

Maya Archaeology Field School in Belize Summer 2024 - ANTH 497

Program Overview

During this unique program, you will spend three and a half weeks living and working in a professional archaeological camp in northwestern Belize. This is an intense program, during which you will work 6 days a week excavating and participating in related activities at the ancient Maya community of Medicinal Trail.

The program is an experience you will remember for years as it provides not only a tremendous learning experience but also an opportunity for personal growth and exposure to the cultures of the Latin American and the Caribbean area.



The 2023 crew at the Tikal, Guatemala.

Program Dates

May 19th through June 12th

Courses Offered

ANTH 497: must have completed Anth 107
(or equivalent for non-Westerns), 6 credits

Education

Through hands on training, you will learn the general aspects of field archaeology: excavation, survey, mapping, artifact processing, and artifact analysis. Field and lab training will be supplemented by occasional lectures. All project participants will have the opportunity to participate in various aspects of archaeological fieldwork.

The Program Setting

This field school is part of the Medicinal Trail Hinterland Communities Archaeological Project (MTHCAP), directed by David M. Hyde, of Western Colorado University. The project is located within the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA), a 250,000-acre nature reserve in northwestern Belize, owned and operated by the Programme for Belize.

MTHCAP shares a camp with many other archaeological projects conducting research on the RBCMA, collectively known as the Programme for Belize Archaeological Project (PfBAP). Dr. Fred Valdez, of The University of Texas at Austin, is the permit holder for the larger umbrella organization PfBAP, which issued by the Institute of Archaeology, National Institute of Culture and History, Belize.

The research area is home to over 60 known ancient Maya sites, many rare birds, two species of monkeys, jaguars, and other fauna and flora of the tropics. It is a fascinating place to do research!

