

**VTPB 303**  
**Medical Communication**  
**in the International Community**

Sample Syllabus

3 credits

Instructor: Donald J. Brightsmith

Course location: Soltis Center, Costa Rica

### Course Description

The goal of this course is to introduce students to Costa Rican culture and cultural communication through experiential learning (field trips, homestays, institutes, clinic tours, independent travel, etc.), readings from the primary and popular literature, and presentations by local people and academics. The students will be required to keep a formal journal which the faculty will review three times throughout the semester. The course will have frequent group discussions about the readings, presentations, and activities to encourage students to explicitly analyze the cultural context in which they are working. Before each group discussion students will be asked to prepare and submit a single page of questions and insights about each topic taken from the readings or their field journal.

Students will be asked to compare and contrast the Costa Rican culture and health care systems with those of the USA. Faculty and students with experience in other cultures will be encouraged to compare and contrast their experiences in Costa Rica in order to allow students to better understand Latin American culture as a whole. Students will also look at the cultural differences and cultural issues between the native Costa Ricans and the US expatriates living in Costa Rica. Topics such as medical tourism, rural medicine, veterinary care, water quality, and public opinions of conservation will also be investigated. Students will be required to read Costa Rican English (Tico Times) or Spanish (La Nación) news media (depending on language ability) and present brief oral and written overviews of news items on health and the environment.

### Course Location

The course will be based at the Soltis Center in Costa Rica as part of the BIMS Semester in Costa Rica program. The course will also travel to various locations throughout Costa Rica.

### Instructor

Donald J. Brightsmith, PhD ( [Brightsmith1@tamu.edu](mailto:Brightsmith1@tamu.edu) )

### Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. Describe Costa Rican culture as seen through a mixture of field trips, homestays, volunteerism, independent travel, readings, and presentations by local people and academics.
2. Monitor, report on, and describe the greater context of current events related to human health, animal health, and environmental health in Costa Rica and Latin America
3. List and discuss differences in human and animal healthcare between rural Costa Rica, Urban Costa Rica, and the USA

4. Compare and synthesize information from a wide variety of sources to formulate in writing new insights in to core course topics
5. Demonstrate social, cultural, and global competence through a deeper understanding of Spanish language, Costa Rican culture, and Latin American culture in general
6. Be able to demonstrate a greater awareness of cultural diversity in both writing and oral discourse, with a specific focus on the following topics
  - a. Personal biases and prejudices
  - b. Authority, privilege, and discrimination
  - c. Dialog as a tool to unite
  - d. Tolerance and intolerance in different cultural milieus
  - e. Conflict

### Contact Hours

Lectures	10
Discussions	20
Student presentations	5
Activities*	21 (which is equivalent to ~ 7 lecture hours)
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Total in lecture hour equivalents	42

*\*Given the less intense interactions during visits, tours, and other activities approximately 3 hours of activity is considered equivalent to 1 hour of lecture, discussion, or student presentations.*

### Grading Policies

Student grades will be based on the following:

Attendance and compliance with the rules	25%
Field journal	25%
News presentations	10%
Final project presentation	10%
Written questions and insights on discussion topics	30%
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	100%

The final grading scale will be as follows: A = 100-90%; B = 89-80%; C = 79-70%; D = 69-60%; F = 59-0%. The 25% for attendance and compliance will be assigned in the following way. In order to pass the course the students must get a passing grade on the combined writing and speaking portions of the course (Field Journal and Written questions for discussion topics for writing and News presentations and Final project presentations for the public speaking components). There are 13 required activities listed in the course schedule below. In order to receive full credit, students will need to attend each activity or have a university excused absence for any activities they miss. Students will receive full attendance credit for being present at the required activity. If students choose not to participate in course required activities and do not have an illness or excused absence they will lose up to 5% off from their grade per unexcused absence (removed from the 25% Attendance and compliance with rules portion of the grade). Students who are tardy, disrespectful to activity leaders or do otherwise not follow the rules set by the faculty and staff of the Soltis Center will be warned in writing and then, upon a second infraction be docked up to 5% of their grade per infraction (removed from the 25% Attendance and compliance with rules portion of the grade).

## Readings

There are no required texts for this course. Reading assignments from the popular or scientific literature may be assigned. Students will be required to read either the English language newspaper (Tico Times) or Spanish language newspaper (La Nación) or an electronic equivalent.

## Assignments

### **Field notebook**

Each student will be required to maintain a field notebook throughout the course. Entries will be required for all major course activities. Each entry will include text which 1) documents the activities and experiences and 2) reflects upon these activities and compares them to other professional or cultural references. Students will be presented a variety of formats at the beginning of the course and will be encouraged to experiment and come up with a style that matches their needs and interests. Students will be encouraged to write their observations, reactions, and comparisons with their home countries in their notes. Students will also be required to journal on specific cultural diversity topics including writing about their own expectations, biases and prejudices; power, privilege and discrimination in international tourism; when and how to be tolerant or intolerant when in a foreign culture, and how to see multiple sides of a conflict. Field notebooks will be evaluated at three times during the semester.

