

SOCWRK 494/594: Working with Mexicans

Course Description

SOCWRK 494/594 will help professionals in the health, mental health, and education fields learn about contemporary Mexican issues to improve their work with Mexicans who are newly immigrated to the United States. The workshop will be held at the Cemanahuac Educational Community in Cuernavaca (Morelos), and Buenavista a Cuellar (Guererro).

The course is designed to provide an immersion experience of either four-week or two-week duration. For those with time/resource constraints that preclude a full four-week commitment, the first two weeks still offer in-depth cultural and language enrichment that includes living with a host family (Spanish only) in an urban setting with ready access to important archeological, historical, cultural sites in and around Mexico City and Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico.

Using Mexican professionals as guest lecturers, the workshop will provide 60 hours of course content in the following areas: ethnically sensitive practice with Latino clients; gender issues; the political, religious, historical and socio-economic context of work with Latino clients; Mexican/U.S. relations; and theories of behavior and diagnostic processes sensitive to the Latino experience. Studying in Mexico, participants will develop broad awareness of the reality of Mexican life and experiences shaping the lives of Mexican immigrants to the United States.

In addition to the workshop, participants will take 80 hours of immersion Spanish, live and take meals with Mexican host families, and visit archeological and cultural sites in and around Mexico City, and the rural historic State of Morlos.

The full program may be taken for four Boise State University undergraduate or graduate academic credits or for 60 continuing education units. Each module may be taken for 2 credits or 30 continuing education units. Additional credits may be arranged as special project independent studies supervised by the course instructors.

Immersion Spanish: Participants will take 80 hours of immersion Spanish through the Cemanahuac Educational Community during four weeks of study. Placement examinations will help determine your level of Spanish so that you can be placed in an appropriate class. Spanish is taught Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM by experienced instructors in classes of no more than 5 students. Immersion Spanish means that only Spanish is spoken in class.

Living with Mexican Families: We will live with Mexican host families. Workshop fees cover room and board. Living with Mexican families, we will have opportunities to learn

about family life, practice speaking Spanish, and experience family gatherings and celebrations.

Workshop Objectives

1. To learn about, recognize, and appreciate the rich mosaic of Mexican traditions and customs.
2. To recognize cultural, religious, historical and socio-economic factors that affect Mexicans today.
3. To develop an understanding of developmental and socialization processes related to life in Mexico.
4. To interact with Mexicans in ways that help participants appreciate Mexican life.
5. To improve understanding of contemporary Mexican/U.S. relations.
6. To understand forces that foster Mexican emigration to the United States.
7. To develop skill in using Spanish with clients, patients, students, and for personal use.

Expectations

Participants are expected to function as adult learners, to complete assigned readings, to participate fully in course activities and to have fun. Those seeking CEUs are expected as well to complete assigned readings, to attend all class sessions and are encouraged to keep a journal.

Participants enrolling for undergraduate credit are expected to complete assigned readings, to attend all class sessions and are required to keep a journal culminating in a written reflection of their workshop experience.

Participants enrolling for graduate credit are expected to complete assigned readings, to attend all class sessions and are required to keep a journal culminating in a written reflection of their workshop experience. In addition, they will write a 10 page paper discussing their understanding of factors relevant to working professionally with Mexicans.

Participants seeking additional undergraduate or graduate level independent study will work out a contract for that work with the instructors.

All participants are encouraged to “think Mexico” before leaving for Cuernavaca becoming aware of stories and newspaper articles, breaking news and other resources that may contribute to their achievement of the workshop objectives and educational outcomes.

Journaling

The journal is a systematic way of documenting learning, collecting information and stimulating reflection and self-analysis.

The journal can be utilized as a resource for class discussion and the basis for a written reflection paper.

Emphasis is on exploring and expressing thoughts, feelings, beliefs, discoveries, questions, observations, challenges and insights, without the usual university emphasis on grammar, organization and correct spelling.

Journal entries can provide a vehicle for analysis, synthesis, and application of learning—drawing from a variety of opportunities and experiences including readings, class presentations and discussions, interactions with host families and local Mexicans, interactions with classmates, and participation in field trips and Spanish immersion classes.

