

CARLETON COLLEGE EL MUNDO MAYA: Socio-Cultural Field Research Seminar in Guatemala and Chiapas

PROGRAM DATES

The Program will take place during winter term of 2012.

DIRECTOR

Jerome Levi, Professor of Anthropology and Chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology Jay Levi led Carleton's Guatemala and Chiapas program in winter 2006, 2008, and 2010, and was the Director of Latin American Studies, 2003-2006. He has taught at Carleton since 1993 and conducted ethnographic research on Mesoamerica for nearly three decades, initially focusing on the Tzotzil Maya in the Chiapas highlands and later on the Tarahumara (Rarámuri) of southwest Chihuahua. His teaching and research interests are in the areas of indigenous rights, the anthropology of religion, ethnicity, economic and environmental anthropology. He recently served as the Editor for Mesoamerican Ethnology for the Library of Congress's *Handbook of Latin American Studies*, and contributed to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*.

PREREQUISITES

This program is designed for students who are interested in the Mayan peoples of Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico, the cultural ecology, religions, archaeology, history and ethnology of the region, as well as social change and development in Latin America. Students will undertake independent field research focused on these topics. To participate in the program, students must have completed Sociology/Anthropology 110 or 111 by January 2012. The ability to communicate effectively in Spanish, as indicated by advanced work in Spanish beyond Spanish 204 or its equivalent, is also necessary to the participant's success in conducting field research in the Guatemalan highland. The instructor reserves the right to issue special permission to interested students who have not taken Sociology/Anthropology 110 or 111, but who have equivalent preparatory work in

Latin American Studies or another related field.

INTRODUCTION

Both Guatemala and the neighboring state of Chiapas, Mexico are lands of stunning physical beauty, cultural diversity, and stark socio-economic contrasts. With its population comprised of 23 ethnic groups—some 22 indigenous Mayan linguistic groups and the economically and politically dominant *ladinos*—Guatemala has long been known for its rich local cultural traditions. But it is also marked by extreme inequalities and poverty. Today, after decades of a brutal civil war, Guatemalans struggle to build a nation based on the multilingual and pluricultural principles mandated by the 1996 Peace Accords.

In many ways the cultural history of Chiapas is similar to Guatemala's. It too is known for vibrant indigenous cultures and glaring inequalities between its many Mayan peoples and the dominant *ladinos*. Yet the recent struggles for indigenous rights here, after the Zapatista Army of National Liberation mounted an insurrection in 1994 that gained international attention, also differs from Guatemala's. In the same year that Guatemala signed its Peace Accords, a treaty was signed in San Andres, Chiapas between the Zapatistas and the Mexican government, and although there have been many setbacks there are also signs of hope in Mexico's construction of a pluricultural society and transition to democracy after 71 years of single party rule.

Through coursework and independent research, this program provides students with the opportunity to examine, from an anthropological perspective, issues of cultural continuity, resource management, and social change in Guatemala and Chiapas. This program examines the region's people attempt to come to terms with social inequality, human rights abuses, and sustainable development in an effort to build a multi-ethnic society.

The program begins with an introduction to Guatemala and the Maya. Based in a rustic mountain lodge overlooking the beautiful colonial city of Antigua, initial days of orientation and team building will be followed by excursions to Guatemala City for lectures on community action and human rights, a visit to the National Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, a trip to the Parque Central, and a night hike to the spectacular Pacaya Volcano. The program then heads to Lake Atitlán, the jewel of highland Guatemala. Ringed by smoking volcanoes and over a dozen indigenous villages along its northern and western shores, here students will augment their classroom knowledge of Mesoamerican cultures with practice-based field experiences to help them begin planning the independent research projects they'll undertake among local Tzutuhil or Kaqchikel people at the end of the program.

During the next two weeks the group will be occasionally "roughing it" as its attention shifts to the Maya tropical forest where students will explore the jungles of northern Guatemala, known as El Petén, and eastern Chiapas. Focusing on Maya cultural ecology, prehistory, and contemporary lowland cultures, the group will travel overland as well as along the Pasión and Usumacinta Rivers to visit some of the most important archaeological sites in the Maya world, including Tikal, Palenque, Yaxchilán, Bonampák, Seibal, and Uaxactun. As the program moves through the Montes Azules and Maya Biosphere Reserves, comprising the largest tropical rainforest in Central America, students will learn about the relation between Maya population booms, environmental collapse, and current efforts at sustainable development. In eastern Chiapas, students will spend several days living among the Lacandonones, the most isolated and culturally conservative indigenous people in Mesoamerica, seldom visited until the second half of the 20th century.

