



HONR 3000 & HONR 3023:

Contemporary Cultures of the Western World [HI]

Meeting: W 12:30-1:20 And Spring Break
Location: 201 Old Central

PLACE AS TEXT: CENTRAL MEXICO

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Office Hours: By Appt.

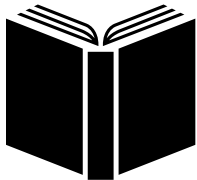
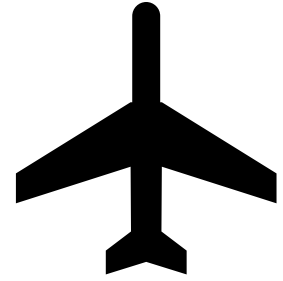
Overview: In this three-credit hour course (Led by Dr. John Andrews & Dr. Christine Thomas) we will explore the rich culture of Central Mexico through reading, discussion, and international travel. This class will use a Place-As-Text Curriculum, which means the contemporary culture of Central Mexico (specifically Puebla, La Preciosita, and Mexico City) will be our object of study and will emphasize experiential learning and reflective writing. We will explore contemporary life in Central Mexico through reading, discussion of topics including modernization and cultural identity formation, and numerous excursions and activities aimed at developing interdisciplinary understanding. There are no prerequisites, and the class is open to all majors.

H & I General Education Designation: This course features the General Education designations (H) Humanities and (I) International. What this means:

- It is appropriate for students of all majors and does not require prior knowledge or study of the subject matter.
- Utilizing a Place-As-Text curriculum, the course provides ample opportunities for analyzing and interpreting ideas, aesthetics, and values that form and inform society. Class assignments and meetings will focus on experiencing and analyzing the physical and cultural environments that make up Central Mexico, and thinking through the way in which these environments represent and construct identities. We also read and discuss literary material about Mexico as a way of understanding it's cultural identities, and we also take into consideration powerful historical events that are crucial for understanding the present realities of Central Mexico.
- This course will emphasize how ideas, events, arts, and texts shape diverse individual identities. To give one example, the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs left both cultural and physical marks on the architecture and layout of the city. The present day Zocalo has undergone numerous transformations changing constantly to suit the current climate.

H & I Designation Continued...

- During the travel component, students will practice observing closely, listening carefully, and navigating foreign cities with confidence. This will require good communication skills and practical problem-solving abilities. Students will get to experience, understand, and develop respect for diverse people and perspectives. Colonization, modernization, and various political ideologies will serve as important frames of reference as we learn about life in Central Mexico.
- Students will have ample opportunity for critical thinking and writing in this course. Students will give presentations, write reflective essays, and write a substantial research paper. These assignments are designed to teach students how to engage in cultural analysis with sound critical thinking and writing skills.



Libros (Books):

- *Down and Delirious In Mexico City: The Aztec Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century.* Hernandez, Daniel. Scribner, 2011.



Our travel to Central Mexico will occur during spring break. During our visit, we will go on numerous excursions and stay in three distinct cities to gain first hand knowledge of life in Central Mexico. These stays will include:

- **Puebla:** One of the oldest cities in Mexico, Puebla is a vibrant “college town” known for its culinary history, colonial architecture, and distinct pottery. Named a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Puebla has a diverse and complex history illustrated by the Mexican Baroque architecture, numerous museums such as Fort Loreto where the Battle of Puebla (Cinco De Mayo) took place, and the world industries such as Volkswagen that have made Puebla their home in Mexico. While in Puebla we will stay at OSU’s partner university, Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla (UPAEP).
- **La Preciosita:** A migrant community, meaning that many residents leave to work elsewhere and return financial support to family members who live there, La Preciosita is a vibrant rural community that works toward self sustainability. While there we will stay with host families, work in the community, and hear stories from the locals to experience rural life in Central Mexico.
- **Mexico City:** The fifth largest city in the world by population, Mexico City is a bustling mixture of cultures, aesthetics, and identities. Some places we will visit include the Zocalo, Palacio de Belles Artes, Tenochtitlan, and the the Frieda Khalo Museum. While there we will stay at a modern hotel in the heart of Mexico City and experience the cosmopolitan heart of Mexico first hand.

REQUIREMENTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Participation (5 Segments 25%):

During the semester you will receive five participation grades (weeks 1-4; weeks 5-8; week in Mexico; weeks 9-12; weeks 13-16).

In Stillwater: This class meets Wednesdays, 12:30-1:20, throughout the semester. Regular class meetings will be used to discuss and reflect on class readings about Mexico which will provide insights into historical and contemporary aspects of Mexico. Carefully read each day's reading selections and watch the documentaries prior to class, annotate your texts, and write down questions and observations, and be prepared to share your ideas. Our class time is limited, and we have a lot to cover, so be ready to jump right in!

In Mexico: As a study-away, Place-as-Text class, your open-minded and enthusiastic participation is essential! We will have daily excursions and activities, and our experiences in Mexico will become the basis of discussions and writing assignments. It is essential that you observe closely, ask questions, and take notes about what you encounter. Most of our daily activities will consist of structured small and large group activities with opportunities to explore the vibrant cities and communities of central Mexico. Your participation also covers matters such as being on time for meals and excursions, listening attentively to tour guides and lecturers, and following instructions and guidelines for professional behavior.

Pre-Travel Inquiry (5%):

Prior to your trip you will write a brief 2-page inquiry based on our early course readings, discussions, and your own expectations about our trip to central Mexico. Write about the questions you have or things you're most interested in exploring in Mexico. In your discussion you should engage with the class readings or discussions that have generated your inquiry. This is exploratory writing; it should be clearly written but can be reflections on the course readings in the context of your own personal thoughts.

Photo Essay (5 posts 10%):

We will work collaboratively on the creation of a class photo essay via Instagram. Each student will contribute 5 posts with no more than one per day. Your post must include at least one photo with a caption for the image(s) with enough information so people viewing the post will understand what you are doing and what is intriguing to you about the place that merits a post. I prefer that you appear in at least one of the 5 photos, and you are also welcomed to include classmates as well (with their permission). This is an informal assignment but should be engaging and clear, as it is for a public audience. You can share them on your own personal Instagram or create an account just for the trip. When adding your posts, you must tag them with the location of the post AND the hashtags #okstatehonorsexpat and #okstatehonors, but you are more than welcome to use other hashtags as you see fit. Note: you will need to sign up for an Instagram account, if you don't already have one.

Reflective Essay (4-5 Pages 25%):

You will write an essay based on our travel to and excursions in Central Mexico. These essays will bring into focus elements of our daily excursions and activities, as we explore life, landscape, and culture. You will select key moments, conversations, encounters, or objects that that made an impact on you and caused you to think and reflect about life in Central Mexico. If you encounter cultural practices or environments that are unfamiliar, you might explore how that experience challenges or changes your own cultural assumptions. This essay will both vividly narrate and reflect on the meaning of your experiences. The essay must also contain 2-4 photos that are relevant to your narrative. This writing should be carefully written and revised. You will receive a peer review and my written feedback on this assignment.

Research Essay (6-8 Pages 30%):

At the end of the course, you will select a topic related to life and culture in Central Mexico and research it through the lens of one of the 17 UN sustainable development goals. It may be an area of study closely related to your academic major, or it may be an interest of yours you want to pursue based on your experience; it is possible to combine cultural and physical studies in various ways (architecture speaks to culture, for instance, as do things like environmentalist initiatives, or even a deeper exploration of the UN Sustainable Development Goals in practice and importance). There are many possible topic areas, including issues in contemporary Mexican politics; immigration; environmentalism; or the arts, to name a few. Mexico City is one of the largest mega-cities in the world, so there are ample opportunities for addressing aspects of cultural diversity or hybridity as well. I will also consult individually with each of you about your essay plans and give you feedback on a draft prior to the due date.

Final Presentation (5%):

You will present your final research to the class at the end of the term. These presentations will follow a 3-minute thesis format and should be carefully structured and timed, with visual media to support.



Grading Breakdown:

- Participation 25%
- Pre-Travel Inquiry 5%
- Photo Essay 10%
- Reflective Essay 25%
- Research Essay 30%
- Final Presentation 5%

- Participation
- Photo Essay
- Research Essay
- Pre-Travel Inquiry
- Reflective Essay
- Final Presentation

