

# PhD in Sustainability

## Welcome Letter 2026

### DEAR INCOMING STUDENT:

Congratulations on your acceptance and decision to begin SIT's Doctoral Program in Sustainability this summer! I would once again like to welcome you into the doctoral program—a significant next step in your academic, personal, and professional development and career. The entire SIT Graduate Institute faculty and staff looks forward to supporting you throughout this gratifying journey. I'd also like to take this opportunity to share some important information about the program and to answer some of your questions regarding what to expect. This letter contains important information about your upcoming semester, residency, and subsequent studies and should prove useful as you prepare for the program.

### YOUR FACULTY

My name is **Joe Lanning**, and I am the Ph.D. Program Chair and Associate Professor of Sustainability Studies at SIT. I hold a doctorate in ecological and environmental anthropology from the University of Georgia and an M.A. in global history from the University of Rochester. I am an educator, practitioner, and researcher active in sustainable development and food systems, with a regional focus on southern Africa. My research focuses on the mixed livelihoods of rural Malawians as they navigate climatic, environmental, and economic risk and uncertainty in their efforts to achieve food security. I have conducted extended ethnographic research with farmers in Malawi, examining agricultural decision-making. Recently, my collaborative research explored food insecurity and mental health among post-partum women in Malawi and the spread of zoonotic disease due to forest clearing in Panama. In addition to being the chair for the sustainability PhD program, I oversee the Global Master's program in sustainable development practice. I have also been involved in teaching agroecology in Malawi through my time as a Peace Corps volunteer and through the Zisinthe Farm and Community Garden, where I serve as a planning partner. My publications are available [here](#).

**Dr. Aly Dagang, Ph.D.** completed her BA in international development with an emphasis in Latin American studies at American University in Washington, DC, and her PhD in agroforestry and forest conservation at the University of Florida, Gainesville. Her early research, carried out with smallholder farmers, examined biophysical and socioeconomic aspects of wood and fruit tree repopulation of grazed pastures in central Panama. Since then, her work has branched out to include critical issues such as land use decision making among smallholders, and urban-to-rural migration in the Panamanian context with her most recent publication entitled *Climate transformations: Evolving food security, migration, and alternative livelihood strategies in Panama* in *The Routledge Handbook of Sustainable Diets*. Aly has been the SIT Panama academic director since 2002, the chair for the Sustainable Development Practice Hybrid MA since 2020, and previously served as SIT Study Abroad associate academic dean for Latin America. Aly was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Panamanian province of Panama Oeste, and has worked on projects focused on gender, agroforestry, sustainable agriculture, forestry, and conservation. Finally, Aly is a proud mom and celebrates the brave students who are also parents and working professionals.

**Dr. Cátia Magro, Ph.D.**, completed her doctorate in Environment and Sustainability from NOVA University

of Lisbon – School of Science and Technology (FCT-NOVA). A native of Lisbon, Portugal, Cátia is deeply passionate about protecting nature and leveraging technology, which inspired her career path as an environmental engineer. Her research has primarily focused resource management and on technology development, leading to one patent application, 21 Science Citation Index articles, and four book chapters. She is currently the Academic Director of the SIT Portugal program in sustainability and environmental justice, while contributing for a national waste management project addressing and measuring the implications of mass and seasonal tourism in the Algarve region, aiming to develop sustainable and just solutions. Cátia has expanded her impact by serving as a mentor at the HiseedTech association, where she guides teams in transforming their ideas into market-ready products and solutions, helping to bridge the gap between scientific research and real-world applications. Outside her professional endeavors, she finds joy in traveling, spend time near the ocean, and delving into the imaginative worlds of fantasy fiction. Her deep love for storytelling and communication in science inspired her to write a children’s book on women’s empowerment and sustainability, aiming to spark meaningful behavioral change in both young readers and the adults around them. Cátia leads our residency in Portugal.

**Dr. J. Richard Walz, Ph.D.** is chair of the Climate Change and Global Sustainability MA program at SIT Graduate Institute and academic director of the SIT Study Abroad Tanzania programs. He teaches environmental social science and methodology courses that integrate field studies primarily located in eastern Africa. His research and publications emphasize contemporary and historical topics at the human-environment interface, especially how communities forge social mosaics around resources and how they perceive and utilize landscapes and seascapes in an era of environmental change. His teaching and publications incorporate community-based research and promote independent student field studies on climate, resources, and society where Africa meets the Indian Ocean. He oversees the Zanzibar office and programs or excursions to Pemba and Mafia islands and lead our residency in Zanzibar.

