

**SIMON'S ROCK AT BARD COLLEGE
SEMESTER ABROAD PROGRAM**

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES IN
MONTSERRAT**

January 19th – April 18th, 2026



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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY STUDIES IN MONTSERRAT

This program is an opportunity for students to study abroad while taking advantage of the well-developed connections SRBC faculty have developed with the government of Montserrat, NGOs, and other experts in a variety of fields. The program is focused on understanding the complexities of human engagement with the natural world in light of extensive ecological and social disruption, the global crisis in biodiversity, and climate change, and is designed to allow students to participate in the core curriculum while exploring their own interests.

Specifically it is an opportunity to engage the people of Montserrat in an effort to understand how they are currently responding to major ecological and cultural disturbance due first to Hurricane Hugo in 1989, and then the Soufriere Hills Volcano, which underwent a series of eruptions from 1995-2012, forcing the evacuation of 12,000 people (85% of the population). An important element of the program is that it will include collaborations with resident experts, the Montserrat National Trust, the National Museum, and the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, providing a rich cultural exchange and learning opportunity for all participants.

Due to its relatively small size (population of 4,500), Montserrat provides an opportunity for participants to fully engage with these issues, to explore and conduct research, and to learn about Caribbean culture and history, tropical ecology, anthropology, volcanology, marine science, and many other disciplines. It is an opportunity for students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and from around the world to engage with each other in an effort to understand how society can respond to major ecological and cultural disturbance.

This semester experience can be an academic cornerstone for careers in environmental science, social activism, education, and sustainability, and can be the incubator for senior thesis projects. The program is open to students from the Bard network of institutions. Students from outside the Bard network are welcome to apply as visiting students.

PROGRAM CURRICULUM

The Montserrat Semester Abroad program offers students the opportunity to explore a wide range of social and environmental issues on a small island that has suffered significant ecological and social disruption over the past 30 years. Students will get to know both the island and many of its residents quite well, including from the government, NGOs, and educational institutions.

While specific courses may change from year to year, all participants are required to take the core curriculum which includes courses in 1) Natural History, 2) Marine Biology, 3) Geology and Volcanology, and 4) Cultural Studies. For upper level students working towards a thesis in Montserrat, advanced course work beyond the core curriculum can be achieved through the Advanced Research Methods course or through independent study. Students must take 16-18 credits. All course work is subject to approval by the program director and the SRBC Academic Affairs Office.

Core Courses:

ENVS Natural History of Montserrat
BIO/ENVS Marine Biology: Coral Reef Conservation
ENVS Geology and Volcanology
SOC/ENVS Cultural Studies in Montserrat

Required pre-departure course: History, Culture and Environment

Required Water Safety Course in Montserrat:

Water Safety: Man o' war, bearded fireworms, and body surfing.

How To Apply

The program is open to rising sophomores, juniors, or seniors. You must be 18 or older to attend. In order to attend the program, you must **1)** submit the Petition for Study Abroad form to the Bard Abroad Office (bardabroad@bard.edu), and **2)** submit a brief application outlining your reasons for wanting to attend the program, and an explanation of how it fits into your overall academic plan. Both sets of documents can be found online - <https://simons-rock.edu/academics/program-overview/ecology-and-sustainability-studies-in-montserrat.php>

All students will also be registered for the pre-departure course which takes place late in the fall semester.

PROGRAM EXPENSES

If you are a student of Bard College-Annandale, or Simon's Rock at Bard College, your AY25 financial aid package will be applied to the program. Additional costs include travel insurance provided by SRBC/Bard (charged to student account ~\$300), vaccinations, airfare, and personal expenses. Required field trips are covered by the program but some optional programs, such as becoming a certified diver, are not. All travel on the island, food, and accommodations are included.

KEY LOGISTICS

Time Difference

Montserrat time is one hour later than Eastern Standard Time during the winter
e.g. 9:00 am EST is 10:00 am in Montserrat

Local currency

Eastern Caribbean Dollars (XCD) at an exchange of xcd 2.7 = US \$1. US dollars are generally accepted everywhere, however you will receive your change in XCD.

