



S F S THE SCHOOL
FOR FIELD STUDIES

Language, Culture, and Society of Peru

SFS 2090

Syllabus
2 credits

The School for Field Studies (SFS)
Center for Amazon Studies
Tarapoto, Peru

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.

www.fieldstudies.org

© 2026 The School for Field Studies



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 they may present. In other words, this is a field program, and the field can change.

Course Overview

This course is comprised of two integrated modules:

- Culture and Society of Peru
- Spanish Language

The Spanish module is taught by language instructors and is designed to provide students with a working knowledge of the Spanish language for communication. This course is meant to provide beginner students the basics for everyday communication and survival, while serving as a refresher for more advanced students, emphasizing the development of improved orality for everyday communication.

The Society and Culture module aims to provide students with an initial national and local historical and cultural context for understanding the cultural and political complexities of contemporary Peru.

Instructional parts of the course will be complemented by opportunities for participation in community and cultural activities. The course does not provide cultural immersion, rather it aims to provide students with initial insights and tools they can build on outside class time during their time in Peru. We encourage students to take advantage of these opportunities outside of class!

Learning Objectives

To complement lectures, the students will participate in visits and activities designed to provide insight and experiences with the cultural and historical context of Peru and its varied geography and ethnic composition, along with language competence in Spanish.

Course activities, including lectures, field visits and cultural orientation, along with the Spanish classes, will facilitate direct interaction with the local population in a variety of contexts. This will contribute to a more refined understanding of our center's region within larger Peru, and the capacity for enhanced communication in Spanish language. Though we will be working in a multilingual cultural context, Spanish, the national lingua franca will ease communications with local people.

Module I: Culture and Society of Peru

This module seeks to introduce the students to the cultural diversity of Peru and provide a broader historical and social context for their semester in Peru through a combination of lectures, classroom discussions, site visits and cultural experiences.

The module takes advantage of our center's location in the highlands of the Amazon and our excursion to the Andean highlands to provide direct interaction with local Amazonian and Andean communities and help students understand the basic history and cultural expressions of two of the three geographical regions of Peru: "Costa, Sierra Selva" (coast, mountains and jungle). Reading materials will contribute to the basic understanding of the history behind the multi-ethnic components of Peruvian society that form the socio-cultural complexities of contemporary Peru. The combination of lectures, discussions and field experiences will help students understand the processes of such a culturally rich place. We will explore how Peruvian cultures and societies have both shaped and been shaped by the country's diverse environments.

Module II: Spanish Language

The main objective of this module is to give beginner students a basic knowledge of the Spanish language and provide more advanced students with a refresher of their language skills, emphasizing orality to increase confidence in everyday communication. Through in-class practice, students will develop reading, writing, and oral conversation skills useful for their continued development of the language outside the classroom.

The course will be taught by local language instructors at two general levels (beginner and intermediate/advanced) based on a Center placement evaluation administered by instructors at the start of the semester to place students in the appropriate group. Conversation and practice of oral skills will be a fundamental part of the course for both levels. Opportunities for interaction in Spanish with native speakers are encouraged to enhance an increased use of vocabulary and the development of oral abilities. Cultural outings and events scheduled to complement the culture and society module will provide initial opportunities for these interactions and students will also participate in a weekly Spanish language lunch with center staff.

Assessment

Assessment Item	Value (%)
Module 1: Amazon & the Andes: History, Culture, and Society	50
1. Field Reflections 1	10
2. Field Reflections 2	10
3. Round Table Discussion	20
4. Participation	10
Module 2: Spanish Language	50
1. Quizzes/Participation	50
TOTAL	100

Field Reflections (20% - 10% and 10%)

You will be asked to produce a written reflection of your cultural experiences twice during the semester. These reflections should take the form of a brief essay or journal entry (your choice) and should be 2 - pages of double-spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman Font. The expectation is that you will write a thoughtful account of what you have experienced/learned of past and present Peruvian culture.

Field Reflection 1: Peru and I (10%)

Midway through the course, reflect on your perceptions of similarities or differences between the culture you come from or identify with and the culture you have experienced so far in the course. Please pick only ONE OR TWO aspects so that you can focus your efforts on a cohesive expression.

Field Reflection 2: Andean Highlands vs. Amazon Lowlands (10%)

After our visit to the Andean Highlands, you will be asked to write a reflection comparing and contrasting the observed cultures of the two regions we have visited: the Peruvian Amazon and the Peruvian Andes. Your paper should compare and contrast the cultures of these two regions based on your experiences during our outings. Think about similarities and differences to the lowland Amazon you observe during our visit to the highlands: dress, speech, behavior/customs, worldview, resource use,

history, etc. Focus on ONE OR TWO particular aspects if you wish, but your paper should reflect thought on whatever subject you choose to focus on. Feel free to consult with the professors beforehand.

