Seeing the world on a small island: undergraduate research for sustainable societies

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Introduction

Our undergraduate research program stimulates bachelor students from the University of Aruba (UA) and Utrecht University (UU) to engage with societal challenges and the world at large.

- Field site is Aruba, a small island state with cultural history, socioeconomic circumstances and a natural environment make it well-suited as a site for SDG-related field work in disciplines across the academic spectrum.
- Students employ principles of community-based research for sustainable societies and diverse individual projects.
- Students form an intercultural and interdisciplinary team and support each other’s research process in a peer-to-peer learning context.
- Cultural and intellectual exchange with each other and with stakeholders in the Aruban community enhances students’ understanding of other cultures, their own society, and their role in the world.

Program Design

Our program is designed to:

- Offer a comprehensive education in the academic spectrum.
- Involve students in field research projects in the context of the small island state.
- Address needs in Aruban society.
- Mitigate the volatility of prices to ensure sustainability.
- Enhance students’ understanding of other cultures, and with stakeholders in the Aruban community.
- Support students in their research process in a peer-to-peer learning context.
- Enable students to make a difference and benefit Aruba.

Key Outcomes

Example student projects | SDGs | Year
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The assessment of Aruba’s shoreline pollution | SDG 13, 14 | 2015
Employee perceptions of mental communication within the health sector | SDG 3 | 2015
Anxiety management in a changing society | SDG 3 | 2016
The role of English in Aruba’s linguistic landscape | SDG 11 | 2016
Cultural and commodification in Aruba | SDG 11 | 2017
Assessment of endemic fauna in key biodiversity areas | SDG 15 | 2017
Emotional impact in people with disabilities resulting in being independent in Aruba | SDG 3, 10 | 2017
Policy for energy system innovation: multi-actor policy-making of the Aruba energy transition | SDG 11, 13, 17 | 2018
The impact of illegal dumpsites on the environment | SDG 15 | 2018
Sharing stories bai-pak: the making of heritage in a Caribbean oil town | SDG 9, 10, 11 | 2019
Road driving and the ecosystems: impacts on landscape functionality | SDG 15 | 2019
Import costs of fruits and vegetables on Aruba: mitigating the volatility of prices to ensure sustainable supply | SDG 2 | 2019

Program project spin-offs

- Impact in Aruban context: inspiration for community initiatives, local activism and policy proposals.
- Academic publications of research outcomes.
- Alumni engagement in Aruban education programs.

Key Outcomes: Numbers

Outcomes 2014-2019 in numbers

- UU students completing preparation course: 47
- UU students completing field research program: 26
- UA students completing field research program: 31
- Field research projects in annual volume: 56

All projects include community-based dimensions & address needs in Aruban society.

Projects link to one, and often more, global SDGs.

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Total projects per SDG (2015-2019)

For detailed information, see

UA website: [http://www.ua.aw/international/](http://www.ua.aw/international/)
UU website: [https://tinyurl.com/qvc8naw](https://tinyurl.com/qvc8naw)

Recognition

- Student write and peer review papers for annual program volume.
- Students present research outcomes to community at public symposium.
- Examples of student projects include:
  - Import costs of fruits and vegetables on Aruba: mitigating the volatility of prices to ensure sustainable supply
  - Sharing stories bai-pak: the making of heritage in a Caribbean oil town

Conclusions

- Undergraduate research in context of diversity: a pedagogical instrument that creates a transformative and empowering experience for students.
- Students benefit personally from cultural and intellectual exchange.
- CBR & peer-to-peer learning: understanding and appreciation of different kinds of knowledge.
- Research skills made meaningful for students and society by invoking SDGs.
- Bachelor students make transition from student to independent researcher (quality research).
- Outcomes of undergraduate research have impact in the context of the small island state.

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For more information, see

UA website: [http://www.ua.aw/international/](http://www.ua.aw/international/)
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