

Sustainability and Conservation at local level in Costa Rica

STUDY GUIDE – Spring 2025

Changes may occur

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1. Introduction

This study guide is a supplement to the Course Description of Sustainability and Conservation in Costa Rica. It will give information about the courses and advice on how best to study and carry out the different tasks.

If you have any questions related to academic writing, please contact costarica@kulturstudier.no

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2. Course structure

This section provides information about the different sections of the Sustainability course.

Part 1: Self-study

Learning outcome

The self-study reading will introduce students to a basic background knowledge about some important social and environmental dynamics in the rural context of Costa Rica. Students will also explore, at an elemental level some concepts which will be medullar through the course such as, agrifood system, sustainable agriculture and women empowerment in rural areas. You will write a paper which answers three questions based on two articles and a documentary.

Formal requirements

The reflection is to be comprised of approximately **1200 words**. This work must be submitted no later than **February 13th, 2025**. You must write your document in the following format: It must be a Microsoft word document, Times New Roman, 12 points, space 1.5 between lines. It is obligatory to include front page with your full name and word count information. **The assignment must have a proper reference list accounting all other sources you have used, including videos, news or documentaries. (Please see section 4 on academic writing)**. It is essential that you adhere carefully to the formal requirements of both, this written assignment and all others during the course. This is a *working requirement* and must be passed (Approved) to complete the course. The intention is to give you an early orientation of how you will be assessed, and what to expect from the other submissions you will be required to compose during the course. Students will get the answer whether they approved the assignment three-four weeks after the submission date. Those students who did not approve must resubmit the assignment. Deadline for new submissions (Not approved) March,14th before 16:00 pm.

Self-study assignment	Deadline February 13 th
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A throughline thematic in the course is the study of sustainable and fair practices which can contribute to nature conservation and social-economic welfare in rural areas. This is a preliminary activity which will reveal what is really at stake when exploring the sustainability and the environmental justice of food production in the Global South. Read this interactive story about women's situation within food systems: <https://www.fao.org/interactive/women-in-agrifood-systems/en/>

After reading the interactive story, now you can begin with the self-study assignment

Sources	Written assignment
Reading for part 1 Roosendaal, L., Brouwer, H., Garcia-Campos, P. & Prado-Rivera, F. 2021. Costa Rica's journey towards sustainable food systems – The	Part 1: Write a short essay (400 words) about some of the most notorious weaknesses and strengths of Costa Rica respecting its agrifood systems.

<p>processes and practices that made a difference. Rome, FAO.</p> <p>Link: Costa Ricas journey towards sustainable food sytems</p>	
<p>Readings for part 2</p> <p>-FAO. 2023. The status of women in agrifood systems. Rome. (Only Chapter 2 and 3)</p> <p>Link: Status of Women in Food Systems</p> <p>Read only Chapter 2 and 3</p>	<p>Part 2: Write a short essay (400 words) about at least five different unfavourable conditions experienced by women in agrifood systems and how these negative conditions could be meliorated (according to the report, other sources and to your own opinion).</p> <p>-</p>
<p>Documentary for part 3</p> <p>Link: Buried seeds documentary</p>	<p>Part 3</p> <p>Can you find in the documentary some testimonies which reinforce some of the assumptions of the two articles you have studied? In other words, is there any interview which refers to the unfavourable conditions experienced by women in agricultural production or which deals with the weaknesses and strengths of Costa Rica agrifood system? (400 words)</p>

Part 2: Studies in Costa Rica

Lectures and seminars (30 hours of instruction)

Through the semester, there will be 8 participatory seminars and 6 lectures with a duration of 2 hours each. Generally, lectures will take place either on Tuesdays or Wednesdays. There will be several guest lecturers. During week 1 students will get a document with an updated calendar with all guest lectures. Most of participatory seminars will be given online. [At this link](#) it is possible to access the detailed calendar with all lectures, deadlines and obligatory academic excursions.

Day excursions, overnight field excursions, and lectures during field excursions (50 hours of instruction)

This course features an experiential learning approach through the visit to several community-based organizations. These visits will allow us to better understand the social and cultural dimension of sustainable food systems, nature conservation and development in rural areas in the tropics.

The submission deadline for the academic report on the two-day excursions is 20th of March, 2025. The general topic for the day excursion is the relation between the theory you will explore in some selected readings and your observations and experiences during the day excursions. In the seminar in week 4 it will be explained how to best make a correct reference list and what the evaluation requirements are.

