

The Balkan Lab

Field-Based Learning in Bosnia and Herzegovina

A SHORT EX PROGRAM

*We create academically rigorous field experiences that transform Bosnia and Herzegovina into a **living classroom** — where students explore complex political, social, and historical realities through dialogue, reflection, and engagement with diverse perspectives.*

The most meaningful learning often happens when students move beyond the classroom.

Academic theories provide essential frameworks for understanding the world. Yet many of today's most pressing questions cannot be fully understood through lectures and textbooks alone. Experiential learning allows students to engage directly with the people, institutions, and communities that shape contemporary societies, transforming abstract concepts into lived understanding.

The Balkan Lab designs immersive field programs that connect academic learning with real-world experience. Rather than presenting predetermined answers, we create environments where students encounter complexity, question assumptions, and develop their own informed perspectives through observation, dialogue, and critical reflection.

*Bosnia and Herzegovina serves as **the classroom** — not because it offers simple lessons, but because it invites thoughtful questions.*

03 / PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

The essential parameters of the field program.



FORMAT	Short-term immersive field program. The sample program in this prospectus is a ten-day, multi-city field experience; duration and structure adapt to the academic calendar and priorities of the partner institution.
LOCATIONS	The comprehensive sample journey connects Sarajevo, Banja Luka, and Mostar — comparing political, institutional, historical, and social perspectives across Bosnia and Herzegovina. Alternative routes can be built around specific themes or timeframes.
COHORT & CALENDAR	Designed for university cohorts. Group size, dates, pace, and the balance between seminars, institutional visits, field experiences, and reflection are agreed with the partner institution during program design.
ACADEMIC FOCUS	A broad introduction to contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, or greater emphasis on governance, peacebuilding, international relations, European integration, public policy, human rights, identity, civil society, post-conflict recovery, or comparative politics.
PARTNERSHIP MODEL	Co-designed with the partner institution. The Balkan Lab brings local academic and professional knowledge, access, field coordination, and facilitation; faculty bring curricular context and learning objectives.

A structured process, developed in partnership with your institution.

01

Academic Consultation

We begin with the course, cohort, and intended learning outcomes — understanding what students already know, what questions faculty want them to investigate, and how the field experience should complement the wider curriculum.

02

Program Design

We develop a proposed learning journey, identifies relevant institutions, experts, practitioners, communities, and field sites, and sequences the experience so each activity builds on the previous one. The proposal is refined together with the partner institution.

03

Field Delivery

We coordinate the local learning experience and facilitates connections between meetings, site visits, seminars, and discussions — maintaining a coherent academic journey throughout the visit, not simply moving students from one activity to another.

04

Reflection & Integration

Structured reflection helps students interpret what they encountered, compare perspectives, and connect field experience back to academic concepts — supporting assignments, presentations, or research questions where appropriate.

05 / WHAT WE COORDINATE

You do not need to build this field program from scratch.

The exact division of responsibilities is agreed with each partner institution. Depending on program scope, coordination may include:

- Academic itinerary design and sequencing
- Institutional meetings, expert speakers, and academic seminars
- Community engagement, site visits, workshops, and facilitated dialogue
- Local scheduling, transportation planning, and day-to-day coordination
- Accommodation, meals, venues, and other practical arrangements where included in the agreed scope
- Pre-departure and arrival information relevant to the local program
- Faculty coordination and structured student reflection during the field experience

RETAINED BY THE HOME INSTITUTION

Partner institutions retain responsibility for their own academic credit, enrollment, insurance, travel authorization, and institutional requirements unless otherwise agreed. Responsibilities are defined clearly during program development so that faculty know what The Balkan Lab will manage and what remains with the home institution.

I Learning Through Experience

Experiential learning creates opportunities for students to move beyond passive observation and actively engage with the realities they study. Through direct interaction with institutions, communities, experts, and local perspectives, academic concepts become tangible, relevant, and deeply memorable.

