

Before I applied to the School for Field Studies (SFS) Bhutan Program, I had only a very vague idea of where the small kingdom of Bhutan was located. However, upon arriving there, I was enthralled with the uniqueness and originality of a country smaller in size than the state of Maryland. Its isolationist roots preserved an original style of dress found nowhere else in the world as well as a strong nationalism that inspires the citizens to proudly wear buttons with pictures of the king and queen. Nestled in the Himalayas, I found myself constantly gaping at the beauty that surrounded me.

I came to learn about environmental and biological issues. I had prepared myself for lectures on climate change, for re-explanations of how carbon dioxide traps heat radiating off the earth, from textbooks. What I experienced was totally different and much better than that. Since SFS is very research-oriented, I worked with 10 other students to gather data on the potential impacts of the climate-induced bursting of a natural dam on a glacial lake upriver of the tiny village where we lived. According to projections, this rupture, known as a Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), was practically inevitable if the glacial lake continued to fill at current rates. While part of our team did stream bank assessment surveys and floodplain mapping and another part interviewed local governments for their disaster relief plans, my part of the group went door to door and interviewed the villagers asking their perceptions of changing weather and families' preferences for an early warning system in the event of a GLOF or other disaster. I enrolled in the program able to recite the main causes and potential negative outcomes of climate change, but I left with a real understanding of exactly what some of those outcomes would look like. I made connections with people who would be affected, and felt that I had done some small part in reducing those impacts through our research projects. SFS helped me understand a large biological and environmental concept like climate change by making it tangible through the guided research component of the course.