
New Futures for Rural Landscapes

PROGRAM EVALUATION
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
SUMMER 2019
COLOMBIA

Wright-Ingraham
INSTITUTE

INTEGRATIVE STUDIES IN SUSTAINABILITY

Field
Stations

Executive Summary

The Wright-Ingraham Institute Field Stations educational model focuses on interdisciplinary, integrative, place-based studies built around the natural sciences, systems thinking, landscape design and social justice. Programming prepares students across a wide range of disciplines to be better equipped to contribute the imagination, vision and problem-solving skills required for the environmental and cultural challenges of our times. These demands are the framework for the evolving, small scale, independent educational programming of the Field Stations Programs. In the summer of 2019, ten students living in Australia, Brazil, Canada, India, the U.K. and the United States participated in a 28-day program based in and around Bogotá, Medellín and the Middle Magdalena region in Colombia. The outcomes of that program were evaluated through semi-structured interviews and correspondence in summer 2020 with 10 students and 6 faculty (N=16) and are reported here.

KEY THEMATIC TAKEAWAYS IDENTIFIED BY STUDENTS

- *Sharpened observation skills*
- *Increased ecological empathy and awareness*
- *Thinking on larger (regional) or smaller scales*
- *Increased comfort working in interdisciplinary contexts*

CURRENT ALUMNI WORK

- **100%** of alumni are working on environmental justice issues at the time of this program evaluation
- **100%** of alumni want to work with Field Stations in the future
- **66%** of faculty want to work with Field Stations in the future
- **3 participants** said Field Stations influenced how they navigated a job transition or inspired them to pursue work with topics addressed in the Field Stations curriculum
- **100%** of participants said Field Stations positively impacts their current work

CREATION OF NETWORKS

- **970 WhatsApp messages** exchanged between program alumni network in 2019, 38 in 2020*
- **948 WhatsApp messages** exchanged between Field Stations program collaborators in 2019, 101 in 2020*
- **2 core faculty members** created research collaborations they will continue in the future through their participation in the program
- **Creation of a supportive alumni network** focused on environmental studies in the Anthropocene

**as of time of writing (September 2020)*

PUBLICATIONS (*forthcoming*)

- **3 publications total**, one from Field Stations and two from individual program participants

CURRICULUM AND DELIVERABLES

- **3 blocks**
 - *Context and Transect from Bogotá to Medellín*
 - *Urban systems in Medellín*
 - *Rural and Natural Systems in Río Claro*
- **3 assignments**
 - *Introductory Presentations*
 - *Transect Observation Exercise*
 - *Synthesis Project*

TEACHING AND LEARNING STYLES

- *Guest lectures*
- *Site visits*
- *Core faculty-led lectures and exercises*
- *Group critiques*
- *Desk criticisms*
- *One-on-one faculty-student mentoring*
- *Peer-peer mentoring*

CONSTRAINTS OF CURRICULUM AND ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN

- *Lack of clarity about process, board goals, outputs and staffing roles;*
- *Geographically ambitious site selection;*
- *All faculty worked for lower compensation than usual or pro bono;*
- *Shifting Field Stations to a new location (traveling model) poses challenges for building and maintaining local partnerships;*
- *All faculty interviewed requested more clear contracts, delineation of roles and responsibility in future programming;*
- *None of the students are actively working on projects they started during Field Stations, but all participants said their Field Stations project informs their current work in some way;*
- *The program could strengthen the educational equity component by involving more local students in the process, inviting students and faculty with direct experience with the landscape to take part in the workshop, and widening the applicant pool to consider a greater range of professional vocations and educational backgrounds.*

STUDENT PROFILES*

- **3** current doctoral students
- **5** enrolled or completed graduate degrees within one year of Field Stations program dates
- **2** current practitioners

**at time of program, all students were enrolled in or had completed graduate degrees*

COUNTRIES OF RESIDENCE

- **4** - USA
- **2** - Brazil
- **1** - Canada
- **1** - Australia
- **1** - India
- **1** - U.K.