II Complexity Over Simplicity

We believe the world's most important questions cannot be understood in isolation. Democracy, governance, identity, history, peacebuilding, economics, and international relations are deeply interconnected.

Rather than presenting simplified narratives, we encourage students to explore how these forces interact, overlap, and sometimes contradict one another in real-world settings.

Academic theories provide essential frameworks for understanding the world. Our programs challenge students to deepen those frameworks by engaging with the complexity of real-world contexts, where political, social, historical, and cultural forces are deeply interconnected.

06 / OUR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY – CONTINUED

III Many Perspectives, One Conversation

We do not seek to provide definitive answers or advocate a single perspective. Instead, we create opportunities for students to encounter competing narratives, question assumptions, and develop the confidence to navigate complexity with curiosity, critical thinking, and respect for differing viewpoints.

IV Dialogue and Reflection

Learning extends beyond site visits and guest speakers. Structured discussions and guided reflection encourage students to connect experiences, challenge their own assumptions, and synthesize insights across disciplines and perspectives. Reflection transforms observation into understanding.

V Theory Meets Reality

The classroom provides concepts.
Field experiences provide context.

Our programs intentionally bridge the two, allowing students to examine how theories function in practice and how real-world complexity often expands, challenges, or reshapes academic understanding.

07 / THE LEARNING MODEL

Learning is not a sequence of isolated visits. It is a connected intellectual journey.

Each meeting, discussion, institution, and community represents another piece of a larger puzzle. Students gradually build understanding by recognizing connections between experiences rather than treating each one independently.

OUR LEARNING MODEL FOLLOWS A
CONTINUOUS CYCLE

- 01 Academic Theory
- 02 Immersive Experience
- 03 Multiple Perspectives
- 04 Reflection
- 05 *Personal Understanding*

This process encourages students to move beyond collecting information toward constructing their own informed interpretations.

Cycle Repeats · Each City, Each Theme

The field experience is part of the learning process — not an extracurricular tour.

A program with The Balkan Lab can function as more than a stand-alone study visit. In collaboration with partner faculty, the field experience can be integrated into an existing course or academic program before, during, and after travel.

Depending on the course design, academic integration may include the elements listed opposite — adapted to the learning outcomes and assessment approach of the partner institution.

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- | | |
|---|--|
| — Preparatory readings and contextual briefings | — Student presentations and facilitated synthesis sessions |
| — Guided observation and reflection prompts | — Research questions, interview frameworks, or comparative assignments |
| — Field journals or structured learning logs | — Post-program reflection connecting Bosnia and Herzegovina to broader comparative cases |

The Balkan Lab provides the field context and facilitation; faculty retain control over academic credit and formal assessment.

09 / WHAT STUDENTS LEAVE WITH

By the end of the program, students will be able to:

01

Navigate Complexity

Analyze complex political and social issues by recognizing the interconnected roles of history, governance, identity, economics, culture, and international engagement.

02

Think Beyond Single Narratives

Critically evaluate competing perspectives and appreciate that complex societies rarely offer simple explanations or single truths.

03

Connect Theory with Lived Reality

Apply academic concepts to real-world contexts by examining how political and social theories operate in practice.

09 / WHAT STUDENTS LEAVE WITH – CONTINUED

04

Ask Better Questions

Develop thoughtful, evidence-based questions through engagement with institutions, communities, and individuals representing diverse experiences and viewpoints.

05

Reflect Critically

Reflect on how firsthand experience has challenged, refined, or reinforced previous assumptions and academic understanding.

06

Build Independent Understanding

Construct informed and nuanced interpretations by synthesizing observations from multiple disciplines, stakeholders, and lived experiences rather than relying on simplified explanations or single narratives.

Rather than a single discipline or narrative, four interconnected lenses.

01

War, Memory & Reconciliation

The causes and consequences of conflict, transitional justice, memorialization, reconciliation, competing narratives, and collective memory.

02

Governance, Democracy & Institutions

Constitutional design, democratic governance, power-sharing, elections, public administration, accountability, and civic participation.

