

Service Learning and Afro-Caribbean History and Culture

Afro-Caribbean History and Culture 556:300 6 credits

In addition to the coursework, you will serve as a teaching assistant in one of the classrooms at St. Mark's school. St. Mark's School is a private school (pre-school through 11th grade) with approximately 600 students. The school has been ranked as one of the best schools in the region in recent years

Teaching English at St. Mark's School will provide you with "hands-on" experiences with which to compare and contrast race relations in Costa Rica and the United States. You are expected to contribute to the affirmation of Afro-Hispanic culture in Limón and to work to comprehend the complexities of this culture's identity politics.

You will be working with one or more faculty members at St. Mark's. The degree of advice and assistance you will receive from the faculty will depend in part on the person with whom you will work. Faculty members are expected to orient you, to provide you with instructional materials and plans, and to work with you in the classroom. On occasion, however, you may be asked to lead a few classes yourself, with the help and supervision of the teacher. You will observe the English classes at St. Mark's for a few days before you begin working with the students. You will tell your director with which class and teacher you would like to work, but final placement decisions are made by the director.

Beginning the second week, you will assist in the English classes by leading conversations, reading books, and working on other comprehension skills with the students. You will work with small groups of students for about two to three hours a day. The school day begins at 7:00 a.m. and ends at 3:50 p.m. In recent years, English classes were from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. for grades K-6, and from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. for grades 7-11.

Last year, our students continued an extremely popular extracurricular program that combined play and language instruction. The program ran for an hour after school three times a week, and enabled the St. Mark's staff, students, and parents to get to know us on an informal basis. Please consider becoming part of this program, and think about the sorts of games and other activities (plays, drawing, etc.) that might be appropriate. The school needs instructional materials, such as books, tapes, games, songs, etc. If you have these items, please bring them.

"English Day" is the day-long festival that occurs on your last day at St. Mark's. It is an opportunity for you and the students to show off what has been learned. Your Director will help you prepare for "English Day" as needed throughout the program. Pedagogical traditions differ from community to community. You may find that the standards and modes of discipline at St. Mark's are different than what you are used to. Please remember that you are a guest at the school and in the culture. You should be aware that there is great variety in the levels of understanding and ability of the English language among the different grade levels, and even among classrooms. As a result, each teacher uses different methods of teaching, ranging from memorization to role-playing to even more dynamic approaches. Your flexibility in these situations is necessary as an assistant teacher. You should, however, resist the temptation to act as a disciplinarian; this is the responsibility of the individual teachers in all cases. Please also remember that you are considered a "professional" by the school. Remember to keep your relationships with the students at St. Mark's on this level.