

Faculty Report

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Proposal title: Proposal to develop San Diego State University Field School in Oaxaca, Mexico, in collaboration with the Southwest Center for International Studies and the Welte Institute for Oaxacan Studies

Country visited: Mexico

Institutions visited: Dr. Jack Corbett, representing the Southwest Center for International Studies, the Welte Institute for Oaxacan Studies, Universidad Regional Sureste (URSE, Regional University of the Southeast) Language Center, Amigos del Sol language school, Union of Community Museums of Oaxaca, Atzompa Municipal Artisan Market.

Dates of travel:

Carruthers: January 13-18, 2002

Pérez: January 10-17, 2002

Number of student participants: NA

Previous IP proposals submitted and grants awarded
(list titles, countries and dates): NA

Have all required reports been submitted? NA

Other funding for this activity available/applied for: NA

Proposal Abstract (75 word maximum):

This is a proposal to develop an opportunity for San Diego State University to participate in an established, successful consortium for interdisciplinary, community-based field studies in Oaxaca, Mexico. We seek SDSU affiliation with the Southwest Center for International Studies and the Welte Institute of Oaxacan Studies, toward ongoing student and faculty opportunities in Oaxaca for numerous SDSU programs. The program will also fill the language and ethnographic field methods requirements for students in applied anthropology.

Travel report:

I. Opening/overview of intentions/activity

Professors Ramona Pérez (Anthropology) and David Carruthers (Political Science) traveled to Oaxaca, Mexico to develop the opportunity for SDSU students to participate in an existing international, interdisciplinary field school based in Oaxaca. A strong institutional foundation for collaboration in Oaxaca exists. Several SDSU faculty members have research and educational agendas centered in the region, including Latin American Studies, Engineering, International Business, Women's Studies, and others.

San Diego State University is fortunate to have the opportunity to integrate into an existing program, saving us the financially burdensome and labor intensive prospect of developing a program from scratch. Moreover, the Semester in Oaxaca program has a particularly strong record of success. Now in its eighth year, it was originally offered through Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, and subsequently through Wellesley College in Massachusetts. Starting in 2000, the program broadened participation to include qualified students from a wider set of institutions. It is currently coordinated through a consortium serving participating colleges and universities -- the Southwest Center for International Studies (SWCIS) in Tucson, Arizona (<http://www.swcis.org>).

The Oaxaca program has earned a reputation as the most rigorous and highly professional study abroad program in the region, and indeed throughout Mexico. It is a model for international scholarship that maintains the highest possible standards of excellence, drawing participation from Wellesley College, Pacific University, Portland State University, Western Washington University, and other institutions. We seek to count San Diego State University students among these participants, beginning as soon as Fall semester, 2002. To that end, we spent approximately one week in Oaxaca to meet with the program's director, faculty, and staff, and to visit associated facilities.

II. In preparation for the trip abroad

In December 2001 we met with Professor Hugo Murillo, interim Director of Latin American Studies, to go over plans and details.

We initiated contact with the program's creator and director, Dr. Jack Corbett. Professor Corbett helped us determine the most appropriate timing for our visit, and suggested professional contacts in Oaxaca, including program faculty, support staff, and related institutions.

We also investigated accreditation. Though the program as a whole is not campus-based, we confirmed that the intensive Spanish language classes students take through the Regional University of the Southeast (URSE) are recognized and accredited. Moreover, all coursework taken on the program is recognized and accredited. The classes are transcribed either directly by the registrars of institutions participating in the program, or in the form of transfer credits transcribed by Western Washington University.

III. Upon arrival/specific activity

Because this is a community-based program, not campus-based, we sought contact with a wide variety of faculty, staff, and associated actors. While in Oaxaca we met with people involved in each aspect of the program:

Dr. Jack Corbett, Director. Professor Corbett has been coordinating study abroad to Mexico for nearly three decades. He is a faculty member both at Portland State University and at the Oaxacan Technological Institute (ITO - the leading technical and engineering university in Southern Mexico). Professor Corbett lives in Oaxaca half of each year, and teaches Conflict and Change in Modern Mexico for the program.

Gudrun Dohrmann, Director and Librarian, Welte Institute for Oaxacan Studies. The Welte Institute is an internationally recognized, independent research facility in Oaxaca. Program classes are conducted at the Welte Institute, which also offers students an excellent research library and limited computing facilities.

Isabel Castro de Sánchez. Mrs. Castro is the homestay coordinator for the program, committed to cultural integration at the household level.

Dr. Nelly Robles García. Teaches MesoAmerican Archeology. Dr. Robles is the Director of the archeological zone of Monte Alban, and Mexico's foremost authority on cultural resources management. Doctorate from University of Georgia.

Dr. Carlos Sánchez Silva. Dr. Silva teaches Land and Society in Historical Perspective. Research Professor of history at the state university and director of the Oaxaca municipal archive. Doctorate from UC San Diego.

Dr. Javier Méndez, MD. Dr. Méndez teaches Health and Society in Mexico. He is a medical doctor trained in Oaxaca with experience in rural medical practice; he now works primarily with low-income deaf children.

