

Integrating Policy into Interdisciplinary Field Research: Costa Rica as a Laboratory for Sustainable Development Policy Experimentation

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Tiny Costa Rica has assiduously cultivated an outsized reputation as a global leader in sustainable development policy. Costa Rica has been an early adopter in the creation of a robust protected area system, bet the house on ecotourism, pioneered bioprospecting, institutionalized a payments for environmental services program, instituted a carbon tax, and has nearly achieved carbon neutrality in the electricity sector. Most recently Costa Rica has begun to market itself to investors and entrepreneurs as a sustainable technology incubator. Arguably sustainable development is no longer just an important pillar in government policy, it is its central organizing principle.

Costa Rica as "sustainable development laboratory" offers interdisciplinary researchers in the field of Conservation and Development the opportunity to explore Costa Rica's development trajectory within the context of their own research. The UF TCD's Program's unique collaboration with the UF College of Law and the Organization for Tropical Studies, coupled with deep UF ties to the actors who have propelled Costa Rica's sustainable development trajectory provides an unusual opportunity to contextualize the policy dimension in conservation and development.

Joined by TCD student researchers who have benefited from the Program, Program professor and attorney Franklin Paniagua will critically assess the Costa Rica "Green Republic" model, and discuss the ways that the UF TCD/Law Program integrates law, policy and professional practice into interdisciplinary field research.

Franklin Paniagua has a law degree from the University of Costa Rica and a Master's degree from the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Florida. He has professional experience working on environmental and land conflicts and uses this expertise to assist the UF Levin College of Law's summer field course Tropical Conservation and Sustainable Practice: law, policy, and professional practice held annually in Costa Rica. He is also conducting research on the drivers influencing socialization and land-tenure conflict in the Osa Peninsula of Costa Rica, as part of his PhD work at the University of Florida.