

TEACHER'S CORNER: BINATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

"Team research with a Mexican counterpart...not only gives you the insight of a Mexican studying Mexican culture, but it also aids you in knowing what kinds of questions to ask, when to ask, how to ask, what is appropriate in terms of that culture. It greatly enhances your learning experience and hopefully friendships made...will continue."

Kristina Lang-Dei, student

Over the last decade, the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and the Autonomous University of Querétaro, Mexico (UAQ) have developed an innovative research and training project that can serve as a model for others to follow. From its modest beginnings as an anthropology field research project, the Querétaro Research Project (QRP) has grown into a variety of opportunities for students and faculty from several social science disciplines at both universities.

The strength of the QRP lies in its binational collaboration. Whether in the field or in the classroom, the experience of Mexican and United States students living and working together teaches these young people the benefits of collaboration and communication across international and cultural borders. It also establishes the interpersonal basis for long term professional ties among Mexican and U.S. participants.

The Project's Research Focus

The Querétaro Research Project is an innovative team effort involving undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and researchers from both UCSB and UAQ. Participants work independently or jointly, but all share a framework of macro-micro analysis of interrelationships between individuals, extended social and political networks, communities, and larger social, economic, and political structures. Team members meet regularly to discuss their research with other participants and to co-author papers for conferences and publication.

The main goal of the team research component of the QRP is to study the impact of transnational ties, state policies, and the use of natural resources such as land and water on the Mexican peasant communities in the state of Querétaro. The historical period being researched begins with the 1917 post-Revolutionary land reform program in Querétaro and continues to the present. Research covers the entire state of Querétaro and its contrasting agricultural and ecological zones, while focusing on specific communities and land tenure sectors in each zone, including *pequeños propietarios* (private farmers), *ejidatarios* (state land grant recipients), and *jornaleros* (hired farm workers). Collectively, the studies contribute to a comprehensive ethnographic portrait of how a single region in Mexico has changed, adapted to, and been affected by local, regional, national, and international dynamics and structures over nearly a century. Research projects have covered such topics as female migration and employment, traditional medical practices, the impact of transnational corporations on health care decisions and farming practices, and political participation by the inhabitants of Querétaro.

Participants are encouraged to present the results of their research in professional journals and conferences in both Mexico and the United States. One of the main advantages of the team approach is the mentorship provided by faculty of both universities for graduate and undergraduate team members. This gives students a rare opportunity to participate in the research process from inception to publication, giving them their first glance into the life of a professional anthropologist.

Fieldwork Training

The training component of the QRP has developed in response to the research goals of the Project, and has become an essential part of the involvement of students in the research process. The QRP has trained students from both universities. We believe that the training component has three unique features generally absent in other field training programs for U.S. students:

- 1) computer "simulated" field research as preparation for the actual period of field work;
- 2) the opportunity to receive additional training and carry out field research in Querétaro; and
- 3) the pairing of U.S. students with students from the host culture.

At UCSB, field methods are introduced to undergraduates in a course that uses multiple teaching techniques to introduce students to ethnographic methods. Reading assignments include standard texts and articles on ethnographic field methods as well as ethnographic monographs and articles on Mexican peasant villages. The course also employs the assignment of field exercises in the surrounding community.



What sets this course apart is the use of computer-accessed multimedia lessons, a simulation of ethnographic research in Mexico. These simulations give students experience integrating theory, methods, and data in a complex, interactive environment. It also moves the teaching of research "outside" the classroom into a different culture. Students using the multimedia simulations are able to explore realistic facets of field research, including resource limitations (such as time and funding constraints), situation decision-making (such as choosing an informant), dealing with conflicting or incomplete sources of data, and exposure to a foreign (for most students) language. They learn to appreciate the ambiguity of real world data.

A second, more advanced source of undergraduate training is the UCSB-UAQ field methods practicum in Mexico. This intensive field training is coordinated by faculty and advanced graduate students from both universities. For ten days, the UCSB-UAQ students live together in a house in the region to be studied. They review basic ethnographic data collection methods during lectures, and reinforce their skills with afternoon exercises in the surrounding community, by interviewing, constructing genealogies, collecting life histories, preparing community resource inventories, mapping the community and its household sites, and other data collection techniques. Paired students from the two universities are then placed with families in rural Querétaro communities for up to six weeks. The students take extensive field notes and keep a field journal, which are reviewed weekly with a faculty member. This field experience has a profound impact on undergraduates that is heightened by their collaboration with Mexican students. One student said that sharing a room -- and nightly talks -- with the daughter of her host taught

her a great deal about the role of women in the community, as daughters, sisters, and wives, without the censorship of information she might have experienced by talking to the girl in the presence of other family members.

Graduate students from both universities have also benefited from QRP training and research opportunities. UCSB graduate students have undertaken summer research projects in Querétaro, and several have carried out dissertation research there. While in Querétaro, they are granted visiting scholar status and they actively participate in academic activities. In the past, these activities have included teaching undergraduate seminars at UAQ as well as carrying out joint projects with their Mexican counterparts.

In a similar manner, Mexican graduate students from UAQ have attended seminars in development anthropology at UCSB as visiting scholars. One of the authors (Gutiérrez), a *querétano*, is currently a doctoral candidate in the anthropology department of UCSB; his research focuses on haciendas in Querétaro in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Aside from receiving advanced training in anthropology, he has contributed significantly to the development of the fieldwork course and has taught it twice.

Mexican students have received training from other departments at UCSB as well, advancing technical skills such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) development and remote sensing or cartography. They also take advantage of UCSB's extensive research library where they may find key resources not widely available in Mexico. While taking classes at UCSB, the Mexican students meet weekly the UCSB QRP team members (students and faculty) to discuss their work, participate in round table discussions, and

collaborate on the planning, analysis, and dissemination of joint UCSB-UAQ research.

Conclusions

Our experience with the development of this project has emphasized the benefits of including students in all phases of the research process, and has led to a multi-dimensional field methods curriculum. By exposing U.S. students to the ideas of their contemporaries in other countries, and by placing them in a field setting requiring collaboration with their peers, students contribute to and benefit from the intellectual and cultural values of the host culture students. Students who have participated in the QRP have an increased appreciation for the kind of skills they will need to apply once they enter an actual field setting. The participating students and faculty alike have been enthusiastic supporters of this project as well as substantial contributors to its development.

You can't really understand another culture unless you live with the people in that society, and our program offers that opportunity. What this means is that our students have a chance to live with the people they normally just learn about in books and films. The students live with them, live with the families, understand what they have to go through on a daily basis in order to survive, to make their lives work, to carry out the ceremonies that give meaning to their lives. The students learn how their hosts manifest their emotions, organize their daily existence, feed and clothe themselves, and meet the challenges and opportunities that people have to confront in another culture. These are things you cannot learn from books.

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