



Study abroad.

SYLLABUS

UNDERSTANDING MEXICAN CULTURE

Professor Sara Champ

Contact Hrs: 40 Fieldwork Hrs: 20

Language of Instruction: English

MORELIA, MEXICO

Introduction

As the lives of U.S. and Mexican citizens become increasingly interconnected due to various economic and social phenomena, communities on both sides of the border are faced with different social, political and economic challenges associated with population and cultural movements. This fact implies a growing need for an educational process that prepares future professionals to live and work in bicultural and bilingual communities. The culture of Mexico is maintained and transformed by Mexican migrants, which can result in behaviors, beliefs and attitudes that differ from those expected from the population of the host communities, generating uncertainty and misunderstandings.

Objectives

This seminar has been designed from an interdisciplinary perspective and its objective is to introduce U.S. students to Mexican cultural, social, historical, and institutional contexts that influence attitudes, behaviors and beliefs of Mexican migrants in specific situations in the United States.

The seminar will explore readings, lectures and conferences in history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, literature, film and a variety of other related materials that address the different aspects of Mexican society and culture that are transported and transformed in the migration processes to the United States.

Seminar Goal

The goal of the seminar is to expand student's understanding of the influence of the various factors and institutions –history, culture, education, medical care, law enforcement, social services- on Mexicans who migrate to the United States, thereby allowing our students to understand how migrants might relate to those similar factors and institutions in the United States.

Topics and seminar content

Topics of inquiry include: religion, corruption and violence, the Mexican legal system and political/social institutions, family and gender issues, migration patterns and profiles, the esthetics and art, the welfare state, authoritarianism and democracy, ethnic and social minorities, and the impact of a neoliberal economic model, all of which are interrelated.

Topics:

The Mexican political system and institutions

What are the institutions that have formed modern Mexico's political system? What part does corruption play in the smooth operations of these systems? What principles guide the work done in

these institutions? Is the political structure of Mexico shifting towards democracy? Why and what are the responses to these challenges?

- The Mexican political system and institutions
 - Transition from authoritarianism to democracy
 - Democratic transition in Mexico
 - End of revolutionary nationalism
- Corruption as an institution
 - Drug trafficking

Social institutions

Family and religion are two of the strongest units of social organization in Mexico. What part have they played in alleviating social ills (or exacerbating the)? How is the traditional family structure changing and what effect is this having on gender roles?

- The end of the welfare state
 - Impact of neoliberalism
- Family
 - The role of tradition and its challenges
 - New models of family in urban/rural scenario
 - Family disintegration
- Religion
 - The Virgin of Guadalupe
 - Syncretism and folk religion
 - Religious struggles (historic and contemporary events)
- Gender
 - Neoliberalism and individualism and the empowerment of women
 - Violence in gender relations
 - Machismo in daily life culture

Migration to the U.S.

We will consider the causes of migration and the impact on communities, reasons people leave, and at what cost.

- Historical and social patterns of migration from Mexico to the US
 - Migration from Michoacan to the US
- Social and economic consequences of migration in Mexico
 - The case of Michoacan

Art and esthetics

We will analyze the transcendence of artistic manifestations and the esthetic production as symbolic tools of the nationalist policies of the state.

- The Mexican museums
- The cultural tourism strategy
- The folk art and the handcrafts

Ethnic and social minorities

Who are the people that make up Mexico? Is there social inequality based on race? What are the causes of the separations between groups? And how is Mexico dealing with different ethnic groups?

- The mestizo myth and racism in Mexico
- The indigenous issue in Mexico
 - Case study of the EZLN
 - The purépecha identity

- Counter culture in Mexico
 - Homosexuality in Mexico
 - Youth urban identities (cholos, Neza punks)

Mexico and the challenges of the XXI century

What effect is NAFTA and neoliberalism having on the sense of national identity? What direction is the country headed in terms of its changes in politics, economic model and shifting from state to private interests?

- Two nationalisms
- The environmental issue

Presentation of fieldwork results

Each student will present to the class group, the development and conclusions of the fieldwork as well as his/her considerations. The evaluation of this session by the classmates will be considered for the grading procedures.

Grading procedures

Written work 30%

I require short abstracts of every reading assignment (1 page typed, font size 12). These are due at the beginning of class and should summarize the main points of the text. In addition to a summary I require that you add one question that relates to the reading. We will use these questions to facilitate class discussion.

Final Exam 30%

You are also responsible for a final exam at the end of the term that will cover the topics from class as well as the conferences.

Field work 30%

At determined moment, the student will select a theme of fieldwork. The grading for this process will include the preparation of a chart or schedule, and the accomplishment of the activities that the student has already planned.

Fieldwork presentation 10%

Each student will make a brief presentation (20 minutes) of their fieldwork during the last week of classes.

Bibliography:

Students will be provided with a compilation of the readings.

