

# Challenges in Sustainable Development in Haiti: from Theory to Practice

## Course Overview

The intersession course *Sustainable Development Challenges in Haiti* will allow students to move from theory to practice through a combination of readings, lectures, meetings, and direct participation in the construction of an ecological sanitation system with the organization SOIL. The readings and lectures will take an interdisciplinary look at the connections between poverty, public health and the environment in Haiti. Students will be encouraged to look holistically at environmental and public health problems from a human rights perspective, examining the role that inequality has played in creating and maintaining health and environmental crises in Haiti.

The course will take place in Haiti during the winter intersession from January 4-15, 2010. Each day there will be a morning meeting for group discussions of the class readings, and to allow evaluation of the previous days work. During their stay students will participate in the following activities:

- Visits to several of SOIL's ecological sanitation sites, a rural technology center and an experimental farm in Milot. While in Milot students will also have a chance to visit the historic monuments of the Palace of San Souci and the Citadel.
- Visit to the Village of Labadi where SOIL has constructed 4 large public ecological toilets. Labadi is also the site where Royal Caribbean cruises has a private beach, the largest site for tourist activity in the country. This visit will allow students to evaluate the effects of tourism from both environmental and social perspectives.
- A visit to Shada (an overcrowded urban slum in Cap Haitien) with discussion of the special challenges of urban development. We will meet with several local grassroots NGO's to get a better sense of community identified priorities.
- Interactions with local government officials, including meetings with the mayors of Milot, Borgne and Cap Haitien. We will discuss both the positive and negative roles that international organizations have played with regards to local governments.
- Construction of an ecological sanitation system. Students will have a chance to help with both project implementation and community outreach.
- Daily group meetings, to discuss the previous days work and to reflect on ways to enhance the sustainability of the project, with special attention given to project maintenance.

At the conclusion of the course, students will be required to write a research or development proposal which gives equal weight to academic rigor and community relevance. They will be asked to search online for various grant-making organizations and research institutions and their proposals will be submitted at the completion of the class. After having a chance to visit numerous projects and meet with various individuals and groups in Haiti, students should have acquired a good sense of community needs and they will be asked to develop a proposal that addresses a specific need. Another course requirement is a public presentation upon returning to the US. Students who submit exemplary proposals, and are interested in pursuing the project, will have the opportunity to return to Haiti to complete their proposed project during a summer internship. SOIL will also provide logistical and advisory support for graduate students interested in developing research in Haiti.

The class is designed for undergraduates and graduates from any discipline interested in bringing their academic training to bear on issues of human suffering and environmental destruction. The goal of the class is to recruit a broad range of students to bring a variety of disciplinary perspectives to the table.

## How will the student benefit by taking this course?

1. Through readings and lectures, students will gain an appreciation for the complex political, environmental, economic and social history of Haiti, giving them a historical context through which they can interpret their field experience.
2. During their 9 days in Haiti, students will visit development projects throughout northern Haiti, getting a sense of problems faced by both rural and urban communities. Field visits to project sites will also offer students a chance to evaluate the sustainability of different development approaches.
3. Students will gain hands on experience in development work, from fundraising and outreach to project implementation.
4. Course participants will have a chance to interact with local leaders, community organizations and school children, through daily meetings geared towards deepening our understanding of the interactions between poverty, the environment and public health.
5. The research proposal submitted at the end of the session, will challenge students to think creatively about how rigorous academic research can be designed to meet vital community needs.
6. The public presentation will help students learn to engage with groups in their community to promote a cause.
7. Both the field experience and the research proposal lay the groundwork for future participation in research and development projects in Haiti. The relationship between SOIL and the University of Miami will provide the necessary infrastructure for students to return to Haiti to carry out further research and volunteer with various development projects.

## Instructor's Biography

**Sasha Kramer** (Ph.D. in Biological Sciences from Stanford University) is an Adjunct Professor of International Studies at the University of Miami and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for Latin American Studies. Before coming to Miami she completed a Postdoctoral Research position with the Collaboratory [for Research on Global Projects](#) at Stanford, which included coordinating an ecological sanitation project in Haiti in collaboration with [Stanford's Engineers for a Sustainable World](#) and several departments: Anthropological Sciences, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Biological Sciences and the School of Medicine.

Dr. Kramer has worked as an ecologist and human rights observer in northern Haiti since 2004. In 2006, she co-founded a non-profit called SOIL (Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods [www.oursoil.org](http://www.oursoil.org)), dedicated to supporting and promoting soil fertility in Haiti and forging collaborations between students and researchers in the United States and local community organizations in Haiti. She is also the co-founder of SOL (Sosyete Oganize pou Lanati), a Haitian non-profit dedicated to promoting environmental justice and ecologically sound development in cooperation with the US non-profit SOIL.

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