University of Aruba

Faculty of Arts and Science

Department of Social Work and Development

FAS Educational Trip 2017

Year 2, Semester 1

Social Work: The Costa Rica Perspective

Assignment number 2

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Introduction

For the Faculty of Arts and Science 2017 educational trip, the social work and development students headed to Costa Rica to learn more about the Costa Rican culture, social work practice, social institutions, organizations and foundations and also to broaden our multicultural experience of our Latin American neighbor countries. During the educational trip in Costa Rica, I was able to learn so much about the Costa Rica culture, values, language, and gastronomy and also experience a volunteer work experience in one of Costa Rica’s poorest villages with a significant amount of social problems La Carpio.

This paper will describe in detail the Costa Rica perspective in the eyes of a social work student including the social work education and professionalism in the social work practice in Costa Rica.
Social Work Education

The University of Costa Rica, Social Work department (Universidad de Costa Rica, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales, Escuela de Trabajo Social) was founded in the year 1942. This year the department of social work is celebrating their 72nd anniversary. According to the history of the Escuela de Trabajo Social (2017) the purpose for creating a social work school at the University of Costa Rica was during the same time period that a need for social workers and social assistance was become more and more necessary.

The social work program is a four-year bachelor’s program from which graduates are equipped and prepared to enter the social work field. However, in comparison to Aruba it is necessary that every professional in the fields of accounting, medicine, education and social work to mention a few, must obtain a valid license in order to practice the profession. In order to obtain this license, which is known as a licenciatura in Costa Rica, the person must follow a one-year license program, which is usually done right after the Bachelors’ program. The University of Costa Rica, social work program offers a fifth year in the program with the license program included meaning that the program stretches to five year with the licensee included.

The courses that are currently being offered during the four-year program of social work at the University of Costa Rica (2017) are as follows: (Reference to figure 1 in Appendix)

**Year 1 Bachelors**

- Curso integrado de humanidades I y II (Integrated humanities course I and II)
- Actividad deportiva (Sports activities)
- Trabajo social I y II (Social work I and II)
- Sociologia basica I (Sociology beginners I)
- Historia de las instituciones de Costa Rica I y II (History of the social institutions of Costa Rica I and II)
- Repertorio (Repertoire/role play)
- Organizaciones y movimientos sociales en Costa Rica (Organizations and social movements in Costa Rica)

**Year 2 Bachelors**

- Ideología, ética, y derechos humanos I (Human rights, values and ethics I)
- Teoría y métodos del trabajo social I (Social work theories and methods I)
- Seminario II: salud integral (Seminar II integral health)
- Epistemología I y II (Epistemology I and II)
- Estadística I y II para ciencias sociales (Statistics I and II for social sciences)
- Curso de arte (Art course)
- Seminario de realidad nacional I (Critical Thinking seminar I)
- Seminario III: Pobresa (Seminario III: poverty)
- Teoría y métodos del trabajo social II (Social work theories and methods II)
- Teoría y métodos de investigación I (Research and theory I)
- Desarrollo humano (Human development)

**Year 3 Bachelors**

- Taller I y II: organizacion local y construcción de cuidadania I y II (Workshop I and II : local organization and construction of citizenship I and II)
- Teoría y métodos del trabajo social III y IV (Social work theories and methods III and IV)
- Teoría y métodos de investigación II (Research and theory I)
- Teoría del estado y política I y II (Political and organizational theories I and II)
- Optativo de idioma (Free elective of language course)
- Seminario IV: Violencia intrafamiliar (Seminar IV: family violence)
- Seminario de realidad nacional II (Critical Thinking seminar II)

**Year 4 Bachelors**

- Ideología, ética, y derechos humanos II (Human rights, values and ethics II)
- Seminario I: familias (Seminar II: families)
- Principios de administración pública I (Principles of public administration I)
- Taller III: gestión de servicios sociales I y II (Workshop III: management of social services I and II)
- Teoría y métodos del trabajo social V y VI (Social work theories and methods V and VI)
- Sistemas de atención social: fundamentos legales (Social care systems: legal fundamentals)
- Epistemología III (Epistemology III)
- Intervención de trabajo social con familias (Social work interventions with families)

**Year 5: Licenciatura**

- Diseño de trabajo final de graduacion (Thesis)
- Taller V: análisis y diseño de servicios sociales I y II (Workshop V: analysis and design of social services I and II)
- Investigación evaluativa I y II (Qualitative research I and II)
- Planificación y programación social I (Planning and social programming)
- Administración de programas sociales (Administration of social programs)
Regarding the courses that the University of Costa Rica social work program offers, I believe that a significant amount of the courses are similar to those offered at the University of Aruba Social Work and Development program. However, a number of differences between the two programs are: incorporation of art and sports courses in the curriculum, similar courses such as social work theories and methods, research and human rights, values and ethics are spread out throughout the four-year program, courses and workshops relevant to the Costa Rica social system are incorporated in the curriculum, and free elective of language courses.

