Course Description
This seminar is designed to give students direct experience with the job of being a foreign correspondent. Classes will focus on two themes: the practice of international journalism and the history and contemporary reality of Costa Rica. Our semester will culminate with a reporting trip to Costa Rica during spring break. The seminar is valuable to two types of students—those interested in the possibility of a career in international journalism, for whom this seminar is the only structured way for these students to learn about and practice foreign reporting—and those who are not pursuing a career in journalism but want to learn journalistic skills. Many fields, from public health to environmental protection, need people who know how to research, conduct interviews, understand complex issues on the ground, distill information, and write clearly. This is especially valuable in careers that involve international work.

Since we will only have one week in Costa Rica, we will concentrate in one region. We have chosen Liberia, one of Costa Rica’s oldest towns and the regional hub in the country’s northwest. Liberia is near places that are rich in reporting possibilities. Mired in colonial history as well a distinct local cowboy culture located 50 miles from the border with Nicaragua, Liberia is at the center of various cultural, political, and environmental debates that shape not only modern Costa Rican life but also that of Central America.

Seminar Structure. The seminar will meet nine times before our departure. About half of the seminar’s classroom time in Providence will be devoted to teaching the skills of international journalism—essentially, how to be a foreign correspondent. Students are assigned to settle on the topic about which they want to write while abroad. Before departing, they will write preliminary stories and critique those written by their classmates. They will also plan how they want to spend their foreign reporting week, including determining who they need to interview and where they need to go in order to report their story. Experienced foreign correspondents will be our guests at several of these preparatory classes.

We stress the importance of multi-platform reporting, “backpack journalism,” and meeting the varied needs of new media. The other half of our class time will be devoted to learning about Costa Rica. We read about its history, culture, and politics, and invite experts to join us in class or by Skype. This will give students the background they need to write their stories and will also leave them with an understanding of this country and the region around it.
In our preparatory classes, students will be expected to complete two writing assignments. They will also
choose the topic about which they want to report while in Costa Rica. After our return, students will help edit classmates’ stories. They will also work individually with the instructor to prepare stories for publication. Those that are judged worthy—presumably all of them—will be offered for publication in Costa Rica’s main English-language newspaper, the Tico Times.

An editor from the Tico Times will work with us throughout the semester. He will meet with us by Skype as we prepare our trip, advise us while we are in Costa Rica, and help prepare our stories for publication.

Students are expected to follow news from Costa Rica. At each class, we will reserve time for discussion about events there. We will make every effort to understand issues of the moment in Costa Rica before we depart. Each week, one or two students will be asked to bring to class a single story, datelined from abroad, that has been published in the previous week; distribute copies to classmates; and explain why this story is especially good or especially bad. This exercise will help us understand techniques of effective international journalism.

We will meet five times after our return. At the first of these classes, students will devote themselves to editing their classmates’ stories. We will then devote one class to the possibilities of video journalism. Our final class will be a review of and reflection on what we have seen and learned. This will be before a public audience at the Watson Institute, coordinated with the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies, and centered around a video-enriched account of our trip.

Language Skills. Students in this seminar are expected to have completed HISP 600 or have the equivalent of at least third-year proficiency in Spanish. Language fluency is valuable in any travel experience, but especially so in journalism. Conducting interviews directly allows reporters to build an emotional connection to the people about whom they are writing, in ways that are almost impossible when an interpreter is necessary. Fluency also allows reporters to follow the local press, including TV and radio, and to read scholarly material about the country they are covering. It enables them to be working all the time—constantly absorbing impressions and able to engage in casual conversation at any time. Language fluency in a foreign correspondent is both a sign of respect and a vital tool for insightful reporting.

In this course, students will learn:
- to use basic skills of journalism, including interviewing, reporting, and editing
- to write articles in a crisp and accessible journalistic style that are informative but also inviting to readers
- to approach foreign countries the way a journalist does, deciding which stories to cover and how to approach them
- to respect cultural sensitivities that shape the way people respond to outsiders
- to work with a professional editor from an English-language newspaper abroad
- to understand the history, politics, and culture of Costa Rica.

Evaluation

From the beginning of our seminar, students should be alert for story ideas. We will devote time in each class to discussing topics about which we might write. By the end of February, each student should have settled on a topic to cover in Costa Rica. At each class thereafter, each student will be asked to report on what progress he or she has made in researching the story and planning how to report it once we arrive.

All writing in this seminar will be done in journalistic rather than academic style. There will be three story assignments: two before our departure and a third to emerge from our trip.

The first assignment requires you to immerse yourself in a Spanish-language environment in the Providence
area. It could be a student, civic, or professional meeting, a party, a restaurant, a household, a taxi stand, a class, an outing, a dinner, a festival, or any other place or event where Spanish speakers gather. The assignment is to bring readers into the scene—to convey what you have seen in a way that demonstrates your reporting and writing skills.

The second assignment is to write a profile of a single Spanish-speaking person who lives in the Providence area. This can be someone of any age or social status, but not a Brown student. We will take time in class to discuss the techniques of writing a captivating profile.

Each of these articles should be 800 to 1,000 words long. They will be returned with comments and circulated among the class. Students will participate in round-table editing of each story, leading to a rewritten final draft.