Round Table Discussion (20%)

Students will participate in a round table discussion, where the students will share an image (picture, video or other form of imagery) of one of their favorite things or moments from their time in Peru and construct a quick and concise narrative around “what this picture says about Peruvian culture to ME”. You will be asked to share the importance (to you) of what is happening in the picture, as well as some of the culturally important aspects of the image. The discussion will be moderated, but students will be expected to ask about other images, compare culturally significant parts of different images, and overall be engaged in a lively discussion about differences in culture (both among Peruvian locales and between our own different backgrounds). Students will be graded on:

- 1) a brief written script or explanatory text, which they should give to the professors at the end of their presentation
- 2) their preparation for the discussion following their presentation
- 3) constructive participation in classmate’s presentations.

Participation (10%)

This program requires regular attendance; missing a class can negatively impact your grade. Stay engaged, bring necessary materials, and pay attention to your peers and instructors. Participate actively in group exercises to enhance critical thinking and debate skills.

Spanish Language (50%)

The evaluation of the students’ proficiency in Spanish includes short reviews, short oral presentations, and quizzes. Oral class participation is highly encouraged since it is critical for language acquisition. Field trips will serve as an outlet for students to practice Spanish outside class and be in closer contact with real-life situations and socio-cultural spaces. This activity consists of structured exercises with specific objectives and activities, addressing different levels of proficiency in Spanish. Examples include a visit to downtown Tarapoto, shopping at the farmer's market, interviewing the neighborhood, finding groceries in stores, exchanging money at the bank, etc.

Grading Scheme

A	95.00 - 100.00%	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	0.00 - 59.99%
		B-	80.00 - 82.99%	C-	70.00 - 72.99%		

General Reminders

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.

"I approach coursework, fieldwork, and research with integrity and commit to full participation. I do my own work with honesty and give credit where it's due. I use tools and technology responsibly and only as permitted. I speak up when something conflicts with our shared values. I respect the communities we learn from and commit to ethical, non-extractive research that keeps knowledge connected to the places and people who share it with us.."

Deadlines – Deadlines for written and oral assignments are instated to promote equity among students and to allow faculty ample time to review and return assignments before others are due. As such, deadlines are firm; extensions will only be considered under extreme circumstances. Late assignments will incur a penalty of 10% of your grade for each day you are late. After two days past the deadline, assignments will no longer be accepted. 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 course is mandatory, it is important that you are prompt for all activities, bring the necessary equipment for field exercises and class activities, and simply get involved.

AI Usage for Assignments – SFS acknowledges the growing role of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in education and professional settings. While AI can be a valuable resource for learning and productivity, its use must align with the learning goals and integrity of each assignment. For this reason, students are encouraged to discuss the acceptable uses of AI for each assignment with the instructor. If you wish to use AI for any part of an assignment, consult with the instructor beforehand to ensure that its use adheres to the academic expectations of the course. Let's work together to navigate this evolving landscape responsibly!

Course Content

Type: D: Discussion, FC: Field Components, L: Lecture, GL: Guest Lecture; LAB: Practical Exercises

No	Topics Covered	Hours	Type	Required Readings
Module I: Culture and Society of Peru				
1	Introduction to the Course; Pre-Inca Cultures to Modern Peru Introduction to course content and expectations. We will cover Pre-Inca Cultures, The Inca Empire, Spanish Colonization (Viceroyalty of Peru), The Independence of Peru, The Republic of Peru, and Modern Immigration to Peru.	2.0	L; D	Hunefeldt (2005) pp. xi-xvi.
2	A Brief History of Peru: Geography and People We will take a brief journey through the history of Peru, getting to know its people and geography. Timeline of the Pre-Inca cultures, Inca, Spanish invasion, Independence and Republic. Research and presentation of Pre-Inca and Inca cultures.	2.0	L; D	Hunefeldt (2005).
3	Indigenous Culture & Language: Quechua Of Peru's many indigenous languages, many still survive today and have influenced the regional Spanish. We will examine the case of the more widely spoken Quechua language of the Andes mountains, discussing how its history reflects the national status of indigenous culture. History of Tupac Amaru II and his inspiration for contemporary groups and figures.	2.0	L; D	
4	Music and Dances of Peru; Round Table Discussion Students will be introduced to some of the main rhythms and dances from each of the three regions of Peru and discuss the role of music and dance in Peruvian society. Students will participate in a round table discussion sharing an image or artwork of one of their favorite things or moments from their time in Peru.	2.0	L; D	Feldman (2007).
5	Round Table Discussion (Continued); Mistura: Culinary Culture of Peru If time is on our side, we will continue with the Round Table Discussion. Introduction to Peruvian cuisine of different regions. Recipes reflect regional availability of ingredients as well as the convergence of different traditions. A demonstration will be held by our station cooks.	2.0	L; D	Casey (2017).

