

ROOTED LOCALLY. IMPACTING GLOBALLY.



THE SCHOOL FOR FIELD STUDIES **FY25 ANNUAL REPORT**

SEPTEMBER 2024 - AUGUST 2025

*Alumni Choice Award Winner
Photo Credit: Sam Zwiefelhofer (Tanzania, Spring 2025)*

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Dear Friends of The School for Field Studies,

It is a privilege to share with you the first Annual Report from The School for Field Studies (SFS) in several years and my first as President. As we look back on Fiscal Year 2025, we do so with a sense of gratitude for the vision and leadership that brought us here, and with great excitement for the future that lies ahead.

For more than four decades, SFS has been rooted in the belief that immersive, field-based education transforms lives and, through those lives, changes the world. Our alumni, now numbering more than 21,500, are a testament to that impact: scientists, educators, policymakers, and leaders advancing sustainability and resilience in communities worldwide. That legacy is a testament to the dedication of our faculty, staff, and supporters who built a foundation strong enough to carry us into this new era.

This year, we have taken deliberate steps to strengthen our programs and expand our reach, with new programs in Croatia and Italy. From our restoration of coral reefs in the Turks and Caicos Islands, to conservation partnerships in East Africa, to rainforest recovery projects in Australia, our students are not only learning, they are contributing to solutions in real time. Our centers around the world are thriving as hubs of collaboration, where students, faculty, and local partners come together in pursuit of a shared goal: a more sustainable and just planet.

At the same time, we are charting a bold course forward: innovating our curricula and research to meet the urgent environmental challenges of our time, strengthening our commitment to the communities we serve, and expanding opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to join us in the field.

With your continued partnership, SFS will remain a leader in experiential education and applied environmental research—**rooted locally, impacting globally.**

Thank you for your support, your trust, and your shared commitment to our mission. I am honored to lead SFS into its next chapter, and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together.

With gratitude,



A stylized, handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large 'K' and 'A' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Katlyn Armstrong
President, The School for Field Studies



SINCE 1980

45+ YEARS OF IMPACT

Former President **Dr. Jim Cramer** compiled an enviable record over his thirteen-year tenure—expanding SFS from six locations to twelve, across six continents; strengthening our research capacity; leading the organization prudently through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic; actively engaging the talents of more than 21,000 alumni; and imaginatively projecting SFS across a broad media landscape.

Photo Credit: Ka'Voizia Glynn (Costa Rica, Summer 2025)

SFS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

FY24-FY25

TERRY ANDREAS, Chair & SFS Founder
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For the most up-to-date information on SFS governance and staff, please visit our website.

12 CENTERS • 6 CONTINENTS



OUR MISSION

SFS creates transformative study abroad experiences through field-based learning and research. Our educational programs explore the social and ecological dimensions of the complex environmental problems faced by our local partners, contributing to sustainable solutions in the places where we live and work. The SFS community is part of a growing network of individuals and institutions committed to environmental stewardship.

OUR VISION

SFS envisions a world where each of us is a responsible steward of the environment and where society is grounded in the understanding that all life, including humankind, is deeply intertwined. We envision a world where all people have access to clean air, clean water, nutritious food, and the other essential services of a healthy ecosystem – now and for all future generations to come.

Young people are the future. We believe that in order to achieve our vision and solve our world's biggest challenges, we must train and educate the next generation of leaders to think critically, act compassionately, and work collaboratively – our diversity is our strength.

WHO WE REACHED

EXPANDING ACCESS & STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

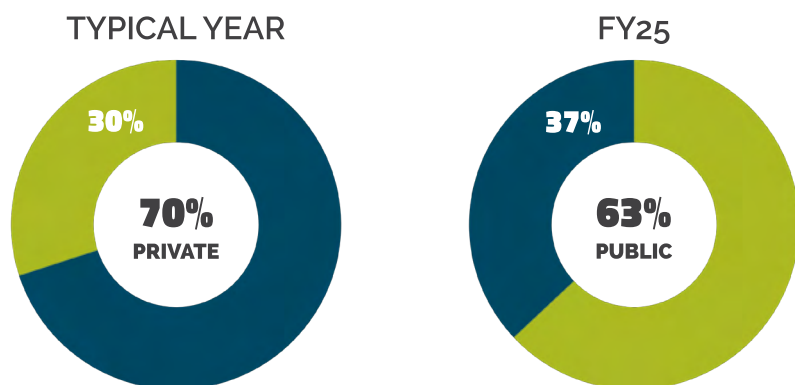
693
STUDENTS

156
SENDING SCHOOLS

38
PROGRAMS OFFERED
(Fall 2024, Spring & Summer 2025)

THE SHIFT: PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE

A measurable shift toward greater public-university participation.



**ACCESS
MILESTONE**
SUMMER
2025

We welcomed our **first HBCU student in at least a decade**, from **Florida Agricultural & Mechanical University**, who joined our Costa Rica program — a meaningful step forward in our commitment to access and inclusion.

