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Indigenous Social Movements and Culture – July 2023

Classes and Credits

90 hours, 6 credits, accredited by the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM).

Indigenous Social Movements and Culture (SOC 357/557): 2 credits

Spanish (SPAN 201/301/401/501): 2 credits

Mexican History (HIST 352/552): 2 credits

Course Description

Indigenous Social Movements and Culture is a study abroad experience about the Zapatista movement – one of the most dynamic and innovative social movements in Latin America – in 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. 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 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 rest of 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

Indigenous Social Movements and Culture (SOC 357/557): 2 credits

Theory and practice of Zapatismo, with particular emphasis on political strategies and institutions, education, health care, production cooperatives, and national and international relations.

Students work with secondary school students in Oventic to develop research projects. 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 Indigena,” 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.

History (HIST 354/554): 2 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, 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*

Spanish (LANG 201/301/401/501): 2 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 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 four 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:

- 50% Team Project with Secondary School Students: The Project is presented on the final day of the program.
- 50% class participation: Students are expected to prepare for academic classes by studying assigned reading materials. Classes are discussion based and students will be assigned to lead discussions at various times during the semester.

AUSM Mexico Study Abroad Program

July 2 – 29, 2023

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Breakfast 8-9 Lunch 2-3 Dinner 7-8						1
2 Mid-day Arrival 4 Orientation @ UniTierra	3 7 Depart for Oventic 10 Orientation 4 Hist: Construyendo Dignidad	4 9 Soc: Work in milpa 4 Lang: Spanish 8 Group check-in	5 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Secondary school project 8 Autonomous education	6 9 Hist: Mexican revolution 4 Soc: Taller de tamales 8 Lang: Taller ESRAZ	7 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Soc: Seven principios Zapatista 8 Reflexion colectiva	8 9 Soc: Volunteer work 4 Lang: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in
9 Free day	10 9 Hist: Corporativismo 4 Soc: Coffee Coop 8 Hist: Tierra Sagrada	11 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Lang: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	12 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Secondary school project	13 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Zapatista coops 8 Soc: Music session	14 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Taller with medical clinic 8 Reflexion colectiva	15 9 Soc: Volunteer work 8 Group check-in
16 Free day	17 9 Hist: Mex social movement 4 Soc: Encuentro de muje-	18 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Lang: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	19 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Secondary school project	20 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Visita escuela primaria de Tivo 8 Soc: Musica tradicional	21 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Tortilla taller 8 Reflexion colectiva	22 9 Basketball or Soccer tournament 8 Group check-in
23 Free day	24 9 Hist: AMLO y 4-T 3 Soc: Visita Municipio de San Andres	25 9 Hist: Zapatismo 4 Lang: Tejido y bordado 8 Group check-in	26 9 Lang: Spanish 3 Soc: Secondary school project	27 9 Lang: Spanish 4 Soc: Coffee roasting taller	28 9 Fiesta de despedida Presentation of secondary school projects 4 Return to UniTierra	29 Early: Depart for airport
30	31					

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 more 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 \$3,200 which includes 6 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. Living conditions in Oventic are rustic, with healthy but simple food, dormitory style sleeping that will require a sleeping bag, outhouses, and cold showers.

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

For more information, email studyabroad@ausm.community.