THE COSTA RICAN ORGANIZING PROJECT
SW 496
COURSE DESCRIPTION
The Costa Rican Organizing Project provides an overview of community organizing methods and offers community organizing experience in a rural international setting. The course is designed to foster a deep connection between students and developing communities in Latin America and to inspire students to pursue careers in the public interest. The course includes training activities in San Diego in addition to weekly classes, meetings, and volunteer work in Costa Rica. The training activities focus on methods of community organizing, with a primary focus on the Consensus Organizing model. While abroad, students work with the Costa Rican nonprofit organization CEPIA to train a group of local teenagers in the Consensus Organizing model and work with them to develop a new program at CEPIA to address a community-identified need.

LEARNING OUTCOMES
Anticipated learning outcomes include teaching students to:
• Articulate and apply the Consensus Organizing model.
• Critically examine issues affecting low-income communities and develop sustainable interventions in collaboration with community members.
• Respect and appreciate the strengths of individuals in developing areas of the world.
• Demonstrate the skills necessary to effectively work with various individuals and groups in a foreign country.
• Demonstrate a global perspective regarding issues affecting developing communities.
• Develop a life-long sense of volunteerism.

CONSSENSUS ORGANIZING MODEL
Consensus Organizing is a model of community organizing that seeks to create grass-roots change by training communities to develop interventions that meet their own self-interests as well as the self-interests of external stakeholders. Key principles include:
• Solutions to local problems should come from affected communities.
• Self-interest can be harnessed as a motivation for improving the welfare of communities.
• Common people have the power to lead and create change.
• Projects should position communities to make even greater gains in the future.

CEPIA
CEPIA stands for “Culture, Education and Psychology of Infants and Adolescents.” It is a Costa Rican non-profit organization that seeks to promote culture, health, sports, and education for children and teenagers from low-income backgrounds in the communities of Guanacaste, Costa Rica.
In addition to providing counseling, meals, and mentorship for the youth, CEPIA staff and volunteers teach individual and group lessons on subjects such as: computer skills, foreign languages, personal hygiene, swimming, and surfing. CEPIA has a small staff and is constantly looking for new and innovative ways to improve the lives of the residents of Guanacaste, which are primary reasons it was identified as a partner for this course.

FUTURE GOALS
The Costa Rican Organizing Project will take place for the first time in the summer of 2012. The course is expected to become an ongoing part of the Consensus Organizing Center’s mission to train students and community members in the Consensus Organizing model. Additionally, by training students to apply the model in a foreign country, students will develop the confidence and skills necessary to export the model to communities it could not otherwise reach. In the future, it is anticipated that the course will be taught not only in Costa Rica, but in other foreign countries as well.