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Zapatismo, Revolutionary History, Mayan Culture

Classes and Credits

240 hours, 16 credits, accredited by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM).

Mexican history (HIST 354/554): 4 credits

Spanish (LANG 201/301/401/501): 4 credits

Indigenous culture (ANT 356/556): 4 credits

Revolutionary Mexico (SOC 357/557): 4 credits

Course Description

Zapatismo, Revolutionary History, Mayan Culture is a study abroad experience about the Zapatista movement – one of the most dynamic and innovative social movements in Latin America – within the context of indigenous culture in southern Mexico. The academic program utilizes a multi-disciplinary, student-centered pedagogy that emphasizes discussion, student presentations, group reflection and integration of theory with hands-on experience. These classes provide an invigorating context for developing spoken Spanish in formal classes and informal settings. Professors are activist/academics with years of firsthand experience in popular struggles, and indigenous *promotores* trained at the language school in Oventic.

This is a **full Spanish immersion** program with all classes and activities conducted in Spanish. No English translation is provided.

Location

Oventic is an hour's drive from the San Cristobal de las Casas, capital of the highland region in the Mexican state of Chiapas. It is an indigenous, decolonized, autonomous space that is home to the Zapatistas' regional Good Government, an autonomous hospital, artisanal cooperatives, and the first regional secondary school constructed by the Zapatista movement – among many other things! About 100 indigenous secondary students, generally ages 12-15, live in Oventic during the week and attend school there.

Alongside the secondary school is the Oventic language school (CELMRAZ), where classes and activities are held. The school's *promotores* teach Spanish using language instruction as a point of departure for learning about Zapatista autonomy, its political and ethical principles, and Mayan culture and philosophy. The school also facilitates exchanges between Zapatista secondary school teachers, study abroad students, secondary school students, and the cooperatives, clinics, and autonomous projects in Oventic. Living conditions in Oventic are rustic, with healthy but simple food, dormitory style sleeping that requires a sleeping bag, outhouses, and cold showers.

Classes

History (HIST 354/554): 4 credits

Classes focus on two general areas.

- History of Mexico, including the Mexican Revolution, corporativism as a political practice, social movements in the 70s and 80s, political reform in the 90s and 00s, and the Fourth Transformation initiated by President Lopez Obrador.
 - John Mason Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico*
 - Adolfo Gilly, *La Revolucion Interrumpida*
 - AUSM, “The Fourth Transformation and the Future of Mexico”
 - Judith Adler Hellman, “Mexican Popular Movements, Clientelism, and the Process of Democratization”
- History of Zapatismo, using original Zapatista texts to trace the development of Zapatismo
 - All six *Declaraciones de la Selva Lacandon*
 - “The Thirteenth Stele”
 - “Pedestrians of History”
 - *Critical Thought against the Capitalist Hydra*

Indigenous culture (ANT 356/556): 4 credits

This course is composed of direct experiential encounters with indigenous culture, including:

- Workshops on tortilla making, coffee roasting and tamale production.
- Weekend workshops on the traditional indigenous kitchen, including recipe exchanges and cooking techniques.
- Artistic projects developed with Secondary School students. Past artistic projects included production of a puppet show, musical presentations featuring newly authored songs, painted murals with cultural or political messages, and a theater production.
- Production of boots at the local boot-making cooperative.
- Work in the milpa - planting, tending, harvesting or processing/storing (depending on the season) corn, beans, squash and seasonal vegetables produced in large community gardens.
- Song nights dedicated to learning traditional indigenous songs.
- *Tejido y bordado*, a weekly workshop in which students make a satchel using traditional back-strap weaving. Each student is assigned an instructor from the CELMRAZ language school to teach the technique. Weaving sessions are also forums for informal Spanish-language conversation about life in Oventic, Zapatista history, and indigenous culture.

Revolutionary Mexico (SOC 357/557): 4 credits

This course focuses on the theory, forms and practices of Zapatismo. The first week is dedicated to institutions in San Cristobal that support indigenous social movements, including the Fray Bartolome Human Rights Center, alternative media, educational projects at UniTierra, and the Junta of Good Government located on the UniTierra grounds. Weeks two through nine in Oventic focus on the practice of Zapatismo, with particular emphasis on political strategies and institutions, education, health care, production cooperatives, and national and international relations, with special emphasis on the last decade.