A few recommendations that I would like to propose to the University of Aruba, Social Work and Development program is to incorporate a art course with the choice of crafts, painting, drama, dance or creative art in which students are free to choose an art of their choice as a form of self-expression, self-care and also incorporate creative therapy where social work students are able to learn other social work approaches and methods that they could incorporate in their future profession. Even though we have the course of Student Progress Assistance during our four-year program at the University of Aruba, I believe that we should be able to have a free elective course of art to practice self-care, self-expression and also creativity in the program and as future professionals in the field.

In addition, I believe that incorporating a free elective specifically for a language course would also be beneficial as well as feasible in our program. Considering the diverse population of Aruba and the multicultural participants that as future social workers we will encounter, it is significantly important that we practice and learn the four basic and most spoken languages in
Aruba: Papiamento, Spanish, Dutch and English. In our four-year program at the University of Aruba, we do get the opportunity to practice our English with the courses being offered including Academic Reading and Writing, however we do not get sufficient opportunities in the classroom and during the year two course of Dutch to practice Dutch. The Spanish language is also becoming a more spoken language in our community considering the amount of immigrants from Latin American countries. For that very reason it is important that the Spanish language is also offered in our program so that as future social workers we are able to communicate with our participants in Spanish as well.

Furthermore, I believe that by having a one-year licensee program is also something that could be incorporated and tailored to the Aruban context and labor market in order to ensure that professionals are fully equipped with the knowledge, skill and professional tools to perform the profession. In opinion, the licenciatura that is a mandatory license for all professionals in Costa Rica is what makes the care and service provided in Costa Rica a high-quality one especially in regards to the social work and medical field.

Professionalization of the Social Work Profession

For every social work profession, it is important that the professional adheres to a set of rules and guidelines such as the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics. In Costa Rica there is a social workers’ association named Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales de Costa Rica whom have officially approved their code of ethics in the year 1969 (Código de Ética del Trabajador Social, 1969). This year the Costa Rica social work association is celebrating their 50th anniversary.
One of the benefits that a member of the Costa Rica social work association obtains from their membership is a life policy insurance of two million Costa Rica colones which is equivalent to $1768 that covers: “basic coverage in case of an accidental or non-accidental death, complete or partial disability, funeral expenses, and effects of terminal illnesses. The Costa Rica social work association consists of a board of directors that changes every year during the month of March. The board consists of a president, secretary, treasurer, fiscal and three vocals or board members. In addition there are counselors and board of directors in subsidiaries.

The core objectives of the Costa Rica social work association according to the Colegio de Trabajadores Sociales de Costa Rica (2017) is:

- Promote the progress of the Social Work profession in all its aspects.
- Ensure that the ethical principles of the profession are met.
- Defend the particular interest and group of its members.
- Collaborate with the Government of the Republic, in situations of national emergency, through the corresponding agency.
- Manage or decree, when possible, the assistance deemed necessary to protect professionals in disgrace.
- Any others that are considered necessary.

The Costa Rica social work association obtains the vibrancy of the social work profession through their high standard of professionalism and mutual teamwork amongst social workers and organizations in Costa Rica. Social workers are encouraged to work closely with organizations and foundations and to also report back on findings, making the collaboration between organizations, agencies and social workers an effective and efficient one. Furthermore, through
the association, social workers are able to attend seminars, workshops, receive support and aids, which also contributes to the vibrancy of the social work profession. One aspect of the Costa Rica social work association and social work profession in Costa Rica that Aruban social workers could learn from is the necessity of having a qualified degree and license to perform the profession in order to ensure a high-quality service in a professional and ethical manner.

Through the licensed program, professionals are able to update themselves with the latest changes in laws, policies, social work methods and necessary resources that could benefit not only the social worker but also the service that is being provided. In addition, the Costa Rica social workers adheres to their own social work code of ethics and conduct which also holds the professionals accountable for unethical and unacceptable behaviors and practices, which is an aspect that we do not have as yet here in Aruba.