Emergency Phone Numbers (see section on Communication for more details)

On island: Police dial 999 / Fire dial 911

Calling Montserrat from the U.S.: 1 – 664 – local number (7 digits)

Montserrat Volcano Observatory

The active Soufriere Hills Volcano is monitored by the Montserrat Volcano Observatory. Details available at www.mvo.ms. Radio Montserrat can be monitored for information (Radio ZJB).

STUDENT CHECKLIST

- ☐ Hepatitis A, Typhoid, and Tetanus vaccinations
- ☐ Passport
- ☐ 2 copies of passport – 1 copy left at home
- ☐ Pre-departure travel plans communicated to Tom Coote
- ☐ Snorkel, mask, fins, & dive skin
- ☐ Write-in-the-Rain or similar waterproof journal
- ☐ Adequate supply of all necessary and preventative prescription medications
- ☐ Parent/guardian current contact information is on file with Simon's Rock/Bard

CULTURE & CUSTOMS

Simon's Rock at Bard College is visiting Montserrat under the invitation, auspices and guidance of the Government of Montserrat, and the local communities within the project area, and as such, we are guests in Montserrat. As guests, we therefore have a duty to ensure that we behave accordingly and conduct ourselves with every due respect, courtesy and consideration to our hosts. Everyone will be expected to conduct themselves with the care and consideration that they themselves would expect of any guest in their own home.

We have worked closely with the Minister of Education and the Permanent Secretary, as well as others to develop this opportunity and we hope to enjoy many years of bringing students to the island to study. Please work with your program staff and fellow students to help build this relationship.

Soufriere Hills Volcano

- Soufriere Hills Volcano had a major eruption in 1997 which essentially closed the southern end of the island – known as the “Exclusion Zone.” However the north end of the island was largely unaffected and the impact of the continued low-level emissions is minor. The volcano is closely monitored by the Montserrat Volcano Observatory (details available at <http://www.mvo.ms>) and Radio Montserrat can be monitored for information (Radio ZJB).

PROGRAM ITINERARY

Important! – The following itinerary is tentative and will be finalized in December.

Do not purchase any flights until the final dates are determined and only in conversation with the program director.

Jan 19th – Arrival

Students have two options for travel. They can meet at JFK and depart with other members of the team, or they can arrange to fly into Antigua and Montserrat on their own. Regardless of which option is chosen, all flights have to be coordinated through the Program Director, Tom Coote. This process is tricky because the only flights from Antigua to Montserrat are small 7-18 seat planes and they only fly 2-3 trips each day. Therefore flights into Antigua need to be coordinated with the small plane departure times. You will be provided with detailed transportation coordination information once flight schedules are confirmed. Do not make any reservations until that time. Detailed itinerary will be provided in December.

March 14th-18th – St. Patrick's Day Festival Break

April 12th-16th – Final Exams & Natural History Conference

April 18th – Departure

ACCOMMODATIONS

Housing is at the Simon's Rock Field Station in Old Towne. The dorms consist of double and triple rooms and shared building bathrooms. The dorms have wifi, a small refrigerator and a hot water pot but no cooking facilities.

Laundry facilities are available but all laundry is done by housekeeping. Bring a laundry bag to assist housekeeping in keeping track of your clothing.

FOOD, MEALS, & CHORES

Groceries are expensive in Montserrat. The meals that are planned are simple, and rice and beans will be a staple. Breakfast and lunches will be “self-serve” but dinners will be sit down family style. The kitchen will have limited hours but there will be a snack room with access 24/7. Students will be responsible for making sure that the snack room remains clean and in good order.