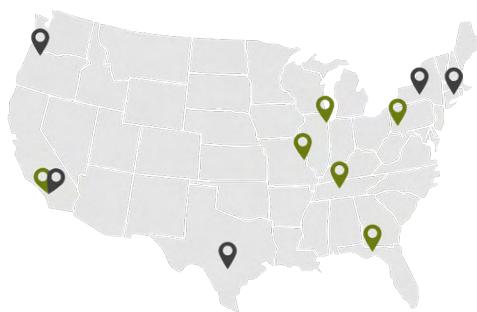
TOP SENDING SCHOOLS

- Colorado College
- Davidson College
- Harvard University
- Reed College
- Smith College
- University of Colorado/Boulder
- University of Michigan/Ann Arbor
- University of Minnesota/Twin Cities
- University of Wisconsin/Madison
- Yale University

*After sustained outreach, SFS welcomed **six new partner institutions** and renewed relationships with **five returning schools** in FY25.*

NEW PARTNER INSTITUTIONS

- Carnegie Mellon University
- Florida A&M University
- Harvey Mudd College
- Loyola University Chicago
- Vanderbilt University
- Washington University in St. Louis



RECONNECTED PARTNERS

- Cornell University
- Lewis and Clark College
- Pitzer College
- Trinity University (TX)
- University of Connecticut

SCHOOL OF RECORD

Our courses are accredited through our School of Record, the **University of Minnesota–Twin Cities**, which has served in this role since 2014. The University partners with SFS to ensure program quality through ongoing oversight and five-year program reviews, and issues official transcripts to SFS students as needed.



Photo Credit: Isabel Colvin (Australia, Summer 2025)

AUSTRALIA

CENTER FOR RAINFOREST STUDIES

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS AND SKILLS TAUGHT

- Biodiversity surveys (flora and fauna)
- Vegetation structure and restoration monitoring
- Invertebrate collection, pinning, and preservation
- Bryophyte and dung beetle sampling as bioindicators
- Habitat assessment for mammals (e.g., platypus)
- Socioecological research methods, interviews, and perception surveys
- Data collection for conservation management trials

KEY EXCURSIONS & FIELD SITES

- Watsonville Cultural Park
- Mabi Rainforest remnants
- Regenerative and monoculture farms
- Reforested urban parks (e.g., Malanda BioBlitz site)
- Road-creek crossings and cinder cone restoration sites



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Long-term rainforest and cinder cone restoration projects
- Volunteer work with local conservation organizations
- Participation in BioBlitz events engaging the broader community
- Presentation of student research findings to local stakeholders
- Collaboration with Aboriginal communities to document and preserve Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Development of biocultural resources (e.g., signage, field guides, educational materials)

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Tablelands Regional Council
- James Cook University
- TREAT and Landcare
- Petals in the Park and the Regen Hub
- Local landholders and restoration stakeholders (including cinder cone partners)
- Emerging partnership with Rainforest to Bush, a First Nations-owned cultural experience provider
- Agricultural cooperatives and rural livelihood groups



Photo Credit: Eli Morrow (Australia, Fall 2017)



Photo Credit: Glenda Wee (Australia, Summer 2024)



Photo Credit: Sascha Chernesky (Bhutan, Summer 2025)

BHUTAN

CENTER FOR CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS AND SKILLS TAUGHT

- Camera trapping and wildlife surveys
- Forest inventory and biodiversity assessments
- Socio-economic interviews and community research
- GIS, mapping, and spatial analysis
- Integration of Bhutanese conservation policy and governance systems into coursework



KEY EXCURSIONS & FIELD SITES

- Fieldwork conducted across multiple regions and valleys, including:
 - Paro, Phobjikha, Punakha, Wangdue, Bumthang, Thimphu, Phuentsholing, and Haa



13 DIRECTED
RESEARCH PROJECTS



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Environmental clean-ups in Phobjikha Valley
- Tree planting and habitat restoration
- Student research presentations for local stakeholders

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Bhutan Ecological Society (BES)
- Royal University of Bhutan (College of Natural Resources)
- Department of Forests and Park Services
- Bhutan Trust Fund for Environmental Conservation
- Faculty engagement in national conservation and advisory roles



Photo Credit: Isaac Goldings (Bhutan, Fall 2023)



CAMBODIA

CENTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE AND MEKONG ECOLOGIES

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT & ACADEMIC OUTPUTS

- Training in biodiversity surveys, forest structure assessments, freshwater and wetland sampling, fisheries monitoring, soil analysis, GIS, and socio-economic research methods
- Applied field learning across tropical forests, rivers, wetlands, Tonle Sap floodplain systems, and agroecological landscapes
- Field excursions examined conservation, fisheries, hydropower, land use, and livelihoods in the Mekong region
- Coursework integrated ecological, social, and policy perspectives on resource management and sustainability

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Tonle Sap region (Kampong Kleng, Chong Kneas, Prek Toal Biosphere Reserve)
- Mondulkiri Province (Elephant Valley Project, Busra Waterfalls, Senmonorom)
- Stung Treng Province (Sopheakmit Waterfalls, SeSan II Hydropower Dam)
- Kratie Province (Kampi Irrawaddy dolphin area, community forests)
- Preah Vihear and Siem Reap Provinces (community forests, Kulen Mountain)



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Environmental education and youth outreach with local schools and after school programs
- Cultural and academic exchange with Cambodian university students
- Community-based conservation activities, including waste reduction and habitat stewardship
- Student research sharing and engagement with local partners and community members

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Cambodian universities, including Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia (PUC)
- Community forestry networks and Indigenous organizations
- Local conservation NGOs and environmental organizations
- Agricultural cooperatives and rural livelihood groups
- Education-focused community organizations and schools





CHILE

CENTER FOR CLIMATE STUDIES



Photo Credit: Rami Hage (Chile, Summer 2024)

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Marine and fjord-based field research techniques
- Water quality sampling and analysis
- Coastal pollution assessment
- Climate and ecological data collection across marine, freshwater, and terrestrial systems
- Research vessel-based field methods
- Scientific research design and analysis

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Southern Patagonia: Field research across 10+ terrestrial, freshwater, glacial, and marine sites
- Protected Areas Studied:
 - Torres del Paine National Park
 - Isla Magdalena Natural Monument
 - Pali Aike National Park