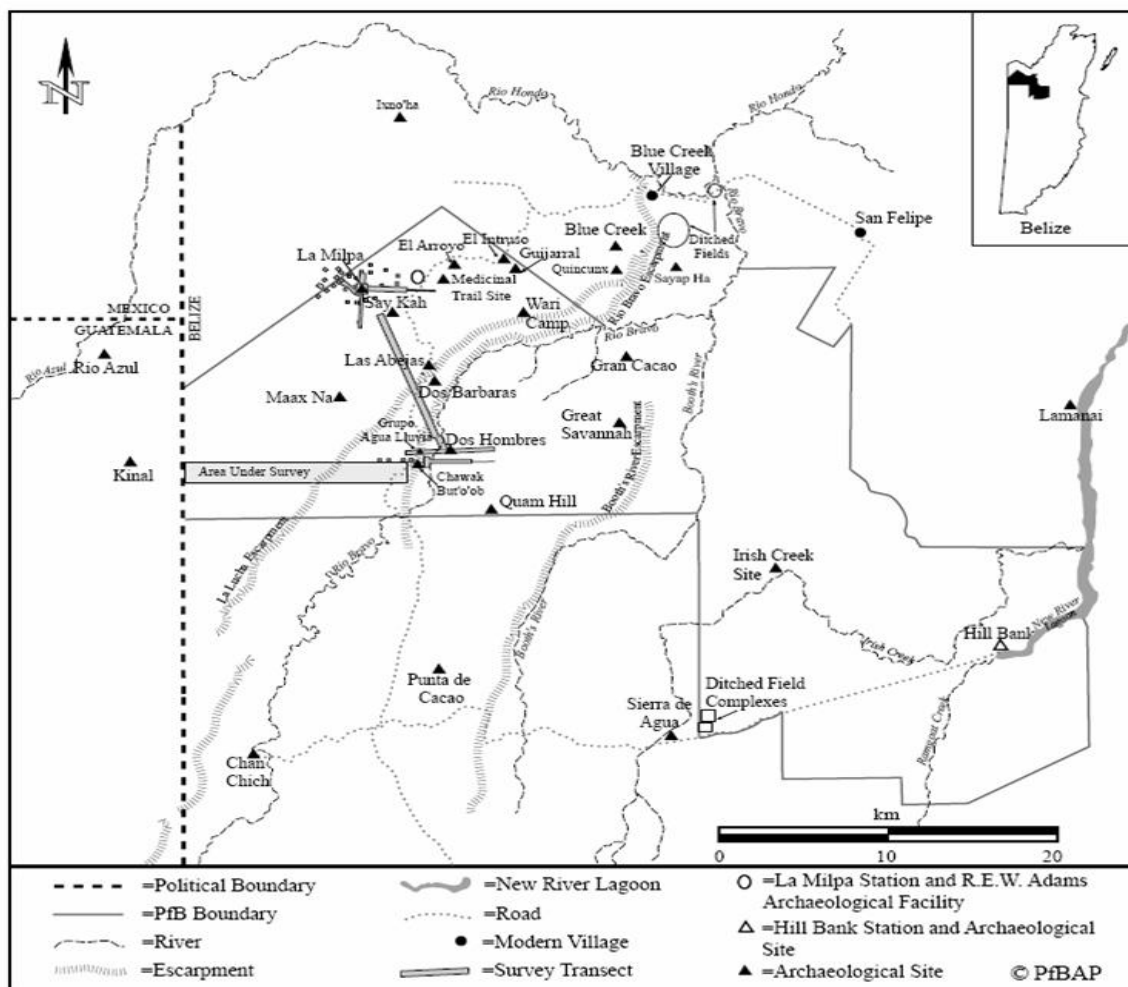


The RBCMA from the air. The clearing is where our camp is located.

2024 Maya Archaeology Field School in Belize

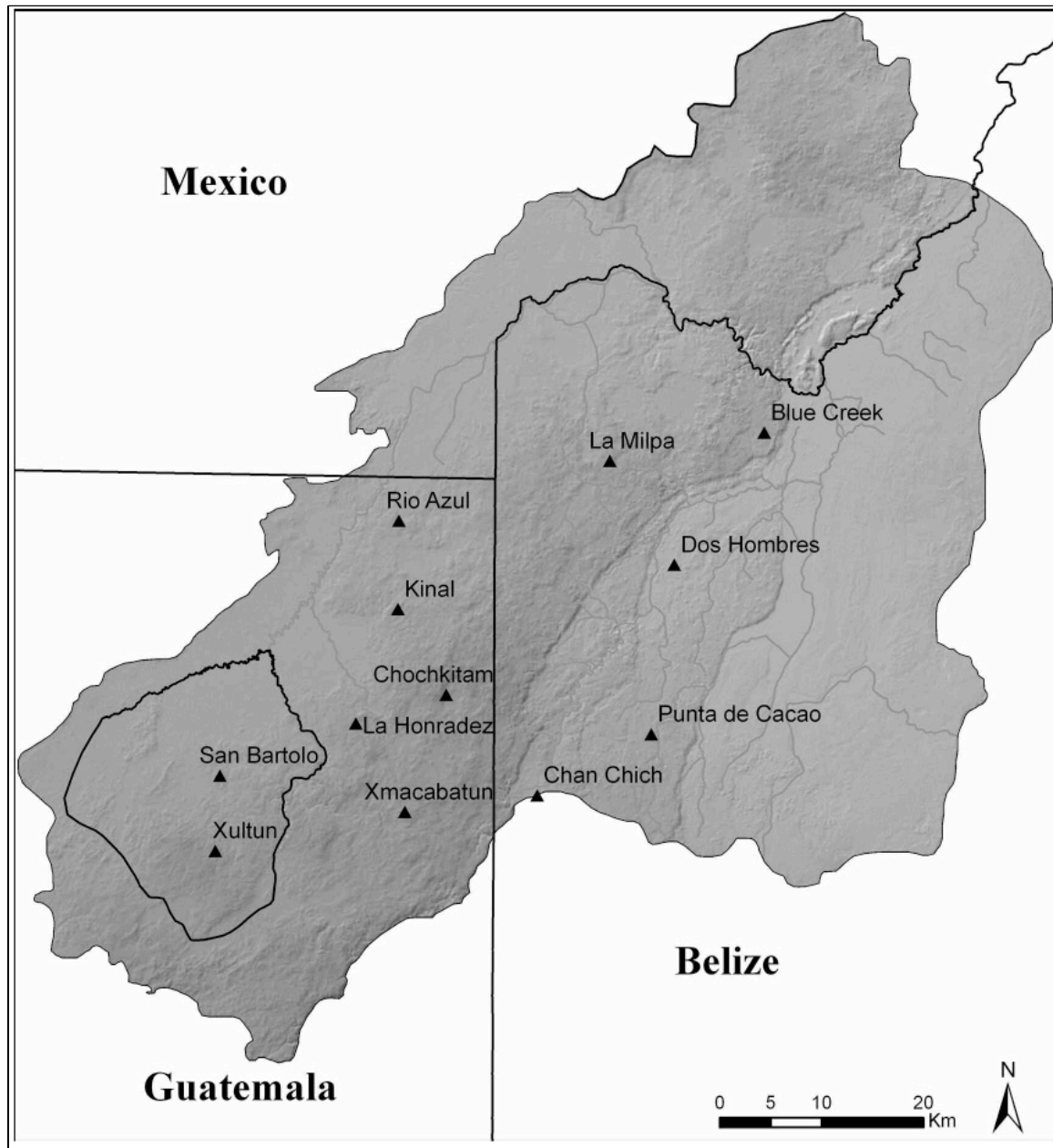
The WCU Field School has been in operation since 2012 and is an outgrowth of previous programs Dr. Hyde has directed or operated to varying degrees. Dr. Hyde previously directed a similar field school through The University of Texas at San Antonio (2009 & 2010), and prior to that was field director of The University of Texas at Austin field school (2004-2008). In that time, the field school(s) has trained hundreds of students.