Recommendations About Food and Water

The water is considered safe and the groups in past years had no problem drinking water from the tap. However, we recommend:

- Eat only thoroughly cooked foods. Boil it, Cook it, Peel it or Forget it!
This means:
 - No salads from food stands! They look good... but you'll regret it!
 - Only eat fruit that you can peel or wash yourself, not fruit that has been pre-peeled or washed for you.
 - Fruit juices may be problematic—best to avoid them or buy juice in a can or bottle.
- Don't eat food that looks like it was cooked yesterday and has been sitting in the sun since then.
- Don't eat food that looks or smells bad.
- STAY HYDRATED! Drink plenty of fluids. Got a headache? Drink water. Tired? Drink water. Stomach problems? Drink water! Basically, carrying drinking water at all times of travel is required. Your goal is to pass light colored urine every 2 hours.

These guidelines are mentioned as a precaution to help keep you healthy. Traveler's diarrhea is not pleasant and the bathroom is NOT where you want to spend your time!

Personal Hygiene & Avoiding Certain Discomforts

- Wash Your Hands Thoroughly and Often!
- Rinse your ears out with fresh water after swimming in the ocean (to avoid ear infections).
- Body rashes can happen in hot environments – avoid wearing wet clothing longer than necessary.

Chores

Assignments will include:

- Snack Room manager

- House maintenance (kitchen and bathrooms and common spaces)
- Other tasks as assigned by program staff or community-wide decisions

SAFETY & MONEY

Money

Credit cards are not widely accepted. Traveler's checks can be cashed at banks only. All students should travel with some cash on hand for small personal purchases but these funds **need to be brand new bills in denominations of \$5 or more**. Local merchants will not accept even a slightly worn bill, and they will check every bill for the slightest tear or blemish.

The national currency of Montserrat is the Eastern Caribbean Dollar (XCD) although USD is equally welcome in most establishments. There is no need to change USD into XCD at any stage during your time in Montserrat but bear in mind you will be given change in XCD when purchasing from shops on the island. The exchange rate is approximately $\text{XCD } 2.7 = \text{USD } \1 .

There are only one or two ATMs and they will disburse cash in XCD. **You can only get cash with a Visa card**. Once on island it is recommended that you hold onto your US \$ and take out some EC \$ to use during your stay. Be sure to call your bank and credit card company to authorize use in Montserrat. American Express is not accepted on the island.

MEDICAL NOTES

If medical care is required the nearest critical care facility is the Mount St. John's Medical Center in Antigua. There is an air ambulance on standby to transfer people to the hospital on Antigua as necessary. Basic services are provided by the St. John's Medical Centre in Montserrat and a few small clinics. All basic medical expenses are covered under the program fee.

Bard College and Simon's Rock at Bard College provide expanded medical coverage for travel abroad, which covers serious medical issues including support for medical evacuation. This coverage will be billed to the students' account.

PACKING LIST

You are limited to one large carry-on backpack and one checked bag. Carry-on bag size limit is 45 linear inches (14”+9”+22”); checked bag size limit is 62 linear inches (length+width+height) and 50 lbs. There are significant airline charges for overweight bags.

If you take the small plane to Montserrat, anticipate a strong possibility of having your large bag left behind for delivery the next day. In other words, have a change of clothes and toiletries in your carry-on.

If you have packing questions about what you can carry in your carry-on and what should go in your checked bag, see tsa.gov (where there is a useful app about luggage).

- Seasonal temperatures – winter and summer temperatures vary between 76-88 degrees Fahrenheit (sea breezes are the norm).

Required Equipment List:

Dive booties or water shoes (needed for comfort and safety)
Dive skin/rash guard (needed for sun protection and jellyfish)
Sturdy water bottle(s) – 2L in size at least
Backpack-small to midsize for field work
Closed-toe hiking shoes
Headlamp/flashlight
Write-in-the-Rain field book
Laundry bag

Recommended Equipment List:

Dive gloves
Snorkeling gear (snorkel, mask, fins)
1 mm wetsuit – recommended, but not required (not having one will not impact your participation in the academic programming)
Multi-tool knife (don’t pack this item in your carry-on bag)
Camera & spare batteries
Sunglasses
Beach towel
Binoculars

No Goretex – doesn’t work
well in the tropics!

