

## **Community Health in Oaxaca, Mexico**

**ISL 959:375**

**Summer 2011**

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**June 8-July10**

### **Course Description**

Rutgers University is positioned at one end of a transnational migration corridor that extends from Oaxaca, a state in southern Mexico, to New Brunswick, NJ, a city with a diverse population including a rapidly growing number of migrants from southern Mexico. Rutgers faculty have begun to transform the corridor into what we imagine to be a multi-sited space of transnational knowledge production, education, and inter-institutional exchange that would include Rutgers University in New Brunswick and SUNEI and ProWorld in Oaxaca. Rutgers faculty, students and leaders are now developing opportunities for scholarship, pedagogy and community development as a result of Rutgers' strategic location within this corridor.

This course on "Community Health in Oaxaca, Mexico" represents one part of this larger, multidisciplinary effort to develop and expand relationships with the Mexican community both in Mexico and New Jersey. The course would involve three main components:

- Course on the anthropology of health in Mexico
- Course in Medical Spanish
- Service learning activities in community and public health programs in Oaxaca

The program will go for four and a half weeks during June and July. Each week begins with a morning seminar on culture and health in Mexico focused on key anthropological studies of these issues. During the middle of the week, students spend each morning in a community health service project that is on-going. Examples of projects include work in rural health clinics, in programs for the elderly, and organizations that promote public health. ProWorld will make connections to these types of programs and has considerable experience placing students in them. Students will also have daily language classes in the late afternoon, with an emphasis on medical Spanish. Each week ends with a seminar during which students would reflect on their experiences in working in community health programs. Weekends include excursions to cultural and ecological sites, time with homestay families, and opportunities to explore Oaxaca.

## Course Objectives and Expectations

This course is designed as part of Rutgers Study Abroad/International Service Learning programs. Students will learn about the realities of Mexican society: through direct participation and interaction with people; through providing community service to various health projects; and through classroom discussions and readings. Students will not only learn about community health in Mexico, but they will develop a deeper understanding of what it is like to live in another society, where much of their taken-for-granted assumptions about social life are challenged on a fundamental level. As in any course whose basis is the discipline of medical anthropology, I want students to appreciate the lack of clear-cut answers to daily and deeply structural social problems. More specifically, my objectives and expectations for the course are that students:

- Learn about the Mexican health care system, understanding the realities and consequences of medicine in a context of globalization;
- Come to understand the realities of life in Oaxaca, Mexico, with a special emphasis on the issues of access to health care for local families and communities and how Mexico's national health care reform has affected that access;
- Learn about health issues in Oaxaca to better understand health in a developing country context, and to inform students' understandings of health issues among Mexican immigrants in New Brunswick, NJ.
- Develop a multinational perspective on health care systems as they operate in Mexico in comparison to the United States;
- Do all the assigned readings and writing projects by the dates due, as they would in any regular class at their home institutions;
- Improve their Spanish language skills through class work with an emphasis on medical Spanish and immersion in Oaxaca;
- Participate wholeheartedly in service projects dedicated to helping the communities in which we will work;
- Reflect on the service learning experiences in the form of field notes and diaries so that students record and integrate their service learning experiences with classroom learning
- Face the challenges of life in a foreign culture with humor and graciousness, showing a respect for local customs and a maturity to deal with the inevitable hardships that will arise; and
- Comport themselves as ambassadors for Rutgers University and their country, remembering at all times that they are guests in another land

## Requirements and Grading

You will receive one grade for your participation in this program through the Rutgers Study Abroad Program. I will assist you in transferring those credits and grades to fit with particular curricular requirements. Course outcomes will be assessed using the following methods:

- Faculty review of students' brief reaction papers to assigned readings
- Student progress in Spanish proficiency - pre- and post-assessment by the local language school
- Faculty review of student field notes and journals on their learning experiences
- Quality of student participation in the various seminars
- Student post-program evaluations of the experience (quantitative and qualitative)
- Student post-program essay that assesses what they learned about health care in Mexico and about themselves
- Student participation in service learning activities in New Brunswick and New Jersey after returning from Mexico

**Attendance:** Class will meet once per week on Monday mornings for three hours to discuss course readings. We will also meet as a group on Friday mornings for reflection on and discussion of our field and service experiences. We will spend three mornings each week in community health services, health education, and public health prevention projects in and around the city of Oaxaca. On those same days, there will be a medical Spanish class in the late afternoon. In addition, several events outside of class will be scheduled each week. Attendance at every class meeting, group outing or event is mandatory, unless excused by illness. Tardiness will not be tolerated – tardies and unexcused absences will reduce your final course grade.