ACADEMIC & CONSERVATION IMPACT

- Research findings informed local conservation planning and management strategies
- Student and faculty data contributed to understanding climate change impacts in a highly sensitive region
- Strengthened the Center's role as a field research hub in Patagonia

22 DIRECTED RESEARCH PROJECTS



Photo Credit: Betsy Overstrum (Chile, Fall 2022)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

- Active collaboration with CONAF (Chile's National Forest Service)
- Partnerships with municipal governments, private conservation reserves, estancias, and universities
- Weekly student participation in local environmental and community projects, including:
 - Recycling and compost initiatives
 - Fossil classification and geoconservation
 - Environmental education and outreach



Photo Credit: Eva Coleman (Chile, Spring 2023)



Photo Credit: Isabelle Bruder (Costa Rica, Spring 2022)

COSTA RICA

CENTER FOR ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE STUDIES



FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Biodiversity inventories & species monitoring
- Bat mist-netting & acoustic monitoring
- Tree climbing & canopy camera trapping
- Physiological plant ecology & soil analysis
- GIS mapping and statistical analysis (R software)
- Participatory Action Research & social cartography

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Tropical Dry Forest – Santa Rosa National Park
- Tropical Rainforest – Centro Manú
- Cloud Forest – Monteverde
- Highlands & Páramo – Cerro de la Muerte (Cerro Vueltas)
- Agroforestry systems & coffee/cacao farms (Altos de Naranjo, La Amelia, Carrizal)
- Community-managed water protection forests (Atenas region)

63 AMPHIBIAN & REPTILE SPECIES
RECORDED IN BAJO LA PAZ SURVEYS

8 BAT SPECIES DOCUMENTED
DURING THE FIRST BAT COUNT IN ATENAS

66 INDIVIDUAL BATS
CAPTURED, STUDIED, AND RELEASED

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Reforestation near water springs with ASADA Barrio San José
- Community Participation Survey in La Presa
- World Food Day celebration (Atenas)
- Il Water & Biodiversity Festival
- First public Tree-Climbing Experience in Atenas
- First Bat Count in Atenas (RELCOM international effort)

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Monteverde Institute
- Municipality of Atenas
- University of Costa Rica (UCR)
- National Technical University of Costa Rica (UTN)
- ASADA Barrio San José (community water association)
- RELCOM (Latin American Bat Conservation Network)
- Local community water committees and conservation organizations



PROGRAM GROWTH & CAPACITY BUILDING

NEW INITIATIVES EXPANDED OR LAUNCHED

- Edible Forest & greenhouse project
- Composting system developed with UTN students
- Expanded volunteer & practicum pathways



7 DIRECTED RESEARCH PROJECTS



Photo Credit: Blue World Institute

CROATIA

CENTER FOR CONSERVATION OF MARINE MEGAFAUNA

NEW CENTER MILESTONE

- Inaugural academic term (Fall 2024)
- First two student cohorts launched across fall and spring terms



Photo Credit: Blue World Institute

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Sea turtle rehabilitation
- Boat-based cetacean surveys
- Photo-ID and abundance modeling
- Acoustic monitoring (hydrophones)
- GIS mapping and statistical analysis (R software)

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Adriatic Sea (open-water surveys)
- Cres–Lošinj Archipelago (primary field site)
- Brijuni National Park (conservation management case study)
- Fisheries interaction zones (industrial and small-scale)
- Blue World Institute – Sea Turtle Rescue Center (Lošinj) (applied rehabilitation and conservation training)



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Marine conservation efforts, including student-supported coastal and underwater cleanup activities
- Freshwater habitat restoration, assisting local partners with pond clearance to improve biodiversity
- Agricultural and cultural engagement, working alongside local families during traditional olive harvests
- Place-based collaboration, embedding students in community-led conservation and land stewardship efforts

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Blue World Institute of Marine Research and Conservation (BWI)
- Local fisheries groups and marine stakeholders
- Local dive operators
- Local environmental NGOs
- Local agricultural producers and small businesses
- Local families and community land stewards on Lošinj Island



11 DIRECTED
RESEARCH PROJECTS



ITALY

CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE FOOD SYSTEMS

NEW CENTER MILESTONE

- **Inaugural academic term (Fall 2024)**
- First two student cohorts launched across fall and spring terms



FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

STUDENTS CONDUCTED

- Ecosystem service observations
- Agri-environmental questionnaires
- Bioindicator field protocols (soil fauna, pollinators)

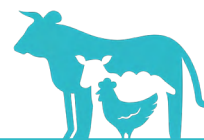
MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

(Tuscany & Southern Italy)

- Chianti Classico Region: vineyards, olive groves, oak woodlands, and agricultural landscapes
- Maremma Region & Orbetello Lagoon: coastal farms, wetlands, Mediterranean ecosystems, and protected areas
- Mugello–Casentino Region: mountain pastures, forests, agro–pastoral systems, and Casentino Forest National Park
- Sicily: Aeolian (Eolian) Archipelago
Overnight field excursion to:
 - Lipari
 - Vulcano
 - Salina

7

DIRECTED RESEARCH PROJECTS



19+

FARMS ENGAGED

In Directed Research Interviews & Field Exercises

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- *English for Pasta* language exchange
- Public Directed Research presentations at Greve municipal hall for farmers, local officials, and community members

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- COOP Greve
- SPEVIS agronomists
- WWF Oasis of Orbetello
- Foreste Casentinesi National Park
- Maremma Tuscany Regional Park
- 19+ regional farms in Chianti, Maremma, Mugello–Casentino, and Chianti Classico