Clothing List:

Non-cotton field pants and shorts
Non-cotton long-sleeved and short sleeve shirts
One set of casual, nice clothing for outings in town

You will need a minimum
of 5 changes of field
clothes, including
shorts/pants, socks, tee
shirts, and underwear.

Fleece/sweatshirt
Lightweight waterproof jacket
Sandals
Wide brimmed hat
Swimwear
Underwear

Toiletries:

1. Keep in mind the limits on liquids/gels in carry-on luggage
2. Wherever possible, please ensure that these items are biodegradable and environmentally friendly (i.e. low in nitrates and phosphate-free). Most of the list below is available in some form on the island, but brand and selection will be very limited.

Toothbrush and toothpaste

Insect repellent (Off Clean Feel - picaridin is highly recommended over Deet)

Benadryl

Hydrocortisone cream

Sunscreen (see side note) and lip salve

Razor blades for shaving as needed

Shampoo & soap

Hand sanitizer towelettes

Moleskin for blisters

Medicated talcum powder (for “nappy rash”)

Contact lens solutions if needed

* Female participants: bring extra supply of feminine care products

There is evidence that
sunscreen is killing reefs so
dive skins and hats are the
preferable tools to protect
yourself from sun exposure.

Medications:

- Bring any prescription drugs you take IN THE CONTAINER they came in with your name and the prescription on it. Be sure to have enough for the whole trip (double your usual supply).
- A small supply of any over-the-counter drugs you use regularly (such as aspirin or migraine headache medications)
- If you wear contacts, bring an extra pair and/or a pair of glasses.
- The program staff will bring a first aid kit with basic medication/band aids/etc. BUT there won't be an unlimited supply. If there's something you think you will need while you are there—allergy medication, motion sickness medication, etc., bring it yourself.

What to Leave Behind:

- Hair dryers or other small electrical appliances
- Jewelry - Anything that you love, leave at home.

PROGRAM STAFF INFORMATION

Core faculty members are from Simon's Rock at Bard College, with visiting faculty from Bard College and other associated universities, and resident researchers from the Montserrat National Trust and the Montserrat Volcano Observatory. Program staff live on and off campus but are engaged with students on a daily basis.

Dr. Thomas Coote, Field Station and Program Director

Environmental Studies, Landscape Ecology and Genetics

BA, Simon's Rock at Bard College; MSES Bard College; PhD, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Dr. Coote's research focuses on aquatic ecology and genetics with a particular focus on molluscs. Current research is focused on the island of Montserrat's aquatic fauna, in particular populations of amphidromous species, now landlocked due to volcanic eruptions. Dr. Coote has been the recipient of the Hudson River Foundation's Polgar Fellowship as well as the New York National Sea Grant Fellowship. In addition to his academic background he served for 10 years in Student Affairs.

Dr. Kathryn Boswell, Associate Faculty

Anthropology

MA & PhD, Indiana University, Bloomington

Dr. Boswell's recent publications include "Establishing 'Stable Beginnings' through Alternative Channels: Voluntary Association Membership, Marriage, and Women's Socio-Economic Welfare in Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina Faso" in *Africa Today* and "Accumulation, War, and Dispossession: Burkinabé Repatriates' Problematic Reincorporation in the Homeland" in *NEAA Bulletin*. She has previously taught at Indiana University, Richmond and served as an OSI-Africa Doctoral Scholar; Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C. She has been the recipient of several Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships as well as two-time IIE Fulbright awardee to Côte d'Ivoire (1999-2000) and Burkina Faso (2004-2005). Dr. Boswell has presented at the African Studies Association, American Anthropological Association, Northeastern Anthropological Association, among others. She has been teaching at Simon's Rock since 2008.