### **News summaries**

Students will be required to read Costa Rican English (Tico Times) or Spanish (La Nación) news media plus one other media outlet in search of items related to health and the environment. Twice during the semester students will be required to submit a list of 10 articles they have read (with titles and URLs). Of those 10 they will have to choose one and create a 3 minute PowerPoint presentation and present it to the class. Before class each student will be required to email to Dr. Brightsmith a list of the articles and PowerPoint presentation. Additional details on this assignment will be given elsewhere.

### **Written questions and insights on discussion topics**

Throughout the semester, students will participate in a wide array of cultural experiences including stays in towns and cities; visits to health facilities, national parks, institutes, and museums; cross country travel; cooking and eating in local restaurants; etc. Students will be expected to take notes on these experiences and their reactions to these experiences in their field notebooks. Throughout the semester we will have regular formal discussions about these cultural experiences during which we will hold respectful discussions about socially sensitive topics. We will also have discussions specific cultural diversity topics including: understanding biases, distribution of power and authority, informed dialog as a tool for uniting, tolerance versus intolerance in foreign cultures, understanding conflict, and how to function in a global society. In order to ensure that the students are prepared for these discussions, each student will be expected to prepare and submit before the beginning of class approximately one to two pages of observations, questions and insights related to the topic of the discussion. These written documents will be graded and form the basis of the grade for each discussion. Students will not be graded on their oral participation. However, they may be called upon to comment on things that they have written in their documents.

### **Environmental Threats Project**

Each student will be required to complete a case study on an important health or environmental threat. The case study will 1) discuss how this threat can affect human health, animal health and/or biodiversity conservation, 2) show how perceptions of this threat change among different cultures and information

sources, and 3) develop a plan to mitigate the effects of this threat. This assignment is part of the course One Health and Tropical Ecology (all students must be simultaneously enrolled in both courses to be part of the Costa Rica Semester Program). For the Medical Communication course students will be graded only on the oral presentation portion of this project. The oral presentation will be about 6-7 minutes long and given using PowerPoint. Students will be evaluated on the quality of the slides and the mechanics of the presentation.

### Compliance

In the field and in the station, compliance with rules and regulations set by the faculty and staff of the program is vital to create a safe and productive learning environment. Tardiness can cause logistical delays which affect the entire course. Unsafe behavior can endanger the lives of students and those around them. Irresponsible behavior can damage the reputation of TAMU and the Soltis Center. Students will be given a set of guiding rules at the beginning of the semester. Appropriate behavior in the field and social settings in any area, including Latin America are vital for the ability to live and work overseas. As a result, learning to live by the rules will provide students with valuable skills for the future.

Students who are tardy, disrespectful to activity leaders, and do not follow the rules set by the faculty and staff of the Soltis Center will be warned in writing and then be docked up to 5% of their grade per infraction (removed from the 25% Attendance and compliance with rules portion of the grade).

### Attendance and make-up policies

Given that this course is part of an integrated semester program, all students are required to participate in all “required activities” which includes lectures, discussions, field trips and outings unless it is explicitly stated that an activity is optional. Students will be excused from “required activities” for illness or other university approved excused absence. For more information on attendance please see <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>. If students choose not to participate in course required activities and do not have an illness or excused absence they will lose up to 5% off from their grade per unexcused absence (removed from the 25% Attendance and compliance with rules portion of the grade).

If students have an illness or university approved excused absence and are forced to miss assignments they will be given a chance to hand in the assignment at the earliest date convenient for the professor. There will be no makeups possible for field trips, activities, discussions, or lectures.

### Attendance and compliance grading illustrative scenarios

The following table shows in tabular format the grading repercussions of differing scenarios following the grading guidelines presented above. Note there are 13 activities throughout the semester. In addition, no student will be docked points for compliance or tardiness violations without first receiving a formal written warning explaining what was done wrong and how to correct it. Note that the minimum number of points students can receive for Attendance and Compliance is 0. No negative grades are permitted in this section. Notice that the total possible points for this section is 25.

Activities attended	Excused absences	Unexcused absences	Compliance violations (after written warning)	Total Attendance and Compliance grade
13	0	0	0	25
11	2	0	0	25

11	1	1	0	20
12	0	0	1	20
10	1	1	1	15
8	1	2	2	5
6	2	2	3	0
6	1	3	3	0

### Study Abroad Course Itinerary

See attachment for proposed course itinerary in Costa Rica

### Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Policy Statement

If you have a disability that requires special accommodation, please inform the instructors upon application to this semester program and provide a memo from the Student Disability Services Office that verifies the disability and recommends specific accommodations.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at the Student Services at White Creek complex on west campus or call 979-845-1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu/>

### Academic Integrity Statement

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”

For more information on the Aggie Honor Code and the Honor Council Rules and Procedures please visit the following website <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>. Students who break the Aggie Honor Code and fail to comply with the Honor Council Rules and Procedures will receive zero points on the assignment or exam in question and will be officially reported to the Aggie Honor System Office.

Daily schedule for  
VTPB 303 Medical Communication in the International Community

Dates are based on previous semesters and exact activities will vary due to unique opportunities which arise during the semester.