**Reading and participation:** Students are expected to do all the assigned readings for each class meeting. Please bear in mind that this is a six-credit program, and the workload reflects this. Students will write brief (2 page) reaction papers to each week's readings and keep a journal of their community service experiences. Being prepared for class is necessary for full comprehension of the lectures and engaged participation in class discussions. Participation involves being alert and taking notes during lectures; asking questions to clarify points of misunderstanding; engaging actively in small-group activities; and contributing meaningfully and often to discussions. Keeping up with the readings is the best way to be sure you are ready to participate.

**The following books are required for the course:**

- Kaja Finkler. 2001. *Physicians at Work, Patients in Pain*. Carolina Academic Press.
- Matthew Gutmann. 2007. *Fixing Men*. University of California Press.
- Arthur Rubel, et al. 1991. *Susto: A Folk Illness*. University of California Press.
- James Young & Linda Garro. 1993. *Medical Choice in a Mexican Village*. Waveland Press.

**Assignments and Evaluation:** Assignments should be typed, double-spaced, and submitted in hard copy or e-mail format on the dates indicated. The grades will be determined on the following bases:

- **Participation** (20 %) – Students are expected to attend and participate in all meetings and class events, including research and service activities.
- **Journals** (20 %) – Students will keep a daily field diary, in which they reflect on their experiences doing fieldwork and service. I will collect these diaries at the end of the program. In addition, students will be called upon to share their observations and reflections verbally in weekly group discussions.
- **Weekly Assignments** (40%) – You will write a brief reaction paper to the assigned readings.
- **Final Paper** (20 %) – A final paper (5 pages) that reflects on the learning and growth that occurred as a result of all the activities in the program

**Language** All readings, writing, and classroom discussion for this course will be in English. Students have the choice to hand in their written assignments in Spanish. Most of our field trips, events and activities will be in Spanish. Students will have weekly Spanish classes at their appropriate level, with a focus on medical Spanish. Students will be given a pre and a post assessment, which should show measurable improvement and upon which their grade in language class will be based.

**Disciplinary policy** There will be a zero tolerance policy for student misbehavior while on this trip. Mexico is a more socially conservative society than the U.S., and you should conduct yourselves accordingly. While I will not be supervising your behavior outside of class activities, any reports of students getting into trouble with host families or local authorities will result in disciplinary action, possibly including the student returning home immediately and receiving a failing grade in the class. I also expect you to know and abide by the Rutgers University academic honesty policy in preparing your work for this course. You will be required to sign a Behavior Policy form.

## ProWorld Volunteers

Helping to coordinate this study abroad program is ProWorld. ProWorld's mission is to empower communities, promote social and economic development, conserve the environment, and cultivate educated, compassionate global citizens. ProWorld's volunteer and education abroad programs will open your eyes to a new culture, give you a chance to make a difference, and provide you with hands-on experience in development work, cross-cultural communication, and a foreign language. ProWorld provides on-site support for our study abroad program and connections to the community health projects we will work with. ProWorld works with these community partners on a year-round basis.

## Course Schedule

For each week of the program, the syllabus lists the course schedule, community service activities, readings, and written or other assignments students are expected to complete in the course of that week. Readings should be completed by, and written assignments are due at the time of our Monday morning class.

## Prior to the Course

Please read a brief history of Mexico that will allow you to place our program in Oaxaca in context. I would recommend either Brian Hamnett. 2006. *A Concise History of Mexico* (Cambridge Concise Histories) or Richard Grabman. 2009. *Gods, Gachupines, and Gringos: A People's History of Mexico*.

## Week 1

6/8	<b>Arrival Day;</b> Stay in a family-run hostel
6/9	10 am – 1 pm Orientation; 2 pm – 3pm Comida; 3:30 pm – 4:30 pm Walking tour of Oaxaca; Evening - move in with homestay families
6/10	9 am – 1 pm Orientation to field sites
6/11	Free day to explore and enjoy with homestay families
6/12	Trip to Monte Alban, a dramatic archaeological site

## Week 2

6/13	10 am – 1 pm Seminar: <b><i>Medical Choice in a Mexican Village</i></b> This anthropological study examines how local people choose one type of health care over another, using the cultural concept of the health care system to frame their analysis. Villagers generally are poor and use their medical knowledge to evaluate the meaning, severity, and potential consequences of an illness. The authors examine preferences for healing in creative ways and find that local people have developed a comprehensive set of "rules" for making decisions about treatment. This book will give us insights into the kinds of issues people face in the communities where we work and some of their concerns in deciding how to get help. <b>Reading:</b> James Young & Linda Garro. 1993. <i>Medical Choice in a Mexican Village</i> . Waveland Press.
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- 6/14-16      8 am – 1 pm Field placements in community health projects  
                  2:30 – 4:30 Lunch with homestay families  
                  5:30 pm – 8:10 pm Medical Spanish Classes at Amigos del Sol Language Institute
- 6/17          10 am – 1 pm Reflection Seminar
- 6/18          Trip to Teotitlan del Valle, meet with a Zapotec women's weaving cooperative;  
                  Talk and session on traditional Zapotec healing- group 'limpia'
- 6/19          Free day