The group returns to the highlands to explore central Chiapas. The program will be based in the picturesque colonial city of San Cristobal de las Casas. In the neighboring Tzotzil community of San Juan Chamula, students will attend the Maya celebration of Carnaval, a complex ceremonial, coinciding with the five "lost days" in the ancient solar calendar, that each year symbolically reestablishes cosmic order. Next, students will learn first-hand about the Zapatista rebellion and the ongoing struggle for indigenous rights by living and working for several days in an autonomous Zapatista community.

Returning to Lake Atitlán, Guatemala, students devote the last three weeks of the program to conducting their independent field research projects and writing up their findings. Students will live with families in indigenous communities around the lake in which they carry out their field projects. The field sites provide opportunities for research on topics such as sustainable development, conservation, women's issues, human rights work, the role of religion, ethnomedicine and healing, grassroots community organization, ecotourism, and other topics. In the final week, students analyze their field data, write their reports, and present their findings to the group in a concluding research colloquium.

COURSE OF STUDY, 18 CREDITS

All coursework counts towards Latin American Studies major or concentration

SOAN 251: Resource Management, Community Development, and Social Change in Guatemala and Chiapas (4 credits)

This course counts towards ENTS concentration
This course explores contemporary strategies for survival in Maya lands in the face of the global economy by examining how community groups, entrepreneurs, peasant organizations, niche markets,

social movements, government and non-governmental organizations play important roles in promoting economic betterment, social justice, locally based decision making, and more equitable, environmentally sound, sustainable development. Through readings, lectures, interviews, and direct community engagement with human rights activists, conservation experts, development practitioners, and both farmers and foragers in the Maya tropical forest, students will learn about the complex interplay between cultural ecology, resource management, and community revitalization.

Instructor: Professor Levi

SOAN 241: Mesoamerican Cultures (6 Credits)

Mesoamerica, a major area of pre-Columbian civilization, is a region generally extending from around the Tropic of Cancer in Mexico to northwestern Costa Rica. This course will examine both ancient and modern peoples of Mesoamerica, with special reference to the Maya peoples of Guatemala and southern Mexico. Students will cover topics including economic, social, political, and religious organization as well as cosmology and symbolism. Course materials should assist students in selecting a topic for their individual research projects.

Instructor: Professor Levi

SOAN 295: Field Methods and Individual Research Project (6 Credits)

The first part of the course is designed to prepare students for their individual field research projects. Students will cover participant observation, interview methods, research ethics, and develop a prospectus for their field research. In the second part of the course, students will apply their knowledge of field methods and conduct 3 weeks of ethnographic research in a highland Maya community in western Guatemala based on their prospectus, followed by a 1 week period during which students will write their research papers and present their findings in a research symposium.

Instructor: Professor Levi

SOAN 290: Directed Reading (2 Credits)

During winter break 2011-2012, participants are asked to read selected works chosen to provide background on Guatemalan history, Mayan culture, and contemporary social issues in preparation for the field seminar. Students will write an integrative essay on this material and participate in discussions covering the readings during the first week of the program.

Instructor: Professor Levi

EXPENSES

Students pay the 2011-2012 Carleton comprehensive fee, which covers the cost of instruction, room, board, all program events, and transportation from Guatemala to Chiapas. Students are responsible for the cost of transportation from the U.S. to Guatemala City and for return transportation to the U.S. at the conclusion of the seminar. Participants are also responsible for purchase of books, personal items, independent travel during term, personal field gear such as tape recorders, and personal travel during the seminar.

APPLICATIONS & INFORMATION MEETINGS

Application forms are available from the Office of Off-Campus Studies, Leighton 119 or on the OCS website, <http://go.carleton.edu/ocs>.

Applications are due to Liz Musicant, Leighton 230, by Friday, April 22, 2011.

There will be two information meetings:

- **Tuesday, January 18, 5:00, Leighton 305**
- **Tuesday, April 5, 5:00, Leighton 305**

For more information about the program, please contact: Professor Jerome Levi
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Winter 2012

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