Reflection

My experience as a social work student visiting Costa Rica for the first time was an educational and fruitful one. I was able to learn not only about the Costa Rica culture, values, and social systems but I was also able to overcome a few of my fears during the educational trip. One of the was my hesitation and anxious thought prior to arriving at Costa Rica about the stay at the host families. During my stay at the host family, I was able to learn a lot about the family setting and family values which includes a diversity of religious beliefs, dishes and also household rules. I was also able to conquer my fear of heights and anxiety in situations where I have no control over.
The educational trip also provided me with the opportunity to work on the four transversal lines, which are diversity, identity, sustainability, civic participation, social action and social interaction. In addition, I was also able to work on core competencies number

**Diversity**

The first transversal line that I was able to work on and experience during the 7-day educational trip was diversity. Aruba has a rich multi-culture population that consists of citizens of Latin America, Europe, Asia and Pacific, and North America. One of the objectives of the educational trip was to learn and get acquainted with the multicultural aspects of our neighbor countries, in this case Costa Rica. Costa Rica is rich in culture not only because of its Spanish language and values, but also because of the number of immigrants from neighbor countries such as Nicaragua, Panama, Mexico, Venezuela, Colombia and Honduras that form part of Costa Rica’s population. I was also able to respect and celebrate the differences in values, beliefs, especially during my stay at the host families.

One example of celebrating diversity with my host family was on my first day with the host family. My host family is a catholic and very religious family meaning that they say grace and prays before every meal, which was something that I am not used to in my own family in Aruba. However, I wanted to integrate myself with the family and really experience their world and the Costa Rica perspective in that family, so every time that they did pray before dinner, I would also participate with them even though they told me that I am not obligated to do so.

Additionally I engaged in active conversations with each family member, asking more questions about their life in Costa Rica, what they like to do as a family, their hobbies and interests and also sharing information about Aruba and my current studies. During our
excursions in San Jose and the other cities, I was able to see a wide range of diversity amongst the citizens in regards to how they dressed, greeted, beliefs and also values. Considering the different Latin American cultures that have created a melting pot in the Costa Rica society, I was able to appreciate and experience different perspectives. During the volunteer work experience at La Carpio which is a village consisting of immigrants with poor living conditions, I was also able to experience a different view and perspective of the Costa Rica living comparing those who live in a middle-class or upper-middle class family to those who are living in poverty.

In my opinion, promoting diversity and development starts with understanding and experiencing the different lifestyles and cultures around the world, especially cultures and living conditions that your participants of future participants live in. When you get the opportunity, to experience and live through the experience with a family or person, you are able to truly understand and appreciate their point of view. This was the experience that I received through the visits at La Carpio, Costa Rica Humanitarian Foundation and the host family stays. I was able to learn so much about their diverse culture, beliefs, and also how they see social issues in Costa Rica. With this experience, I was able to build my foundation of understanding and appreciating diversity and become a multicultural competent social worker.

Sustainability

In Costa Rica I was able to truly see and experience what being sustainable truly entails, not only in the social aspect, but also the environment aspect as well. Costa Rica is not only a popular destination because of it’s rich culture and green nature, but they are also an exemplary country that promotes a green and sustainable earth. Starting with their initiatives and laws that promotes recycling, having recycling bins everywhere, signs in all places from the airport to stores and homes asking people to turn off the lights when they are not being used, using
sustainable energy from waste, and also promote and educate children from pre-school until they are adults to become change agents in their own environment.

I was able to learn that each school has campaigns where they teach children the importance of recycling and reducing waste in order to keep Costa Rica not only clean, but uphold to their commitment to a green and sustainable country. In the villages and cities, governments have placed a competition where the cleanest city receives a title and award, which also serves as an incentive to promote a clean city. I was impressed with a country as big as Costa Rica, being so clean and also sustainable in all aspects. I believe that I was able to acquire the knowledge and skills regarding the transversal line: sustainability during our visit at the finca Life Costa Rica, where we have learned about the function of the ranch and how everything that is being used is made of recycled material and renewable energy and gas made from animal waste.

