

FINPE (FINLAND-PERU)

Coordinator: University of Turku (UTU), Finland

Partners: Universidad Nacional Agraria La Molina (UNALM) and Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (UNMSM), Peru

Study areas: Natural Sciences

What are the main aims of your network?

The University of Turku has a history of nearly 30 years of research and training activities in Peru, and is actively collaborating with the universities of La Molina and San Marcos in Lima. The FINPE project, under the frames of which students and teachers are exchanged, is one of many common activities between these partner universities. The FINPE project aims at:

- providing the participating exchange students and teachers a hands-on experience and insights on different higher education systems and innovative learning environments,
- providing the participants an opportunity to acquire and produce new knowledge and exchange views and experiences, in a different cultural setting;
- providing the participants an opportunity to learn modern interdisciplinary approaches and problem-setting regarding environmental issues and sustainable development;
- creating an awareness about development questions and providing the students interested by development cooperation an opportunity to gain specific country experience and to establish broad networking;
- intensifying the educational collaboration and the exchange of teachers and researchers, which will facilitate new initiatives in research and training;
- institutionalising the collaboration between the partner institutions, to ensure the institutional framework for the common activities also in the future.

The initiator of the project is the University of Turku Amazon Research Team (UTU-ART), which is an interdisciplinary research team including senior scientists, PhD students and undergraduate students from different, mainly European and Latin American countries, actively working at the Departments of Biology, Geology and Geography at the University of Turku.

What kind of activities are there in your network?

The common activities include joint research and development activities, educational collaboration in the form of joint seminars and instruction of MSc / PhD theses work, and since 2004 also student and teacher exchanges under FINPE, funded mainly through the North-South-South North-South-South Higher Education Institution Network Programme.

During the academic years 2009–2010 and 2010-2011 (according to the academic year in Finland), 5 students and 4 teachers per academic year will be exchanged between the participating



institutions. The Peruvian students stay in Finland for the full academic year (2 semesters, 9 months) and the Finnish students stay in Peru for one semester (5 months). The teacher visits last from one week to several weeks.

During this period, also a network meeting will be arranged in Lima, where the project and its results so far will be discussed and future plans will be made. One important aim of the network meeting is spreading information about the common activities to all levels at the Peruvian universities, which will benefit the different forms of collaboration in the future.

What sort of successes and challenges have you encountered during your project?

Since the beginning of the FINPE project, nearly 30 students have got the opportunity to study at one of the partner institutions. In addition to actual course participation, many Peruvian students have participated in research projects in Turku and gained valuable experience, and in the same way Finnish students have had a unique possibility to gather scientific material for their Master's theses in Peru.

The exchanges have been fruitful both in terms of gain of academic knowledge and personal growth. We are happy to notice that an unofficial alumni network has been created spontaneously, as most of the former exchange students are keeping in contact with the partner institutions and host countries, and with each other. This creates a good basis for further academic cooperation, for which good interpersonal contacts are essential.

The main challenges are related to the administration of the student exchanges. Whereas student exchange has been an essential part of the activities at the University of Turku for a long time, these activities are more recent at the partner institutions in Peru. The key issue has been the recognition of the studies completed at the host institution.

Your advice to forthcoming networks

A good network is established on good academic and administrative contacts. Active partners are a necessity for a working network. Keep up the contacts at all levels and share information within the network as much as possible.