Photo Credit: Dryden Eliason (Italy, Fall 2024)



Photo Credit: William Hughes (Kenya/Tanzania, Spring 2010)

KENYA

CENTER FOR ENDANGERED SPECIES CONSERVATION

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Line transects
- Habitat assessment
- GIS & spatial mapping
- Behavioral observation
- Camera trap data collection
- Conservation data interpretation

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Naboisho Conservancy
- Rift Valley ecosystems
- Maasai Mara National Reserve
- Community-managed conservancies
- Human–wildlife conflict interface zones



Photo Credit: Donovan Snell (Kenya, Summer 2025)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

ENGAGEMENT WITH

- Maasai community members
- Local conservancy leadership
- Community wildlife scouts

FOCUS AREAS

- Human–wildlife coexistence
- Community-led conservation models
- Land-use planning and conservation governance

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Local conservancies and conservation NGOs
 - Nature Kenya (*NEW*)
 - Maasai Mara Community Wildlife Conservancies Association (*NEW*)
 - Giraffe Conservation Foundation (*NEW*)
 - Big Life Foundation
 - Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund
 - Jane Goodall Institute
 - William Holden Wildlife Education Centre
 - Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS)
 - Ol Pejeta Conservancy



Photo Credit: Kristen Beattie (Kenya/Tanzania, Fall 2014)



Photo Credit: Shannon Hickey (Costa Rica, Fall 2023)

PANAMA

CENTER FOR TROPICAL ISLAND BIODIVERSITY STUDIES



FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Tropical forest biodiversity surveys
- Vegetation plots and forest structure assessment
- Agroforestry system analysis
- Soil sampling and land-use change assessment
- Species identification (flora and select fauna)
- GIS and spatial analysis for conservation planning
- Community-based research methods
- Scientific research design, data analysis, and presentation

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Lowland tropical forest sites in central Panama
- Agroforestry systems managed by local landowners
- Forest research plots and conservation areas
- Rural agricultural landscapes examining land-use change, soil processes, and biodiversity



Photo Credit: Danielle Recco (Panama, Spring 2023)



14 DIRECTED
RESEARCH PROJECTS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Environmental education and outreach with local schools and community groups
- Emphasis on conservation awareness and sustainable land use
- Collaboration with local farmers and agroforestry practitioners
- Integration of community knowledge into academic coursework

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Local schools and community organizations
- Local farmers and agroforestry practitioners
- Community land managers and conservation stakeholders
- Regional conservation and environmental organization



Photo Credit: Mike Halamek (Panama, Fall 2015)



Photo Credit: Mark Bowler (Peru)

PERU

CENTER FOR FOR AMAZON STUDIES



Photo Credit: Mark Bowler (Peru)



Photo Credit: Sydney Larson (Peru, Spring 2018)

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Ecological field experiments and data collection
- GIS and spatial analysis for land use and conservation
- Community-based research methods
- Integration of Indigenous knowledge into ecological research
- Scientific research design, writing, and oral presentation

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS

- Iquitos (Amazon Basin)
- Cusco region (Andean–Amazon interface)

 **12 DIRECTED
RESEARCH PROJECTS**



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Environmental education workshops for children
- Biodiversity and conservation outreach activities
- Participatory workshops returning research results to local stakeholders
- Joint restoration and cleanup activities near the CAS campus

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Hoja Viva
- Centro Bartolomé de las Casas
- Chirikyacu and El Naranjal (Kichwa communities)
- WamanWasi and Indigenous producer associations
- Universidad Nacional de la Amazonía Peruana (UNAP)
- Local Peruvian researchers and field scientists
- Regional conservation and watershed management organizations





Photo Credit: Delaney O'Brien (Tanzania, Spring 2025)

TANZANIA

CENTER FOR WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT STUDIES



Photo Credit: Savannah Vonesh (Tanzania, Spring 2024)

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Wildlife census techniques
- Line transects & distance sampling
- Camera trap deployment & data analysis
- Behavioral observation of large mammals
- Habitat assessment & vegetation surveys
- GIS, spatial mapping & statistical analysis
- Human–wildlife conflict assessment
- Conservation research design & field ethics

MAJOR FIELD EXCURSIONS & STUDY AREAS

- Tarangire National Park
- Lake Manyara National Park
- Ngorongoro Conservation Area
- Community-managed Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)
- Northern Tanzania rangelands



Photo Credit: Max Zeltsar (Tanzania, Fall 2023)

17 DIRECTED
RESEARCH
PROJECTS



~35,000 KM²

**TARANGIRE–MANYARA
ECOSYSTEM STUDIED**

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Tree nursery development and seedling preparation for community distribution
- Environmental education and support for local primary schools
- Beekeeping for sustainable livelihoods: A student-led Directed Research project supported beekeeping equipment and hives in the Karatu District, advancing livelihoods and conservation

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Collaboration with local communities, primary schools, conservation practitioners, and park authorities, including:
 - Tanzania National Parks Authority, Ngorongoro Conservation Area Authority, Honeyguide Foundation, Tarangire Lion Project, and African People & Wildlife Conservancy



Photo Credit: Jayson Leem (TCI, Spring 2025)

TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

CENTER FOR MARINE RESOURCE STUDIES



Photo Credit: John DeBuysser (TCI, Fall 2015)

FIELD-BASED LEARNING & RESEARCH



42 PADI OPEN WATER
CERTIFICATIONS

59 PADI ADVANCED
CERTIFICATIONS

FIELD METHODS TAUGHT

- Benthic habitat assessment
- GIS and spatial mapping
- Scientific diving protocols and safety
- Fish identification and underwater visual surveys
- Coral nursery maintenance and reef restoration techniques
- Behavioral observation of marine species
- Conservation data interpretation and analysis