The overnight field trip (four nights in Longo Mai and one night in FUDEBIOL) combines a practical and theoretical approach. Kulturstudier students will be organized in medium-size groups (12-15 students) to visit and live in Longo Mai, departing on Mondays and returning to San Isidro on Fridays. The main academic goal of this stay is to get insight into the social and ecological reality of rural communities in Central America and learn some basics about agrifood systems, agroecology, and agroforestry in tropical ecosystems. The main academic goal of the one-night field trip in FUDEBIOL is to experience and understand the importance of this reforestation and environmental education project and prepare to the environmental experiential learning program in Longo Mai.

During Longo Mai visit we will learn about the history of this project: a kind of intentional community attempting to provide sustainable livelihoods to landless peasants through organic agriculture for self-sufficiency and forest protection. This overnight trip will also function as a cultural immersion to practice your Spanish and get experience of the Costa Rican lifestyle in the rural areas. As a Spanish and Sustainability student, you will live in the house of a Costa Rican family together with at least another student. While students are in Longo Mai, there will always be Kulturstudier staff on site. The trip from San Isidro to Longo Mai takes 45 minutes by car.

Longo Mai program

During your stay, there will be many academic and practical activities, such as:

- Introductory lecture about the history of Longo Mai
- Guided visit to the coffee and/or sugar cane fields
- Guided visit to Passiflora agroforestry project
- Guided visit to the Longo Mai natural reserve
- Guided visit and workshop in the permaculture project of the artist and activist Guadalupe Urbina
- Cocoa workshop: How to make chocolate directly from the cocoa tree
- Agroecology and agroforestry workshop: Students will experiment and learn about organic agriculture and agroforestry in the tropics
- Conversatory about the ecological and socioeconomic challenges of this region
- One Spanish lesson during your stay
- One group reflection about the environmental experiential learning approach and the academic relevance of the excursion.

It is important to note that the agroecology and agroforestry workshops will require some moderate physical activity (approximately 3 hours each morning in Longo Mai). As a student, you will not be working in agricultural hard labour. The idea is to experience, experiment and practice some agroecological techniques and get a direct sensorial contact with the cultural and ecological dimensions of planting and keeping some crops such as cocoa, coffee, cassava, pineapple, passion fruit, heart of palm, and many species of fruit trees. Remember that it is necessary to wear proper clothing. Due to the high level of precipitation in Longo Mai, the fields and the forest may be muddy even during the dry season. Therefore, it is important to wear rubber boots during the workshops.

Group work presentation based on the overnight field trip

After the participation in Longo Mai, students will present an assigned topic in groups of 4-6 students. There will be a seminar on week 10 in the program where it will be explained how the presentation must be done and what the evaluation requirements are.

Final exam

During the final seminar in week 15 students will get instruction and guidance about the final exam. In this 2-day take-home exam, students will answer two general questions that cover the learning outcomes for this course. Date: Last week of the course.

Part 3: Evaluations and exams in Costa Rica

UISIL uses the following grading for all the subjects.

Grading Scale

90 - 100%	A	Excellent
80 - 89 %	B	Good
70 - 79%	C	Fair
Less than 70%		Failed

Evaluation and submission dates

Exams and other submissions must be written in English.

Self-study assignment Submission deadline: 13 th of February	Approved / Not approved
Participation in field excursions	10 %
Academic day excursions report Submission deadline: 20 th of March	25 %
Academic overnight field trip group presentation (based on Longo Mai and FUDEBIOL visits).	25%
Final Home Exam: Week 16: Tuesday (May 6 th) from 09:00 am until Wednesday (May, 7 th) at 16:00 pm.	40 %

3. Academic calendar and course reader

Reading list Compendium: The course is divided in four thematic units: circular and solidarity economy; responsible governance; agrobiodiversity and environmental consciousness. You will be able to buy the compendium in paper format with the articles in Costa Rica, at the price of the photocopy work. The reading list schedule and calendar with all lectures, submissions and activities can also be found [at this link](#).