03

International Engagement

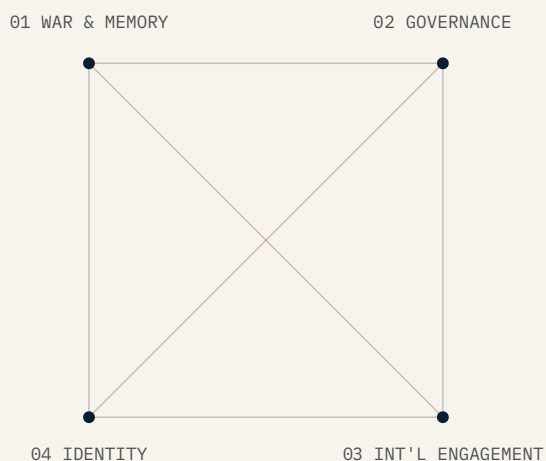
The roles of international organizations, diplomacy, peace implementation, development cooperation, and foreign investment.

04

Identity, Society & Religion

How identity, religion, ethnicity, culture, education, and media shape diversity, coexistence, and social cohesion.

10 / INTERCONNECTED LEARNING



Not four subjects. One conversation.

These four learning lenses are not explored independently. Every meeting, discussion, site visit, and conversation contributes to multiple themes simultaneously.

Rather than organizing knowledge into separate categories, the program encourages students to recognize how governance influences identity, how history shapes politics, how international engagement affects institutions, and how communities navigate these interconnected realities.

Understanding emerges not from studying each topic in isolation, but from recognizing the relationships between them.



Designed as an intellectual journey — not a sequence of activities.

Students begin by developing historical and societal context before exploring contemporary institutions, engaging with diverse communities, and examining the role of international actors. Throughout the program, structured reflection helps participants connect individual experiences into a broader understanding.

Rather than guiding every student toward the same conclusion, the program encourages each participant to develop their own academic lens:

A student interested in constitutional law may focus on governance and institutions.

A peace studies student may be drawn toward reconciliation and transitional justice.

A journalism student may explore media narratives and public discourse.

Others may examine religion, identity, diplomacy, civil society, education, entrepreneurship, or memory.

**The shared experience remains the same.
The intellectual journey is unique to every student.**

Ten days. Ten questions.

The following itinerary illustrates one example of how a ten-day field program may be structured. Each day is intentionally designed around a central question that builds upon previous learning experiences.

Rather than treating lectures, institutional visits, and discussions as separate activities, the program integrates them into a coherent educational journey — each experience contributing to a deeper understanding of contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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DAY 01 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

● SARAJEVO

Arrival & Orientation

Students arrive in Sarajevo and are introduced to the program's educational philosophy, learning approach, and expectations. The opening orientation encourages students to approach the week with curiosity and critical thinking, recognizing that Bosnia and Herzegovina cannot be understood through a single narrative or discipline.

Rather than seeking immediate answers, students are encouraged to observe, ask questions, and engage openly with the complexity they will encounter throughout the program.

DAY 02 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

● SARAJEVO

Why Bosnia Works the Way It Does Today

The program begins by establishing the historical foundations necessary to understand contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rather than providing a comprehensive military history of the 1992–1995 war, the day explores how the conflict shaped today’s political institutions, social dynamics, and constitutional framework.

A foundations seminar introduces the historical and political context behind the Dayton Peace Agreement, power-sharing, and the country’s unique institutional design. Throughout the day, students examine how conflict is remembered through Sarajevo’s public spaces and memorials before engaging with personal experiences at the War Childhood Museum.

The day concludes with an interactive KUVI methodology workshop, where former veterans from different sides of the conflict participate in a facilitated dialogue. Rather than debating history, the workshop demonstrates how dialogue, listening, and acknowledgement can contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation in contemporary society.

DAY 03 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

● SARAJEVO

How Does Bosnia Govern a Deeply Divided Society?

