

Culture and Environment in Sitka, Alaska

Anthropology 280

Sitka, Alaska

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This field course examines the relationship between culture, community, and the environment in the island setting of Sitka, Alaska. You will learn about the region's marine and terrestrial environments, its occupation and use by the indigenous Tlingit Indians and by non-Native residents, and current controversies surrounding the use of its natural resources – its fish, timber, and natural beauty. You will learn about Tlingit and Western views of nature and compare their ideas about stewardship and conservation. You will also learn about conservation initiatives in the town. Wherever possible the emphasis is hands-on, experiential learning.

The community-engaged experience in this course allows students to examine how course concepts and environmental issues play out in a community setting, and address community-identified priorities and needs to advance the public good. While the main focus is on environmental issues, attention is also given to social justice issues involving the minority native Tlingit community's place in and relationship to the wider Sitka community.

This community-engaged learning helps USF fulfill its vision of developing leaders who will fashion a more humane and just world. This four-unit course fulfills the CEL requirement for USF.

Readings

Donahue, D and Plaxton-Moore, S. *Student Companion to Community Engaged Learning* (selections)

Gmelch, George "Tale of Two Rivers: Culture, Ecology and Competition in an Alaskan Fishery" (from *Natural History*)

Gmelch, Sharon and G. Gmelch "Studying Subsistence in Sitka" (from *In the Field*)

Gmelch, S. Introduction to Tlingit (excerpt from *The Tlingit Encounter with Photography*)

Gmelch, S "Why Tourism Matters" (from *Tourists and Tourism*)

Harper, S *The Way of Wilderness* (selection)

McAndrew, Francis "The Natural Environment" (from *Environmental Psychology*)

Nelson, Richard *The Island Within* (selections)

Thornton, Thomas *Being and Place among the Tlingit* (selections)

Thornton, Thomas "Alaskan Native Subsistence: A Matter of Cultural Survival" (from *Cultural Survival Quarterly*)

Videos (predeparture)

Ready, Set, Engage! Why We Engage: <https://vimeo.com/175587086/8127207dd1>

Ready, Set, Engage! Principles and Practice of Community Engagement:
<https://vimeo.com/175587087/542059e235>

Ready, Set, Engage! Stories of Engagement: <https://vimeo.com/175587088/d4c2ef4e42>

Course requirements:

1. **Field Journal and Assignments:** You will keep a field journal in which you record on a daily basis what you have learned from our guest speakers, films, fieldtrips, and the interactions you have with local people. Your journal will also include your reflections on these experiences. You will also have four short writing assignments based on your observations and at least one interview.
2. **Community Engaged Project/Activities:** You will work collectively and/or individually for at least 20 hours to complete project(s) or activities that address community-identified priorities and needs.
3. **Class Meetings.** Always come on time and prepared. Read any assigned readings before class meetings and be ready to discuss. We will have a number of distinguished guest speakers, including scientists, environmental filmmakers, fisheries people and environmental activists. Please pay attention to what they have to say, take notes in your journals, and be inquisitive.
4. **Individual Meetings:** Everyone will meet with one of us individually during the trip to discuss your experiences and observations. At this time, we will ask you to read passages from your field journal.
5. **Attendance and Participation:** Unless you are sick, no absences are allowed. “To attend” means to be present and engaged whether in class or on fieldtrips and excursions, that is, *active participation*.
6. **Assessment:** Your final grade will be based on the quality of your participation in seminars and fieldtrips, your field journal, quality of contributions to community-engaged projects and activities, and your writing assignments. There will also be an open-notebook final exam.

Learning Outcomes

1. You will learn about Southeast Alaska’s unique natural environment and how its human populations (Tlingit and non-Native) in Sitka have historically and differentially interacted with that environment. (CEL 1)
2. You will learn about subsistence practices, both native and non-native and how they differ, and their importance to residents of this small, island Alaskan town. (CEL 1 and 2)
3. You will examine how competition between native and non-native groups over resources and how environmental issues enter the public arena for consideration and debate. (CEL 1 and 2)
4. You will learn about the role and impact of cruise-ship tourism in Sitka. (CEL 2)

5. You will think critically about the range of practical, social, political, and ethical issues that shape how a population and its subgroups relates to and handles (e.g., exploits, protects) its natural resources. (CEL 1, 2, and 3)

Community Engaged Learning (CEL) Outcomes:

Through synthesis of classroom, field, and community experiences, students will:

- Learn the values and priorities of the native and non-native communities in Sitka.
- Examine an environmental/social justice issue, including its root causes, impacts, intersections with other issues, and possible solutions.
- Analyze one's own and others' culture and world view and their implications for how one defines and contributes to the common good.

