

## **U.S.-Mexico Border Perspectives**

### **SYLLABUS**

**Chicano/Latino Studies 160**  
**Social Science 1731**  
**International Studies 177B**  
**Perspectives on the U.S.-Mexico Border**  
**Winter 2014**  
**Monday, 7 pm to 9:50 pm**  
**SSL-248**

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### **COURSE OVERVIEW**

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.

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.

U.S border counties would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> youngest state with almost 29 percent of its population under the age of 18. It would have the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest concentration of Hispanics of all states, almost 3.36 million percent of its population.

By 2020 the combined border population is expected to top 20 million.

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.

\*At least 70,000 people have been killed since 2006 as a result of drug cartels' turf battles with rival gangs and fights with the Mexican military. Thousands more have simply disappeared. Former President Felipe Calderon greatly escalated the war when he deployed the military crush the drug mafias. The drug trade has not been significantly affected even with the election of President Enrique Pena Nieto.

[http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/03/think\\_again\\_mexican\\_drug\\_cartels#sthash.hZ6dpoaq.igWE2znM.dpbs](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/12/03/think_again_mexican_drug_cartels#sthash.hZ6dpoaq.igWE2znM.dpbs)

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.

## **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**

TERM 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\\_region](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 6th: 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 13: 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 20: Martin Luther King Day. No Class

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

### Week Four

January 27: 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 3: Midterm Exam**

**\*Research paper proposals due**

**Read: *Martinez, chapter seven***

**Week Six**

**February 10: Violence & Drugs: Narcos and the War on Mexico  
History and the Future**

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

**Week Seven**

**February 17: President's Day. No Class**

**Week Eight**

**February 24: 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 3: Health and the Environment: The Border's AIDS epidemic**

**Week Ten**

**March 10: \* Class Summary, Final Exam Review and Research papers Due**

**Monday, March 17<sup>th</sup>, 7 pm**

**Final Exam**