Dr. Mike Bergman, Associate Faculty

Geophysics

BA, Columbia University; PhD, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dr. Bergman joined the Simon's Rock faculty after a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard University, where he studied fluid dynamics, magnetohydrodynamics, and

the generation of planetary magnetic fields. He is the recipient of fellowships from the National Science Foundation (NSF), NASA, and NATO, which sponsored his work at the University of Glasgow. His recent work involves experimental studies of the effects of magnetic fields, rotation, and fluid flow during the solidification and deformation of ice and metals, for which he has received grants from the Research Corporation and the National Science Foundation. He was awarded the 2000 Doornbos Memorial Prize in Exeter, United Kingdom, for his research on the Earth's interior, and is the secretary of SEDI, an international association of scientists who study the Earth's deep interior. He has published papers, some with student coauthors, in *Geophysical and Astrophysical Fluid Dynamics*, *Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors*, *Metallurgical and Materials Transactions*, *Nature*, *Geophysical Research Letters*, *Journal of Geophysical Research*, and *Journal of Crystal Growth*. He is the author of a chapter in the American Geophysical Union monograph *Core Dynamics, Structure, and Rotation*, and a chapter in the *Elsevier Encyclopedia of the Earth Sciences*, and has served as guest editor for *Physics of the Earth and Planetary Interiors*. He has also written a News and Views column for *Nature*. In Spring 2013, Dr. Bergman was a visiting research scientist at the École Normale Supérieure in Lyon, France.

Dr. Sarah Snyder, Associate Researcher and Faculty

Herpetology

BS, Unity College; PhD, University of Nevada, Reno

Dr. Snyder was a National Academies Education Fellow in the Life Sciences from 2013-2014 and has previously taught at the University of Nevada, Reno. Her research addresses conservation concerns for sensitive reptile and amphibian populations by examining mechanistic relationships between animals and their environment. As a doctoral student, she studied the effects of wildfire on the thermal ecology of tortoises in the Mojave Desert. Her work has been presented at many national and international conferences including the World Congress of Herpetology, the Joint Meeting of Herpetologists and Ichthyologists, and annual meetings of the Society for Integrative and Comparative Biology and the Ecological Society of America. Dr. Snyder has been actively involved in educational outreach at the University of Nevada Museum of Natural History, Nevada Bugs & Butterflies, and the Flying Cloud Institute's Young Women in Science Program.

Dr. Chris Coggins's, Associate Faculty

Geography

PhD & MS, Louisiana State University

Dr. Coggin's research focuses on rural China, political ecology, biodiversity, sacred landscapes, protected area management, globalization, and property/possession.

He has led students and faculty on eight trips to China since 1999, six of which have involved intensive field research. He is the co-editor of *Sacred Forests of Asia: Spiritual Ecology and the Politics of Nature Conservation* (with Bixia Chen; Routledge, 2023) and *Mapping Shangrila: Contested Landscapes of the Sino-Tibetan Borderlands* (with Emily Yeh; University of Washington, 2014). He is the author of *The Tiger and the Pangolin: Nature, Culture, and Conservation in China* (University of Hawaii Press, 2003) (runner-up for the 2003 Julian Steward Award for best book in environmental/ecological anthropology and nominated for the Kiriama Prize in nonfiction). He is also the co-author of *The Primates of China: Biogeography and Conservation Status — Past, Present, and Future* (China Forestry Publishing House, 2002). He has published refereed articles in many geography, environment, and Asia-related books and periodicals. Since 2011, he has led teams engaged in a multi-year, mixed methods, field and archival research project on the fengshui forests of southern and central China. His work on the history of humans and tigers in China has been featured on BBC 4's [Natural Histories](#). Dr. Coggins has been teaching at Simon's Rock since 1998.

Dr. Donald McClelland, Associate Researcher and Visiting Faculty (Lycoming College)

Botany

AA & BA, Simon's Rock at Bard College; PhD & MPhil, The Graduate Center of the City University of New York and The New York Botanical Garden

Dr. McClelland was The New York Botanical Garden's National Science Foundation funded Planetary Biodiversity Inventory: Solanum graduate fellow.