No	Topics Covered	Hours	Type	Required Readings
Module II: Spanish Language				
1	Conocernos Dar y pedir datos personales. Saludar y despedirse. Deletrear. Preguntar sobre palabras. Describir a alguien. (El género, el alfabeto, las tres conjugaciones: -ar, -er, -ir, los verbos ser, llamarse y tener, vivir, estar.)	3.0	L; LAB; D	
2	Comprar Comprar en tienda. Pedir precios y pagar. Usar el léxico de la vestimenta. Hablar de preferencias. (El demostrativo: este/esta/estos/estas, el/la/los/las + adjetivo, qué, cuál/cuáles + sustantivo, el verbo ir, el verbo preferir, cuantificadores: muy, bien, bastante, un poco.)	3.0	L; LAB; D	
3	Salir a Comer o Beber Ofrecer e invitar. Expresar deseos y gustos. Dar y pedir valoración. (El artículo determinado: el, la, los, las, el presente de indicativo, el verbo querer (diptongo), el verbo gustar, la negación.)	3.0	L; LAB; D; FV	
4	Dónde Estás Describir lugares. Expresar existencia y/o ubicación. Hablar del clima. (Uso de hay, el verbo estar, el superlativo, cuantificadores: muy, mucho, mucha, muchos y muchas, expresar necesidades.)	2.0	L; LAB; D	
5	Orientarse y Transportarse Pedir y dar informaciones para llegar a un sitio. Preguntar y decir la hora. Expresar frecuencia. Hablar de hábitos. (Los verbos pronominales, los verbos ir y irse, las preposiciones y adverbios de lugar: a, en, al lado de, cerca de, lejos de.)	2.0	L; LAB; D	
6	Pedir Ayuda en Situaciones Imprevistas Pedir ayuda. Explicar una situación. Dar informaciones personales. (El gerundio, describir, llamar por teléfono.)	2.0	L; LAB; D	
	Total	25		
	UMN Instructional Hours*	30		

**UMN defines an instructional hour as a 50-minute block. SFS syllabi are written in full 60-minute hours for programming purposes. Therefore 50 full hours = 60 UMN instructional hours (for four credit courses) and 25 full hours = 30 UMN instructional hours (for two credit courses).*

Reading List

Required readings in bold.

1. Aviles, Marco (2015). How Food Became Religion in Peru's Capital City. Smithsonian.com, September 16, 2015. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/lima-peru-food-culinary-boom-cooking-restaurants-180956467/>
2. Blumenthal, Ralph (2014). Protection sought for vast and ancient Incan road. The New York Times, June 18, 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/19/arts/design/protection-sought-for-vast-and-ancient-incan-road.html>
3. **Casey, Nicholas (2017).** Thousands Once Spoke His Language in the Amazon. Now, He's the Only One. The New York Times, December 26, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/26/world/americas/peru-amazon-the-end.html>
4. Cherfas (2016) Your quinoa habit really did help Peru's poor. But there's trouble ahead. The Salt. NPR.
5. **Feldman, H. (2007).** *Black Rhythms of Peru: Reviving African Musical Heritage in the Black Pacific.* Music/Culture series.
6. **Hunefeldt, C. (2005) Introduction. A Brief History of Peru. pp. xi-xvi.**
7. Moura (2014) Will camu camu be the next Amazonian 'it' fruit? The Salt. NPR.
8. National Academy of Sciences (1989) The Lost Crops of the Incas: Little-known Plants of the Andes with Promise for Worldwide Cultivation
9. Galeano, J. (2008) Amazonian Folktales in Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature Volume I: I-J. Ed. Bron Taylor. Pp. 40-42.
10. Tello Imaina & Fraser (2016) Rubber Barons' Abuses Live on in Memory and Myth. Sapiens. <https://www.sapiens.org/culture/rubber-era-myths/>
11. Mann, Charles C. (2005). 1491: New Revelations of the Americas before Columbus. New York: Knopf.
12. McNerney, Gabriel (2014). Peru: Echoes Of A Glorious History