Students develop research projects together with the secondary school students in Oventic. Past research topics included public health practices at the local clinic, the organization and governance of women’s

artisan cooperatives, the Junta of Good Government, water management and purification, and the academic content in secondary school classes.

Course texts are written by indigenous authors or collectives:

- “No Habra Paisaje después de la Batalla,” March, 2022, Zapatista commentary on the war in Ukraine.
- “Chiapas al Borde de la Guerra Civil,” September, 2021, human rights abuses in Chiapas indigenous communities.
- “Contra la Xenofobia y el racismo, la Lucha por la Vida,” September, 2021, Zapatista commentary on immigrant rights.
- “El Pasaporte Zapatista,” June 2021, Zapatista international political initiative in Europe.
- “Palabras del CCRI-CG del EZLN en el 26 Aniversario,” December, 2019, Annual Zapatista overview of conditions in Mexico.
- “Comunicado del CCRI-CG del EZLN: Y Rompemos el Cerco,” August, 2019, Formation of nine new Juntas of Good Government.
- “Desmiente el EZLN Contacto Alguno con AMLO,” July 2018, Statement on AMLO’s politics.
- “Trump, La Navaja de Ockam, El Gato de Schrodinger y El Gato-Perro,” December 2017, Zapatista analysis of international politics.
- “Los Muros Arriba, Las Grietas Abajo (y a la Izquierda),” February 2017, Zapatista political analysis and call to action.
- “Declaracion del V Congreso Nacional Indígena,” January 2017, National Indigenous Congress analysis and call to action.
- “El Festival CompARTE y la Solidaridad,” July 2016, Invitation to international festival of art and resistance.
- “Entre la Luz y la Sombra,” May 2014, Zapatista historical review and political analysis.
- “EZLN Anuncia Disolución del FZLN,” November 2005, EZLN dissolves the FZLN as a political formation.

Spanish (LANG 301/401/501): 4 credits

Promotores at CELMRAZ, the Oventic language school, use generative materials as foundations for discussion-based classes using popular education pedagogies. Generative materials include recent newspaper articles (a new set of materials is generated each semester dependent on current events), texts produced by the Zapatista movement dealing with politics and culture, videos, songs, etc. Weekly writing assignments of two to three pages in Spanish focus on current events, reflections on subjects addressed in other academic classes, diary-type entries, or analysis of student experiences.

Students who prefer a more traditionally structured approach focused on grammar are encouraged to bring a grammar textbook to compliment the indigenous pedagogy. If requested, *promotores* will establish classes outside the normal curriculum to facilitate this more traditional approach. Ultimately, the point is to develop communication skills and cultural knowledge that will serve students for a lifetime.

We make extensive use of field trips and workshops, including research and art projects developed jointly with indigenous middle school students, a weaving project directed by language school *promotores*, “*dias del campo*” that include agricultural work, nature exploration, etc., cooking classes led by indigenous chefs, and much more. We encourage students not to speak English during the entire program, including with fellow students for whom English is often their first language (of course, we see varying levels of commitment).

In general, our students return to the US after 10 weeks of full Spanish immersion with greatly enhanced Spanish speaking abilities and extensive vocabulary development, especially in politics, culture and history.

Complimentary classes: Many of the classes designated as LANG, SOC, ANT or HIST complement each other in terms of course content. For example, the weaving classes are conducted fully in Spanish and introduce vocabulary that is not covered in formal language classes while also teaching something of indigenous culture. Many of the Sociology classes, particularly the workshops as well as work with secondary students, improve conversational Spanish and introduce new vocabulary. To some extent, the academic designation of each class is a formality that does not fully recognize the organic relationship among all classes.

