



S F S THE SCHOOL
FOR FIELD STUDIES

Directed Research SFS 4910

Syllabus
4 credits

The School for Field Studies (SFS)
Center for Sustainable Food Systems
Greve, Chianti, Italy

This syllabus may develop or change over time based on local conditions, learning opportunities, and faculty expertise. Course content may vary from semester to semester.

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COURSE CONTENT SUBJECT TO CHANGE

Please note that this is a copy of a recent syllabus. A final syllabus will be provided to students on the first day of academic programming.

SFS programs are different from other travel or study abroad programs. Each iteration of a program is unique and often cannot be implemented exactly as planned for a variety of reasons. There are factors which, although monitored closely, are beyond our control. For example:

- Changes in access to or expiration or change in terms of permits to the highly regulated and sensitive environments in which we work;
- Changes in social/political conditions or tenuous weather situations/natural disasters may require changes to sites or plans, often with little notice;
- Some aspects of programs depend on the current faculty team as well as the goodwill and generosity of individuals, communities, and institutions which lend support.

Please be advised that these or other variables may require changes before or during the program. Part of the SFS experience is adapting to changing conditions and overcoming the obstacles that may present. In other words, this is a field program, and the field can change.

Center Research Direction

Currently research at SFS Center for Sustainable Food System focuses on answering the question:

How can the sustainability of food systems in Tuscany and EU be enhanced by mainstreaming biodiversity and ecosystem services from field to fork?

The overall objective of research is to integrate the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainability through an interdisciplinary and transformative approach. In order to do so, the concept of ecosystem services, capable of building a bridge between natural and social sciences, is adopted to analyze food systems. Research will identify and analyze different food systems' drivers, pressures, state and impacts at farm and agroecosystem levels, to both assess their sustainability and to develop policy recommendations to enhance the delivery of ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation.

Research will be carried out in 3 different research sites in Tuscany to understand and assess food systems sustainability in different socio-ecological contexts. These are:

- Smooth hilly landscape of the Chianti area in Central Tuscany, characterized by vineyards, olive groves and oak woods
- Flat arable land, mediterranean maquis natural pastures and olive groves in Maremma, South coast of Tuscany
- Chestnuts, beech tree and oak woods and natural pastures in Mugello and Casentino Mountains of the Appenino range in North-east Tuscany

Research activities will be carried out in collaboration with local experts, of both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, such as Parks authorities, Tuscany regional officers, local Bio-districts actors, WWF activists, stewardship farmers network, producers and consumers cooperatives, etc. Research results will be presented and discussed with local communities and stakeholders.

Course Overview

The aim of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to apply ecological, biological, and/or social-scientific methods to a field research project that addresses a local issue related to the environment. This course prepares students to distinguish hidden assumptions in scientific approaches. We will also investigate the ways that various methods and theories differentiate (or do not) fact from interpretation, cause from correlation, and advocacy from objectivity. Through the Directed Research projects, students will contribute to a growing body of scientific research that informs local conservation and resource management decisions and further the Center's research agenda.

Each student will join a faculty-led team that will carry out field research, data analysis, and communication of results in one or across several of the following disciplines: ecology, natural resource management, and social sciences. The Directed Research course is designed to build on the information students have learned in the topical courses as well as Directed Research lectures and workshops specifically designed to assist students in understanding the scientific process, testing hypotheses and presenting results in both written and spoken formats.

Learning Objectives

The core skills students will learn in this course are field techniques, analytical methods, skills, and critical thinking, as well as teamwork, and time management. The specific objectives of the course are:

1. Understand the process of **designing** a field research project
2. **Conduct** field sampling
3. Manage, interpret, and analyze **data** sets
4. **Communicate** research results to diverse audiences
5. Manage teamwork within the context of **collaborative** research

Assessment

You will present your DR projects in the standard scientific formats of a peer-review style report and a conference style presentation. You will also be graded on your data management and your positive contribution to the class. Comprehensive details of all assignments will be provided separately, see below for the general descriptions and expectations.

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Project Proposal	20
Final Report	35
Presentation	25
Data Management	10
Directed Research Skills	10
TOTAL	100

Project Proposal (20%)

The project proposal has two elements: a **Literature Review** and a **Project Summary**.

1. Literature Review

The main objective of the Literature Review is for students to familiarize themselves with previous research and publications in their chosen Directed Research project. This should draw upon a literature base (where possible) to initially review the status of research in the field and then to build a setting and justification for research that still remains to be done.

The Literature Review should include:

- a. A full literature review: A critical evaluation of knowledge in the subject area
- b. An exploration of the DR project status within the literature: Highlight knowledge gaps and how the proposed project fits within the current literature

2. Project Summary

The main objective of the Project Summary is for students to develop a detailed outline for their Directed Research. The Project Summary should include:

- a. Aims/Hypothesis(es): A list of questions that the student would like to answer as a result of the research project they will design
- b. Materials & Methods: A detailed description of the methods to be used in their study and why these methods will be used over other potential methods. This should include sampling design, as well as the physical data collection methods to be employed
- c. Predicted Findings & Importance: A list of predicted findings and implications for each

Final Report (35%)

The final report is written in the style of a peer-review submission to a journal in the appropriate field. You will have ample opportunity for guidance from your DR supervisors throughout the DR period and especially during DR data analysis week. The analytical tools for research workshops in the DR course (and complementary classes in other courses) are designed to prepare you for producing the Results section and improve the quality of your work.