Students explore the constitutional and institutional architecture of Bosnia and Herzegovina through visits to key state-level institutions. Meetings with representatives from government institutions provide insight into the country's complex decision-making processes, power-sharing mechanisms, and constitutional arrangements.

Rather than simply learning how institutions function, students examine why they were designed this way and how historical legacies continue to influence governance today.

DAY 04 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

● SARAJEVO

Why Do International Actors Still Matter?

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains one of the world's most internationally engaged post-conflict societies. Through meetings with international organizations, diplomatic missions, and academic experts, students examine the evolving roles of the European Union, the Office of the High Representative, NATO, the United Nations, and other international stakeholders.

Discussions focus on international peace implementation, democratic development, European integration, and the opportunities and challenges of long-term international engagement.

DAY 05 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

• BANJA LUKA

How Does Republika Srpska Understand Bosnia and Herzegovina?

The program moves to Banja Luka, where students explore Bosnia and Herzegovina from within Republika Srpska. Visits to entity-level institutions and meetings with local academics and public officials provide insight into the constitutional position of Republika Srpska, its political priorities, and its relationship with state-level institutions.

Rather than presenting a single perspective, the day encourages students to compare institutional viewpoints and better understand how governance operates within Bosnia and Herzegovina's multi-level political system.

DAY 06 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

Can Democracy Function Without Accountability?

Democratic governance depends not only on formal institutions but also on accountability, transparency, and an active civil society. Through discussions with investigative journalists, civil society organizations, and anti-corruption experts, students examine contemporary challenges related to corruption, media freedom, civic engagement, and democratic oversight.

By connecting governance with accountability, students gain a deeper understanding of how democratic resilience is built beyond formal political institutions.

DAY 07 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

How Do Identity and Religion Shape Politics?

Identity remains one of the defining features of Bosnia and Herzegovina's political and social landscape. A seminar led by a university professor explores the relationship between political culture, identity, and democratic participation, examining how history, collective memory, and social values continue to influence political life.

Students then participate in an interfaith study visit, engaging with representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina's major religious communities to explore the historical and contemporary relationship between religion, identity, and public life.

The day concludes with a university seminar on religion, nation-building, and politics, encouraging students to reflect on how shared language, intertwined histories, and religious traditions have contributed to the development of distinct national identities within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

DAY 08 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

● MOSTAR

Can One City Tell the Story of Bosnia?

In Mostar, students encounter a city where many of the themes explored throughout the program become visible in everyday life. Through meetings with local institutions, civil society organizations, and community representatives, students examine questions of governance, identity, education, urban development, and post-conflict reconstruction.

Rather than serving as a symbolic conclusion, Mostar functions as a living case study where students connect the historical, political, social, and cultural dimensions explored throughout the week.

DAY 09 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

From Field Experience to Academic Inquiry

The final academic day is dedicated to reflection and synthesis. Rather than presenting definitive conclusions, students identify the questions that emerged most strongly through their field experiences and consider how these questions might develop into future academic research.

Through presentations and facilitated discussion, students reflect on how their assumptions have changed, what complexities remain unresolved, and how their experience in Bosnia and Herzegovina has reshaped their understanding of divided societies, democracy, peacebuilding, and international engagement.

The program concludes not with the expectation that students have found all the answers, but with the confidence to ask more thoughtful questions.

DAY 10 / SAMPLE LEARNING JOURNEY

Departure

Students depart Bosnia and Herzegovina, taking with them not only a deeper understanding of one country's political and social realities, but also new perspectives for examining conflict, democracy, identity, and peacebuilding in comparative contexts around the world.

A NOTE ON TAILORING

Every program is developed in collaboration with the partner institution. While the sample learning journey illustrates a comprehensive introduction to Bosnia and Herzegovina, each program can be tailored to complement existing courses, academic objectives, faculty interests, and disciplinary perspectives.

Depending on the partner institution, greater emphasis may be placed on topics such as democratic governance, peacebuilding, international relations, European integration, public policy, human rights, identity, civil society, post-conflict recovery, or comparative politics.

