Nilgiris Field Learning Center

The Nilgiris Field Learning Center is a faculty-led partnership between Cornell University and the Keystone Foundation in Kotagiri, Tamil Nadu.

- Students, faculty, community members, and professionals learn and research together to develop practical solutions to complex problems.
- The partnership is an interdisciplinary, collaborative effort that explores questions of sustainable environments and livelihoods. Emerging areas of focus include:
  - impacts of biodiversity on nutrition and traditional medicine systems
  - effects of urbanization on biodiversity in the reserve
  - systems of governance for effective implementation of conservation, sustainable environments, and livelihood generation.
The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve

The Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, a beautiful and pristine section of the Western Ghats in South India, is incredibly rich in culture, communities, and biodiversity. Across the Biosphere, small towns, tea, coffee, and spice plantations, vegetable cultivation, and tourist facilities are interspersed with forested lands and national parks that are home to a wide variety of flora and fauna. A significant tribal population includes forest dwellers and hunter gatherers.

Learning Modules

The NFLC offers a study abroad program each spring. This semester-long engaged learning and research program (15 credits) is taught by Cornell faculty in collaboration with Keystone staff. An orientation module sets the context for research and the semester. In weeks 2-7, students learn more about the context of the Nilgiris Biosphere and methods of inquiry through practice. After spring break (week 8), students engage in field work during weeks 9-15 on food and nutrition, traditional health, environmental governance, and urban planning. The final module helps develop analytical and presentation skills.

- **ANTHR 1520**: Tamil Conversation in Context, Prof. Willford, 2 credits
- **ANTHR 4520**: Society & Culture in the Nilgiris: Engaged Research in Rural South India, Prof. Willford, 3 credits
- **CRP 3850**: Planning & Sustainability, the Case of the Nilgiri Biosphere in Southern India, Prof. Kudva, 3 credits
- **NTRES 4940**: Environmental Governance in the Nilgiris, Prof. Wolf, 3 credits
- Independent Study in Anthropology, Urban Planning, Natural Resources, Nutrition, or Global Public Health 4 credits

Faculty

Cornell faculty are on site to lead educational modules and direct field work.

Neema Kudva, City and Regional Planning
Rebecca Stoltzfus, Nutritional Sciences
Andrew Willford, Anthropology
Steven Wolf, Natural Resources

Keystone Partners

Partners will co-teach educational modules and direct field work.

Pratim Roy, Director, Keystone Foundation
Somnath Sen, Managing Trustee, Keystone Foundation
Anita Varghese, Deputy Director, Research
Archana Sivaramakrishnan, Programme Coordinator, Environmental Governance & Livelihoods
Sarasasmeeta “Sara” Pathy, Administration

The Keystone Foundation

The Keystone Foundation has been working with indigenous communities in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve for 20 years. The focus of Keystone’s work includes livelihood generation, conservation, environmental governance, and supporting and celebrating diverse local cultures and peoples. The Keystone campus is a hub for local honey production, education, and skill development. Fifty staff members implement Keystone programs on campus and in field stations.

Kotagiri is a hill station located at 5,900 feet above sea level. The weather during the spring semester will be mild, with warm days and cool nights. Recreational opportunities – hiking, national parks – abound.