460
CORAL FRAGMENTS
PROPAGATED & OUTPLANTED

7 IN-WATER NURSERY
LINES ESTABLISHED

17 DIRECTED
RESEARCH PROJECTS



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PARTNERSHIPS

PRIMARY COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

- Marine conservation outreach and education
- Collaboration with local fishers on fisheries management community knowledge-sharing through research dissemination
- Improved access and safety through a new shared floating dock

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Turks & Caicos Islands Department of Environment & Coastal Resources (DECR)
- Local fishers and marine stakeholders
- Visiting scientists and academic partners
- Sailrock Resort
- Salterra Resort & Spa





RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

TURNING FIELD RESEARCH INTO ACTION

Directed Research is a faculty-mentored capstone course in which students conduct independent scientific research during the final weeks of the semester. Students design a study, collect and analyze data, and present their findings—contributing to ongoing research in areas such as climate resilience, wildlife ecology, food security, coral health, and sustainable development.



DR. KATIE GOODALL

*SFS Dean of Academic Affairs
Kenya, Spring 2001*

Directed Research provides students with the strongest possible foundation in

field-based, environmental inquiry. Our Center-based model means that, within three months, students can dive deeply into environmental research in ways rarely found in undergraduate curricula. In the process, students learn what responsible research can be: grounded in community relationships, honoring different ways of knowing, and shared with diverse audiences. Directed Research teaches lifelong critical thinking skills, no matter where SFS alumni journey next.



PUBLICATION MILESTONE



508 PUBLICATIONS TO DATE

81 WITH STUDENT COLLABORATION

2024	47 Publications 6 Student Collaborations
2025	39 Publications 5 Student Collaborations



166 DIRECTED
RESEARCH PROJECTS (FY25)

EXPLORE MORE
SFS RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

DR. LEON MACH

Center Director, Panama

From a round-the-world sabbatical to new global research collaborations, Dr. Leon Mach had an extraordinary year. His travels across Portugal, Spain, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka deepened his surf tourism research, sparked international partnerships, and expanded conversations around sustainability, access, and resilience in coastal communities. In 2025, Dr. Mach was also promoted to Center Director of SFS Panama, reflecting SFS's commitment to supporting faculty growth and leadership—both in the field and beyond.



UNVEILING THE SECRETS OF A MYSTERIOUS OCTOPUS

This year, The School for Field Studies (SFS) celebrates the publication of a groundbreaking research paper in the Journal of Molluscan Studies: ***“Deception in the dark—an ethogram of *Callistoctopus furvus*.”***

The study was led by SFS Turks & Caicos Associate Professor of Tropical Marine Ecology C.E. “Shades” O’Brien, Ph.D., in collaboration with two-time alumna Emily Lekas (SFS Turks & Caicos and Croatia) and Dr. Tatiana Leite of Brazil. Together, the team documented the behaviors and skin patterning of the elusive Caribbean octopus, *Callistoctopus furvus*—a species that had never been described in such detail before.

Over the course of three years, the research team cataloged an astonishing 16 skin patterns, 11 behaviors, and 10 postures displayed by the octopus. Highlights included the bold “Polka Dotted” skin pattern, a “Parachute Attack” predatory tactic, and even “Bipedal Locomotion,” where the octopus “walks” across the seafloor on two arms. The findings not only add to the scientific understanding of *C. furvus* but also underscore the creativity and adaptability of marine life.

For Emily, the project was the culmination of years of immersive learning that began with her decision to study abroad with SFS.

“I knew I wanted to get hands-on research experience in marine science, and SFS offered exactly the kind of immersive program I was looking for,” Emily says. “My semesters in Turks & Caicos and Croatia gave me the field and data skills required for a career in marine science and helped solidify my path in marine invertebrate research.”

Emily’s curiosity about under-researched invertebrates drew her to the *C. furvus* project, and her collaboration with Shades extended far beyond a single semester.

*“Shades’ tropical marine ecology class was my favorite, and when it came time for directed research, I asked them about continuing octopus work beyond the term,” she shares. “Shades has been an **ink-redible** mentor over the last three years—I truly wouldn’t be where I am today without their encouragement and collaboration.”*

That mentorship, along with support from her network in Florida and Virginia—including her undergraduate advisor at the University of Richmond, Dr. Grayson, who helped her carry the research forward—gave Emily the foundation she needed to turn field data into a published paper.

“Seeing my name in print was a dream I’ve had since high school,” she says. “I’m so grateful to everyone at SFS and beyond who supported me along the way.”

Today, Emily works as a research technician at the Whitney Laboratory for Marine Biosciences, a role she credits directly to her octopus research.

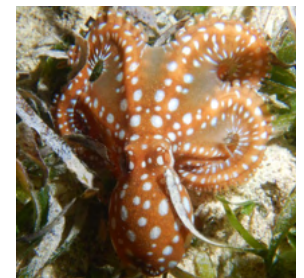
“My SFS experience boosted both my skills and my confidence as a scientist. The octopus project helped me secure my current position studying animal behavior alongside laboratory chemistry.”

This fall, Emily will begin a Ph.D. program in biological chemistry, and she hopes to publish a micro-publication based on her undergraduate honors thesis on *C. furvus* skin patterning before starting graduate school.

Shades says Emily’s journey reflects the true impact of the SFS model.