PRIMARY CAREER FOCUS*

- **5** - Architecture or landscape architecture
- **2** - Urban/regional planning
- **2** - Social sciences or policy
- **1** - Engineering

**at time of program, all students were enrolled in or had completed graduate degrees*

CORE FACULTY PROFILES*

- **3** - Design practitioners (with university teaching affiliation or experience)
- **2** - Full-time university faculty
- **1** - Policy practitioner
- **1** - Sustainability education practitioner

**all core faculty had design backgrounds or lenses*

COUNTRIES OF RESIDENCE

- **6** - USA
- **1** - Norway

PARTNER ORGANIZATION PROFILE

FUNDACIÓN AMAZONAS

Magdalena River Valley, Antioquia, Colombia

Leadership: Justo Arosemena, Research Director*

*Justo Arosemena served as affiliate faculty for programming in the portion of the trip that took place in the Río Claro Nature Reserve. He led study tours, lectured about the region, advised student projects, introduced workshop participants to local stakeholders and coordinated logistics.

SUPPORTING FACULTY (N=31)

- 12 - Design Professions
- 8 - Agriculture/Ecotourism
- 6 - Natural Sciences
- 3 - Entrepreneur or business owner
- 1 - Government/Policy
- 1 - Nonprofit or foundation

COUNTRIES OF RESIDENCE

- 26 - Colombia
- 4 - United States
- 1 - Ireland

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Figure 1. Participant Work and Impact of Field Stations

Residence	Current Work	Job change in 2019-2020	Field Stations Impact on Current Work	Equity Lens
Brazil	Public Management Trainee <i>Environmental Institute State of Espiritu Santo, Brazil</i>	Yes	Field Stations impacted this participant to apply for work at the Environmental Institute. Through working with the group in 2019, they realized that questions of environmental justice aren't going away, and they wanted to become more involved with an interdisciplinary team. Their organization manages national parks in the region and takes care of environmental permitting and regulations.	This participant is focused on making environmental agencies work better and with grassroots movements so they are helpful to vulnerable groups and not perceived as top-down interventions.

Residence	Current Work	Job change in 2019-2020	Field Stations Impact on Current Work	Equity Lens
USA	Landscape Designer <i>SCAPE</i>	Yes	The program made working collaboratively in an interdisciplinary office much easier. This participant now approaches New York City projects by going out into the field to survey the landscape instead of relying solely on visualizations on the computer.	Serves on the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee at SCAPE, focusing on the problem of green gentrification and landscape architecture projects.
Canada	Project Manager <i>Simon Fraser University's Community Economic Development Program</i>	Yes	This participant's practice is influenced by Field Stations by thinking about how variables are interconnected and intertwined, such as relationships between climate change, industry development, and people's well-being and their livelihood and sustainability.	Promotes and invests in projects that have a social and ecological benefit to the community. Their agency is also working toward economic reconciliation, wealth generation, management and distribution.
USA	MLA Student <i>University of Maryland</i>	No	This participant is applying principles they used in their Field Stations project - thinking through what happens to a piece of landscape over the course of billions of years - in their current practice. They are going outside more and keen on using the observational skills they learned in Field Stations to explore other places.	Working toward making high-quality landscape experiences accessible to all people, and choosing how to use community input to prioritize vulnerable voices.
USA	PhD Student <i>University of Colorado at Boulder, USA</i>	No	Field Stations has impacted this participant's comfort talking to and consulting with practitioners, engineers and scientists. They are also implementing more visual forms of representing data due to the experience with Field Stations.	Investigating how heavily impacted industrial areas in the United States and broadly trying to understand how they navigate the politics of energy transition. The work considers how environmental justice concerns intersect with human health, documentation status, housing and workers' rights.
UK	Outreach Manager <i>UK Forest Stewardship Council Consultant, Climate Risk and Resilience</i>	Yes	This participant is using their study of ecosystem services in Colombia in their current role at the Forest Stewardship Council. In their other role, they are using visualization skills they gained through Field Stations 2020 to communicate and map climate risks.	Focusing on trust and access to information in informal settlements that are highly impacted by climate change.