Grading: Students are expected to attend all classes and workshops. An 80% attendance rate is required by the accrediting institution (UAM-Xochimilco). Grading is based on the following:

- 25% Team Project with Secondary School Students: The project is presented on the final day of the program in Oventic.
- 25% weekly written reflections in Spanish. Each student will write a 2-3 page reflection on the most impactful events of the week. The reflection might be on a topic of discussion in class or a notable experience outside of classes.
- 25% class participation: Students are expected to prepare for academic classes by studying assigned reading materials. Classes are discussion based and students are assigned to lead discussions at various times during the semester.
- 25% final project: Final projects may be a 7-10 page written investigation, a zine, a work of art, etc. with format and content developed in discussion with professors. Written projects and presentations are in Spanish

AUSM Mexico Study Abroad Program Fall 2023

September

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
8-9 Breakfast 2-3 Lunch 7-8 Dinner	Courses Mexican history Indigenous culture Spanish Revolutionary Mexico	HIST 354-554 – 4 cr ANT 356-556 – 4 cr LANG 101-501 – 4 cr SOC 357-557 – 4 cr		1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
					Arrival in Chiapas Orientation UniTierra	Intro UniTierra Health and safety Program orientation
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
9 Tour UniTierra 12 Soc: Human rights 4 Group check-in	9 Hist: Mex revolution 4 Hist: Museo Tatic Samuel	9 Ant: tour San Cristobal 4 Hist: Mex revolution 8 Group check-in	9 Hist: Ejidos 12 Ant: Popular markets 4 Soc: Alternative media	9 Hist: PRI 4 Soc: Open discussion on student observations 8 Group check-in	Ant: Milpa Ant: Traditional indigenous kitchen	Free day
25	26	27	28	29	30	
7 Depart for Oventic 10 Intro & Orientation 4 Hist: Construyendo Dignidad	Reflection due 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Soc: Autonomous education 8 Group check-in	9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: How is Zapatismo organized? 8 Final project discussion	9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Junta de Buena Gobierno 8 Group check-in	Ant: Milpa Ant: Traditional indigenous kitchen	Free day

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
						1
2 Reflection due 9 Hist: coporativismo 2 Ant: traditional cooking 8 Ant: Traditional music	3 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	4 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	5 9 Ant: Visit historic mountain 8 Final project discussion	6 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Zapatista coops 8 Group check-in	7 Basketball or soccer tournament	8 Free day
9 Reflection due 9 Hist: 1968 & 1971 12 Ant: Taller de café 8 Ant: Traditional music	10 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	11 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	12 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Zapatista political strategies 8 Final project discussion	13 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Siete principios Zapatistas 8 Group check-in	14 Ant: Milpa Ant: Traditional indigenous kitchen	15 Free day
16 Reflection due 9 Hist: Popular uprisings 8 Ant: Traditional music	17 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	18 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	19 9 Ant: Visit San Andres 8 Final project discussion	20 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Zapatista medical clinic 8 Group check-in	21 Ant: Milpa Ant: Traditional indigenous kitchen	22 Free day
23 Reflection due 9 Hist: Reforma politica 4 Ant: Taller de tortillas 8 Ant: Traditional music	24 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	25 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	26 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Women in Zapatismo 8 Final project discussion	27 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Tierra y comunidad 8 Group check-in	28 Ant: Milpa Ant: Traditional indigenous kitchen	29 Free day
30 Reflection due 9 Hist: Political parties 8 Ant: Traditional music	31 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in					

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
		1 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	2 9 Soc: Visita escuela primaria de Tivo 8 Final project discussion	3 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Meaning of autonomy	4 Volunteer work Traditional indigenous kitchen	5 Free day
6 Reflection due 9 Hist: AMLO & 4-T 4 Ant: Taller de tamales 8 Ant: Traditional mu-	7 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	8 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Secondary school project	9 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: LGBTQ in Zapatismo 8 Final project discussion	10 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Open discussion on Zapatismo 8 Group check-in	11 Volunteer work Traditional indigenous kitchen	12 Free day
13 Reflection due 9 Hist: Current events 8 Ant: Traditional music	14 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Ant: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	15 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Presentation of Secondary school project	16 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: International relations & solidarity 8 Final project discussion	17 9 Ant: Food preparation for fiesta de despedida 2 Fiesta 4 Return to UniTierra	18 9 Evaluation of Oventic	19 Free day
20 9 Hist: Current events 12 Ant: Artisan markets	21 9 Preparation of final project 8 Group check-in	22 Presentation of final projects	23 Presentation of final projects	24 9 Evaluation of semester 12 Free time	25 Depart for US	26

