



INTERNATIONAL ALLIANCE OF  
RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES

# **Borderland: Critical approaches to field research and engagement in the Global South**

**Themes: Migration, Mobilities, and Immobilities**

## **Course Program**



**Course conveners:**

Associate Professor Khatharya Um (KU), University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Andreas Egelund Christensen (AEC), University of Copenhagen

## Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to think critically about the research process, epistemologies, and ethics in the conduct of research. The aim is to provide students with the tools to raise and address critical questions in their own research, and to establish a foundation from which they can apply the knowledge and practices from the course to future engagement with the Global South, be it through research, policy, advocacy, or other pursuits.

As such, the course is focused on the *research process* rather than the mastery of a specific topic, method, or region. Showcasing different approaches, issues, and regional contexts, the course is organized around the themes of **Migration, Mobilities and Immobilities** that have emerged as among the most pressing 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges, cutting across 11 of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, we are interested in the different forms and facets of movement (internal, cross-border; regular, and irregular) and of im/mobilities (social, political, economic). We are particularly attentive to intersectional and cross-cutting issues.

In exploring these themes, the course combines classroom learning with meaningful interactions and placement with local NGOs and ongoing research projects in and around Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. Through their field engagement, students will be introduced to critical research methods, issues, and policies related to the themes of the course. They will also have an opportunity to interact with impacted communities as well as with groups and organizations that are actively working on related issues through research, policies, community-centered initiatives, and advocacy.

## Course Structure and Format

The course is divided into the following components:

- Pre-departure research and preparation (one week)
- In-class lectures and discussions (one week)
- Field placement (two weeks)
- Independent and supervised research writing (one week)
- Public presentation
- Draft and submission of short research proposal

All activities in the course revolve around the themes of **Migration, Mobilities and Immobilities**, and are designed to complement each other and reinforce learning and meaningful engagement with the curriculum. The readings, lectures, and experiential activities are aimed at providing the necessary contexts for student field engagement and for the development of the research proposal, while work conducted with NGOs and research programs in Chiang Mai is meant to give students the “real-world” experience that informs critical research. Drawing upon insights from these different forms of field engagement, students will reflect on the research implications, and develop a succinct research proposal (based on their work with the NGO or on a completely different topic of their choice but that is related the themes of the course).

## Course Assignments:

Students are required to complete the following assignments:

- Actively engage with the classroom lectures and discussions – (including keeping up with the readings and coming to class prepared to engage with these issues)
- Successfully complete assignments set by their host institutions
- Make a public presentation of the work carried out during their field placement
- Develop a short research proposal (3-5 pages) either based on their field placement or on a completely different topic of their choice, but that is related to the themes of the course

## Assessment

- In keeping with the University of Copenhagen's grading system, the final assessment is based on a scale of 7. For some students, this numerical score will be translated into a letter grade as required by their institution.
- The final grade will be based on the following matrix:

○ Active participation	20%
○ Performance during field placement and public presentation	40%
○ Final Research Proposal (3-5 pages)	40%

## Learning Goals

We envision that through lectures, meaningful engagement with issues, communities, institutions, and collaborative and experiential learning, students will

- Gain valuable experience and insights working on a project that is of critical importance, be it through an NGO, a research or policy project.
- Gain a deeper appreciation of the challenges facing researchers, communities, and activists working on critical issues.
- Contribute in meaningful ways to the work of hosting organizations where they are placed.
- Have an opportunity to reflect on research implications and draft a short but well-thought through research proposal based on their field engagement or a topic related to the course that could be expanded into a longer proposal for future engagement with the Global South, be it through research, policy, advocacy, or other pursuits.

## Policies

All students are expected to be full and active participants in the entire course.

Absences from any activities related to the course must be pre-approved by the course conveners and, while in the field, also by the field supervisors at the hosting institutions.

## **Principles of Community**

At the beginning of the course, we will co-create a set of principles that will guide our engagement with each other as a diverse and complex learning community, with our professional colleagues in the field, and with the larger community in which we will be immersed during our time in Chiang Mai.

## **Submission of research project proposal**

The final research proposal must be submitted and uploaded as a pdf to Absalon no later than August 9 (all day in your time zone).

The research proposal must be a maximum of 3-5 pages (app. 1500 words). More details will be provided about this assignment during the first week of class.

## **Assigned Readings**

All readings are in pdfs and can be accessed via the online course platform *Absalon*.

Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings as scheduled, and prior to attending the seminars. The readings provide important contexts for the lectures but are also important to other components of the curriculum. We have kept the reading list very manageable so that students can dedicate sufficient time to their projects and field engagement.

## **Pre-departure assignments:**

- Conduct background research on the national and local environment in Thailand particularly on issues related to your research interests.
- Conduct background research on the organization to which you are assigned.
- Start reading the assigned articles.
- Think about the topic and begin your preliminary research for your research proposal.
- Research your university's policies on research ethics
  - Is there an office at your university that oversees and ensures the ethical conduct of research- such as the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects.
  - What are students required to do before they can begin their field research?
  - Determine whether your research requires that you secure certain approvals.

Some questions to reflect upon:

- What topic are you interested in researching?
- What are some specific research questions pertaining to this topic that you are interested in investigating?
- Why is this topic important and why are these specific questions critical to that topic?

- What has been written about this topic?
- What are some challenges that you anticipate encountering in conducting this research?

### **QUICK OVERVIEW OF COURSE TIMETABLE.**

**Pre-departure preparation:** July 1-5

**In class lectures:** July 8-12

**Field trip (all):** July 13

**Field engagement (NGOs/Ongoing research projects):** July 15-26

**Writing process, supervision and preparing public presentation:** July 29 - August 1

**Public Forum and presentation:** August 2

**Evaluation and farewell party:** August 2

**Free weekends:** July 21-21 + 27-28

**Submission of research project proposal:** August 9