

Field Research Seminar in Guatemala

This program, in collaboration with the [Center for Global Education](#) at Augsburg College, will take place during the winter term, alternating every other year. The next program will take place during the 2008 winter term.

Director

Jerome Levi, Associate Professor of Anthropology

Jay Levi led Carleton's first "Social and Cultural Field Research Seminar in Guatemala" in winter 2006 and was the Direction 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 for Latin American Studies*, and contributed to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures*.

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 issues of cultural empowerment, community development and social change in Guatemala, as that nation's people attempt to come to terms with the

pressing concerns of poverty, extreme inequality, and human rights abuses of the past, and build a multi-ethnic society.

The program is based in the western highland city of Quetzaltenango. Known as Xela (or simply Xela), Quetzaltenango is a major center for the K'iche people, and Guatemala's second-largest city. During the first three weeks of the program, students will travel to Quetzaltenango, where they will live with families, participate in program seminars, and prepare their independent field projects.

The following four weeks will be devoted to the student's independent field research projects. Students will live with families in the western highland communities in which they carry out their field projects. The field sites provide opportunities for research on topics such as sustainable development and conservation, ecotourism, and other topics. In most cases, students will pursue individual projects; however, collaborative research projects will also be possible.

Students will then return to Quetzaltenango to finish analyzing their field research material, write their research papers, and present their work to the group as a whole.

The program will include travel to neighboring Chiapas, Mexico, to meet with community leaders and others involved in the struggle for indigenous rights and social justice in that region. This part of the seminar will provide an important comparative case for the coursework and research students will carry out in Guatemala.

Prerequisites

The program is designed for students who are interested in the Mayan peoples of Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico, the history and culture 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 the start of the program. 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 highland Guatemala. 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.

Course of Study, 18 Credits

All coursework also counts toward the Latin American Studies Major and Concentration.

Sociology/Anthropology 251: Community Development, Cultural Empowerment, and Social Change in Guatemala (4 credits)

This seminar focuses on the role of community groups, social movements, local governments, and non-governmental organization in promoting cultural empowerment,

human rights, and more equitable and sustainable development. Through readings, as well as meetings and interviews with cultural and human rights activists, development practitioners, and others, we will study the ways that Guatemalans are working to rebuild communities, promote cultural revitalization and empowerment, and forge paths to more equitable and sustainable economic growth. The program will include a field trip to Chiapas, Mexico, to provide a comparative study of these issues in that region.

Instructor: Professor Jerome Levi

Sociology/Anthropology 241: Mesoamerican Cultures (4 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 Jerome Levi

Sociology/Anthropology 205: Indigenous Language Instruction (2 credits) S/CR/NC

During the first two weeks of the program, students will receive intensive instruction in a Mayan language spoken in the field research area (either K'iche or Mam). While this intensive language instruction will not provide fluency in the language, it will provide basic language skills that will facilitate and enrich students' field research.

Instructor: Staff

Sociology/Anthropology 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 4 weeks of ethnographic research in highland Maya community in western Guatemala based on their prospectus, followed by a 1 week period in Quetzaltenango during which students will write their research papers and present their findings in a research symposium.

Instructor: Professor Jerome Levi

Sociology/Anthropology 290: Directed Reading (2 credits)

During winter break before the start of the program, participants are asked to read selected works chosen to provide background on Guatemalan history, Maya 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 reading during the first week of the program.

Instructor: Professor Jerome Levi

Expenses

Students pay the 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. For more information about expenses and financial aid, visit the [Office of Off-Campus Studies](#).

Applications

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

For more information about the program, please contact:

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To find out more about Center for Global Education at Augsburg College, visit their website at www.centerforglobaleducation.org.