

**IDEV3500: Field Course in Development Studies  
Guelph Institute of Development Studies  
University of Guelph**

**CULTURE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL  
[1.0 credits]**

**Pre-departure sessions: April 1; April 22-25, 2025 (exact time and location TBD)  
Field school: May 1-22, 2025**

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**OVERVIEW**

In this field school, students will learn about current development dynamics, opportunities and challenges in the context of Nepal. Students will learn about the history and culture of Nepal through visits to historic sites, meet with local development and human rights organisations, and learn about the country's culture, religions, politics and economy from local experts. By visiting three different geographic regions of Nepal, students will understand variations in development dynamics around the country. They will also get a window into daily life in Nepal through homestay accommodation with local families. While primarily focused on issues related to culture and development, this field school addresses a broad range of issues and topics. It will thus be of interest to students with a range of disciplinary backgrounds, including international development studies, political science, sociology, anthropology, history, art and architecture, geography, environmental studies, rural development, and agriculture.

**WHY NEPAL?**

Bordered by the Himalayas to the north and India to the south, Nepal is a diverse nation with multiple ethnicities, religions, cultures and over 120 spoken languages. As one of the few countries in South Asia that did not experience European colonisation, it has a long history of cultural resilience and social innovation. While currently ranked 146th out of 193 countries on the UNDP's Human Development Index, Nepal has made progress in poverty reduction, gender equality, sustainable agriculture, democratic governance, conservation, climate change adaptation, and disaster risk reduction. At the same time, however, the country has experienced massive political instability through a decade-long civil war

(1996-2006) and the 2008 transition from monarchy to republic. In 2015, a major earthquake resulted in thousands of deaths and the destruction of many heritage sites, which - in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic - was a major blow to the tourism sector, which is a pillar of the Nepali economy. Additionally, the country has simultaneously experienced challenges associated with rapid urbanisation and large-scale outward migration. Geopolitically, Nepal navigates complex regional dynamics that are largely dictated by its closest superpower neighbours, India and China. Despite these challenges, Nepal continues to make progress on many social indicators, and is projected to graduate out of the Least Developing Country (LDC) category by 2026.

## FIELD SCHOOL SUMMARY

After landing in Kathmandu and having a day of introduction to the city and local partners, students will fly to Ilam District in the far east of the country, a region that is far off the beaten tourist track and known for its tea production and endangered red pandas. There, students will have the opportunity to learn about agriculture, environmental conservation, and education policy in the context of rural development. From Ilam, students will drive to Chitwan in the southern Terai, where the country established its first national park in 1973. The park is home to many endangered species, including one of the last populations of the single-horned rhinoceros and the Bengal tiger. Conservation efforts, however, have come at the price of local indigenous communities, who were evicted and displaced to make room for the park. Here, students will have the chance to learn about the tensions between conservation, livelihoods and culture. Finally, the last part of the field school will take place in the Kathmandu Valley, which is the both the political center of the country and home to seven UNESCO World Heritage Sites. In Kathmandu, rapid urbanisation poses environmental and economic challenges, even while traditional livelihoods, religious rituals, and cultural practices persist amidst the bustle of city life. It is also the home to many NGOs and social organisations, and students will have the chance to meet with transgender activists, disability rights advocates, youth from political organisations, heritage conservationists, and environmental scientists.

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

- **Understand the complexity of development issues:** During the in-country part of the field school, students will learn about development opportunities and challenges in the context of Nepal. In the final project, students will apply and extend their knowledge by conducting further research on a topic that they learned about during the field school. (University Learning Outcome #1; IDS Program Learning Outcomes #2 and #3)
- **Global Understanding:** Through site visits and meetings with local experts and organisations, students will enhance their sense of historical development and understanding about the impact of geographic, political, social and economic

context. The field school will enhance students' sense of civic knowledge and engagement through interactions that demonstrate how Canadians and Nepalis are interconnected through global challenges such as climate change, human rights, and migration. (University Learning Outcome #3)

- **Intercultural Competence**: Students will develop strategies for improving their intercultural competence. The main tools that will be used for this objective during the seminar portion of the course will be the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) survey, cultural training activities, and written reflections. These concepts and tools will also be introduced during the pre-departure seminars and reinforced during the field school. (University Learning Outcome #3)
- **Critical Reflection**: Through groups discussions, written reflections, participation in the IDI survey, and the final process letter, students will engage in metacognitive reflection about their learning processes. This will also contribute to students' self-understanding of their own position, place, values and experiences within the context of international development. (University Learning Outcomes #1 and #5; IDS Program Learning Outcome #8)
- **Communication**: Students will enhance their communication skills through the assignments. In the blog post, students will represent their learning during the field school to a general audience. During the final project, students will conduct research and analyse a topic of their choosing using a mode of communication (i.e. written, visual, or oral) of their choice. (University Learning Outcome #4; IDS Program Learning Outcomes #3 and #6)

## **COURSEWORK**

- 1. Participation (25%)**: Students are expected to participate in five pre-departure classes, which includes the completion of all required readings and in-class activities. During the field school, students are expected to participate in activities and group discussions.
- 2. Three written reflections**
  - a. Pre-departure reflection (10%)** – Due April 25, 2025. Identify your goals and expectations for the field school, making connections to the concepts and readings from the pre-departure sessions wherever possible.
  - b. Intercultural competence reflection (10%)**: How has your cultural background or identity shaped your experience abroad? Think of an intercultural interaction that you have experienced or observed. What happened and how did you feel about it? What have you learned from the experience, and how has it influenced your actions or behaviour? You should

connect this reflection to the readings and discussions about intercultural competence. You may submit this reflection at any time during the field school prior to departure.

