

Global Education Policy Leadership Program

Education Policy in Costa Rica: Environmental Sustainability & Community Autonomy 2025 Program Description

Program Co-Coordinators

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In this post-pandemic period of international change, disruption and increased concern over climate issues, the 2025 Global Education Policy Leadership Program (Global EPLP) will focus on environmental education and sustainability policies in Costa Rica, a Central American nation that highly values its rich national resource and cultural heritage, and tradition of community autonomy. The 2025 Global EPLP was developed through a new partnership established between Michigan State University's (MSU) Office of K-12 Outreach, based in the College of Education and MSU's Residential College in the Arts and Humanities' Program on Sustainability in Costa Rica. The Program, led by its founding Director, maintains a permanent presence in the country and regularly hosts visiting scholars and study abroad program participants.

In 2019, Costa Rica was awarded the United Nations Environment Programme's Champions of the Earth award for "policy leadership in recognition of its efforts and commitment to combat climate change and protect the planet's natural resources." The UN's announcement noted that "Costa Rica has long punched above its weight as a global green pioneer with a strong social conscience." (UN, September 20, 2019). In 2021, Costa Rica became the first country from Central America to join the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development (OECD), which conducted its initial Environmental Performance Review in 2023, recognizing the nation as "a megadiverse county, known globally for its success in reversing deforestation and pursuing a growth model based on the sustainable use of its environmental resources." Costa Rica is also one of only a few countries without a standing army.

Purpose of the Program

The Global EPLP is an international education policy and leadership-oriented program that annually provides a focused professional development opportunity for a small, diverse group of academics, research associates, and education leaders to examine innovative education policy strategies and current challenges facing the host country. Participants acquire a broader global perspective by studying education policy initiatives in economically developed and developing countries. To date, we have offered 11 successful field-based programs for approximately 150 senior U.S. education policy leaders in China (2011, 2012, 2017), England (2013, 2022), Bhutan (2015), India (2016), Germany and Switzerland (2017), Iceland (2021), New Zealand (2023), and Norway (2024). Each program includes a mix of academic and policy briefings, school/university visits, and cultural experiences.

Program Goals and Expectations for 2025

MSU's Program on Sustainability in Costa Rica has developed a unique model for exploring the complex and interconnected relationships involving environmental sustainability, and community autonomy in Latin America. Better understanding the challenges and dynamics of environmental protection, economic development, resource security, youth development, and community engagement, while respecting indigenous culture and rights, are among the 2025 Global EPLP goals. In addition, Costa Rica's national and regional policy initiatives designed to improve student literacy and learning opportunities in primary and secondary schools, and the preparation of teachers and school leaders to support these efforts will be explored.

Through participation in a series of monthly two-hour Zoom predeparture seminars (August, September, and October), an October in-country field study, and a post-trip November Zoom debriefing, the 2025 Global EPLP Senior Fellows will engage with school, university, community and policy leaders, and cultural experts in San Jose and Monteverde, Costa Rica to examine:

- Strategies for integrating social and environmental policies in teaching and learning
- The essential role of community organizations and partners
- Ethical questions related to environmental sustainability and public vs individual good
- Traditional academic vs vocational programs and apprenticeships
- Policy roles of higher education and government agencies
- The challenges of "ecotourism" for community autonomy

Schedule of Global EPLP Meetings in 2025 (Dates are tentative and subject to change, except for the trip) Note: ***All times are in the Eastern Time Zone. Meeting times were selected to enable policy experts from Costa Rica to participate in the meetings, given the two-hour time difference.***

The two-hour seminars will be held on-line using Zoom software communications. Each session is designed to help prepare participants for the field experience in Costa Rica as well as a post-visit program analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

Friday, August 15, 2025. 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon Program orientation, introductions, and expectations. *An Overview of Education and Education Policy in Costa Rica*, including history, structure, and current issues. Guest Expert: Vincent Delgado, Founding Director, MSU's Residential College in the Arts and Humanities' Program on Sustainability in Costa Rica.

Friday, September 12, 2025. 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon *Political Structures in Costa Rican Education*, including unions, and legislative and administrative roles and responsibilities. Guest Expert: TBA

Friday, October 3, 2025. 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon *Contemporary Issues in Costa Rican Education*. Guest Expert: TBA

Thursday, October 16 - Saturday, October 25, 2025, Field Study in San Jose & Monteverde

The field study is designed to provide Senior Fellows with an opportunity to:

- Develop relationships with educators at both basic and tertiary levels.
- Attend briefings at the University of Costa Rica, the Ministry of Education, and leading education policy organizations, and visit primary and secondary schools.
- Visit environmental education resource centers, sustainability demonstration projects, and local cultural and historic sites in San Jose (at sea level) and in Monteverde (at 4,500 ft.) in the cloud forest.
- Collect data related to the optional Global EPLP policy analysis projects.

October 2025 Global EPLP Costa Rica Tentative Day-By-Day Itinerary

Thursday, October 16, 2025 - DEPART USA and Arrive in Costa Rica

Morning departure and connecting flights from the U.S. to Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO) located in Alajuela, Costa Rica. Upon arrival, complete baggage claims process and immigration/customs requirements. Meet the local representative in the arrivals hall for group coach transfer to the Hotel Studio Boutique. Evening Global EPLP group dinner and welcome discussion. (TBA).