4. Guidance on how to read and write academic texts

Guidance to read an academic paper

Academic reading is a skill which only improves with practice. Every skilful academic reader has expended hundreds (or thousands) of hours to achieve this level. Evidently, the content of a book about Sustainability is very theoretical because it combines topics on history, economics, sociology, anthropology, and ecology. Therefore, it is not unusual that students who are in their first or second year at university experience that it is quite challenging to understand all the ideas and information. It is important to do your best effort and consider as normal the fact that you probably three, four, or more times before you fully understand it. The lectures in Costa Rica will be very pedagogical and the professor will take in consideration that many of these topics and theories are completely new for you. At the end of the course, you will notice that you are mastering academic reading much better and that will help you in the next years of your studies. It will be very helpful to search for general information about the recent history of Costa Rica on the internet or other sources to get some necessary background knowledge. [This website](#) provides good advice about academic reading.

Guidance to write an academic paper

There are two writing stages throughout this course. First, you will write a reflection during your self-study period. Reading the assigned material will certainly help you dive into this issue at more depth. Second, you will present two reports and a written exam at the end of the course. Together with the oral in-class work, these written assignments shall serve to stimulate and document your:

- a. reading and understanding of the course literature and other relevant information,
- b. critical reflection upon the topics in question, and
- c. familiarity with the standards of academic writing.

We encourage you to be pro-active both during the lectures, seminars, and also outside class. We will gladly discuss any concerns/ ideas/ thoughts/ confusions you might have either via mail or in person. Show initiative! Our teachers are available and more than happy to engage with you.

Some guidelines concerning your short essays:

Although you are not expected to deliver original contributions to research, there are some basic guidelines that you ought to follow when writing your academic assignments. These guidelines are in accordance with usual standards for University/College assignments and will, in combination with the overall purpose defined above, serve as our criteria for assessment. They are as follows:

1. Define your topic, intention and structure in the introduction – and stick to them

Whether writing a short paper, a group paper or a home exam essay, you must have an introduction. Here you first present your topic/s. Then you formulate what question/s related to the topic/s that you intend to look into. These question/s and your intention must be clearly formulated and realistic. Finally, you outline the structure of your paper/essay, that is, how you will proceed in the following pages to critically reflect and explore your question/s. This structure must be simple and logical, normally resting on three building blocks:

- d. an introductory part as already described,

- e. a main part (normally consisting of various sub-chapters/sections) where you present your material, and discuss your results in relation to the overall topic/s and question/s raised in the introduction, and
- f. a concluding part where you summarise your study and draw some conclusions.

Once you have defined your topic/s, intention and structure in the introduction, it is important that you stick to them throughout the paper.

You have the right to guidance during the writing periods. We advise you to make use of this opportunity, since writing consists in large part of re-writing, and it is often through the constructive and critical feedback of another person that we develop our ideas further.

2. Systematize your material

It is essential for the quality - and readability - of the text that you present and discuss your material in a systematic manner. By “your material” we mean the different views/theoretical approaches and empirical examples you use to study the topic/s in question. There is no standard way of doing this. What is important is that you give reasons in the text for why you choose to put the various elements of the material together the way you do. Each time you introduce a new idea or example, remember to ask yourself: Is it clear to the reader (and yourself) why this idea/example is being introduced here? If your answer is not a clear “yes”, the text needs revising.

3. Discuss and conclude your results

What is equally vital for the quality of the paper, but often forgotten, is that you *discuss* the material (the views/theoretical approaches and empirical examples) in relation to the topic and questions raised in the introduction. It is this element of discussion that makes the paper an academic study. We encourage you to use these papers as opportunities to further develop your own, critical voice.

Finally, in the end, you must summarize your study and draw some tentative conclusions on the basis of the above discussion.

4. Write clearly and smoothly

While academic writing demands a formal style, this does not mean using intricate formulations. On the contrary, you should search for phrasings that communicate your ideas as clearly and precisely as possible. In addition, and this is equally important, you should put effort in establishing good flow between the elements of the text. This implies that there must be a meaningful connection between the various phrases of a section, between the various sections of a chapter, and between the various chapters of the paper/essay. To obtain this, it is often helpful to begin papers by briefly stating what you are about to do, and how it relates to where you come from.

5. Get the technicalities right

The official referencing style for the program UISIL-Kulturstudier is APA 7th. It is obligatory to use this style. During the first weeks in our program, there will be a seminar about academic writing. Please consult the following website: <https://kildekompasset.no/en/referencing-styles/apa-7th/>.

If you have any questions related to academic writing, please contact costarica@kulturstudier.no