Castañeda, Jorge and Pastor, Robert A. *Limits to Friendship*. Vintage Books, 1989.

Chodkiewicz, Jean-Luc. *Globalization and Community*. University of Manitoba, 2004

Eduardo Ruiz, Ramon. *On the Rim of Mexico*. Westview, 1998.

Garcia Canclini, Nestor. *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico*, U of Texas Press, 1993.

Ed. Joseph, Gilbert and Henderson, Timothy. *The Mexican Reader*. Duke University Press, 2003.

Preston, Julia and Dillon, Samuel. *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2004.

Quinones, Sam. *True Tales From Another Mexico*. U of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 2001

Simon, Joel. *Endangered Mexico*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1997.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork is research on a topic that can relate to (but is not limited) to class themes. It is research that is done outside of the classroom and may involve work on the university campus or further field. Essentially it is a research project that students design to understand something more about Mexico and its culture. You are responsible for creating a project, gathering information, and relating this information to what you have learned in class. Your conclusions will be handed in for a grade. You will also be responsible for an oral presentation to the class on your findings.

How to begin:

Draw up an investigation project:

1. Faculty members of the AHA program in Morelia can assist you in exploring different fieldwork topics, options and resources. You can also be helped in order to contact other faculty members at UNLA.
2. Identify the theme of your project.
3. Determine your objectives. What do you wish to investigate and why?
4. State your method. What resources are required and how are you going to obtain the information for your research project?
5. Plan a calendar that includes dates for bibliographic research, visits to research sites, conduct interviews, and meetings with advisors.

This investigation project should be typed (no more than one page) and handed in for approval (See due dates).

- Meet at least 2 more times with faculty member to monitor your progress.
- Hand in your methods of investigation, your research findings and your conclusions in a typed 6-8 page paper (font size 12 double spaced).
- It is absolutely necessary to show your sources (bibliography, typed interviews, journal sections, etc.)
- Share them with the class in an oral presentation.

UNLA faculty members will serve as project advisors supervising advances and helping solve difficulties that students might face.

Group projects will be allowed in order that students with higher Spanish skills can assist those with less. Authorization for the group projects will be required.

In addition, your research project could precede a larger and more in-depth research topic.

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Learners will:

- Design and carry out an effective research proposal and plan, complete with research tools and instruments.
- Discuss the ethics of field-based research and follow ethical guidelines.
- Explore in depth a topic of personal and academic interest.
- Record observations and insights from their research in a field journal or reading log.
- Compile a professional portfolio that portrays the success of their research.

Potential Research Methods

Students may choose to do any one or combination of the following:

- Read books and articles about the topic of interest.
- Visit museums, archeological sites, or other locations where will help the student learn more about the research topic.
- Watch videos, films, or TV programs related to the topic.
- Complete volunteer/service-learning work related to the independent study topic.

- Conduct participant/observation research in a particular organization or community related to the research topic.
- Conduct interviews or record oral histories of people relevant to the topic of interest.

Final papers should include the following:

Section 1: Introduction and Rationale (*in your own words*)

- a. What is the problem or area of study the students plans to explore?
- b. Why is this issue important?

Section 2: Background and Context

- a. Background knowledge: What is already known about this topic?
- b. What have you learned from the background readings so far?
- c. Mini-literature review: What has been written on the topic, and from which theoretical frameworks?
- d. Context of the issue in Mexico: What is the local context and situation of this issue in Mexico?

Section 3: Research Questions and Theoretical Framework (*In general, your theory or basic approach to understanding your topic. Why is it unique that you are conducting the research in Mexico*)

- a. What is the purpose of the study, and how will it build on previous studies that exist?
- b. What are the specific research questions?
- c. Theoretical framework: What theoretical or other lenses are being used and why?

Section 4: Methodology: Discussion of the Research Design and Implementation (*smaller section*)

- a. What were the research methods and/or techniques? (Interviews? Participant observation, etc.?)
- b. Why were those methods or techniques chosen?
- c. Procedures: How many people were interviewed, and how were those people and/or places selected? Where was participant observation conducted, etc.?
- d. What ethical considerations were taken into account? Did the sources ask to be credited or were their names changed to protect their anonymity?
- e. Did the original research design change? If so, how and why?
- f. What challenges were encountered in the implementation of the research design?
- g. What were the strengths and weaknesses or limitations of the research design and implementation?

Section 5: Research Findings (*largest section*)

- a. Research data: What was discovered?
- b. Interpretation of the data: What does it mean?
- c. Broader context of the findings: How does what was found relate to the body of knowledge discussed earlier? How is it similar and/or different? Does it support others' ideas? Refute them? Offer new insights?

Section 6: Conclusions

- a. Final reflections
- b. Questions for further exploration
- c. End notes or footnotes, bibliography. appendices