Class Room and Fieldtrip Etiquette

- Remember that while we are in Sitka, you are a representative of USF. Respectful and attentive behavior is expected at all times inside and outside of class and on fieldtrips.
- All electronic devices including cell phones, laptops (if you brought one) should be turned off at all times during class/workshops/fieldtrips. This is an immersion course. The excursions, walks/hikes, speakers, and films have all been carefully planned and are all part of the course, so please no texting or checking your social media accounts during class and field activities.
- Even though we are off-campus, university policies apply. Here are some possible issues:
 - 1) Being noisy and coming in late. Please respect dorm rules. No one outside of our group is allowed in dorm rooms.
 - 2) If you are legally old enough to drink (21+), please drink responsibly and know your limits.
 - 3) Your safety is very important! When going out at night, make sure you are with other students and act responsibly. If you leave the campus with several other students, make sure that all of you get back to campus together. Be aware of your surroundings at all times. Pay attention to other people and wildlife (bears may be in the area, including on campus).

Predeparture Orientation and Introduction

Before departing for Alaska, we will meet to discuss course objectives, activities, community engaged learning, and the logistics of the summer field program. A second meeting will deal with community engaged learning, led by Star Plaxton-Moore, USF director of CEL. You will be given a short list of readings and videos to watch before arriving in Sitka.

Collaboration with Local Organizations

Both the Sitka Sound Science Center and the Sitka Fine Arts Camp have been involved in the planning of the field program, and throughout the field program we work closely with them.

Each student will be involved in at least one major community service engagement project. In the past these have mainly been in conjunction with the Science Center and the Sitka Conservation Society.ⁱⁱⁱ The precise project or activity will depend upon their needs each summer. In the past, students have participated in an intertidal survey, designed and conducted a survey of tourists and locals related to the construction of a cruise ship dock, conducted day-long cleanups of ocean current debris deposited on the beaches of nearby Kruzof Island, netted hundreds of salmon for a food program for native Tlingit elders, fenced off a section of forest to study of the effect of deer browsing on forest regeneration, photographed and collected sound of grey whales for a whale research project, and assisted in various roles for a local documentary filmmaker.

Our speakers are drawn from many local organizations, including those mentioned above, as well as the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (Tlingit), the Sitka Conservation Society, city government, the Sitka Visitors Center (tourism authority), Sitka National Historical Park, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the US Forest Service, and the Sheldon Jackson Museum.

Daily Schedule

Below was the daily schedule for last summer (2022). This changes somewhat each summer according to the availability of speakers and different activities. But this will give you what the daily schedule looks like.

July 26: Introduction to Sitka

9 am: **Introduction to the Course** (G Gmelch)

10:00: **Sitka History and Culture, walking tour** (Lisa Busch, Executive Director Sitka Sound Science Center, hereafter SSSC)

1:30: **Community Sustainability** (Bethany Goodrich, Tongass Policy and Communications Specialist with the Sitka Conservation Society & Sustainable Southeast Partnership)

3:30 or 4:00: **Sitka National Historical Park, walking tour** (Jessica Perkins, National Park Ranger)

July 27: Fisheries I

9 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (G and S Gmelch)

10:00: **Commercial Fishing** talk (Tim Ryan, commercial fisherman)

1:30: **Fish Processing I, talk and plant tour Seafood Producers Cooperative**

4:00: **Independent Crescent Harbor Assignment** (G and S Gmelch)

7 pm: **Film showings: *Salmon: The Wild Connection* & *The Private Lives of Salmon*** (filmmaker Liz McKenzie)

July 28: Fisheries II

9 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (G and S Gmelch)