Daily entries are expected. With concentration and practice, a “focused free-writing” (Bean, 2001) can result in two or more pages of normal-sized handwriting in 15 to 20 minutes. This is a technique in which “you put your pen to paper and write nonstop” for a designated period of time. If you find yourself stuck, “just write *relax* or a key word over and over until a new thought springs into your mind.” (Bean, p.102)

Suggestions:

- Freely express emotional reactions, thoughts, questions, and opinions in relation to the many experiences in which you are engaged during this immersion experience.
- Describe your experiences with communicating in a second language.
- Record the cultural or historical significance of food/meals and/or compare or contrast with your own food-centered traditions or customs.
- Record what your five senses tell you about what you are experiencing. Describe ambient or background sounds and the smells that you pick up during your travels. Do the same with the sights that are normally out of focus to your vision. Generally, these are experienced on the subconscious level, but they greatly affect the way we perceive things, and can sometimes throw us off balance. Include more of these sight, sound, smells, etc. details in your journal. Doing this will not only help you to become a better journal writer, it will also help you to be a better observer.
- Share your journaling with classmates and invite them to offer suggestions and insights from their journaling experience.

As you read and journal, you may find it useful to focus on these questions:

- How does what I am reading and experiencing increase my understanding of the rich tapestry of Mexican culture?
- How does what I am learning about the cultures, economics, politics and religions of the Mexican people contribute to my understanding of contemporary Mexican relations with the United States?
- What are the effects of globalization on the lives of Mexican people?

- What are the forces that are contributing to the emigration of Mexican citizens to the United States?
- How will this new knowledge contribute to my effectiveness in working with Mexicans in the United States?

Reading Assignment

We will read three brief, insightful books in preparation for our time in Mexico. *Mexico in Focus* by John Ross is a concise introduction to Mexican history, politics and culture. *Mexican Lives* by Judith Hellman tells the stories of fifteen diverse Mexicans, putting a human face on the political and economic transformations affecting their country. *Inside Mexico: Living, traveling and doing business in a changing society* by Paula Heusinkveld provides good working knowledge of Mexican customs, values and worldview.

In addition, as an enjoyable way of getting a feel for the Spanish conquest of Mexico through the eyes of the conquered, we encourage reading an excellent short novel—*Song of the Hummingbird*, by Graciela Limón. However, you may opt to read any novel set in Mexico. These books are available inexpensively in paperback from Amazon.com.

Required texts:

Hellman, J. A. (1994). *Mexican Lives*. New York: The New Press.

Heusinkveld, P. (1994). *Inside Mexico: Living, traveling and doing business in a changing society*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Ross, J. (2003). *Mexico in focus: A guide to the people, politics and culture*. New York: Interlink Books.

Recommended novel:

Limón, G. (1996). *Song of the hummingbird*. Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, University of Houston.

Other fiction with insight into Mexican and Mexican American culture and life:

Benitez, Sandra (2003). *Night of the radishes*. New York: Hyperion.

Benitez, Sandra (1993). *A place where the sea remembers*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Esquivel, Laura (1992). *Like water for chocolate*. New York: Doubleday.

Fuentes, Carlos (1994). *The orange tree*. Trans. by Alfred Mac Adam. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Spanish title: *Naranjo*.

Fuentes, Carlos (1991). *The campaign*. Trans. by Alfred Mac Adam. New York:

Farrar, Straus, Giroux. Spanish title: *Campaña*.

Fuentes, Carlos (1991). *The death of Artemio Cruz*. New York: Noonday Press.

Michener, James A. (1992). *Mexico*. New York: Random House.

Paredes, Américo (1994). *The hammon and the beans and other stories*. Houston: Arte Público Press.

Rodriquez, Richard (1992). *Days of obligation: An argument with my Mexican Father*. New York: Penguin.

Other recommended resources¹:

Adler, Rachel H. (2004). *Yucatan in Dallas, Texas: Breaching the border, bridging the distance*. Boston: Pearson.

Ethnographic case study painting a vivid picture of the lives of Mexican migrants, showing how migrants maintain active social ties across borders.

Atkin, S. Beth (1993). *Voices from the fields: Children of migrant farmworkers tell their stories*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Moving photo essay on the experiences of migrant farmworker families.

Baker, Richard (1995). *Los dos mundos: Rural Mexican Americans, another America*. Logan, UT: Utah State University Press.

Ethnographic study of the separate worlds of Mexican and Anglo Americans living in the same Idaho town.

Barry, Tom (1995) *Zapata's revenge: Free trade and the farm crisis in Mexico*. Boston: South End Press.