The stories we report in Costa Rica are to be completed soon after our return. After final edits, they will be submitted to the Tico Times. Students are expected to submit photos or videos to accompany their work. Tico Times editors will train us in the use of “backpack journalism” techniques that allow reporters to work in various media.

**Given the amount of writing, feedback, and editing, this course is designated a WRIT course.**

**Grading and Time Allotment:** Half the grade will be based on the two stories composed in Providence, and on class participation—especially skills demonstrated during classroom editing sessions. The other half will be based on work produced from Costa Rica. Details on how stories will be assessed will be handed out in class but will be based on the degree to which the work is publishable.

Over 14 weeks, students will spend 3 hours per week in class (42 hours total). Reading assignments should take about 5 hours per week (65 hours total). Work on each of the two articles to be produced in Providence, including reporting, writing and editing, should take 15 hours (30 hours total). In Costa Rica, students will be expected to spend most of their time reporting stories—a total of about 50 hours.

Brown University is committed to full inclusion of all students. Please inform me early in the term if you have a disability or other conditions that might require accommodations or modification of any of these course procedures. You may speak with me after class or during office hours. For more information, please contact Student and Employee Accessibility Services at 401-863-9588 or SEAS@brown.edu.

**Required Books**

ON JOURNALISM

*The Artful Edit: On the Practice of Editing Yourself*, by Susan Bell  
*It Was the Best of Sentences, It Was the Worst of Sentences*, by June Casagrande  
*Foreign News: Exploring the World of Foreign Correspondents*, by Ulf Hannerz  
*International News Reporting: Frontlines and Deadlines*, by John Own and Heather Purdy (eds.)  
*The Elements of Style*, By William Strunk and E. B. White

ON COSTA RICA:  
*The Costa Rica Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, edited by Steven Palmer and Ivan Molina  
*Costa Rica: A Traveler’s Literary Companion*, edited by Barbara Ras and Oscar Artas  
*The History of Costa Rica*, by Ivan Molina and Steven Palmer

**Required Articles**
COSTA RICA IN HISTORY (For Week Three):


CONTEMPORARY DEBATES (For Week Eight):


Sequence of Classes

Week 1: Introduction; Ethics of International Journalism; Competing Views of the World; Objectivity and Fairness; Changing Media Landscapes; Opportunities for Foreign Correspondents; Preparation for First Writing Assignment

Week 2: Essential Journalistic Skills; Choosing Topics; Techniques of Interviewing; Story Structure; Observation and Description; Journalism in the Digital Age
Reading: *International News Reporting* (all); *Elements of Style* (all)

Week 3: Costa Rican History; Civil War and Abolition of the Army; Emergence of Civic Culture; Coffee Economy; Costa Rica in the Cold War
Reading: *History of Costa Rica* (all); Articles by Biddle, Furlong, Cohen, Busey and Reding (see above)
Guest: Prof. Mateo Jarquin, Harvard U.
Due: First story

Week 4: Practicing Journalism in Unfamiliar Places; Working for the Tico Times; Presentation of Story Ideas; Challenges of Reporting in Costa Rica; Review of First Stories
Reading: *The News* (all); *Costa Rica Reader*, pp. 139-182
Guest: Alexander Villegas, Tico Times

Week 5: Classroom Editing of First Stories; Principles of International Journalism; The Work of a Foreign Correspondent; Techniques of Information-Gathering Abroad
Reading: *Foreign News* (all)
Due: Rewrite of first story

Week 6: Profile Writing; Preparation for Second Writing Assignment
Reading: *Costa Rica Reader*, pp. 183-274
Due: Final version of first story

Week 7: Costa Rica Today; Economic and Political Challenges; Possibilities for Insightful Journalism; Costa Rica’s Place in Latin America; US-Costa Rica Relations
Reading: *The Artful Edit* (all); *Costa Rica Reader*, pp. 275-366
Guest: June Erlick, editor of ReVista and former columnist, Tico Times

Week 8: Political Culture of Costa Rica; Emergence of President Alvarado and Vice President Campbell; Current Political Issues; Pre-departure Briefing by Brown Office of International Programs
Reading: *Costa Rica Reader*, pp. 319-366; Articles by Reynolds, Page & Paride, Rosero-Bixhy & Dow, Lohse, Rosero-Bixhy et. al., Borges and Rayer (see above)
Guest: Prof. James Iffland, Boston U.
Due: Rewrite of second story

Week 9: Final Discussion of Story Ideas; Preparations for Departure
Reading: *Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion* (all)
Due: Final version of second story

Week 10: Class Review of Our Trip; Reactions to the Challenges of Working in Costa Rica; Impressions After a Week As a Foreign Correspondent
Due: First Draft of Costa Rica Story
Week 11: Classroom Editing of First Drafts
Reading: *It Was the Best of Sentences, It Was the Worst of Sentences* (all)

April 12: Final Editing Session; Submission to Tico Times
Due: Rewritten stories

Week 13: Video and Cinema as Journalism; Critical Review of Films about Costa Rica

Week 14: Public Presentation: Lessons Learned about Costa Rica and International Journalism; Video Account of Our Trip