“Being able to teach and work with smart, passionate students like Emily on projects like this is one of the most rewarding aspects of being a professor at SFS,” they say. “I am currently collaborating with several other SFS alums on research into octopus and conch behavior, and each of them brings energy, fresh ideas, and the skillsets they honed during their time with SFS.”

Together, their work exemplifies what happens when immersive education, mentorship, and alumni engagement come together—turning curiosity in the field into discoveries that deepen our understanding of the ocean.



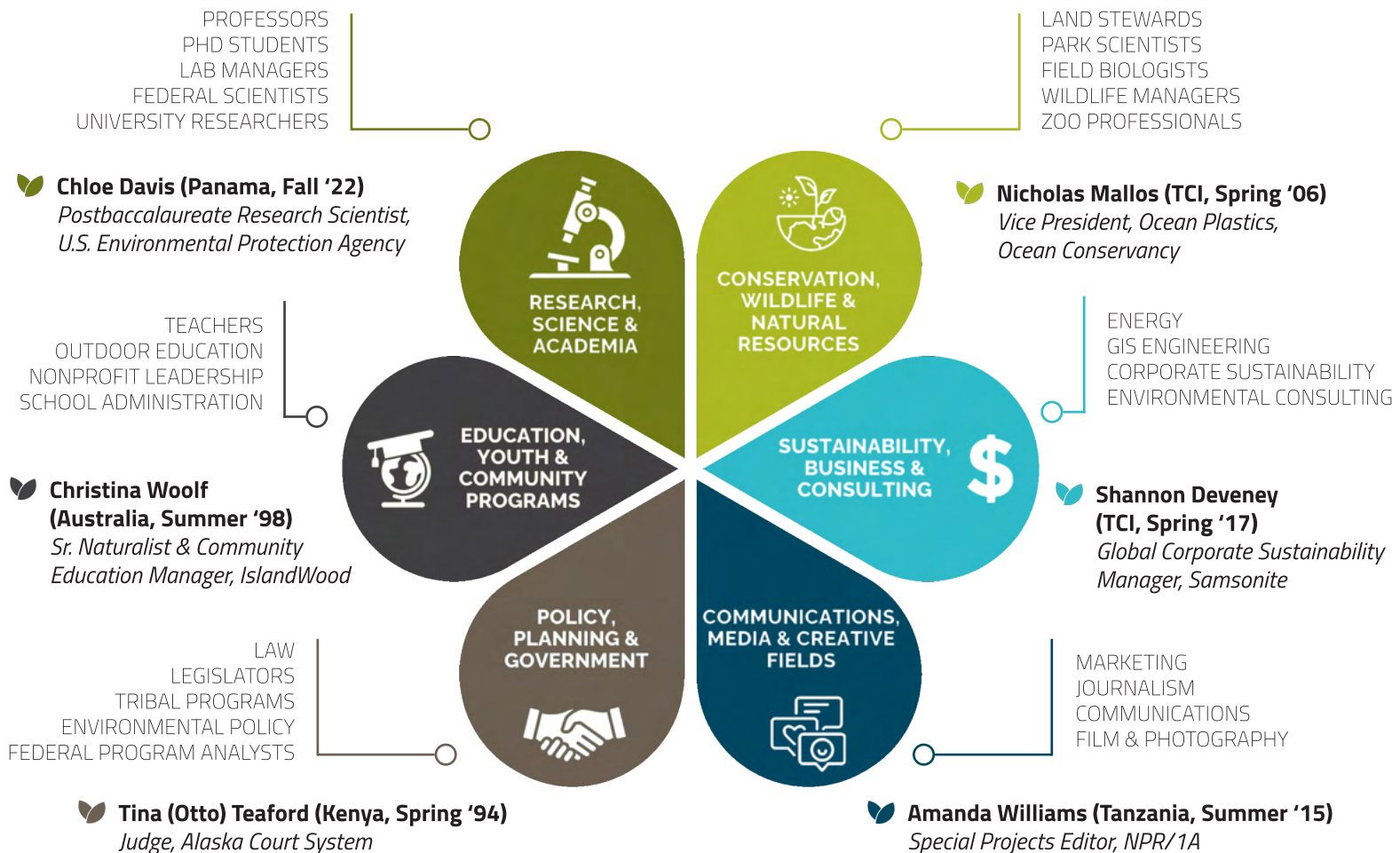
READ THE FULL ARTICLE IN
JOURNAL OF MOLLUSCAN STUDIES





ALUMNI CAREERS

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



“



My scholastic and research experiences through SFS helped unearth a passion for public health and environmental justice that I could never formerly put into words. Thanks to my time there, I became a better scholar, scientist, and global citizen. I am exceedingly grateful for the experiences I had... SFS helped give me clarity and a sense of direction during a period of time when I did not know what I wanted to do after college.

— **Chloe Davis** | Panama, Fall 2022 | Postbaccalaureate Research Scientist, EPA

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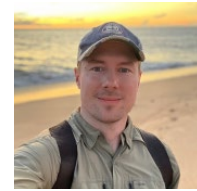


SFS ALUMNI ARE LEADING MEANINGFUL CHANGE ACROSS THE GLOBE.

Explore their inspiring stories on our **Featured Alumni** page at fieldstudies.org/featured-alumni.