Examination of the contrast in agriculture in the United States and Mexico especially in light of the trade agreements under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Barry, Tom (1992). *Mexico: A country guide*. Albuquerque, NM: The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center.

Excellent introduction to Mexico and Mexican/U.S. relations.

¹ Thanks to Vivian Harvey, Educational Programs Coordinator, Cemanahuac Educational Community, for many contributions to this list.

Behar, Ruth (1993). *Translated woman: Crossing the border with Esperanza's story*. Boston: Beacon Press.

A Cuban American woman anthropologist interviewing a Mexican woman finds unexpected common ground in this insightful account.

Bodeen, J., Ed. (2002). *Seeking light in each dark room*. Yakima, WA: Blue Begonia Press.

Letters, testimonials, and moving personal interviews with migrants to the Yakima, WA area.

Collier, G. (1994). *Basta! Land and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas*. Oakland, CA: Food First Books.

Discussion of the economic, political and social forces resulting in the Zapatista uprising.

Conover, T. (1987). *Coyotes: a journey through the secret world of America's illegal aliens*. New York: Random House Publishers (Vantage Books).

Stories and testimonials of Mexicans who have emigrated (documented and undocumented) to the United States

Lewis, O. (1961). *The Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.

Much of the information about Mexican family life and family values in a poor colonia is still applicable today. The description of the effects of poverty is a powerful one and can be applied to any group.

Lutz, Ellen L. (1990). *Human rights in Mexico: A policy of impunity*. Human Rights Watch.

Documentation of human rights abuses by Mexican public security units.

Martinez, R. (2001) *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail*. New York: Henry Holt and Company (Picador).

A moving story of one family's efforts and resulting lives from their migration from Michoacan to the United States

National Geographic (1996). *Emerging Mexico: A special issue*. Washington, DC:

National Geographic Society.

Photo essays exploring how Mexicans are coping with economic and political crises and shaping their future.

Noble, John, et al. (2006). *Mexico*. Melbourne: Lonely Planet Publications.

An excellent introductory guide to Mexico covering history; travel tips; regional information on attractions, housing, restaurants, etc.

Simon, J. (1997) *Endangered Mexico: An environment on the edge*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books.

Most interesting but very depressing view of ecological problems in Mexico.

Tangeman, Michael (1995). *Mexico at the crossroads: Politics, the church, and the poor*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

Explores the interrelationship between the Mexican government, the Church and marginalized Mexicans.

Urrea, Luis A. (1996). *By the lake of sleeping children: The secret life of the Mexico border*. New York: Anchor Books (Doubleday).

A first-person reveling account on the post NAFTA and post Prop 187 lives of garbage pickers and dump dwellers, fearsome coyotes and their desperate clientele, as they live along the California border and attempt the dangerous crossing to the United States

Urrea, Luis A. (1993). *Across the wire: Life and hard times on the Mexican border*. New York: Anchor Books.

A compelling and unprecedented look at what life is like for those refugees living on the Mexico side of the border, just 20 miles south of San Diego.

U.S. Department of State, Mexico Country Page

<http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/mx/>

Access to map of Mexico , U.S. Department of State background notes providing information on Mexican people, history, government, political conditions, economy, defense, foreign relations and foreign relations and Library of Congress detailed Country Study of Mexican history and contemporary Mexico from a U.S. perspective.

Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: U.S-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press

A powerful book that examines culturally relevant teaching as Mexican immigrant families encounter cultural differences regarding the role of teachers. Within the traditions of the United States, fundamental elements of Mexican students' cultural framework are frequently ignored or misunderstood, resulting in underachievement, high drop out rates and barriers to learning for Mexican youth. Valenzuela describes the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility that serves as the foundation for learning while highlighting the negative effects of assimilationist policies on Mexican culture and language.

Valle, Isabel (1994). *Fields of toil: A migrant family's journey*. Pullman, WA: Washington State University Press.

A reporter from a Washington newspaper lived with a migrant family for a full year and compiled her experiences and observations into an award-winning reports and now into a book which documents the daily struggle for survival of this family.

Weinberg, Bill (2000). *Homage to Chiapas: The new indigenous struggles in Mexico*. London: Verso.

Comprehensive, readable discussion of the historical and social context of the Zapatistas and other contemporary resistance movements in Mexico.

Additional materials will be provided as handouts.