Presentation (25%)

You will present a subset of your DR work in a conference style presentation of 12 min length with additional time for questions. Unless the scope of your DR project is very small, you should not attempt to squeeze in everything from your final report into this presentation. Making sure that you are within the time limit is a very important skill and so thorough rehearsal is important.

Data Management (10%)

It is important to record and store research data in a manner that is useful. You will need to provide (as applicable) Excel sheets with your research data in a format that is intelligible to someone else. You may need to provide both raw and manipulated data you used to create figures, tables and to run statistical tests. You need to annotate your spreadsheets (use text boxes if appropriate) so that an outsider can understand what the data are. You may be required to provide field notes on your findings for review.

Directed Research Skills (10%)

Your Directed Research Skills will be graded throughout the DR course by your supervisor. Your final grade will depend upon your attendance to all DR activities, active involvement and competencies in field data collection, data interpretation and group participation/support.

Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100%	B+	86.00 - 89.99%	C+	76.00 - 79.99%	D	60.00 - 69.99%
A-	90.00 - 94.99%	B	83.00 - 85.99%	C	73.00 - 75.99%	F	<60.00%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

General Reminders

Intellectual Property – There are many implications about intellectual property and the use of data and research frameworks beyond your semester experience. Many DR projects form part of ongoing and developing research lines at SFS Centers, the work of which is the intellectual property of SFS faculty. However, faculty are always interested in continuing collaborations, and there is often the possibility for student *co-authorship* on future academic publications. We will discuss the ethics of data gathering and academic publications during the semester, but you can also review in advance SFS's [data policy](#).

Honor Code/Plagiarism – SFS places high expectations on their students and we hold students accountable for their behaviors. SFS students are held to the honor code below. SFS has a zero-tolerance policy towards student cheating, plagiarism, data falsification, and any other form of dishonest academic and/or research practice or behavior. Using the ideas or material of others without giving due credit is

cheating and will not be tolerated. Any SFS student found to have engaged in or facilitated academic and/or research dishonesty will receive no credit (0%) for that activity.

“SFS does not tolerate cheating or plagiarism in any form. While participating in an SFS program, students are expected to refrain from cheating, plagiarism and any other behavior which would result in a student receiving credit for work which they did not accomplish on their own. Students are expected to report any instance of cheating or plagiarism by others.”

Deadlines – Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated for several reasons: they are a part of working life to which students need to become accustomed and promote equity among students. Deadlines allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. Late assignments will incur a 10% penalty for each day that they are late. No assignment will be accepted after three days. Assignments will be handed back to students after a one-week grading period. Grade corrections for any assessment item should be requested in writing at least 24 hours after assignments are returned. No corrections will be considered afterwards.

Content Statement – Every student comes to SFS with unique life experiences, which contribute to the way various information is processed. Some of the content in this course may be intellectually or emotionally challenging but has been intentionally selected to achieve certain learning goals and/or showcase the complexity of many modern issues. If you anticipate a challenge engaging with a certain topic or find that you are struggling with certain discussions, we encourage you to talk about it with faculty, friends, family, the HWM, or access available mental health resources.

Participation – Since we offer a program that is likely more intensive than you might be used to at your home institution, missing even one lecture can have a proportionally greater effect on your final grade simply because there is little room to make up for lost time. Participation in all components of the program is mandatory because your actions can significantly affect the experience you and your classmates have while at SFS. Therefore, it is important that you are prompt for all DR activities, bring the necessary equipment for field research, and simply get involved.

Course Content

L: Classroom lecture, L/Demo: Classroom lecture and demonstration

DR Coursework Component: The coursework component of the DR is designed to prepare the students to conduct scientific research. The lectures are delivered throughout the semester, in conjunction with the topical courses, so that students are well prepared to work with their faculty mentor on meaningful research. Some of the course activities below will be delivered to the whole class, or as part of your specific DR group once you have selected a given project.

No	Title and outline	Type	Hours
01	DR Course Introduction In this class, each Faculty will do a 30-minute overview of their DR to enable students do an informed decision in selecting their DR choice	L	1.0
02	Introduction to the Scientific Method Familiarize students with the process of science and associated methods	L	1.0
03	Introduction to Scientific Writing & Reading Explore the difference between primary and secondary sources; expectations and standards of practice; describe expectations for the DR paper	L	1.0

04	Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods Lecture will introduce students to qualitative and quantitative research	L/Demo	1.0
05	Research Ethics The lecture will introduce students to the ethical considerations involved in research (e.g. human subject's protection, data integrity and management)	L	1.0
06	Risk & Time Management in DR Will prepare students on how to manage risks in the field during data collection, and how to effectively manage the time allocated for the DR course	L	1.0
07	Effective Scientific Communication Skills Students will understand the importance of scientific communication skills and start to think about how to address different audiences	L	1.0
08	Analytical Tools and Statistics Students will learn the various methods that they will use to analyze and represent data from the field which suits their respective DR projects.	L/Demo	4.0
09	Project Development & Proposal Faculty will lay out expectations of student proposals and students and faculty will form discussion groups to further DR proposals.	L/Demo	4.0
Total			15 Hours
DR Research Component This portion of the DR course is made up of research time, which includes data collection, synthesis, and dissemination. Given the intense nature of the Directed Research project, students receive over 140 contact hours during this period.			Days Allocated
Data Collection Students work within their DR group to go into the field to collect data			11 days
Data Synthesis Students work closely with their faculty mentors to analyze their collected data and write up their findings in a structured scientific paper			6 days
Research Dissemination Students prepare, practice, and deliver presentations for SFS and community audiences.			3 days
Total			20 days