### Week 3

- 6/20      10 am – 1 pm Seminar: ***Susto: A Folk Illness***  
             Much of my own research has been carried out on the cultural syndrome of *ataques de nervios* among Puerto Ricans and other Latinos. The work of Arthur Rubel on *susto* in Oaxaca was very influential on my own research. *Susto* is a folk illness that is widespread throughout Latin America and associated with a broad array of symptoms. Among susceptible populations, the sickness is understood to be caused by a fright (*susto* means fright in Spanish) that sometimes leads to the separation of soul and body. As has my own work, this study takes an interdisciplinary approach, looking for understandings of *susto* in the interaction of social, physiological, and psychological factors. Since I worked on the *DSM-IV*, including the section on cultural syndromes, I will share my experiences bringing *susto* into the manual.  
             **Readings:** Arthur Rubel, Carl O'Neill & Rolando Collado-Ardon. 1991. *Susto: A Folk Illness*. University of California Press.  
             Guarnaccia, P.J., R. Lewis-Fernandez and M. Rivera Marano. 2003. Toward a Puerto Rican Popular Nosology: *Nervios* and *Ataques de Nervios*. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 27:339-366.
- 6/21-23      8 am – 1 pm Field placements in community health projects  
                  2:30 – 4:30 Lunch with homestay families  
                  5:30 pm – 8:10 pm Medical Spanish Classes at Amigos del Sol Language Institute
- 6/24          10 am – 1 pm Reflection Seminar
- 6/25-26      Free weekend

## Week 4

- 6/27 10 am – 1 pm Seminar: ***Physicians at Work, Patients in Pain***  
Finkler's work brings an anthropological focus to the work of physicians. Her book addresses the interplay between traditional healing and biomedical treatment and examines the strengths and weaknesses of these different healing approaches. Finkler studies the problems that physicians face in reconciling their training in biomedicine with the cultural dimensions of medical practice in Mexico. Her research in Mexico on Spiritualist healers and now physicians has addressed issues of treatment outcomes from different kinds of medical practice. This book will give us insight into the other side of health care as we work in different community health settings.  
**Reading:** Kaja Finkler. 2001. *Physicians at Work, Patients in Pain*. Carolina Academic Press.
- 6/28-30 8 am – 1 pm Field placements in community health projects  
2:30 – 4:30 Lunch with homestay families  
5:30 pm – 8:10 pm Medical Spanish Classes at Amigos del Sol Language Institute
- 7/1 10 am – 1 pm Reflection Seminar
- 7/2 Trip to Eco-Tourism Community of Benito Juarez in the Sierra Juarez
- 7/3 Free day

## Week 5

- 7/4 10 am – 1 pm Seminar: ***Fixing Men: Sex, Birth Control and AIDS in Mexico***  
Prior to going back to graduate school in medical anthropology, I worked as a family planning health educator for four years. One of my goals was to engage young men in family planning programs and I also did counseling for men undergoing vasectomies, so this book resonates with me. While most studies on reproductive health make women their focus, Gutmann examines how men in Oaxaca, and the women in their lives, make decisions about birth control, and how they cope with HIV infection and AIDS. As in our first book, this study looks at how men, and women, juggle the healing techniques biomedical and indigenous medical practitioners employ for infertility, impotence, and infidelity. This book complements Finkler's study of biomedical and folk practitioners. By this time you will have interacted with men in Oaxaca and can assess for yourselves how Gutmann portrays these issues.  
**Reading:** Matthew Gutmann. 2007. *Fixing Men*. University of California Press.
- 7/5-7 8 am – 1 pm Field placements in community health projects  
2:30 – 4:30 Lunch with homestay families  
5:30 pm – 8:10 pm Medical Spanish Classes at Amigos del Sol Language Institute
- 7/8 8 am – 1 pm Participation in group community service project  
2:30 – 4:30 Closing Comida and Reflection Session
- 7/9 Free Day to say goodbye to families and purchase of last minute gifts
- 7/10 **Departure Day**

## **Assignments**

### ***Reaction papers to assigned readings***

For each class, I would like students to write a 2 page (double-spaced) reaction paper to the assigned readings. This paper will help you prepare for the class discussions and will give me a sense of what you are getting out of the course. The papers will be collected at the end of each class. I expect you to use full sentences and paragraphs and to present a coherent discussion of the readings. At the same time, these do not have to be polished projects; they are thought pieces. I would prefer to have them typewritten, but will accept legible handwriting.