MTHCAP takes place at the Medicinal Trail Community located in northwestern Belize, east of the large political center of La Milpa in the La Lucha Uplands (Figure 2). The property on which the site is located, designated as the Rio Bravo Conservation and Management Area (RBCMA), is owned and operated by the Programme for Belize (PFB), a locally run non-profit organization, which has adopted the role of conserving the rich natural and cultural heritages of RBCMA.



MTHCAP and the other projects of the PFBAP have their roots in the Rio Azul Archaeological Project of the 1980s, directed by REW Adams, in northeastern Guatemala, and its successor, the Ixcanrio Regional Project. In 1992, the Guatemala project(s) was shut

down and moved across the border to the RBCMA in northwestern Belize. The Guatemala and the Belize projects collectively are part of the larger Three Rivers Region, an arbitrarily defined archaeological and geographic area that encompasses nearly 2000 km² of northeastern Guatemala, northwestern Belize, and the southeastern corner of the Mexican state of Campeche

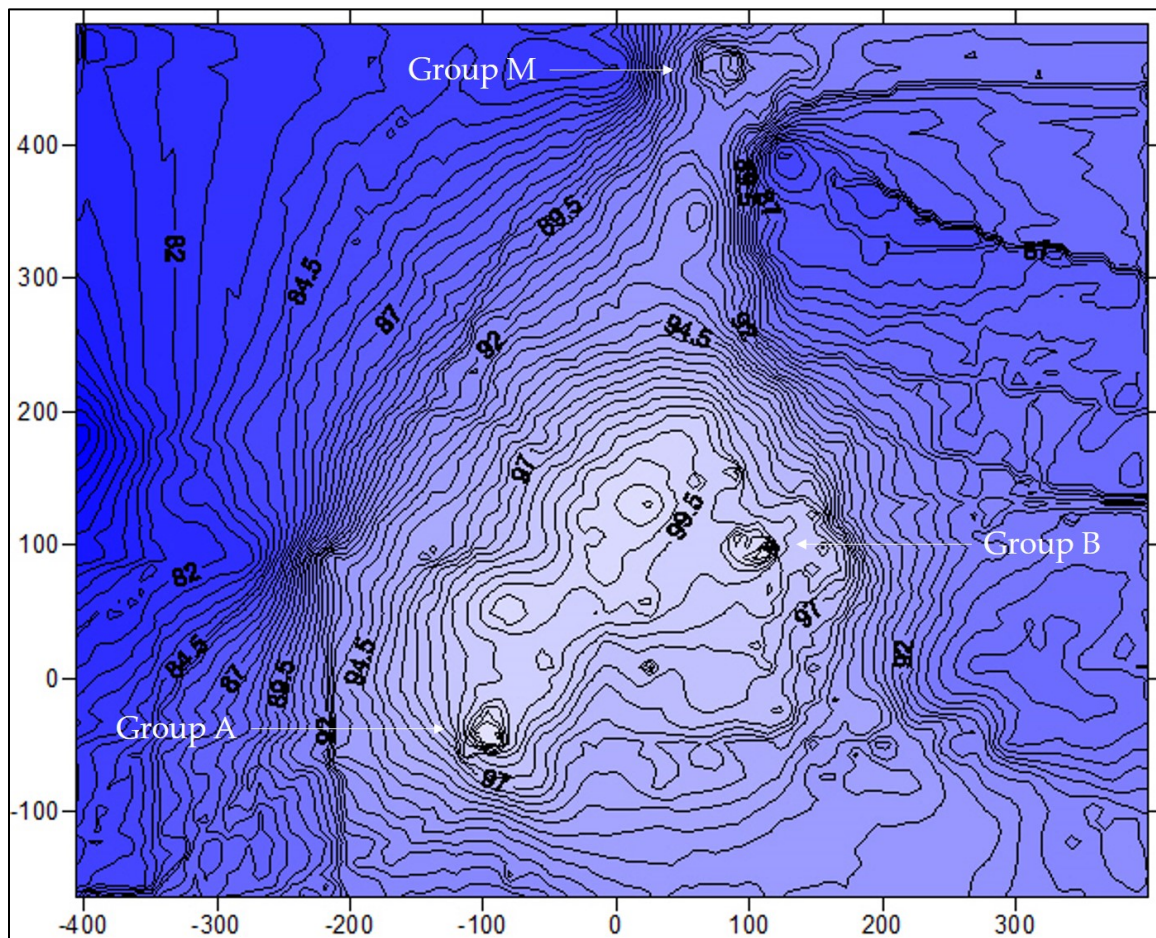


Map of the Three Rivers Region

Medicinal Trail Community: Description

The Medicinal Trail site is a dispersed hinterland community of at least three closely related formal courtyard groups, numerous informal clusters of mounds, and multiple landscape modifications such as terraces, depressions, and linear features. The boundaries

for the Medicinal Trail community are based on natural physiographic borders and land absent of archaeological structures or features. The eastern boundary of the community is the escarpment, and associated settlement extends to the Turtle Pond to the west, located in the PfB's La Milpa Research Station facility, where the topography is relative flat and low. The northern boundary is Group M. located on the edge of ridgetop that drops significantly. Reconnaissance south of Group E indicates very little cultural features until Hun Tun and therefore the southern boundary is between the two settlements.