Date	Academic code	Contact hours	Activity
15-Aug	Cultural Diversity Module	1	Students view online module on holding respectful discussions and discourse on difficult topics
21-Aug	Lecture	0.5	Introduction to CRiBS
21-Aug	Lecture	0.5	Introduction to Medical Communication in the International Community
21-Aug	Lecture	1	Introduction to Costa Rica
21-Aug	Lecture	0.5	The role of field notes and the field journal
23-Aug	Lecture	1	Introduction to Costa Rican Healthcare system
23-Aug	Discussion	0.5	Review session on Field notes
24-Aug	Lecture	0.5	Bananas and Costa Rica: Economic, Social and environmental impacts (two lectures in one file)
24-Aug	Discussion	0.5	First impressions including holding respectful discussions, personal biases and prejudices
25-Aug	Activity	0.75	Visit to Banana plantation
28-Aug	Discussion	0.5	Life as an ExPat in Costa Rica
29-Aug	Assignment		Questions and Reflections for discussion one page due (Lessons from weekend field trip)
29-Aug	Discussion		Lessons from weekend field trip
30-Aug	Discussion	0.5	Lessons from weekend field trip
30-Aug	Assignment		Field Journal I due
1-Sep	Lecture	1	Learning Spanish: Tips from an old gringo
4-Sep	Discussion	1	Homestay Discussion
4-Sep	Activity	1.5	Visit to veterinary clinic in Liberia
4-Sep	Activity	1.5	Visit to CIMA hospital in Liberia
6-Sep	Activity	1	Medical tourism
10-Sep	Assignment		One page for discussion due
10-Sep	Lecture	1	Presentation techniques
10-Sep	Discussion	0.5	Discussion on Week in Flamingo including how to function in a global society
11-Sep	Discussion	0.5	Discussion on Week in Flamingo
11-Sep	Cultural Diversity Module	1	Students view online module on understanding conflict from multiple viewpoints

12-Sep	Cultural Diversity Discussion	0.5	Understanding conflict from multiple viewpoints
13-Sep	Assignment		Send Article list for News presentation
13-Sep	Assignment		Send Power point for News presentation
13-Sep	Presentation	2	News presentation (Topic human health, animal health or environmental health)
14-Sep	Activity	1	Antorchas procession. People will be carrying lights through the street as part of the traditional independence day celebration.
15-Sep	Activity	2	Independence Day parade
24-Sep	Assignment		One page for discussion due
24-Sep	Discussion	0.5	Independence Day and Rincon trip
24-Sep	Cultural Diversity Module	1	Students view online module on understanding self, bias and prejudice
25-Sep	Cultural Diversity Discussion	0.5	Using informed dialog to overcome divisive issues
26-Sep	Presentation	2	News presentation (Theme: your One Health Threat Topic, Format: Curley style)
26-Sep	Lecture	1	Tom Newmark Guest lecture
30-Sep	Activity	2	Horseback ride around community
1-Oct	Discussion	1	Homestays
3-Oct	Activity	1	EBAIS tour
4-Oct	Lecture	0.5	Introduction to Panama
8-Oct	Assignment		1 page due for discussion
8-Oct	Discussion	0.5	Crocs, Los Lagos, EBAIS, etc
12-Oct	Discussion	0.5	Reivew of logistics etc. for Panama trip
13-Oct	Activity	1	Cultural evening with local Naso Indigenous People
14-Oct	Activity	2	Cacao plantation for chocolate production tour
14-Oct	Activity	1	Tour of local community (school, health post, etc)
14-Oct	Discussion	1	Challenges of rural healthcare
18-Oct	Discussion	0.5	Panama
18-Oct	Cultural Diversity Module	1	Students view online module on understanding Power and Authority
19-Oct	Cultural Diversity Discussion	0.5	Power and authority and recognizing privilege, opression and discrimination
20-Oct	Cultural Diversity Discussion	0.5	Personal biases and prejudices: how have yours changed?
22-Oct	Activity	2	Orientation to San Joaquin and Heredia

23-Oct	Activity	1.5	Visit to Intensivet
24-Oct	Activity	2	Visita a SENASA with C. Rocio Gonzalez
24-Oct	Discussion	1	Homestay Discussion
25-Oct	Activity	2	Tour of Hospital Calderon Guardia
26-Oct	Cultural Diversity Module	1	Students view online module on tolerance versus intolerance
27-Oct	Cultural Diversity Discussion	0.5	Tolerance versus intolerance: which one is appropriate?
31-Oct	Activity	1.5	Market Treasure hunt in Heredia
1-Nov	Activity	0.25	Try the fruits from the market during the cooking time in the cooking class
3-Nov	Activity	2	Tour of down town San Jose
4-Nov	Discussion	1	Final Homestay discussion on bus
7-Nov	Discussion	0.5	Heredia Discussion 1 Medical and Vet activities
7-Nov	Presentation	1.5	Market Presentations from Heredia
8-Nov	Discussion	0.5	Heredia Discussion 2 all other activities
10-Nov	Presentation	1.5	One Health final presentations