The paper should briefly address some of the following issues:

- What are the key points the author is trying to make?
- What did you learn from this particular reading assignment?
- What new ideas did you derive from this reading?
- What ideas are you critical of and why?
- What insights, personal and/or scholarly, did you get into issues of health and illness from reading this assignment?

### ***Journals of Your Reflections***

Beginning with your arrival in Oaxaca, you should start keeping a journal. This diary should be the place where you record your observations and experiences of your time in Mexico, as well as your personal reactions to what you are observing and experiencing in your daily lives and in your community service activities. Use the journal to reflect on your experiences and relate them to what you are reading about and discussing in the course. You will continue to keep this journal throughout the program.

During your first week, be sure to consider the following questions: What are your reactions to your new reality in Oaxaca, Mexico? What things strike you as unfamiliar and unexpected? What things seem familiar? How are you adjusting to your homestay situation, working with a new group of students, and navigating a strange city? How does what you've seen so far match or conflict with your prior expectations? Write at least five pages each week in your journal, and be prepared to present insights from your journal writing process in our group reflection meetings (held on Friday mornings).

### ***Final Paper***

At the end of the program you will write a 5 page paper (double-spaced). Students should assess their learning along a number of dimensions: What did you learn about health in Mexico? What did you learn from living in Mexican culture for a month? What did you learn about yourself in terms of your skills, cross-cultural strengths and weaknesses, and interests in possible future directions? You had a number of experiences: community service projects; classes in Spanish with an emphasis on medical topics; a course on the medical anthropology of Mexico; reflection seminars on your experiences; homestays with Mexican families; cultural excursions; and other experiences living in Oaxaca for a month. When I ask you what you learned, I am thinking of all these different experiences. Students can choose to review each dimension of the program as a learning experience or to focus on themes that cut across program activities. Feel free to be creative in how you do this.

## Service Activities

A critical component of this program is the service-learning dimension. The philosophy of service-learning is that through engagement with people in the world, students can gain a much deeper understanding of social reality than through book learning alone, and can make meaningful contributions to improving the world around them. This program in engaged anthropology joins service to others with direct study of their lives, to contribute to both the advancement of knowledge about a particular set of issues and problems, and direct intervention in helping people to confront those problems. Students will be spending three mornings each week in service research activities in health programs around Oaxaca coordinated by ProWorld. Some of the possible placement sites include:

***Clinica del Pueblo:*** The Clinica del Pueblo provides health care to the poorest community members of Oaxaca. The clinic provides basic health services and several outpatient surgeries. Volunteers will contribute to the clinic's efforts in a variety of ways, including taking vitals, treating injuries, shadowing nurses and doctors, sitting in on surgeries and cleaning and preparing instruments. Volunteers may also perform other duties as needed such as document translation and categorization of donated medications.

***Secretaria de Salubridad y Asistencia (SSA Clínicas):*** This is the public healthcare system for citizens who are generally the poorest in Oaxaca and do not have health insurance. There is a main hospital located in the city of Oaxaca and numerous clinics scattered through the state providing various clinical and health education services. Participants will work in the smaller clinics alongside nurses and doctors. Here they work with the government program called *Oportunidades*. Students will assist in checking-in patients, participating in campaigns-like vaccinations or clean patios, helping with a health census, and working alongside doctors and nurses.

***Casa Hogar para Ancianos:*** This home for the elderly was built in 1991 on funds donated by the local artist Rufino Tamayo and his wife Olga Flores. Since its inauguration the home has been under the support and direction of the National System for Integral Family Development (DIF). The Casa Hogar's objectives are to offer quality physical, mental and social services to the elderly that have been either abandoned or do not have the resources to support themselves. The home guarantees security to its inhabitants while working to secure for them the highest level of autonomy and self-sufficiency and a healthy environment where they can live with dignity. *Casa Hogar para Ancianos* likes volunteers who are good with people and willing to interact with the residents in social and cultural activities.

***CORAL (Centro Oaxaqueño de Rehabilitación de Audición y Lenguaje):*** CORAL offers hearing-impaired children and adults the gift of a brighter future by providing a full range of low-cost hearing rehabilitative services and programs for those Oaxaqueños that generally cannot afford them. Volunteers will work with the director and teachers at CORAL to facilitate education, help with fundraising, and work with the children and their parents.