

Heritage and Cultural Diversity in Oaxaca, Mexico

Indiana University, Department of Anthropology

Instructors: Stacie King, Anya Royce, Daniel Suslak, and Catherine Tucker

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Oaxaca is a culturally, linguistically and environmentally diverse state in southern Mexico, famous for its rich indigenous heritage, arts, languages, and natural beauty. It is home to 3.3 million people, 16 major ethnic groups, and speakers of two dozen distinct languages who live in 8 separate environmental zones. Many of these cultures converge in the capital of Oaxaca City, in places such as the markets where vendors from the communities sell their crafts and foods, and in the central plaza, a focal point for music and dance performances and a rallying area for groups with political, social, and economic agendas. Museums and cultural events within the city celebrate Oaxaca's cultural diversity and patrimony, and archaeological sites and colonial churches attest to the long history and diversity of Oaxacan peoples. Outside the city are communities of craft producers, farmers, local forestry cooperatives, and indigenous peoples with developed arts and unique ways of promoting environmental and ecological awareness.

The Heritage & Cultural Diversity program is a 3 credit course, co-taught by Stacie King, Anya Royce, Dan Suslak, and Catherine Tucker. This program is designed to introduce you to a broad range of topics within anthropology: 1) cultural patrimony, 2) linguistic practices, 3) cultural diversity, and 4) economic revitalization and human-environment interactions. You will have the chance to experience Oaxaca's tremendous cultural and ecological diversity, and in the process, see the settings in which anthropologists work. For the first half of the program, Oaxaca City will be our home base. In Oaxaca City our program will be affiliated with the Welte Institute for Oaxacan Studies, which will give us access to the facilities of the Institute for our classroom sessions. You will be attending daily lectures on linguistics, the arts, and archaeology, and will take various field trips to museums, archives, archaeological sites, markets, and arts events in and around the city. During the second half of the program, we will travel to the various regions of the state where we maintain active field research programs: the high mountains of the Sierra Norte and the Sierra Mixe, the low-lying Isthmus of Tehuantepec, and the Pacific coast. These site visits will give each of you an opportunity to think about the production of anthropological knowledge and to see first-hand how anthropological research is done.

COURSE MATERIALS

Course packets of required readings will be copied and distributed upon arrival in Oaxaca City.

Students should purchase the Moon Handbook titled Oaxaca, which is by far the best and most up-to-date resource for traveling in Oaxaca (available in store or by order through Amazon, Borders, or Barnes & Noble).

EVALUATION

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| Journal entries (King) | 20 |
| Mini-ethnography (Royce) | 20 |
| Linguistics assignment (Suslak) | 20 |

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| Field observation & discussion (Tucker) | 20 |
| Final presentation (All) | 20 |
| Total | 100 |

SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES

Day 1 **Instructor(s)** n/a **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Arrival in Oaxaca

Day 2 **Instructor(s)** All **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Orientation session

We will discuss safety, cultural differences, expectations, facilities, food, and other concerns. We will also distribute the course packets and have an introductory meal together!

Day 3 **Instructor(s)** Royce **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Classroom session: Culture

Visits to the central markets, plazas, and cultural museums of Oaxaca City, to see the diversity of indigenous crafts and experience indigenous music, dance, and visual arts.

Day 4 **Instructor(s)** Royce **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Classroom session: Cultural Diversity & Expression

Day 5 **Instructor(s)** All **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Santo Domingo Cathedral and Cultural Center
 Regional Museum
 Ethnobotanical Garden

Readings: Selections from Oaxaca: The Archaeological Record, by Marcus Winter, 1992.

After a lecture on Oaxacan culture history from the earliest settled villages at San Jose Mogote (1300 B.C.), to the founding of the imperial Zapotec capital of Monte Albán (500 B.C.), to the Postclassic Mixtec palaces, like those at Mitla (A.D. 1300), we will spend the afternoon touring the archaeological museum. Some or all of the course instructors will lead tours of different parts of the museum. Journal entry required.

Day 6 **Instructor(s)** King **Location(s)** Oaxaca City area
Activities: Tour of Monte Albán (Zapotec archeological site)
 Tour of Ex-convent Cuilapán, INAH storage facility

During the morning we will tour Monte Albán and visit the archaeological museum located at the site. In the afternoon, we will visit the INAH laboratory and storage facility at Cuilapan, where we will meet other archaeologists and view the collections. Discussions will address

cultural heritage, site management, and legal and ethnical issues in archaeology. Journal entry required.

Day 7 **Instructor(s)** n/a **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Free day in Oaxaca City!

Day 8 **Instructor(s)** Suslak **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Classroom session: The Indigenous Languages of Oaxaca
 Guest speakers: indigenous linguists

Readings: “A Oaxacan woman studies to save her language and serve her community.”
The Miami Herald, January 3, 2005, Mexican Edition.

Stanley, Eduardo. “California Mixtecs Glimpse Their Past In Ancient Manuscripts.”
 Pacific News Service, February 20, 2004.

A visit with young speakers of indigenous languages for an open exchange of ideas with their American peers.

A linguistic tour of Oaxaca City will allow students to discover where indigenous words, symbols, and writing appear on city streets, and use tools to identify their origins.