My semester abroad... instilled a fierce love of Africa that has fueled my heart for decades. Nothing in this world makes me happier than being in Africa; SFS gave me that passion, for a lifetime!
— **Britt Dubil** | Kenya, Fall 1991 | Doctor of Veterinary Medicine



Being immersed in that environment every day and learning about the natural world was such a gift. I still use some of the natural resource management foundations we learned in TCI in my work today. — **Jennifer Clinton** | TCI, Spring 2008 | Senior Parks & Conservation Economist



SFS in Kenya was a life-changing experience and dream come true.... It opened my eyes to radically different environments and cultures, and the memories still guide me. — **Ryan Lisson** | Kenya, Fall 2007 | Principal Consultant, ERM



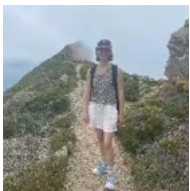
I cherish so many memories from Cambodia/Vietnam. Traveling along the Mekong River, witnessing environmental degradation and protection firsthand, and meeting wonderful people along the way was formative. Ultimately, this time in life helped me make sense of the interconnections between ecology, economics, politics, and culture across the world.
— **Stephanie Steinbrecher** | Cambodia, Spring 2015 | Public Affairs Specialist, EPA



While a student at SFS, I was deeply impacted by how there was a natural and beautiful emphasis on the people of Tanzania living in harmony with their livestock and the surrounding wild creatures. This niche of human-wildlife-conflict resolution resonated very deeply inside me and gave me the push to pursue a degree in veterinary medicine.
— **Justin Kozma** | Tanzania, Summer 2019 | Small Animal and Exotics Veterinarian



Since my time with SFS in Australia, I have found a love for sharing all forms of science as a science teacher! In this role I am able to share the importance of understanding the natural world around us, inspiring an admiration and love for nature in each student. — **Lexi Zanger** | Australia, Fall 2017 | Science Teacher



I frequently refer back to lessons I learned during my time at the SFS Centre in Bhutan, where I gained not only essential perspectives for my work and research but also the privilege of meeting inspiring, thoughtful people at the Centre, in my cohort, and everywhere we went.
— **Helen Dugmore** | Bhutan, Summer 2019 | Food & Waste and Energy & Buildings Manager



Photo Credit: Elias Gradinger (Chile, Fall 2024)

ALUMNI VOICES

REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING, COMMUNITY, AND LIFELONG IMPACT

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

SEPTEMBER 2024 - AUGUST 2025

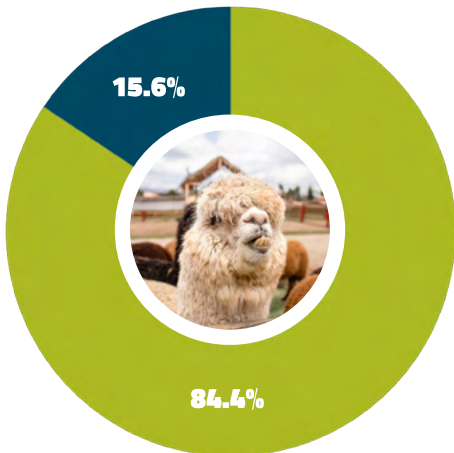


REVENUE

 TUITION & FEES	\$14,450,536
 GIFTS & GRANTS	\$2,044,360
 OTHER	\$197,436
TOTAL REVENUE	\$16,692,332

EXPENSES

 PROGRAM SUPPORT	\$12,382,721
 ADMINISTRATION	\$1,773,893
 MARKETING & ADMISSIONS	\$1,121,340
 OTHER	\$312,563
 DEVELOPMENT	\$262,310
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$15,852,826



DONATION FUNDS

GENERAL FUND / WHERE IT'S NEEDED MOST

Supports the core operations of SFS, ensuring flexibility to respond to urgent needs, maintain program quality, and sustain our global field programs.

FOCUSED IMPACT

Dedicated to specific initiatives, including center-based projects, student opportunities through scholarships, and community engagement efforts, amplifying the direct impact of your support.

SFS thrives because of a community that believes in the power of field-based education and conservation leadership. As a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) institution, we rely on the generosity of donors who make immersive learning, directed research, and global impact possible. Your support fuels student discovery, strengthens partnerships, and sustains our Centers around the world. **Thank you to our amazing donors who continue to support our mission!**



NOTEWORTHY CENTER IMPROVEMENTS

BUILDING SAFER. STRONGER. MORE INNOVATIVE SFS CENTERS

AUSTRALIA

Expanded academic and residential capacity through new modular classroom and laboratory units, along with renovations to the original laboratory building for student accommodation.

BHUTAN

Installed new washers and dryers to support daily operations at the Center.

CAMBODIA

Completed staff housing renovations, upgraded classroom facilities, and installed a rain awning to improve weather protection and learning conditions.

COSTA RICA

Equipped the new laboratory with leaf analysis research equipment and added a greenhouse to support the Center's farm operations.

KENYA

Added a new power generator to ensure continuity during outages and to strengthen operational reliability.

TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

Strengthened marine research capacity and site security through a new boat engine, upgraded access gate, and a self-contained circulating seawater system for coral research. Improved hurricane resiliency through the installation of impact-resistant windows and storm shutters.

IMPROVING ACCESS AND SAFETY IN SOUTH CAICOS

In 2025, the **SFS Center for Marine Resource Studies** installed a new floating dock in South Caicos, made possible through the generosity of **Salterra Resort & Spa owner Michael Tibbetts, Sailrock Resort, Sonny and Jenny Culp, and Mark and Melinda George**. The dock improves safety and accessibility for students, faculty, visitors, and community members—eliminating the need to enter the water to board boats—while expanding capacity for marine research and remaining easily removable during storm events.