The aspect of sustainability was also visible at Life Costa Rica, when we were explained that the ranch also provides opportunities for people from all over the world to not only visit the ranch, but also use their facility as a rehabilitation center for juveniles with mental health problems, minor delinquencies, former drug addicts and also people who want to be motivated to re-enter the labor market. I believe that the transversal line of sustainability was clearly visible at the ranch Life Costa Rica because it is a completely sustainable and eco-friendly facility, and also because they promote strategies and opportunities to empower people to self-capacity and also continue growing and learning.

We were also explained that the people who had the opportunity to work at the ranch with the animals, plants or coffee production, became so motivated and inspired that they continued
doing plantations, animal farming and also growing of plants. This shows how the ranch not only serves as a model for sustainability by using recycled and renewable energy, but also how animals and plants can serve as a form of therapy for recovering addicts, juveniles, and vulnerable groups.

By promoting aspects that empower individuals, groups and a community to further their knowledge and skills, by empowering them with the necessary tools to continue their development; psychologically, emotionally, physically and holistically as well as sustaining their own lives in a positive and healthy aspect, we are able to build sustainable communities and also reduce social issues from emerging and spiraling in a vicious cycle.

Identity

Becoming more self-aware and more conscious of my identity as a future social worker was one of my main goals during this educational trip. Prior to arriving at Costa Rica, I was very hesitant about staying at an unfamiliar place, with an unfamiliar family and having to get accustomed to their values, beliefs, tradition and household rules. I realized that there would be situations where I would have to be more open minded and willing to accept new ideas, perspectives and beliefs especially in the social work field that I will soon be entering. One of the activities that I knew we would be doing during the trip was the sky tram and zip lining.

Knowing my fear of heights, I had the opportunity to reflect as to why I cannot overcome my fear of being in high places especially when it comes to ziplining. I realized through deep reflection and looking inward that the problem was not my fear of heights, but rather an anxiety and fear of situations that are out of my control such as being in an airplane, riding in a sky tram, doing zip lining, riding along a rocky road and being in an unfamiliar place. With this new
insight, I was able to pinpoint how this problem could affect my profession as a future social worker. I was very glad that through this situation I was not only able to work on competency number 9 of self-reflection, but also realize that I have to work on myself and better myself holistically as a person, before I am able to better the lives of others as a future social worker.

At the Costa Rica Humanitarian Foundation we had the opportunity to walk through La Carpio and see how the immigrants that form part of the community of La Carpio live and what social issues they face on a daily basis. This experience has been an eye-opening experience for me because I never had a complete and genuine picture of what it means to live in poverty, until I saw the homes and tin-houses of the people. In addition to that, when I listened to how Mrs. Gail who is the founder and director of CRHF, I felt inspired, motivated and grateful that I made the decision to become a social worker. It was in that moment, when I realized that I was part of something bigger than myself, which I believe is what captures the transversal line of identity.

**Civic Participation, Social Action and Social Interaction**

At the CRHF we also became inspired as to what we could do to not only help better the lives of the people we have met at La Carpio, but also what social movements, policies and projects we could start up in our own island of Aruba to raise more awareness on the subjects of poverty, abuse, domestic violence, and sustainable social work. For example, the foundation of CRHF gives the women who are immigrants and were victims of sexual and domestic abuse an opportunity to make crafts and hand-made items as souvenirs for sale in order to support themselves and their families. In addition, the foundation also focuses on raising awareness and making people more aware of how people live in La Carpio and how through their generous support and donations, they are able to better the lives of others.
Civic participation was also experienced when we visited Life Costa Rica ranch, because I personally became more aware of how important it is to be sustainable, eco-friendly and also protect our planet. With initiatives and social movements such as the creation of a complete eco-friendly farm, giving tours and presentations, providing opportunity for using the ranch as a rehabilitation center and humanitarian foundations, we are able to create a sustainable environment and provide sustainable services not only as future social workers, but as a holistic community.

**Core Competencies**

The core competencies that I was able to work on during the seven-day educational trip at Costa Rica were core competencies number 1: the social work process; core competency number 2: cultural competence: core competency number 8: networking and collaboration; core competency number 9: reflection and self-care; and core competency number 11: developmental approach.

Upon making the choice to form part of the team traveling to Costa Rica, I realized that this would be an excellent opportunity to work on my core competencies and experience a new culture in a foreign country. Starting with core competency number 9 of self care and reflection, the trip was an opportunity for me to be in a new environment and explore more in depth who I am, and what are the things about myself that I would like to work on. When I was in Heredia and I had to walk from the host family home to the CPI school, I passed by so many flowers such as roses, daisies, orchids, and other colorful flowers and green scenery. For someone who struggles with anxiety, I found it so hard to be anxious and depressed when I was around such a beautiful scenery and landscape. The landscape and flora of Costa Rica is self-healing and really serves as a form of therapy in my opinion. Additionally, being away from my family and
everything that I am used to, especially in the host family and being in a room all by myself gave me a lot of time to think and reflect about how everything has been going on with me lately.