- c. **Blog post** (10%) – Deadline TBD. This learning reflection provides you with the opportunity to write about your experiences during the field school for a public audience on the class blog. Your blog post should reflect on how an experience you have had during the field school has contributed to your learning about the dynamics, opportunities and challenges for development in Nepal. A 2-minute video blog will also be accepted as a single submission. The blogging schedule will be determined during the pre-departure sessions. Your blog post should be submitted by 10pm on the day that you have been scheduled to blog.
3. **Final project** (30%) – Due June 23, 2025. For this final project, you should respond to the following prompt: **Choose a topic that was introduced during the Nepal field school. What are the challenges and opportunities for development in relation to this topic? How has this topic evolved over time? How are cultural dynamics connected to this topic?** To answer this question, you should conduct research on the topic, using both primary and scholarly sources (approximately 8-10 sources). You may choose what format to use for the submission of your final project. Possible formats could include an essay (8-10 pages) or photo essay (approx. 15-20 pages), video presentation (10 minutes), or podcast (10 minutes). If you are choosing a video or podcast format, you should submit a 800-1000 word synopsis of your research along with a reference list.
4. **Final process letter** (15%) – June 30, 2025. The purpose of the process letter is for you to document and reflect on the learning journey you have taken during the field school. You should address each of the following five questions in your process letter:
  - a. What have you learned about development dynamics in the field school? What do you know now that you did not know before taking this course?
  - b. How would you describe your learning process in the course? Did you learn anything unexpected? Did you expect to learn something you didn't learn? Did you experience any resistance to the content or course format during your learning process?
  - c. What did you learn about how you learn?
  - d. How could you apply what you learned in this class to other settings (e.g. other classes, your professional development, your job?)

## **OUTLINE OF PRE-DEPARTURE SESSIONS**

The purpose of the pre-departure sessions is provide a theoretical and ethical foundation for how we will approach our learning during the field school. It also provides us with an opportunity for the group to become more comfortable with each other, as well as plan out some of the logistics of the field school.

Specifically, we will understand how experiential learning works and how to make the most of an immersive field school as a learning opportunity. During each session, we will learn about culture and intercultural competence, and have the opportunity to practice different intercultural skills through activities and reflections. Finally, there will be an introduction to Nepal and the main development issues that we will explore during the field school.

### **1) Introductions, Overview, Logistics (April 1)**

No required readings.

### **2) Is the world your classroom? Experiential learning and the purpose of studying abroad (April 22)**

Rebecca Tiessen and Robert Huish, Eds. *Globetrotting or Global Citizenship?: Perils and Potential of International Experiential Learning*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Pages 1-13.

Lane Perry, Lee Stoner, and Michael Tarrant. "More Than a Vacation: Short-term Study Abroad as a Critically Reflective, Transformative Learning Experience." *Creative Education*. 3(5). 2012: 679-683.

### **3) Intercultural Competence (April 23)**

Michael Vande Berg, R. Michael Paige, and Kris Hemming Lou, Eds. *Student Learning Abroad: What Our Students Are Learning, What They're Not, and What We Can Do About It*. Sterling, Virginia: Stylus, 2012. Chapter 5.

Lynne Mitchell and Andrea Paras. 2018. "When Difference Creates Dissonance: Understanding the 'Engine' of Intercultural Learning." *Intercultural Education*. 29(3): 321-339.

### **4) The Ethics of Representation (April 24)**

Rebecca Tiessen and Robert Huish, Eds. "Visual Representation and Canadian Government-Funded Volunteer Abroad Programs: Picturing the Canadian Global Citizen." *Globetrotting or Global Citizenship?: Perils and Potential of International Experiential Learning*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2014.

Kelle Caton and Carla Almeida Santos. "Closing the Hermeneutic Circle: Photographic Encounters with the Other." *Annals of Tourism Research*. 35(1). 2008: 7-26.

## **5) Culture and Sustainable Development in Nepal (April 25)**

Readings TBD.

### **OVERVIEW OF FIELD SCHOOL (MAY 1-22, 2025)**

The field school is roughly divided into four parts, each of which corresponds with a geographic region of the country and a set of themes.

#### **PART ONE: INTRODUCTION TO NEPAL (May 1 and 2)**

- Arrival in Kathmandu and introduction to local partners
- Walking tour

#### **PART TWO: RURAL DEVELOPMENT, AGRICULTURE, AND EDUCATION IN ILAM DISTRICT (May 3-7)**

- Dairy and agricultural cooperatives
- Hiking in red panda zone
- Tea and organic agricultural production in Shree Antu Danda hills
- Visit local high school for interactions with students and teachers

#### **PART THREE: CONSERVATION, LIVELIHOODS, AND CULTURE IN CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK (May 8-10)**

- Interactions with Tharu community members, cultural organisations and conservationists
- Jungle safari
- Elephant and crocodile breeding centres

#### **PART FOUR: RIGHTS, RELIGION, URBANISATION AND CULTURE IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY (May 11-22)**

- Meetings with disability and transgender rights advocates, as well as local experts in rural development, heritage preservation, Nepali economy and business, and youth in politics
- UNESCO World Heritage Sites (Patan, Durbar Square, Pashupatinath, Bhaktapur, Swayambunath, Bouddanath)
- International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)
- Village trekking and overnight in Namobuddha Monastery
- Visit with former Kumari (Living goddess)
- Traditional livelihoods (pottery, painting, yogurt)