Map of the Medicinal Trail Community

2024 Excavations

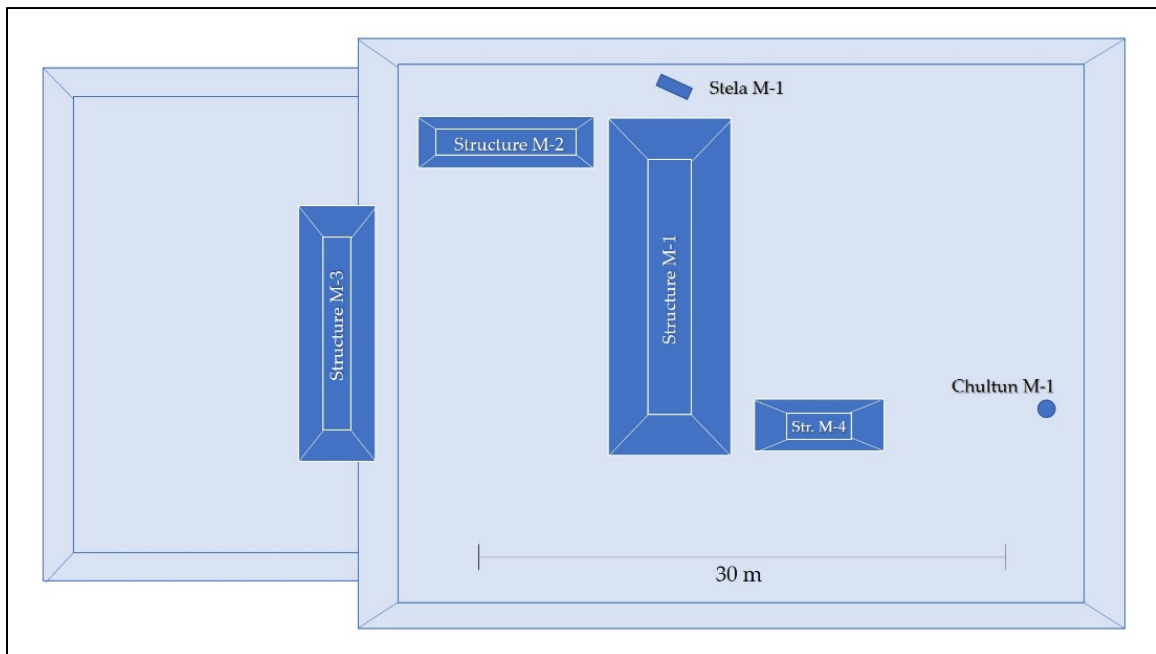
All work will take place at Medicinal Trail, Group M, which was discovered in 2016 as a part of the ongoing TDS and GPS mapping of the community. This group represents the northern boundary of the site and is a non-residential ritual and ceremonial space. There are three courtyards, with Structure M-1 situated between the Middle and Eastern Courtyards. In 2017 we began a test pit excavation in the Middle Courtyard to reveal construction history and chronology, but immediately uncovered a subsurface platform. In 2023, excavations revealed a termination cache with a “God Pot,” and evidence for ritual offerings at a collapsed stela (upright stone monument).



Excavations of a “God Pot” at Group M

For 2024, we will return to Group M to:

- Expose architecture of Structures M-1 and M-2, and if time permitting Str. M-3
- Recover data from inside the rooms of the structures to determine activities and functions



Sketch map of Group M

Camp Facilities

The R. E. W. Adams Research Facility consists of numerous buildings including:

- a large dorm/bunkhouse building and lab
- several roofed tent areas
- a kitchen and dining hall
- showers (water is not heated – one shower/person/day)
- latrines



View of the REW Adams Research Facility where we will live.

Lodging will be assigned upon arrival. Generally, you may expect to share a bunkhouse room (4 bunks) with up to three others, or a tent with one other person. Mattresses or foam sleeping pads will be provided.

Laundry service is once per week and is included in your fees – it may take 1-2 days to get your clothes back so plan accordingly.

A 10,000-Watt diesel generator provides us with part-time electricity. We do not yet have 24-hour electricity, but it is generally on in the mornings and evenings until 9:00pm.

Potable water comes from a well and is pumped through filtering system and is available in camp 24 hours per day 7 days per week.

Typical Field Day

Below is an outline of a typical fieldwork day (Sunday through Friday). This is an approximate daily schedule and may change.

5:30 a.m. Some rise early to prepare for their day and perform camp chores

6:00 a.m. Breakfast

6:30 a.m. Pack lunch and prepare for the field day

7:00 a.m. Depart camp for field work locations

12:00 noon Lunch in the field

3:30 p.m. Leave the field for camp

4:00 p.m. Arrive at camp from the field

4:30-6:00 p.m. Shower and relax until dinner

6:00 p.m. Dinner

7:00 p.m. Lectures and presentations may be scheduled, or free time

8:30 p.m. "Quiet Time": conversations must be at a whisper or taken out of camp

9:00 p.m. Lights out. The generator is turned off

Typical Field Week

Sundays through Fridays: Typically, we will be working at the archaeological site and in the field lab 6 days per week.

Saturdays: We will visit nearby archaeological sites for part of the day, and make a trip to "Linda Vista", a general store in the neighboring Mennonite community. At Linda Vista, you are able to make phone calls and buy snacks.



Students posing with a stucco mask from a building at the site of Lamanai, one of the sites will visit on one of our days off.

