

MNS 352D MARINE BOTANY FIELD RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Celestun, Yucatan, Mexico

NSC 119: Study Abroad Seminar

Taught by UT Faculty Members:

Ken Dunton and Sharon Herzka

Department of Marine Science (Port Aransas)

MAY 9 -27th 2027



THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
Marine Science Institute
College of Natural Sciences



Since 2005, our Marine Botany May Term course has focused on the ecology and vegetation of the Yucatan Peninsula, including seagrass beds, algae, mangrove communities, and coral reefs. Our studies include how coastal modification, tourism, and other anthropogenic activities have affected watersheds, the ecological function of coastal systems, and the ecosystem services they provide. Ongoing mangrove restoration efforts provide a model for examining how community-based efforts are coupled with ecological knowledge to aid in recovering valuable ecosystems.

The course will take place in Celestun and Isla Arena on the shores of the Gulf of Mexico along the northwestern coast of the Yucatan Peninsula, in the states of Yucatan and Campeche* about an hour from the City of Merida's International Airport.







**The Mexican states of Yucatan and Campeche are not listed in UT's restricted travel regions. Students will stay at the Centro de Investigación y Capacitación en Recursos Naturales DUMAC (Ducks Unlimited Mexico)* in Celestun and Centro Ecosturístico Carey at Isla Arena.

The destination



The study areas encompass two national reserves: the Ria Celestun Biosphere Reserve and Los Petenes Biosphere Reserve, known for their extensive mangrove forests, seagrass meadows, shallow Ria's (coastal lagoons), luxuriant vegetation, waterfowl and flamingos, and high biodiversity.



The Yucatan Peninsula is built on porous limestone that allows for rainwater percolation into a massive network of below-ground rivers. Most of the outflow is through freshwater springs within the marine environment that supports unique island-like ecosystems locally known as *petenes*. Sinkholes on land, or *cenote*s, are widespread and have provided refreshing natural pools for centuries.

The Mayan Empire extended across the Yucatan Peninsula and Central America, and their descendants proudly maintained their culinary and cultural traditions. However, the Peninsula's coasts are under pressure from urban development, tourism, and climate change which threaten these indigenous cultures.

Topics are covered from an interdisciplinary perspective; our measurements of water quality, plant community structure, species composition, and sediment parameters will be used by local NGOs to develop management and conservation policies for these unique systems.

Students are expected to develop and conduct independent research in three-member teams under the guidance of an instructor based on proposals developed in NSC 119. This course fulfills part of the Basic Education Requirement in independent inquiry and writing. Students are expected to collect both field and laboratory data for detailed journal entries, oral presentations, and a final research paper.

Estimated Costs

Estimated program fee: $2,750

Actual costs to be determined. Please check our website for the most up-to-date information. The program fee includes the $300 non-refundable deposit, housing, local transportation, meals, on-site orientation and student services, and program activities including boat trips for research and exploration. The fee also includes transportation to/from the Merida International Airport to the research sites.

Spring tuition and fees: Students register for NSC 119 and MNS 352D as part of their normal spring semester registration. Flat rate tuition applies.

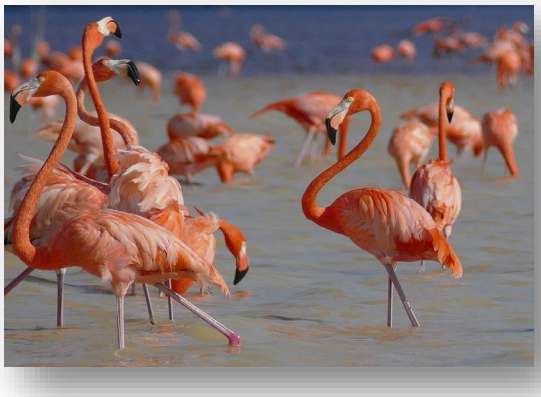
Estimated roundtrip airfare: $500-600. Students purchase roundtrip airfare to Merida, Yucatan from Austin, Houston, or Dallas. Flight information will be provided.

Estimated additional expenses:

Admin fee for Texas Global Portal:	$75
Personal Items:	$200
Medical Insurance:	$95
Passport:	$130
Personal Emergency Funds:	$500

(No Visa required if you are a U.S. citizen)

Photo: Photo: Bernard DUPONT





Financial aid

All federal, state, and UT institutional aid can be used for Study Abroad Programs. Spring financial aid packages can be recalculated based on the additional costs of the program.
http://world.utexas.edu/abroad/funding

Scholarships

International Education Fee Scholarship
Texas Global

CNS Faculty-Led Study Abroad Scholarship, May Term

Apply for scholarships on UT's scholarship system, LASSO.

Other scholarships may be available depending on unique need.
Make an appointment with the Office of Experiential Learning
cns.exl@austin.utexas.edu



Eligibility

Recommended minimum 2.6 GPA
Good academic standing
Upper division standing
UT enrollment during the spring semester preceding the program.
Prerequisites: Biology 311D and CH 302 (or equivalent by exam credit or courses), and six additional semester hours of upper division coursework in marine science, ecology, biochemistry, biology, or a related science field.

Field Research Experience Abroad

This study abroad course is a field experience program of 19 days. The class starts immediately following the end of final exams in the Spring semester in May and ends at the start of the first UT summer session. UT students travel and study with 2 UT faculty members, teaching assistants, and with other UT students.

Getting Started

STEP 1: Attend an information session for an overview of the program and meet with the course faculty, or contact the Marine Sciences Program Coordinator.
The information session is scheduled for
6 PM on Tuesday, October 20th in POB 2.402. Other information is posted under **Important Dates** and at https://utmsi.utexas.edu/academics/undergraduate/study-abroad.

STEP 2: Apply! Follow this link or QR code:
https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/Mw4aF46VTW
The application consists of short questions and 2 brief essays. A maximum of 18 students can attend the course.

For more information, contact the
Marine Science Coordinator, Olivia Smiaroski
Olivia.smiaroski@austin.utexas.edu EPS 4.120
(512) 232-5696

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
Marine Science Institute
College of Natural Sciences

Important Dates

2026

October 20
Attend an information session at 6 p.m. (POB 2.402)
November 1
Application deadline
November 15
Acceptance notices to applicants
November 29
$300 non-refundable deposit due

2027

Mid-January
Students must add NSC 119 and MNS 352D during the add/drop period if they are not yet registered for these courses.
January 11
Classes begin.
February 15
Remainder of the program fee is due.
March 1
Students must complete all online pre-departure materials in MyAbroad Portal, including the health clearance form.
Mid-April
Students attend final pre-departure session in Austin.
May 9
Students travel to Merida, Yucatan. Program begins evening of the 6th.
May 27
Students return to U.S departing from Merida, Yucatan
June 1 – June 4
Online meetings by video link from the Marine Science Institute, Port Aransas, Texas, as needed. to finalize research project reports.
June 7
Final projects due May Term ends

Application can be found using this QR code