We do not ask faculty to fit their course into a fixed educational tour.

We begin with the learning objectives of the partner institution and build the field experience around them.

A course on constitutional design

may require deeper engagement with government institutions and the Dayton framework.

A peacebuilding program

may prioritize memory, reconciliation, transitional justice, and community dialogue.

A journalism cohort

may spend more time with media organizations, investigative journalists, and questions of public discourse.

The itinerary, speakers, case studies, preparatory material, and reflection process can be adjusted without losing the educational philosophy that defines The Balkan Lab — academic rigor, multiple perspectives, direct engagement, and critical reflection.

Why Bosnia and Herzegovina?

In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding complex societies requires more than classroom instruction. It requires direct engagement with the institutions, communities, and people who navigate these complexities every day.

Bosnia and Herzegovina offers a unique opportunity to do exactly that. More than three decades after the Dayton Peace Agreement, the country continues to serve as one of Europe's most compelling case studies in democratic governance, constitutional design, international engagement, peacebuilding, and identity politics.

Few places bring together so many of the defining questions of contemporary politics within a single national context.

*For students, Bosnia and Herzegovina becomes more than a destination — it becomes a **living classroom** where theory and practice intersect.*

Rather than studying concepts in isolation, students observe how they operate in real institutions, public spaces, and everyday life — through direct engagement with policymakers, academics, civil society leaders, journalists, international organizations, and local communities.

How can democracy function in a deeply divided society?

What makes power-sharing succeed — or struggle?

What is the long-term role of international actors in post-conflict governance?

How do identity, religion, and history continue to shape political life?

How can societies build trust while preserving different collective memories?

What role do civil society, media, and citizens play in strengthening democratic accountability?

14 / BEYOND THE BOSNIAN CONTEXT

While these questions emerge from the Bosnian context, they extend far beyond it. They resonate with challenges facing societies across Europe and around the world, making Bosnia and Herzegovina an exceptional setting for comparative learning and critical reflection.

The country's accessible institutions, active civil society, engaged academic community, and ongoing democratic development create opportunities for meaningful dialogue rarely possible through classroom teaching alone. Students engage directly with the people and institutions shaping contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Bosnia and Herzegovina should not be understood as an exception to the world, but as a place through which many of the world's most important political, social, and democratic questions can be explored.

The value of studying Bosnia and Herzegovina is therefore not only in understanding Bosnia itself — it is in developing new ways of thinking about governance, democracy, identity, peacebuilding, and international cooperation in an increasingly complex world.

Meaningful international education begins with academic credibility.

Our programs are not designed by tour operators. They are developed by political scientists, researchers, educators, and practitioners who work every day at the intersection of democratic governance, public policy, civic engagement, and peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

As graduates of political science with extensive international academic experience — including Erasmus+, the BOLD Fellowship at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, and the MIRAI Peacebuilding Program in Japan — we understand both the expectations of international universities and the realities of the society students come to study.

Our professional work extends beyond research into implementation. We have designed and managed nationally and regionally funded projects, collaborated with government institutions, international organizations, universities, and civil society, and facilitated dialogue on issues including democratic governance, elections, youth participation, gender equality, anti-corruption, and post-conflict reconciliation.

This combination of academic training and practical experience gives us something that cannot be learned from guidebooks or conference rooms.

Trusted access to the institutions, experts, practitioners, and communities shaping contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina.

15 / WHY THE BALKAN LAB? – CONTINUED

Bridging classroom learning and field experience.

Rather than offering students a predefined narrative, we design learning environments where they encounter multiple perspectives, engage directly with decision-makers and practitioners, and critically examine the complexity of contemporary society through structured academic inquiry.

Every institution we visit, every guest speaker we invite, and every discussion we facilitate is selected with a clear educational purpose. Our role is not simply to organize logistics, but to curate an intellectually rigorous learning experience.