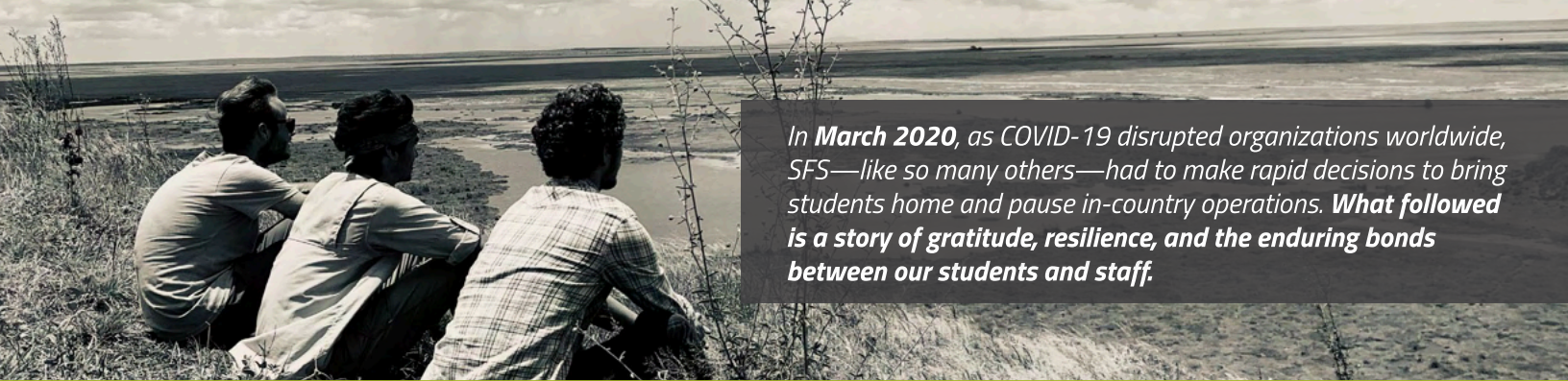
“



SFS faculty introduced me to participatory research. I clearly remember interviewing farmers on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro about the impacts of elephants on their crop fields. It was the first time I really understood how important it is to engage local communities in conservation efforts and how much we could learn from listening.

— **Morgan Ruelle** | Kenya, Spring 2000 | Associate Professor, Clark University

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*In **March 2020**, as COVID-19 disrupted organizations worldwide, SFS—like so many others—had to make rapid decisions to bring students home and pause in-country operations. **What followed is a story of gratitude, resilience, and the enduring bonds between our students and staff.***

A COHORT'S GRATITUDE: FIVE YEARS LATER

By Members of the Kenya Spring 2020 Cohort

Compiled by Aimsley Kadlec | Photography by Ryan Wiramidjaja

When we were in Kenya, we had the most wonderful time exploring and learning at Kilimanjaro Bush Camp. Our experience could not have been as life-changing without the incredible onsite staff. From chefs and drivers to professors, everyone worked tirelessly to make us feel supported—in the classroom, on the soccer field, and everywhere in between.

One member of our cohort arrived dreaming of becoming a wildlife photographer. Living in the bush with Mount Kilimanjaro in the background gave him the chance to build a portfolio he never could have imagined. Moses, Charles, and Martin—our drivers—spent long days with us in the safari cars, always asking, *“Did you get the shot?”*

Today, Ryan works as a photojournalist in Washington, D.C., and knows that portfolio he built in Kenya played a huge role in getting him there.

Then, in mid-March 2020, the global pandemic reached a turning point. We learned that we would be returning home sooner than expected. It was heartbreaking to say goodbye to our cohort and the staff who had become our friends, but they supported us every step of the way.

Even after returning home, our studies continued in a modified format, and we stayed in touch with the team in Kenya. Through those conversations, our cohort realized how uncertain the months ahead were for the people who had given us so much.

We decided to act.

Together, we created a fundraising campaign and shared it widely, inviting friends and family to support the team at SFS Kenya. There was no fundraising goal—**we simply wanted to give back to the people who had shaped our experience so profoundly.**

The response was overwhelming. We raised more than \$5,600, and with the help of Center Director Okello, the funds were distributed equally among the staff.

To us, it felt like the least we could do for the people who had changed our lives.



*Five years later, this story reflects not only the generosity of the 2020 Kenya cohort, but the collective strength of the SFS community. **To everyone who gave during the uncertainty of 2020: thank you for helping our mission endure.***



“



My love for working outdoors with animals, engaging in research, and traveling as much as possible was sparked during my time with the School for Field Studies (SFS) in Southern Chile... The hands-on experience and immersive learning at SFS deepened my commitment to environmental research and conservation efforts. These adventures not only broadened my horizons but also reinforced my dedication to protecting and studying the diverse ecosystems and wildlife that I am so passionate about.

— **Luke Stover** | Chile, Fall 2019 | Zoologist, Field Projects International

”

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FUEL FIELD-BASED RESEARCH & EDUCATION

Your support helps sustain SFS research, student opportunities, and long-term partnerships around the world.

For questions or more information, please contact
GIVING@FIELDSTUDIES.ORG.

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Reconnect and be part of this growing network. Keeping your information up to date helps us stay connected and build a stronger community. By joining the directory, you can:

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- Learn about events, networking, and career opportunities
- Be considered for features on our website and SFS publications
- Discover fellow alumni living and working near you

SCAN THE QR CODE
SIGN UP OR UPDATE YOUR PROFILE



SHARE

SHARE YOUR SFS STORY

From field experiences to career paths, alumni stories help inspire students and demonstrate the lasting impact of SFS programs. Contact us today to share your experience:

ADVANCEMENT & ALUMNI RELATIONS
ALUMNI@FIELDSTUDIES.ORG



Photo Credit: Zachary Blumenfeld (Australia, Fall 2024)



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ITALY • KENYA • PANAMA • PERU • TANZANIA • TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS