

U.S.-Mexico Border Perspectives

SYLLABUS

Chicano/Latino Studies 160

Social Science 1731

International Studies 177B

Perspectives on the U.S.-Mexico *Border* Winter 2015

Monday, 7 pm to 9:50 pm SSL-270

Instructor:

Ricardo Chavira

Office: SST 705

Office Hours: Monday, 4 pm to 6 pm or by appointment

chavirar@uci.edu

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course aims to do several important things.

First, it will make clear that Mexico—not China, not Syria, Iran or a host of other faraway nations—is the country of greatest relevance to Americans, particularly to those of us who live in California or the Southwest.

History, geography, proximity, demography and economy are all factors that make this an indisputable truth.

More Mexicans live in the U.S. than any other foreign country, and Mexico is the number one residence for Americans who opt to move to another country.

Secondly, the class aims to drive home the point that the border 90 minutes to our south is the northern frontier of Latin America. It is much more than

the Mexican border and its dozens of cities.

We will learn as a nation we have long been hugely dependent on Mexican labor and the vast amounts of drugs that funnel through to every corner of the U.S. Indeed, were Mexico to somehow disappear, the effects on several key American industries and the millions of regular users of illicit drugs would be catastrophic. These truths will be fleshed out in the coming weeks.

Now, let's review some fundamental facts and observations.

The nearly 2000-mile border that separates the United States and Mexico is among the world's most important and unusual international boundaries. The product of long and often bloody conflict, it delineates the boundary between starkly contrasting nations. It is among the world's longest borders and is the northernmost region of Latin America.

The border area includes 48 U.S. counties in 4 states¹ and 94 Mexican municipalities in 6 states, including 15 pairs of sister cities.

Yet, this border is not a simple physical barrier meant to regulate who and what crosses. It also forms a distinct economic and cultural region—the borderlands. Far from their respective capitals, American and Mexican borderland settlers developed a strong sense of bi-nationalism and biculturalism. Not surprisingly, Spanglish was born on the border.

Today, however, the border is more often than not characterized by tension over drugs and illegal immigration.

Extreme drug violence has engulfed the Mexican side, and many Americans are alarmed that the southern frontier is insecure. There are complex reasons for this tragic turn of events, and our class will examine them.

However, this course promises more.

Students will explore and assess the U.S.-Mexico border, a critically important region. This study will encompass border history and the many controversies that animate and define the divide between the two nations. The economy and labor, security, immigration, culture and the environment will be examined in depth. A portion of the class will be devoted to placing the U.S.-Mexico border in a global context, comparing it to the frontiers that separate other nations.

Conflict traditionally has infused the border, a characteristic common to many other international boundaries.

The Mexican-American War was sparked by a border conflict, and it ended in what was the most humiliating and catastrophic fashion imaginable. Mexico was forced to surrender half its territory to the U.S. and set what for the most part is today's border.

The primary course goal, however, is to develop an understanding of the border that goes beyond the stereotypical depiction of the region as exclusively a point of conflict.

The U.S.-Mexico border, with some 350 million annual crossings, is the most heavily transited frontier in the world.

San Ysidro, just to our south, is the most heavily trafficked land crossing. Some forty million people and fourteen million vehicles annually enter the United States at this sliver of San Diego. More broadly, the nearly 2,000 mile border region is home to some eleven million people.

From 1993 to 1997, the U.S. border population grew twice as fast as the US average, while Mexico's border population grew three times as fast as the Mexican average.

Between 2000 and 2010 the U.S. border population increased by about 12% and the Mexican border population increased by about 18%. By 2020 the combined border population is expected to top 20 million.

U.S border counties would be the second youngest state with almost 29 percent of its population under the age of 18. It would have the third highest concentration of Hispanics of all states, almost 3.36 million percent of its population. Life expectancy at birth for U.S. border states in 2007

ranged from 77.1 years in New Mexico (74.5 for males and 79.7 for females) to 81.0 years in California (78.6 for males and 83.2 for females), compared to 78.8 years for the U.S. (76.0 for males and 81.2 for females). For the Mexican border states, life expectancy at birth in 2009 ranged from 76.3 years in Tamaulipas (74.0 for males and 78.7 for females) to 77.1 years (74.9 for males and 79.2 for females) in Baja California, compared to 75.3 years for Mexico (72.9 for males and 77.6 for females)

In the last 15 year the number of commercial vehicles crossing the border has increased by 41 percent.

The economies of Mexico and the United States are highly integrated, with each country depending on the other to produce the goods it needs and to consume its exports.

Trade with Mexico accounts for 12.2% of U.S. exports and 11.3% of imports. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was implemented in 1994, trade between the countries has more than tripled.

Mexico is now the United States' third largest trading partner and the second largest destination of exports, accounting for roughly an eighth of all U.S. exports.

The United States is an even more important market for Mexico, purchasing 81% of its exports.

More than 20 U.S. states count Mexico as their number one or two export market.

Two-way trade has almost tripled since passage of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement and totals some \$393 billion annually.

Each day, cross-border trade averages about \$795 million, two-thirds of which comes through ports of entry in Texas.

With an estimated 2,700 maquiladoras, or mainly U.S.-owned twin plants, the border is the focal point of commerce between the neighbors.

* Meanwhile, Mexican cartels smuggle some \$40 billion worth of illegal drugs every year into the United States, the world's biggest market for narcotics. The drug gangs arm themselves with huge arsenals of smuggled U.S.

weapons. Criminal groups continue to battle each other and armed forces for control of high-value turf inside Mexico. The United States, for its part, has been scandalously ineffective in halting the torrent of narcotics entering the U.S. and being dispersed to all 50 states

Writes Guardian Correspondent Laura Carlsen:

In just nine years, the drug war waged by the US and Mexico has created a climate of violence that has claimed more than 100,000 lives throughout the country, many [young people](#) – including two horrific massacres and a mass disappearance in the last six months connected to law enforcement nominally tasked with battling the spread of drugs.

An [ambush on 26 September](#), begun by uniformed local police and finished off by an armed commando, left six young people dead and [43 students missing](#), nearly half of whom [were last seen](#) in police custody. Others are battling for their lives in local hospitals (where the possibility of a new attack is considered so high that the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights [ordered precautionary](#) measures for the wounded and the missing). This week, 28 [semi-burned bodies](#) were discovered in a mass grave, which authorities say could be the bodies of the missing students. Politicians allied with cartels are blamed for the atrocity.

Despite shrill political rhetoric and thinly disguised xenophobia, the U.S. and Mexico are fused.

Some 32 million U.S. residents are of Mexican origin. About one in ten Mexicans live in the United States. More Americans—nearly 800,000—live in Mexico than any other foreign country. Some 13 million Mexicans visited the U.S. last year, while some 19 million Americans did the same in Mexico.

Illegal border crossings appear to have declined in recent years, as job opportunities in the U.S. have decreased. Still substantial numbers of people enter the country without permission. These numbers give us some idea:

2009	556,041
2010	463,382

2011	340,252
2012	364,768
2013	420,789

But apprehensions should never be interpreted as a comprehensive measurement of how many people cross the border in violation of the law. First, the numbers above do not reflect those who are successful in subsequent attempts. They do not reflect the estimated 85,000 annually spotted but who elude capture. And, of course, they can't include those who slip in undetected.

COURSE WORK

Three required components will determine your final grade. They are:

A 2,300-2,500-word (excluding bibliography)
research paper

An essay midterm

An essay final exam

EXPECTATIONS AND STRUCTURE

By the quarter's end you should have a deep, detailed and sophisticated understanding of the border. To help achieve this goal, I will present information, insights and guidance. Students, for their part, should be prepared to devote substantial time to study and full participation in class discussions.

Consequently, the class will function much like a seminar. Lectures should stimulate discussion and debate.

The paper should reflect ample research and incisive analysis. I encourage you to use me as a resource; I'm happy to advise you in researching and preparing the final project. You will receive a written prompt to aid you in completing your paper.

I will be as accessible as possible. So, please be in touch as often as you'd like.

Irregular attendance will unavoidably lower your final grade. My lectures supplement text readings, and much of the final will reflect class discussions. Assigned class readings should be completed by the date listed.

Special Note Regarding Assignments Submitted After Deadline:

If you do not submit work or fail to take exams on the date assigned, you run the risk of not receiving credit. This is the general rule regardless of the reason you were unable to meet deadline.

GRADING

RESEARCH PAPER: 150 POINTS

MIDTERM: 100 Points

FINAL EXAM: 200 Points

POSSIBLE TOTAL: 350

REQUIRED TEXTS

Troublesome Border By Oscar J. Martinez

Line in the Sand by Rachel St. John

***Note: These texts are not at the bookstore. You may easily get them from Amazon or other book vendors.**

Copies of selected studies and articles are posted on the class site. They provide supplemental information of use in better understanding the course and in preparation for your written reports.

US-MEXICO BORDER WEBSITES

These websites contain a wealth of border data and links to other sites.

<http://www.fronterasdesk.org/>

<http://www.smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/bord/intro.html>

<http://www.nacla.org/>

<http://smithsonianeducation.org/migrations/bord/borders.html>

<http://www.borderlandbeat.com/>

<http://www.coha.org/about-coha/>

<http://www.nmsu.edu/~bho/>

[http://www.borderhealth.org/california.php?curr=border_re
gion](http://www.borderhealth.org/california.php?curr=border_region) [http://kellogg.nd.edu/outreach/US Mexico.shtml](http://kellogg.nd.edu/outreach/US_Mexico.shtml)

<http://www.utep.edu/border/>

<http://www.afsc.org/about/default.htm>

<http://www.zonalatina.com/>

Colegio de la frontera norte

Notes:

Zona Latina is a media site with a great link to Mexican newspapers, including those on the border. This last one, obviously, is not an address. It's so long, that it's much easier to Google this name. You'll be directed to the site.

CLASS LECTURE AND READING SCHEDULE

Week One

January 5th: Introduction to class and discussion of syllabus and assignments. Who are we?

Welcome to La Frontera: Are Borders Still Relevant in a Globalized Society? The Border's Boundaries and Identity: Survey of key issues; Texas-Mexico

Read: *Martinez, introduction, chapters one and two; St. John, introduction, chapters one and two*

Week Two

January 12th: Border History: A clash of civilizations; American intrigue and expansionism; The Mexican-American War; filibusters and The Revolution Read: *Martinez, chapter four*

Week Three

January 19th: Martin Luther King Day: No Class

Read: *Martinez, chapter four and St. John, chapters three and four.*

Week Four

January 26th: Mexico-U.S. relations: Still Distant Neighbors?

The Border Economy and Workers; Maquiladoras, China and the Role of Women; Militarization of the Border: Contradictions and Consequences Midterm Exam Review

Week Five

February 2nd: Midterm Exam

***Research paper proposals due**

Read: *Martinez, chapter seven*

Week Six

February 9th: Violence & Drugs: Narcos and the War on Mexico History and the Future

Read: *St. John, chapters five and seven*

Week Seven

February 16th: President's Day. No Class

Week Eight

February 23rd: Mexico-United States Immigration and How It has Shaped the Border; Presentation of film, *Crossing Arizona*

Global Migration: Mexico's Southern Border: Similarities and Contrasts Read: *Martinez, chapter six*

Week Nine

March 2nd: Health and the Environment: The Border's AIDS epidemic

Week Ten

March 9th: * Class Summary, Final Exam Review and Research papers due

**Monday, March
16th 7 to 10 pm**

Final Exam