Tom Sobel. Ms. Sobel teaches Social Issues in Latin American Literature. ABD in Spanish Literature, Stanford University.

Vicki Calvo, Director of the Spanish for Foreigners program in the Language Center of the Regional University of the Southeast (URSE). The program requires two years of college Spanish. However, to ready students for the advanced all-Spanish curriculum and fieldwork, the URSE Language Center provides a three-unit, fully accredited and transcribed intensive Spanish course at the beginning of the semester.

Rogelio Ballesteros. Director, Amigos del Sol Language School. The school provides a series of follow-up language support workshops for the program.

Alexander Brust, Coordinator, Union of Community Museums of the State of Oaxaca. This is an organization of community museums throughout the state. They assist the program by setting up field trips and projects in remote communities, to introduce students to rural life and to help them gain a better understanding of the communities of origin of Oaxacan migrants to the US.

Asunción Enríquez Chávez, ceramicist. An artisan from the nearby community of Atzompa, Mrs. Enríquez Chávez conducts workshops on ceramics production for interested students.

IV. Conclusion, recommendation, and next steps

The semester in Oaxaca is an outstanding program, with a demonstrated record of success. It will offer SDSU students the highest quality educational experience of its kind. This program is distinguished from the majority of study abroad programs by its community-based design. While campus-based programs offer certain familiar advantages, most regional Mexican universities have struggled to maintain high faculty quality and program excellence, particularly in the face of chronic budgetary crises and other serious structural constraints.

The unique strength of the community-based model in such a context is precisely its ability to draw on the larger regional pool of talent, recruiting the highest quality faculty from Oaxaca's various academic, applied, governmental, and nongovernmental institutions. Unlike most campus-based programs in Mexico, all associated program faculty have advanced degrees (mostly PhDs from upper-tier US universities) as well as a wealth of scholarly and applied experience.

In addition to consistently high faculty quality, a community-based program also affords a unique ability to facilitate deeper engagement of student participants

with the community and with Mexican society at large. Rather than replicating a US-style campus-based experience, the program strives to take advantage of the extraordinary opportunities presented by one of Mexico's most richly historic and important regions. For example, the program's students are currently the only students in the state of Oaxaca with access to an archaeology curriculum, taught by the director of the National Institute for History and Archeology's facility at Monte Alban. Dr. Robles García has privileged access to sites throughout the region, spanning centuries of human habitation, and providing students the rarest of opportunities, beyond the reach of even specialized US researchers.

The community-based model also integrates significant fieldwork and travel components into the educational experience. Depending on course options selected, most students spend approximately 30 percent of program time in the field. The public health and archeology courses, for example, involve regular day trips to appropriate facilities and sites, from rural clinics to museums. Supplementary activities further enrich and extend student engagement with Mexico in ways rarely possible in campus-based programs, including special lectures and workshops by artisans, human rights activists, and an AIDS outreach team.

Students also participate in a set of educational journeys to gain familiarity with the history, lands, and cultures of communities spanning the breadth of the Isthmus. They visit villages and towns in the indigenous zones of the arid highlands, the Sierra Madre, the jungles of the Gulf coast of Veracruz, and the Pacific coast. They travel to the remote villages of the Mixteca, and pay a visit to Mexico City's many cultural offerings. Course instructors in turn strive to integrate field experiences directly into classroom materials, tying hacienda visits to history lessons about social stratification, and museum visits to archaeology.

While international learning can begin in the classroom, increasingly we appreciate that only those students with access to quality field studies opportunities can fully realize that potential. Student participants in the Oaxaca semester demonstrate through their own experiences the life transforming nature of the program. Tellingly, this year's students created a web-based magazine, fully on their own initiative. Its title "Espejos y Ventanas" (Mirrors and Windows, see at http://www.geocities.com/mirrors_win/inicio.htm) alludes to the program's ability to provide a window into the Mexican experience, as well as a mirror upon which students reflect on how they too have been changed in the process.

Thus the greatest testimony to the program's success is found in its students. Past program alumni have gone on to PhD programs in the nation's leading graduate schools, including Princeton and Yale. Participants have followed their Oaxaca experience with prestigious awards, including a Fulbright scholarship, and a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford.

We are certain that San Diego State University and our students will be well served by participation in a program with such a proven record of excellence. Because of its interdisciplinary nature, we anticipate potential interest from majors and minors broadly distributed across the Social Sciences and humanities, including Anthropology, Political Science, Latin American Studies, Chicano/a Studies, Sociology, History, Economics, Geography, Women's Studies, International Security and Conflict Resolution, and Spanish. The program also has the potential to accommodate students with Latin American or Mexican orientation who are pursuing careers in other vocational majors, such as International Business, Environmental Science, Public Health, Nutrition, Public Administration, and others.

We intend to begin immediately to recruit student participants for the Fall 2002 semester in Oaxaca.

V. Additional Information

The program maintains a strong commitment to adequate preparation, requiring two years of college Spanish or its equivalent.

The program offers additional opportunities for specialized programs of studies, ideal for graduate students doing thesis research.

All information should be sent to The Office of International Programs via e mail:

oiip@mail.sdsu.edu