

Doctoral Candidates needed

The adaptive nature of culture. A cross-cultural analysis of the returns of Local Environmental Knowledge in three indigenous societies

Duration of contract: March 2011- February 2015
Duration of field work: September 2011-March 2013

Researchers debate the role of culture in shaping human adaptive strategy. Some researchers suggest that the behavioural adaptations that explain the success of our species are partially cultural, i.e., cumulative and transmitted by social learning. Others find that cultural knowledge has often resulted in maladaptive practices, loss of technologies, and societies' collapse. Despite the importance of the debate, we lack empirical and comparative research on the mechanisms through which culture might shape human adaptation. Researchers working on this project will collect data to test a pathway through which cultural knowledge might enhance human adaptive strategy: the individual returns to culturally evolved and environment-specific knowledge. To carry out the study, four doctoral candidates are needed to serve as research associates.

Responsibilities: Students would register in the PhD program of Environmental Sciences and Technology Institute at UAB (<http://icta.uab.cat/formacion/doctorat.jsp>). Students will be responsible for collecting data for the project and preparing it for analysis. Working in pairs, students and postdoctoral fellows will collect six sets of comparable panel data in three foraging societies (one pair in each society): the Tsimane' (Bolivian Amazon), the Baka (Congo Basin), and the Penan (Borneo). Data collection would include administering surveys on local ecological knowledge, household economics, food consumption, and use of natural resources. An important aspect of the field work centres on how to obtain culturally specific measures of variables that can be compared across communities and ethnic groups. Data would be collected during an 18-month period of field work in one of the societies mentioned before.

Profile: Candidates should have an official master's degree and a strong background in the social or natural sciences, including courses in statistics and research methods and be fluent in English. Fluency in Spanish or French will be a plus. Candidates should also be comfortable with the idea of living in tropical rain forests (e.g., heat, mosquitoes, monotonous diet) and tolerance for bouts of medical problems common in tropical conditions (e.g., parasites). Candidates should also show interest to learn from other cultures. Previous field experience would be highly valued. Students would be encouraged to pursue their own research plans and collect data for their dissertation.

Contract terms: Students will be hired full time during four consecutive years (the first three-months will be a probation period) by UAB and they will work at the Ethnoecology Laboratory (<http://icta.uab.es/Ethnoecologia/mission.htm>). The first two years students will have a scholarship and the last two years they will have contracts (net monthly salary about 1.200€). Medical insurance and expenses while in the field associated with the project (i.e., translators) will also be paid for. The project will also cover two round-trips from Barcelona to the field site. Field work is scheduled to begin in September 2011, but familiarization with the project, the bibliography of the area, and coordination with other members of the team will start in March-June 2011. Training in field methods will take place in the Bolivian field site during July 2011.

To apply: Interested students should contact Victoria Reyes-García (victoria.reyes@uab.cat) by February 15, 2011 to receive full consideration. The application should include a letter of interest, a current cv, and a list of 2-3 professors familiar with the student that might write letters of recommendations (letters will only be asked for short-listed candidates).

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