Before returning to Simon's Rock as a faculty member, he taught at Baruch College, Lehman College, the College of Mount St. Vincent, and The New York Botanical Garden's Adult Education program and the NYBG School of Professional Horticulture. Dr. McClelland's research focuses on the taxonomy and systematics of the plant family Solanaceae, the nightshade family, and the flora of eastern North America. He has conducted botanical fieldwork in Bolivia, New Caledonia, the Philippines, throughout the eastern United States, and in Hawaii. Future research projects include conservation of *Solanum viride* (also known as the cannibals' tomato), a species endemic to Oceania, and melissopalynology of southern New England.

Dr. Paul Spruell, Visiting Faculty (Eastern Washington University)

Fisheries Biology

BS, Univ. of Illinois; MS, Michigan State Univ.; PhD, Washington State University.

Dr. Spruell's primary research bridges fisheries biology, conservation genetics, and molecular ecology with a focus on the conservation and management of native salmonids. He specializes in species found in the inland northwest and uses both

traditional ecological methods such as tagging and mark recapture population estimates and molecular techniques such as SNPs to identify family groups based on genotypic similarities among individuals. He has also recently started a collaborative research program studying freshwater shrimp distribution on the Caribbean Island of Montserrat. Dr. Spruell has published over 25 peer-reviewed journal articles and has been the recipient of funding from the National Science Foundation, the Department of Education, and numerous federal, state, and tribal natural resource management agencies.

Dr. Bob Schmidt, Faculty Emeritus

Ichthyology

BS, University of Rhode Island; MS, PhD, University of Connecticut

Dr. Schmidt's specialty is ichthyology, with current interests in biogeography and the fishes of Montserrat, South America, and Hudson River fish larvae. His grants from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and Hudson River Foundation, among others, have enabled him to do research resulting in over 80 papers published in scientific journals including *Copeia*, *Ecology*, *Northeastern Naturalist*, *Transactions of the American Fisheries Society*, and *Caribbean Naturalist*, and contributions to several symposia on Hudson River ecology. His publications include seven coauthored papers on Montserratian fauna. He is an associate director of Hudsonia Ltd., located at Bard College, a director of the Berkshire Environmental Research Center, Ltd. at Simon's Rock, and adjunct curator of fishes at the New York State Museum.

COMMUNICATION

Families Needing to Reach their student on Montserrat

In the event of an emergency and you must contact your student while they are abroad, please follow these guidelines:

Contact Simon's Rock Security: 413-644-4400 or 413-528-7291
Even when the College is closed during Intersession, someone will always answer the phone

Field Station : 664-496-9712

Program Director, Tom Coote: 413-854-4442 (cell)

Cell service is limited on the island. However, wifi is reliable at the field station.

On Island Emergency Numbers

- Police & Emergency Numbers: Fire 911, Police 999
- Police Headquarters: 1-664-491-2555
- Emergency Line: 1-664-491-7790

General Means of Communication

If students wish to use their cell phones on Montserrat to make international calls they should purchase an international calling plan. Without such a plan the cost for using a cell phone will be extremely high.

We have found that the best way to remain in touch with family and friends is through video calls (such as Zoom or Facetime) using wifi.

USEFUL WEBSITES FOR PREPARING YOURSELF

Montserrat Tourist Board

<http://www.visitmontserrat.com/>

Government of Montserrat

<http://www.gov.ms/>

<http://www.gov.ms/a-z-government-listings/>

CDC

<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/montserrat>

State Department

<http://travel.state.gov/>

Fit for Travel

<http://www.fitfortravel.nhs.uk/destinations/caribbean/montserrat.aspx>

Kew Royal Botanic Gardens

<http://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/montserrat>

Montserrat National Trust

<http://montserratnationaltrust.ms/about-us/>

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds

<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/projects/details/198131-montserrat-programme>

Cornell Lab of Ornithology Neotropical Birds

http://neotropical.birds.cornell.edu/portal/species/overview?p_p_spp=673516