Residence	Current Work	Job change in 2019-2020	Field Stations Impact on Current Work	Equity Lens
Brazil	Architect, PhD Researcher	No	This participant uses Field Stations as an example of a way to observe a site - and how the water flows through it - in context.	Working on improving river access in São Paulo and creating beautiful riverside parks that the public will care for as stewards. The riverbanks are currently occupied by people in situations of informality, so the project combines river restoration with social housing development that could increase access to homes and decrease risk.
India	Assistant Professor <i>School of Environment and Architecture, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India</i>	Yes	This participant is using their experience from Field Stations to jump scales in their current work and to move beyond considering human actors in architectural research.	Thinks about the extractive relationships between researchers and communities studied and tries to move away from exclusionary academic language in their work so that the pieces can speak to a wider audience.
Australia	PhD Candidate / Teaching Associate <i>Monash University, Melbourne, Australia</i>	No	This participant is using the approaches they picked up in Field Stations 2019 to redefine flooding and integrate community perspectives on flooding into technical interventions. They are making use of Andrea Pinochet's expertise in scale and measurement, Nick Pevzner and Stephanie Carlisle's understanding of landscape ecology, and David Gouverneur's expertise in informal urbanization to guide their PhD work.	Creating different infrastructure and participation processes for informal settlements that are growing rapidly and on the frontlines of climate change.
USA	Associate Long-Range Planner <i>Teton County, Wyoming, USA</i>	Yes	This participant became more interested in larger (regional) planning questions through their experience with Field Stations. Instead of focusing on the neighborhood or city scale, their work now includes larger landscapes that consider how federal and local entities work together. They were also inspired to take a job in a more rural place due to their experience with Field Stations.	Works to address affordable housing access in Teton County, which is a rural county facing a severe housing crisis.

TOOLS FOR MOVING FORWARD

Figure 2. Tools for Moving Forward

Category	Process	Toolkit
Strategic Planning	Create program goals and values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create goals for short-term, medium and long-term planning - Create measures of success
	Build partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Define value add to partner organizations - Determine length of Field Stations participation in each site
	Prioritize budget transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communicate budget to stakeholders from beginning of relationship - Create a plan for balanced investment from WII board, fundraising and grantwriting
Program Management	Create clear roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Roles needed: Medic, onsite program manager, instructor, program director, etc. - Fully fund Field Stations staff roles
	Create program policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies needed: Reimbursement procedure, travel insurance, contractor hiring procedure
	Create a workflow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create an editorial and management structure for internal and external documents
	Share data and web content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share 2019 report with all contributors and stakeholders - Create web-based portfolio for projects and use social media to tell Field Stations stories
Equity in Education	Prioritize equity in recruiting participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand travel fund to cover all costs for participants who need travel funding - Expand beyond university networks and start admissions process earlier
	Question (settler) colonial legacies in environmental studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discuss history of land transformations, dispossession, and (settler) colonialism - Center environmental justice problems and perspectives
	Acknowledge power imbalances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Between and among local and visiting researchers, faculty and participants, educational trajectories and institutions
	Provide a tuition-free program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a funding trajectory to support tuition-free programming (balance of Institute support fundraising, grantwriting)
Curriculum Development	Less content, more synthesis time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create opportunities for more group critiques, conversations and projects - Think intentionally about integration of natural sciences
	Create and share a field toolkit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Plan more structured drawing exercises (urban and rural), dedicated time to make fieldnotes, run field experiments, include ethics and community engagement trainings - Life cycle analysis combined with systems theory, plant identification training, drawing guides - Offer more background reading on landscape. Use rapid assessment and measured stops on transect
	Consider site selection carefully	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Traverse a smaller geographic area - Provide opportunities for participants to return to sites to observe, interview, collect data
	Decide on primary deliverables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider deliverable options: collective versus individual work - Weigh emphasis on producing a published report versus emphasis on participant learning
	Prioritize content from local experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage primarily local experts, producers, guides, etc. - Create questions that are community-centered

Conclusion and Additional Resources

These findings suggest that the Field Stations 2019 program was successful in encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration, heightening ecological sensibilities and observation skills in participants and creating environmental justice networks. The core components of the program — the transect exercise, synthesis project and lectures blended with site visits — are replicable and should be used in the future. Lack of clarity on program objectives, deliverables, hiring practices and partnerships at times created a sense of insecurity among staff and students, although participants also expressed gratitude for an open, experimental curriculum that pushed them to try new things. Moving forward, centering strategic planning, program management and equity in education could help the program progress to more robust and sustainable offerings. Future curriculum development work could include planning more structured drawing exercises, dedicated time to making field notes, running experiments and including training on ethics and community engagement. Interviewees indicated that traversing a smaller geographic area could limit the scope of the workshop in a positive way, allowing more time for synthesis and for participants to return to sites of interest to collect data. In strategic planning efforts, the program should think intentionally about the benefit of individual versus collective deliverables, the benefit of publishing student work versus creating a more open-ended learning process, and how to engage local experts and partners in a mutually beneficial way.

In the future, staying connected with Field Stations faculty, alumni and partners (either through an annual survey or more informal means) will help the Wright-Ingraham Institute understand the long term impact of its programming. A meaningful next step to this program evaluation would compare similar educational programs and residencies with a field component in order to understand how they measure success.