10:00 – 12:30: **Aquaculture, talk and tour of Sitka Sound Science Center Hatchery**
(Bill Coltharp, Director SSSC Hatchery)
2:00-4:30: **Independent Harbor and commercial fishing assignment**
6:00: **Group dinner and class discussion of subsistence**

July 29: Forests

9 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (G and S Gmelch)
10 –11:30: **Forest Management and Land Use Issues** (Andrew Thoms, Director of Sitka Conservation Society)
1:00-3:30: **The Work of the Forest Service** (US forest service speaker)
4-5:30 pm: CEL activity

July 30: Tlingit Culture Past and Present

9 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (G and S Gmelch)
9:30– 11:30 am: **Language, Storytelling and Nature in Tlingit Culture** (Chuck Miller, Cultural & Community Liaison, Sitka Tribe)
1:30-3:00 pm: **Tlingit History and Culture, tour and independent assignment on Tlingit culture** (Sheldon Jackson Museum, G and S Gmelch)
3-5 pm: CEL activity
7 pm: **Film showing and discussion: *A Matter of Respect*** (filmmaker Ellen Frankenstein and co-producer, anthropologist S Gmelch)

July 31: Nature Exploration

9 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (G and S Gmelch)
10-4: **Indian River Trail hike and nature writing assignment**
7-9 pm: **Illustrated Talk: Tlingit and White Competition on the Alsek River**
(anthropologist G Gmelch)

August 1: Living in Sitka and Alaska

9:30 am: **Daily Orientation** (G and S Gmelch)
10:00: **Group seminar on Subsistence in Sitka** (G and S Gmelch)
1:30: **Managing a Small Alaskan Community** (Mark Gorman, former Sitka City Manager)
3-6 pm: CEL activity
7 pm: **Dinner and Film showing *Eating Alaska*** (and Q&A with filmmaker Ellen Frankenstein)

August 2: The Value of Nature and Wilderness

9:30 am: **Daily Orientation** (G and S Gmelch)
10:00: **Group seminar on the Value of Nature** (G and S Gmelch)
1:00: **Indian River Hike** (with Paul Cook, former USF student now working for the Sitka tribe as a fisheries biologist)
6:30: **Film showing: *The Singing Planet*** (and Q&A with filmmaker Liz MacKenzie)

August 3: Current Environmental issues

9:00 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (G and S Gmelch)
10:00: CEL activity. (**Boat trip with twenty Sitka residents to Kruzof Island for beach cleanup** of ocean debris (Kristina Tirman, Education Coordinator, SSSC) This year it will depend upon community needs/opportunities.
7 pm: **Illustrated talk on the Arctic Wilderness** (writer/naturalist Debbie Miller)

August 4: Tourism's Importance and Impact

9:30 am: **Daily Orientation** (G and S Gmelch)
10:30: **Tourism speaker** (Sitka Visitors Center)
1-3: Raptor Center and Fortress of the Bear
3-6: CEL activity.
7-9:00 pm: Film Showing and Discussion: The Impact of Cruise Tourism in Sitka -- "rough cut" ((and Q&A with filmmaker Ellen Frankenstein and anthropologist S Gmelch)

August 5: Nature and Exploration

9:30 am: **Daily Orientation and Discussion** (George and S Gmelch)
10:30: **Snorkeling in the kelp forest with Science Center marine biologist Lauren Bell**
1-5: CEL activity.
7-8:30 pm: **Individual meetings** with GG to read selected journal/field note entries.

August 6: Wilderness Hike

All day Harbor Mountain hike

August 7: Final Exam

10-Noon: Final Exam (at SSSC)
1-4 pm: **Paddleboarding or Salmon Fishing**
7-9 pm: **Farewell dinner**

August 8: Departures

*The weather and the inevitable occasional change in a speaker's plans means that our schedule is subject to revision.

ⁱ Re: the CEL requirement. There are other Sitka organizations that also have community programs and activities that may be of interest. These include working at the food bank, taking an elders at the Pioneer Home for a walk, working with disabled adults in the outdoor recreation program (ORCA), and working with local volunteers doing maintenance of area trails through the Sitka Trail Works and the Natl. Park Service.

ⁱⁱ