Additionally, the cultural aspect and competency was the highlight of the educational trip. I was able to learn about the city of Heredia, Costa Rica, what are their values and beliefs, gastronomy which I loved especially the Gallo Pinto and fresh fruits and vegetables every day. I worked on core competency number 2: cultural competence when I had the opportunity to exchange ideas, thoughts, experiences with my host family during the family dinners every evenings and also during our visits at the University of Costa Rica and lectures given by the Universidad Libre de Costa Rica. During the trip, I kept in mind that I wanted to socialize and interact with as much as possible persons in Costa Rica. Our tour guide Yoza also gave me a lot of information about how they live in Costa Rica, what are their popular places to go to, what they do in their free times, and also how they celebrate Christmas for example.

My host family also became my home-away-from-home family. I was able to exchange information about Aruba, and also motivate them to visit Aruba during their next family trip. My family also shared with me where are their favorite places in Costa Rica and also how they feel and think about La Carpio. Before I went to La Carpio, I had the assignment from my Spanish teacher at CPI to ask my host family about their thoughts on La Carpio and the social issues in Costa Rica. Through this assignment, I also had the chance to become more comfortable and engage in conversations with my host families.

We also met a lot of people and agencies including the Costa Rica Humanitarian Foundation founder Mrs. Gail, alumni and representative of Universidad Libre de Costa Rica, and professors of the University of Costa Rica social work department. I would have liked if I
had more time to get to know more organizations and social work agencies, however the experience was fruitful and I was able to connect and build collaborations and network with professionals from both the universities as well as the CRHF. I made sure to exchange contact information in order for me to stay in contact and also continue to follow up on any updates of the organization.

During the presentations given by the ULICORI (Universidad Libre de Costa Rica), the two social workers and ULIORI representatives gave us an in-depth presentation about the social work process in Costa Rica as well as the systems, policies and social issues that are present in Costa Rica. Regarding the social work process, it is very similar to the social work process that we are currently learning about in our social work program as well as the one that is being used in Aruba. However, in Costa Rica a lot of attention is given to professionals as to how they provide service, how to create and build inclusive communities and the importance of having a license in order to perform a profession.

All in all, the educational trip was a memorable and learning experience for me on both an academic as well as on a personal level. What I would have done differently would be doing more research about the organizations and agencies that we are going to be visiting so that I could prepare questions in advance and know what to expect. In the case of the visit at La Carpio I did not expect the living conditions to be so vivid and saddening to watch. I would have loved to know that we would be visiting La Carpio so that I would have been able to bring along items to donate. Taking a developmental and holistic approach, I felt the need to leave something behind, so I made sure that I donated my sanitary towels and period pads to the CRHF. I would love that in the future we could bring items to donate for the people in need. Additionally my biggest take away from the experience was the interaction with the children at La Carpio. The
interaction with the children has truly moved me and made me even more grateful for having chosen social work as a profession because I realized how big of an impact we can make on the lives of people, especially children, one at a time.
References


on November 26, 2017.
Appendix

Bachillerato y Licenciatura en TRABAJO SOCIAL
Plan de estudios 2016

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<th>Segundo año</th>
<th>Tercer año</th>
<th>Cuarto año</th>
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| **Segundo Ciclo** | **Cuarto Ciclo** | **Séptimo Ciclo** | **Noveno Ciclo** |
| Seminarío de Realidad Nacional I | Taller II: Organización Local y Construcción de Ciudadanía II | Seminario IV: Voluntariado Local | Diseño de Trabajo Final de Graduación |
| | Sistemas de Atención Social: Fundamentos Legales | Epistemología III | Planificación y Programación Social I |
| | Curricular Social | Investigación Evaluativa II | |
| | | | |

**Bachillerato: 4 años. Licenciatura: 1 año**

Título Comunali Universitario (TCU): máximo 1 año para su realización a partir de III Nivel.

Trabajo final de Graduación (TFG): mínimo 1 semestre, máximo 3 semestres.

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**Figure 1 Study Plan and Curriculum University of Costa Rica**