay.com/content/v1/08-03-03-Young.htm)

Second Pre-Departure Session: Friday, October 11th: 6:00 – 9:00 PM (Husch) – **The Marine Environment of Belize**

Reading Assignment:


Third Pre-Departure Session: (Newman): Friday, November 6th: 6:00-9:00 PM
Belize as a Tourist Destination; Marketing the Mayans; Ecotourism; Student Presentations

Reading Assignment:

Ecotourism: A Brief Introduction (Harvard Business School Case) - to be distributed in class


Fourth Pre-Departure Session: (Husch): Friday, December 4th: 6:00-9:00 PM The Geology & Tropical Rainforest of Belize; Student Presentations

Reading Assignment:
This Dynamic Earth, Kious & Tilling, Preface, Historical Perspective and the associated sidebars entitled “Inside the Earth”, What is a tectonic plate?, “Understanding Plate Motions, Hotspots, and Plate Tectonics and People”.


POST-TRIP SESSION:
April 4th, 2016: 6:00-9:00 PM — Dinner, Debrief and Student Presentations of Research Papers
**KEEPING A JOURNAL**

Below are some guidelines for your journal. Remember that your journal, personal reflection report and site visit questionnaires will comprise 20% of your final grade. Take time each day to write in your journal; otherwise, the task may become too overwhelming.

You will be a participant/observer in several small towns. What do you see going on? How are the people dressed? Are people friendly to strangers? How do people interact? Notice the architecture, the way the streets are laid out, the traffic patterns, and the natural environment. Would you be comfortable as an American studying or living here? What kinds of problems are you having if you don’t know the language?

At the end of your visit in each day…

- How did you spend your free time? Do you feel that you got to know the place?
- What was your opinion of the food, the hotels, and the transportation?
- Would you like to visit these places again? Why or why not?
- Analyze our tour operators in terms of their “eco” practices. Were we good “eco-tourists”—why or why not?

At the end of the trip

- How do residents of Belize view their relationship with their natural environment? Do they have a different perspective than many Americans?
- How did it feel to be an American in another country?
ORGANIZATION/SITE VISIT QUESTIONNAIRE

Please review this Questionnaire prior to our site visits and complete one Questionnaire for each visit.

Your Name: ___________________________________________________________

Organization/Site Name: ________________________________________________

Date/Time of Visit: _____________________________________________________

Name(s) of Presenter(s)/Guide: ___________________________________________

1. What did you learn about this site?

2. What were the site’s biggest challenges?

3. What procedures, if any, has this site instituted to limit its “environmental footprint”?
PERSONAL REFLECTION PAPER

Upon our return, you will draft a Personal Reflection Paper (no more than 3 typed, double-spaced pages) in which you will respond to the following questions:

a. What amazed you?
b. What disappointed you?
c. What concerned you?
d. What struck you emotionally?
e. What did you think of the people you met? Socially? Professionally?
   1. Did you like them?
   2. Trust them?
   3. Feel comfortable with them?
f. How did your social, moral, religious, and personal values compare with the culture of Belize and with the people that you met?
g. How did this trip impact your understanding of the trends and forces affecting sustainability and environmental protection efforts in the world today?
h. What are the major forces of change in Belize and what do those forces signify for the future?
i. What do you envision your professional role to be over the next 20 years? How, if at all, has this trip impacted your vision of your career and/or personal future?