We are also delighted to work with various adjunct faculty each year and more updates about them will be forthcoming soon.

## GET TO KNOW YOUR COHORT

Because of privacy laws, SIT is unable to share personal information about future students with other future students. However, we will soon set up a LinkedIn page and WhatsApp group for the cohort to get to know each other. We will send this information once available. Please note that it is not intended to duplicate or replace official information and is for personal purposes only.

## WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO PREPARE?

Prior to the start of the summer course(s), we will offer a virtual orientation. **The first semester begins officially Monday, May 17, 2026, and will end on August 7, 2026.** Here are more details:

- SIT will hold a synchronous virtual orientation to SIT in early May for new students in all of SIT’s Doctoral programs. Please join the faculty, provost, associate provosts, and president to learn more about the institution and your classmates as well as SIT staff to learn more about the services provided to support our students. Call-in details will be provided in advance and for those unable to join live, we will record the session and forward the link afterwards.

## Background Readings on General SIT Philosophy

Become familiar with the following people and their ideas, as they are the basis of SIT's educational philosophy. Note that these are places to start, and you will have the opportunity to develop your knowledge by reading the authors' original works later on:

- [John Dewey](#)
- [Paolo Freire](#)
- [David Kolb](#)
- [Kurt Lewin](#)

The following is information about books to purchase and readings to complete prior to the start of the semester. Further updates on each of the required courses' readings will be shared closer to the start of the semester. Books can be purchased or rented online from sellers such as Amazon.com.

### **Readings for Perspectives in Sustainability course (taught by Dr. Cátia Magro):**

In advance of the residency, your faculty will send readings to familiarize you with Lisbon and this course. You will also find a number of resources in the Lib-guide. The link and password will be provided by SIT prior to the semester start.

### **PORTUGAL RESIDENCY**

Our summer residency and the course *Perspectives in Sustainability* will run in Lisbon, Portugal from May 17<sup>th</sup> to May 28<sup>th</sup>. It will **continue synchronously and asynchronously online during the remainder of the summer semester, after departing Lisbon**. You may also choose to take an elective course in summer 2025, based on your number of approved transfer credits and need for additional credits.

Please arrive in Lisbon (airport code: LIS) on Monday May 17<sup>th</sup> by 5:00pm. On site staff will assist in coordinating travel from the airport to your lodging once flights are booked and we know your arrival time. All students are required to attend our first cohort gathering and dinner at 7:00pm. Please plan to depart Lisbon on the evening of May 28<sup>th</sup> or the morning of May 29<sup>th</sup>. Students are asked to check out of their rooms no later than 10:00 a.m. EDT, on May 29<sup>th</sup> if staying in pre-arranged housing (below).

We have prebooked housing for all students here: <https://www.studentville.pt/en/residencias/central>

The cost of this accommodation is 29 Euro per night and is a 10-minute walk to both the SIT Portugal Learning Center and a metro station. Through this group booking, we get competitive rates in a convenient location. It offers private rooms and access to a kitchen. If you prefer to book your own, alternate housing, please let me know by **March 15, 2026**.

### **RESIDENCY SCHEDULE**

Classes begin at 9:00 am each morning and finish at 4:30 pm. There will be a 90-minute lunch break between the morning and afternoon classes. Students will also be involved with immersive field visits, hear from guest speakers, and attend group meetings during what may appear to be unscheduled blocks of time in the final schedule (to be shared closer to start of the residency). Thus, students should not plan to conduct work during their time in Portugal, as free time will be limited.

### **FAMILY & PARTNERS**

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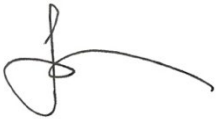
SIT Graduate Institute recognizes that, on occasion, students may wish to have a “companion” (defined as an immediate family member, or partner, to include dependent children) accompany them on their residency. It is important to recognize that the academic components require extensive time and energy. Students are expected to engage in every program activity including classes and evening/weekend group meetings. There are long days of classes and rigorous academic assignments. If students would like to discuss bringing family members to the seminar, please consult with me by **March 15, 2026**

### WHAT ELSE CAN I EXPECT?

Your second residency is scheduled to take place in Zanzibar, Tanzania, during May/June 2027. Details will be confirmed later in the year.

We are pleased that you are joining us to embark on this doctoral journey. On behalf of the SIT faculty and administration, we very much look forward to getting the semester started.

Sincerely,



Joseph Lanning, Ph.D.  
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