

# Students study diverse ecosystems in Ecuador



Samantha Averitt, and Jeremy Geist, students in Oakland University's Department of Biological Sciences, collect macroinvertebrates from a stream in the mountains near the Antisana Volcano, in Ecuador.

📅 January 10, 2020

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A group of Oakland University students spent part of their winter break studying tropical field ecology in the wilds of Ecuador.

Their destinations included the capital city of Quito, the Antisana Volcano, the Amazon Rain Forest, Bella Vista Cloud Forest and a host of other sites that brought them into close proximity with diverse animal and plant life. The 10-day excursion was part of the BIO 4333 course taught by biology professor Scott Tiegs.

"It's one thing to read about these different ecosystems in a book and another thing to actually experience them in all of their glory," said sophomore biology major Samantha Averitt. "I would recommend not only this class to anyone interested in ecology, but also recommend studying abroad."

For the class, students kept a species list that included, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals. They also participated in night hikes and early morning birding. Averitt said her favorite experience was visiting Isla de la Plata, a small island off of Ecuador's central coast known for its teeming variety of marine birds.

"I have always wanted to see a blue-footed booby bird in the wild. Through this class I was able to mark that off my bucket list," she said.

"We also snorkeled in the water surrounding the island. I am currently planning to become a marine biologist so snorkeling in a place that has so many different marine species was so interesting and inspiring."

In the above photo, Averitt and Jeremy Geist, a Ph.D. student and teaching assistant, are shown collecting macroinvertebrates from a stream in the mountains near the Antisana Volcano.

"We were curious about which invertebrates lived in this stream at this elevation," Averitt said. "We found many species and inverts and it was very interesting to learn about them."

Geist added that such knowledge also "helps researchers assess the health of a stream."

The next tropical field ecology course will take place in Guatemala this summer. Learn more about OU's study abroad opportunities at [oakland.edu/ie/studyabroad](https://oakland.edu/ie/studyabroad).



*Students are pictured at the Mitad del Mundo, a monument that marks the Equator, in Quito, Ecuador. Back: Connor Haskin, Manon McCullough, Victor D'Uva, Ethan Tiong, Jake Duemling and Joshua Vollmer. Middle: Julia Durnbaugh and Jennifer Minaudo. Front: Kaleigh Snoddy, Macy Gustavus and Samantha Averitt.*



*Students pictured at a beach near the Pacific coastal town of Ayampe.*



*Students meet some furry friends along the way to the Antisana Volcano.*