Field Research Aruba

Background

This program gives students the opportunity to do empirical research in the field for their bachelor thesis in Aruba, an island in the Dutch Caribbean. Aruba’s natural and human history makes it a proverbial test case for research questions across a wide range of disciplines. A small island developing state, Aruba is roughly the size of Texel, with a population over 100,000. Aruba’s economy, dominated through much of the 20th century by the operations of an oil refinery, is now largely dependent on tourism. The island’s natural environment, as well as its society, has been deeply impacted by these industries. Its colonial history and waves of migration from other parts of the Caribbean and Latin America have created a Caribbean creole culture, and a multicultural society in which four languages are spoken: English, Spanish, and the official languages, Papiamento and Dutch. Aruba’s political status as an independent country in the Kingdom of the Netherlands creates a paradoxical situation for its citizens, who are both of Europe and quite clearly outside of it.

Up until now, only limited research has been done on the natural, social and cultural circumstances in Aruba, which leaves many open questions for participating students. Potential research areas could include questions related to:
citizenship and national identity; government in the emerging post-colonial context; regional relations in the Caribbean; trade law, policy and practice; social and economic development; migration; urbanization; sustainable tourism; biodiversity; environmental conservation; sustainable energy; public health; health education; epidemiology; population genetics; education development; language and education; multilingualism; language and identity; cultural history; culture and identity; cultural heritage and preservation; and more...

Program components

Participating students carry out their research and collect data for their thesis in a peer-to-peer learning context. They are connected to the community with the support of students from the University of Aruba (UA; http://www.ua.aw/), and likewise help support Aruban student peers in the research projects that they are doing for program requirements at UA. Candidates for the program must therefore prepared for cultural and intellectual exchange with Aruban students and stakeholders in the local community. They must also be prepared to make the transition from student to independent researcher while working on an appropriate research project in the Aruban community.

Preparation

Bachelor students prepare for the program by taking a level 2 course in the UCU summer term (20 May~30 June, overlapping with UU’s block 4) of the academic year before they plan to write their thesis.

UCINTCAR21:
Caribbean Studies: The Dutch Caribbean in Context
[7.5 EC summer course] (see course description, Osiris)
Co-taught by teachers from UA and UCU/UU

The course is open to all students who have completed at least 90 ECs. It is required for all students applying to participate in the field research program. In the course, students define a topic area for their potential research in Aruba and survey literature relevant for their topic.

Selection

Students who have completed the summer course apply for participation in the field research program (deadline September 15). The application includes the student’s report on the potential research topic, which is vetted for viability by Aruban partners as well as Utrecht-based research advisors. Applicants also submit statements of motivation, and a course of study plan demonstrating how they will meet degree requirements. The degree plan must demonstrate that the applicant will have completed any thesis-related methods courses before the end of the fall semester (or UU’s block 2), and include options for courses in UU’s block 4 that allow student to complete degree requirements.
After selection (~ October 15), the selected students are assigned an appropriate thesis supervisor in Utrecht on the basis of their defined a topic area. They prepare a preliminary proposal refining specific research questions that could be developed further in collaboration with students and stakeholders in Aruba. Preliminary proposals are approved by supervisor (and UCU fellow) before end of fall semester. UCU students pre-register for UCHUMRES32, UCSCIRES32 or UCSSCRES32, as appropriate.

**Field Research Period**

**UU’s block 3 (February – April)**

*Participating students remain registered at UU. UCU students do not pay for UCU room and board or have housing on the UCU campus. Students are responsible for covering travel costs and living costs on-site in Aruba.*

**On-site, Aruba (10 weeks)**

- **Kick-off seminar** (week 1-2)
  For UU/UCU and UA students, coordinated by UA and UU/UCU faculty members. Students explore the local context, define research questions meaningful for local context, identify local partners and local supervisors, identify literature and develop a research plan specifying methodology to be employed.

  Research plans submitted to UCU/UU bachelor thesis supervisor/fellow and to any local/UA supervisor for final guidance/approval.

- **Field research & preliminary analysis.**
  Students conduct field research and perform initial analyses for their independent projects, under guidance of local supervisor and supervisor in Utrecht, as appropriate, and with support of structured peer-to-peer program (see below).

- **Peer-to-peer program**
  Utrecht students participate in UA/Aruban community, build collaboration, exchange knowledge with each other, UA students and Aruban stakeholders. Includes informal meetings as well as more structured events, like student-led field trips centered around individual research projects, evaluation meetings and final symposium.

  - **Phase 1 Evaluation** (week 4)
    Meeting coordinated by UA faculty member for all participating students. Students share progress and findings.

  - **Phase 2 Evaluation** (week 8)
    Meeting coordinated by UA faculty member for all participating students. Students share progress and findings.

  - **Symposium** (week 10, mid-April)
    Students present study and their (preliminary) findings to Aruban community; proceedings published
**Finalization Phase**

UU’s block 4 (April - June)

Utrecht, Netherlands

*By default, participating UCU students do not have living quarters on the UCU campus, and will have to arrange appropriate accommodation in or near Utrecht.*

- **Completion analysis/thesis.** Students complete analyses for thesis and submit final thesis by end of semester (~May 15).

- **Coursework.** Students complete UU courses in block 4 and/or UCU summer courses as needed for degree requirements (7.5 ECs); note that UCU summer courses may overlap in time/conflict with courses in block 4.