Food

Food in indigenous communities is simple and nutritious, but there isn't a great deal of variety. People eat what they raise and whatever is in season, which means lots of fruits, vegetables, beans and rice. The diet is generally, though not always, consistent with a vegan diet. For example, scrambled eggs are often available for breakfast, but for those who prefer not to eat eggs, beans and rice are the alternative. Chicken is served once a week in Oventic, usually Thursday lunch. For those who choose not to eat chicken, beans and rice are available. The program does not offer soy-based alternatives as they tend to be very expensive and difficult to procure for indigenous communities. Please note that, while indigenous food can often be consistent with veganism, it is very different from typical vegan diets in the US that tend to rely on processed soy products and a wide variety of nuts, vegetables and grains. If you are committed to a vegan diet and prefer not to rely on beans and rice three meals a day, we encourage you to bring a supply of nuts and other protein alternatives with which you may be comfortable.

Corn tortillas provide as much as half of the caloric intake in indigenous communities. Freshly made tortillas using native corn varieties are delicious, but people not accustomed to eating corn tortillas processed with lime should ease into this new diet. Start with one tortilla a day, and gradually work your way up to one at each meal and, after a couple weeks, several tortillas with each meal.

Health and safety

The health and safety of Study Abroad participants is the highest priority for AUSM. Professors have decades of experience leading groups in Mexico. We work closely with local partners to assess current health concerns and safety issues, and we adapt quickly to changing political conditions. Our close, working relationships with local organizations enable us to respond quickly and effectively if emergencies arise. All students must be covered by a health care policy which includes hospitalization and emergency repatriation to the US in case of serious illness or accident. Students can obtain a health insurance policy through AUSM if their current individual or family policy is insufficient.

US Embassy security alert: On April 18, 2023, the US Embassy issued a security alert regarding violence in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, following a shooting. The alert noted a large presence of armed individuals, military movement and gunfire in the Ojo de Agua neighborhood on 17 April. School and business suspensions were reported on 18 April; disruptions may continue in the near term. The embassy advises individuals to exercise increased caution if traveling in or around San Cristobal. Individuals should adhere to the advice of consular authorities and consult official sources for information.

AUSM is monitoring this situation carefully. Our local contacts inform us the violence is related to a dispute between two criminal gangs over control of popular markets near the center of the city and in the Ojo de Agua barrio. This is the second incident of a similar nature over the past year (the first occurred on June 14, 2022) involving armed motorcyclists who occupy streets mainly in the Ojo de Agua barrio, both as a show of force and as a protest against enforcement actions by local authorities or actions by a rival group.

Previous to these incidents, AUSM restricted our students to the UniTierra grounds during our time in the San Cristobal area because of concerns about Covid, particularly the possibility of introducing Covid into the indigenous communities where we spend most of our time. With the advent of these incidents, our students can visit San Cristobal only as part of organized field trips, and only after staff evaluates the security situation.

UniTierra is located on the far northwest edge of San Cristobal, far from the city center and the Ojo de Agua barrio. It is a gated educational institution with guards posted 24 hours a day and is considered very safe. Oventic, where we spend most of our time, is located an hour north of San Cristobal de las Casas. It is also a gated community with 24 hour guards and is considered very safe. San Cristobal de las Casas is an international tourist destination which had been historically immune from organized crime violence. Local hotel and restaurant owners control city politics and it is unlikely they will permit the recent gang violence to damage their substantial interests in the tourist business.

Covid is present in Mexico. All students must be either fully vaccinated or recovered within the past year from a case of Covid. Students must use masks while traveling from the US to Mexico. Students will be instructed to use masks occasionally during visits outside of UniTierra or Oventic, but mask use is not required in this two communities.

Cost

The cost of the program is \$7,500 which includes 16 university credits, housing, most food, ground transportation, and all texts. The program fee does not include round trip airfare from your home to Tuxtla Gutierrez, health insurance, weekend meals, or snacks. A \$500 deposit is required four weeks prior to departure, refundable in the unlikely event the program is canceled.

Program application is available at <https://ausm.community/mexico/apply/>.

For more information, email studyabroad@ausm.community.