Friday, October 17, 2025 – San Jose

Morning: Policy briefings and urban school visits (TBA)

Afternoon: Policy briefings and urban school visits (TBA). Optional evening cultural experiences (TBA). Breakfast (B) provided, Lunch/Dinner (L/D) on your own.

Saturday, October 18, 2025 – San Jose

Morning: Policy briefing and/or urban school visits (TBA)

Afternoon: Half-day private guided San Jose Walking Food Tour and local sightseeing. Optional evening cultural experiences (TBA). B/L provided, D on your own.

Sunday, October 19, 2025 – San Jose

All Day: Private guided tour of museums and cultural sites, including the National Museum, Costa Rican Art Museum, and Pre-Columbian Gold Museum. B provided, L/D on your own.

Monday, October 20, 2025 – San Jose and Transfer to Monteverde

Morning: School visit and briefing.

Afternoon: Transfer by private coach to Monteverde and check-in at Valle Escondido Hotel.

Evening: Visit evening high school classes (TBA) B provided, L/D on your own.

Tuesday, October 21, 2025 - Monteverde

Morning: Transfer by coach for a private Quaker school visit and a cultural center briefing.

Afternoon: Briefings at the Monteverde Institute and community organizations and return to hotel. B provided, L/D on your own.

Wednesday, October 22, 2025 - Monteverde

All Day: Transfer by coach for briefings with conservation experts and tour of Costa Rica's leading sustainability and natural resource education center. Return to hotel. B/L provided, D on your own.

Thursday, October 23, 2025 – Monteverde

Morning: Transfer by coach for a guided visit to the stunning El Tigre Waterfalls.

Afternoon: Briefings at an education center and workshop focused on global youth rainforest action. Return to the hotel. B/L provided, D on your own.

Friday, October 24, 2025 – Monteverde and Transfer to San Jose

All Day: Morning checkout of hotel and travel by private coach to Curu Wildlife Refuge Beach for briefings focused on Costa Rica's refuge and fishing reserve system and how it is taught on the Nicoya Peninsula. Late afternoon, return by coach for check-in at the Hotel Studio Boutique in San Jose. Evening farewell reception TBA. B/L/D provided.

Saturday, October 25, 2025 - Return flight to U.S.A. Early morning group transfer via coach to Juan Santamaría International Airport (SJO) for international flight home or for extended travel plan connections.

Friday, November 14, 2025. 10:00AM to 12:00 Noon

Debriefing the Costa Rica Field Study. Post-trip reflections and closing thoughts. Global EPLP Coordinators and Senior Fellows.

Global EPLP Policy Analysis (Optional)

Completion of a Global Education Policy Analysis. Each Senior Fellow will have the opportunity to complete a written capstone policy analysis of an education policy initiative in Costa Rica. Working individually, or in small (2-4 person) collaborative teams, Senior Fellows analyze an education policy initiative and identify any implications this challenge might have on education

in the U.S. and/or the organization that sponsors the GEPLP experience. The focus of this policy brief would be identified prior to the October field experience. One or more researchable questions would be developed prior to our departure and would focus the data gathering process for the study. The post-tour November 14, debriefing will provide opportunities for fellows to share and discuss their findings and possible implications for U.S. education. Details about the policy analysis will be provided during the August 15, online meeting.

Suggested Readings and Media:

Note: Articles and links will be provided to program participants as electronic documents for your educational use only. Additional readings may be assigned by our monthly Costa Rican on-line guest experts.

OECD (2023), *OECD Environmental Performance Reviews: Costa Rica 2023*, OECD Environmental Performance Reviews, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/ec94fd4e-en>.

UNEP (2019) *The “living Eden” designing a template for a cleaner, carbon-free world*, New York, <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/story/costa-rica-living-eden-designing-template-cleaner-carbon-free-world>

About the Global EPLP Co-Coordinator

Bob Monson coordinates the Advanced Education Policy Leadership Program in New York. From 2000 to 2009, he was a senior lecturer and program coordinator in education leadership at Teachers College, Columbia University. From 2001 to 2022, he coordinated the Education Policy Fellowship Program in the Department of Education Policy & Social Analysis at Teachers College. In 1977, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Across seven states he has served public school children in the capacities of teacher, high school assistant principal, high school principal, assistant superintendent, and four superintendent positions in Ohio, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and New York. In 2010 he was a visiting fellow in education at Oxford University. From 2011-2015 he was a consultant to the University of Cambridge (UK) International Education as well as a consultant in Bhutan, China, the U.A.E., Nicaragua, and India.

Dan Schultz is Senior Policy and Program Advisor for the Office of K-12 Outreach in the College of Education at Michigan State University. He serves as Coordinator Emeritus for the Michigan Education Policy Fellowship Program (MI EPFP), a program he co-led for more than 35 years. He has developed and led over 25 academic and policy-oriented study tours to China, India, Botswana, Bhutan, Germany, Switzerland, Iceland, New Zealand, Norway and the U.K. His background includes executive leadership and policy roles in state government in Michigan, where he was Assistant State Superintendent and Director of Technology and Grants for the Michigan Department of Education. He holds academic degrees in economics and education administration. He is the recipient of the Michigan Reading Association’s Advocacy Award, the MSU College of Education Alumni Association's Distinguished Alumni Award, the Institute for Educational Leadership's National Leadership Award, and the International Friendship Award from Southwest University in China.