Camp Chores

All project members and students participate in the day-to-day operation of camp. Typical duties include, but are not limited to, the following and are assigned on a rotating basis:

- Dorm/Lab - sweep the common areas daily
- Trash - biodegradable trash is taken to a local dump each evening
- Kitchen - clean tables before breakfast and dinner
- Vehicles – supervised inspection of the vehicles (oil, water, tire pressure, etc.)
- Camp - pick up litter/trash around camp
- Dishes - wash the dishes after dinner

Food & Drink

Local cooks are hired to prepare Belizean-style food for breakfast and dinners. Students will make their own lunch from food that will be provided. Most special dietary needs can be accommodated, so please let me know as soon as possible if you have any so we can determine if it will be an issue.

Breakfast: beans, eggs, oatmeal, boiled plantains, cheese, buns, tortillas, fruit.

Lunch: Peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, canned tuna, canned meat (Vienna sausages), breakfast leftovers, fruit, tortillas, buns are some possibilities. You will prepare your own lunch from provided food.

Dinner: beans, rice, vegetables, and chicken/pork/beef. A variety of local dishes will be prepared as well as more familiar fare such as spaghetti. In the past meat was served every other evening only although it is possible that might be switched to every night. Realize though for every meal there is a vegetarian option.



Drinks: soft drinks are available for purchase (Coca-Cola products), drinking water is available 24 hours/day (free of charge). "Kool-Aid", or something similar is usually available (included in fees). Water and "Kool-Aid" are not served cold. We try to keep the Cokes cold, but there are no guarantees.

Snacks: Snacks are not provided. You may wish to bring snacks with you, but most items are available at the Linda Vista store. Keep in mind that you will have to store all snacks in your room and many things melt in the heat, do not keep well, and can attract insects.

Climate and Weather

You can expect the weather to be hot and humid with some rain. Rain is unpredictable, there may be a lot, and there may be none. Neither accommodation nor transportation are air-conditioned – be prepared!

Immigration

US citizens require a valid passport to enter Belize (and Guatemala if you decide to go on the optional trip). A visa is not required. You will be issued a 30 day visitor's permit (it is a stamp in your passport) when you arrive at the airport in Belize City. You will be issued a visitor's permit when you cross the border into Guatemala. If you are not a US citizen you must determine well in advance if a visa or other documentation will be required for you to enter Belize and Guatemala.

Health Issues

Consult with your physician or a travel medicine specialist for advice on immunizations. Make sure you tell your health care provider the nature of your trip. Some health care providers may suggest a tetanus booster, Hepatitis vaccinations, anti-malarial medication, or others measures. It is up to you, in consultation with your preferred medical care provider, to decide what medical course of action is best for you. If you decide to take malaria preventatives, start taking them before leaving for Belize to ensure there are no adverse side effects (and you will have time to switch to a different anti-malarial).

Travel to and from Belize

You will be responsible for booking your own flight to Belize. However – **DO NOT** book travel until you receive written notification that you have been accepted into the program. You will be met at the international airport in Belize City (airport code is BZE).

There is one international airport, it is relatively small and has a single pedestrian exit from the terminal. Students will arrive throughout the day on May 21st – the time of your flight arrival does not matter. Not everyone will likely be flying out of Gunnison or Denver so this gives you more flexibility in finding the cheapest flight.



International flights to Belize all land at the Philip Goldson International Airport (BZE)

Costs

Program fee is \$2400.00. The program is very reasonably priced for an opportunity of this kind. Some programs may charge lower fees, but may require you to bring your own camping equipment, and force you to get a hotel room and pay for meals at your own expense every weekend. Some other programs also require you to spend a significant amount of money on your own tools and excavation equipment – use of these items is included in this program. If it is not listed here it is not included.

The \$2400 Includes:

- Room and board while in camp
- International Health Insurance
- Potable water
- Project-related ground transportation: to camp, to the dig site, transportation to airport at the end of the program
- Laundry service once per week (wash, dry, fold)
- Use of necessary field equipment and supplies
- Operational and administrative costs and fees
- Weekend field trips to archaeological sites and admission fees

The \$2400 DOES NOT Include:

The program involves additional costs for participants. Some significant items are not included in the program fee, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Round trip airfare to Belize
- Passport and associated expenses
- Medicine, prescriptions, immunizations
- Personal spending (personal items, telephone calls, extraneous beverages, souvenirs, etc.)
- Textbook
- Air travel insurance

TUITION COST: \$1080 for 6 Credits!