Day 9 **Instructor(s)** Suslak **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Classroom session: Spanish in Oaxaca
 Guest speaker: Michael Swanton (Burgoa Library)
Readings: Diebold, Jr., A. Richard. 1961. “Incipient Bilingualism.” *Language* 37(1):97-112.

Day 10 **Instructor(s)** King, Suslak **Location(s)** Valley, Sierra Norte
Activities: Tour of Yagul (Zapotec archeological site)
 Tour of Mitla (Zapotec archeological site)
 Visit to Hierve el Agua

This full day field trip will take us first to the site of Yagul, a Classic period center in the eastern Tlacolula valley. Next, we will visit the Postclassic Mixtec site of Mitla. In the afternoon, we will travel to Hierve el Agua to visit the archaeological site and the hot springs, and get our first introduction to the Sierra Mixe. Journal entry required.

Day 11 **Instructor(s)** Suslak **Location(s)** Sierra Norte
Activities: The Mixe Highlands
Readings: Lipp, Frank J. 1991. “Ch. 1: Social organization & Kinship”,
 “Ch. 6: Rites of Passage” *The Mixe of Oaxaca*. Austin, TX:
 University of Texas Press.

Day 12 **Instructor(s)** Tucker **Location(s)** Sierra Norte
Activities: Zapotec Communities and Traditions

Issues of sustainable natural resource management and biodiversity conservation are of increasing concern for indigenous communities and international environmental organizations.

The Sierra Norte has become known for community projects to manage forests sustainably. Students will visit several Zapotec communities, meet with local authorities, and observe forest management activities. These visits will allow students to learn about the institutions that communities have developed to address their development priorities, and the challenges that they are facing. Visits in communities will also consider how indigenous peoples maintain their identity and local autonomy in the context of globalization processes. Assignment: Field observation and discussion.

Day 13 **Instructor(s)** Tucker **Location(s)** Sierra Norte
Activities: Community Forestry in Capulalpam de Mendez

Students will meet with the director of the sustainable forestry program, visit the sawmill and experimental plots to see results of different logging intensity and reforestation methods.

Readings: Dietz, T., E. Ostrom and P. C. Stern. 2003. The Struggle to Govern the Commons. *Science* 302:1907-1912.

Mitchell, R. 2006. Environmental Governance in Mexico: Two Case Studies of Oaxaca's Community Forestry Sector. *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38:519-548.

Day 14 **Instructor(s)** Tucker **Location(s)** Sierra Norte
Activities: Ecotourism Development in Capulalpam de Mendez

Students will partake in ecotourism activities and discussions with guides and program coordinator. Options: horseback riding, hiking, cave tour

Day 15 **Instructor(s)** n/a **Location(s)** Sierra Norte, Oaxaca City
Activities: Return trip to Oaxaca City
 Free afternoon!

Field observation assignment based on Sierra Norte visit is due.

Day 16 **Instructor(s)** Royce **Location(s)** Oaxaca City, Isthmus
Activities: Travel to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec

Day 17 **Instructor(s)** Royce **Location(s)** Isthmus
Activities: Classroom session: Juchitan: A Zapotec City
 Visit to the Foro Ecológico
 Visit to the Casa de la Cultura in Juchitán

The Isthmus Zapotecs of Juchitán are widely admired for their promotion of indigenous identity and political activism through the arts of painting, writing, dance, and music. Two of the city's institutions provide excellent support for learning: the new Foro Ecológico is an organization dedicated to improving the environment and educating people about environmental issues; the Casa de la Cultura, founded in 1971, displays and promotes Isthmus Zapotec culture through

programs, classes, exhibits, and publications. Both locations are familiar with student interns from a number of countries, and based on students' interests and the community's goals, Professor Royce will help students develop and implement a brief focused research project or mini-ethnography.

Day 18 **Instructor(s)** King **Location(s)** Isthmus, Pacific Coast
Activities: Travel to the Pacific Coast
 Mixtec and Chatino Culture & History

Upon arrival in Puerto Escondido, students will meet for a lecture about Mixtec and Chatino culture and history on the Pacific coast. Journal entry required.

Day 19 **Instructor(s)** King **Location(s)** Pacific Coast
Activities: Afro-Mexican communities
 Visit to the Chacahua lagoon ecotourism site
 Visit to Playa Zicatela in Puerto Escondido

While visiting and eating lunch in Chacahua, students will have a discussion about the Afro-Mexican culture in coastal Oaxaca. Journal entry required.

Upon return, students will have free time to visit Playa Zicatela.

Day 20 **Instructor(s)** n/a **Location(s)** Pacific Coast, Oaxaca City
Activities: Return trip to Oaxaca City
 Free afternoon!

Final Journals are due.

Day 21 **Instructor(s)** All **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Classroom session: Final day wrap-up
 Closing dinner

A classroom session on this final full day in Oaxaca will include group discussion and presentation from each participant reflecting on their experience and a topic of interest related to anthropology in Oaxaca. Students are expected to deliver a thoughtful 5-10 minute presentation on their findings.

Day 22 **Instructor(s)** n/a **Location(s)** Oaxaca City
Activities: Departure