

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

Social Problems & Solutions
of
The Yucatan
Mayan Study Abroad: Mexico Winter 2008

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Course Description: This course will focus on topics such as poverty, inequality, unemployment, crime and deviance, abuse, neglect, discrimination, quality of health, and the solutions the state of Mexico have put into place to service residents who suffer from these problems. To critically evaluate the modern state of Mexico, we will focus, on the effects of Globalization and National structural institutions such as the: Economy, Polity, Religion, Family & Community, & Media.

Academic Honesty: Academic Honesty is a very important issue. I expect your work to be an original effort.

Required Reading:

Course Packet: At the Nashville airport prior to departure, students will receive a course packet containing a selection of relevant articles. The cost of the packet will be \$17-25.

REQUIREMENTS

ATTENDANCE CLASS PARTICIPATION & CLASS PREPARATION

300 POINTS (30%): Students are expected to attend all classes, workshops, and excursions and contribute regularly to class discussions and group activities.

REACTION/REFLECTION PAPERS

DETAILS TO FOLLOW WHILE IN MEXICO

400 points (40%): **Three** reaction/reflection options will be offered and **Two** are **required** for this course (each comprising 20% of your overall grade for the course). These papers are based on the integration of readings with actual excursions while in Mexico. They can be hand written, should be at least 5 pages in length (longer, if desired), and should incorporate a minimum of five quotes (with citations) from the week's readings. The papers will call for you to observe, feel, reflect, analyze, and integrate the information in the readings with excursions and class discussion. The format follows, plus tips for how to write a strong paper.

Each paper should include three sections: Section One: Observation
 Section Two: Analysis and Integration
 Section Three: Reactions

Tip: Be sure to note where each section begins.

Section One: Observations

Identify three things that you observed during either a class discussion/meeting guest lecture, or a mandatory excursion. These observations can include anything that especially stood out for you, such as certain kinds of interactions between people, an image encountered that was “visually stimulating,” interesting issues or common themes that emerged (beyond what we were discussing), insights about the dynamics of the “class setting,” etc. Explain what was significant to you about each of the observations.

Tip: Be sure to include, and explain, **three** observations.

Example from an experiential class (taught in a jail) on “women & crime”:

During our discussion about power, I noticed that most definitions of power were negative. For example, several students said that power is the ability to control other people. We didn’t discuss the positive elements of power until much later in the class.

Section Two: Analysis and Integration

In this section, you are to look at the issues that you were asked to consider during the week, reflecting on and analyzing the topics that were addressed. **Integrate the readings for the week**, including at least five relevant quotes (with citations) from those readings. This is probably the most difficult section to write well. In this section, you are expected to present your own analysis based on the readings and discussion for each class meeting. This section is to be at least a page and ½ long.

Tip 1: Prior to writing this section you should reflect on the issues and themes that were discussed or assigned for the week. What themes, points, or issues did you find interesting? Jot these down.

Tip 2: Since it is difficult to write about several issues well, select one (*maybe* two) of these issues or themes to write about.

Tip 3: Develop your own analysis of the issue or theme you select. What do YOU think about what you read and discussed during class or experienced on an excursion?

Tip 4: Use quotations from the readings and examples from discussion/experience/lecture to support your analysis or to highlight the limitations of your analysis.

Example from an experiential class (taught in a jail) on “women & crime”:

The War on Drugs has contributed to an increase in the number of men and women in prison. During the last decade, tougher drug laws have been introduced in most states. These laws often have a greater impact on men than women. As Jones states, “**women are likely to receive harsher penalties than men for their involvement in similar offenses**” (Jones, p. 3). This trend is likely to continue for the next decade, and its impact will extend beyond the lives of incarcerated women. As Pompa writes, “**incarceration also punishes the families of men and women on the inside**” (Pompa, p.7). Lawmakers should consider how these laws affect those who are incarcerated and their loved ones.

Tip: Try **not** to do the following:

Quote #1: “Women are likely to receive harsher penalties than men for their involvement in similar offenses” (Jones, p.3). This quote shows that women in the criminal justice system are treated differently from men. It seems that women and men are treated differently at the county jail.

This is not necessarily “wrong,” but notice whose voice and opinion is emphasized when the quote comes first: not yours. Use this assignment to showcase YOUR analysis. You’ve done the work, participated in the excursion, read the books, and listened in class or to a guest lecture. Now give YOUR analysis of all this. **Make sure you can back your analysis up with something.** Use the quotations and examples to support YOUR analysis or to highlight the limitations of your analysis.

Section Three: Reactions

In this section, you should write about your emotional reaction (how you felt) after class discussion, guest lecture or an excursion. Try to describe *in as much detail as possible* how “the experience” made you feel. For example, don’t just say that the experience made you feel sad/happy/etc. Tell the reader what made you feel sad/happy/etc., how long were you sad/happy/etc., what does sadness/happiness/etc. feel like, did others notice, when did it stop, etc. It may be difficult for some of us to explore these feelings. Writing can be a useful way to examine feelings that we might otherwise ignore. Remember, you will not be penalized for honesty.

PROJECTS

DETAILS TO FOLLOW IN MEXICO

300 POINTS (30% final grade). **Two** choices will be offered and **One** is **required** for this course. For this portion of the class, we will participate in a project together and each student will be asked to write a one-page summary of her/his experience.

Grading:

Your final grade will be determined from:

Attendance, active participation & solid preparation.....300 points
Reaction paper.....400 points
Projects (2 minimum).....(150 points each).....300 points

1000 POINTS POSSIBLE

Letter grades will be given as follows:

A+ = 980-1000 B+ = 870-899 C+ = 770-799 D=600-699
A = 930-979 B = 830-869 C = 730-769 F=Below 600
A- = 900-929 B- = 800-829 C- = 700-729

Instructional Setting and Approach

Some classes take place in more “conventional” university settings while others include visits to various historical sites, museums, Indian communities, national parks and reserves, local neighborhood establishments, and sport, music, and market venues. Indeed, during our month-long stay, we should think of “Mexico” as our classroom.

Brief Course Outline (Topics and dates may change to better fit course and travel objectives):

“Topic” #1: Students will be exposed to issues of Urban Poverty, the abused & neglected lives of “Street Children,” access to Health Care and “Quality Education” while traveling through Merida.

“Topic” #2: While traveling to Uxmal & Palenque, we will focus on two issues: The conundrum of “Environmental concerns VS those of development” & Ethnicity and the human rights of the indigenous.

“Topic” #3: We will then visit the unique town of San Cristobal where we will discuss the division of labor in Mexico along with the “gendering” of labor. In addition, we will consider; San Cristobal: Merchants as an example of successful “Indian” entrepreneurial groups within the “Western Capitalist” model. Just outside San Cristobal we will travel to local Indian villages such as Chamula to observe the retention of unique indigenous culture.

“Topic” #4: Our final destinations in Ecological preserve at Chalkmul and the beach will offer a time to reflect on what we have experienced considering some of the following issues: What role does the US/1st world play in the Social Problems seen throughout our experience in this area of Mexico? How effective is the “state” of Mexico in addressing the social problems residents experience? What role does out-migration play in solutions and problems for this area of Mexico? After living and traveling throughout the Yucatan reflect on obstacles you see as hindering the state of Mexico/Yucatan in better addressing its social problems.