We understand that every university, every course, and every cohort is different. We work closely with faculty partners to adapt each program to specific academic objectives, ensuring that every learning journey reflects the goals of the institution while maintaining the academic standards and educational philosophy that define The Balkan Lab.

For us, Bosnia and Herzegovina is not simply where we live. It is where we research, teach, build partnerships, facilitate dialogue, and contribute to democratic development.

That lived professional experience is the foundation of every program.

16 / THE TEAM BEHIND THE BALKAN LAB

Sara & Srđan

POLITICAL SCIENTISTS • CO-FOUNDERS, THE BALKAN LAB

The Balkan Lab is led by Sara and Srđan, political scientists whose academic and professional paths have developed around many of the same questions that students encounter through the program: democratic governance, political participation, elections, peacebuilding, identity, international cooperation, and the relationship between institutions and citizens.

They first encountered international education as participants in academic and leadership programs abroad and later returned to similar learning environments as trainers, facilitators, lecturers, program designers, and local partners. Their international experience includes programs such as Erasmus+, the BOLD Fellowship in the United States, and peacebuilding-focused academic exchange in Japan.

Their professional experience combines civil society and program management with consulting and stakeholder engagement — including work for the United Nations system and international firms, youth advisory mechanisms, election monitoring and observer education, and the design and delivery of programs involving public institutions, civil society, international organizations, academics, and local communities.

16 / RELEVANT TEAM EXPERIENCE

Background that shapes how programs are designed and delivered:

- Political science education combined with international academic and leadership programs
- Consulting assignments for the United Nations system and international clients
- Work with youth participation and advisory mechanisms connected to international organizations, including UN- and OSCE-related initiatives
- Civil society program design, project management, research, advocacy, and capacity building
- Election monitoring, observer training, democratic accountability, and electoral-framework advocacy
- Stakeholder engagement with institutions, diplomatic and international actors, civil society organizations, experts, and communities
- Facilitation, training, lecturing, and educational program delivery for domestic and international participants

This combination of academic training, practitioner experience, and local professional networks allows The Balkan Lab to design programs from inside the context students are studying.

17 / STUDENT SUPPORT & PROGRAM OPERATIONS

Operational planning is part of program design — not an afterthought.

Universities evaluate an international field program not only by its academic value, but also by whether responsibilities, communication, and logistics are clear.

Before delivery, the division of responsibilities for accommodation, local transportation, meals, venues, student orientation, emergency communication, and day-to-day coordination is agreed with the partner institution and reflected in the program plan.

During the field experience, The Balkan Lab maintains direct coordination with partner faculty and local hosts so that academic and practical elements remain aligned. Health, safety, insurance, accessibility, and institutional travel requirements vary between universities; these are incorporated into planning in cooperation with the partner institution, with more detailed logistical and risk documentation developed as the program moves from proposal to delivery.

18 / FROM PROSPECTUS TO PROGRAM

Once a partner institution identifies an academic interest, we develop a more detailed proposal covering the intended learning objectives, program structure, proposed activities and interlocutors, division of responsibilities, schedule, and budget — allowing faculty and administrators to evaluate the academic and operational model before confirming the program.

We will not tell students what to think.

We will not offer a single narrative.

We will not simplify complexity.

We will create opportunities to question assumptions.

We will connect classrooms with institutions.

We will connect theory with practice.

We will encourage dialogue over certainty.

We will leave students with better questions than the ones they arrived with.

Field-based learning is an educational approach that integrates academic instruction with structured engagement in real-world environments, enabling students to connect theory with practice through direct observation, dialogue, and critical reflection.

Build a program with The Balkan Lab.

Every program begins with a conversation about your students, curriculum, and academic objectives. From there, we develop a proposed learning journey tailored to your institution — including the academic structure, local engagements, operational scope, schedule, and budget.

If Bosnia and Herzegovina can add something to the questions your students are already asking, we would be glad to explore what that field experience could look like.

GET IN TOUCH

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Based in Bosnia and Herzegovina
Sarajevo · Banja Luka · Mostar