

STUDENT COMMENTS ON THE 2007-08 MEXICAN MIGRATION FIELD RESEARCH AND TRAINING PROGRAM

The experience of participating in the Mexican Migration Field Research Program can hardly be summed up. The range of events I was able to participate in and the range of emotions that I felt throughout will stay with me for the rest of my life. From the first day of class, feeling proud and nervous to meet the Professors and my graduate and undergraduate colleagues, to the excitement of traveling to rural Oaxaca and the pain in seeing first-hand the most desperate situations of some of the Tlacotepenses we meet in the field. All of this blended with the extreme gratitude I felt when offered hand-made *mole* by a woman cooking over an *adobe* fireplace, then I was truly able to see for the first time how the kindness of the human spirit is without borders. At that moment I knew that the work I was doing in the program was not just a chance for me to gain invaluable lessons on designing, conducting and analyzing field research and adding to my undergraduate resume (although these benefits should not be ignored) but a chance for me to give back to the migrant community in a significant and meaningful way. True, the data we generate may shape policy and I will be forever proud of that. But on a more personal level, I was able to watch the joy on the face of a Mexican migrant in California when I returned from her hometown and gave her dried chiles and photos sent by her mother back home. I recommend to anyone who has ever thought that they want to make a change to take advantage of the MMFRP.

-- *Chelsea Ambort*

Living in San Diego, I encounter Mexican migrants every day. I see them working at my apartment complex, in restaurants, and on campus, but I have never stopped to talk to them, learn about their hometowns, or really consider what motivated them to come to San Diego. My time spent with families in San Miguel Tlacotepec and Vista opened my eyes to a whole other world. I saw the economic hardships in San Miguel Tlacotepec that motivated migrants to leave, but I also saw the pain and suffering that accompanies the long-term separation of migrant families. MMFRP underlined the complexity of migration while showing the human side of the issue, and it has challenged me to grow intellectually and personally. It truly was a life-changing experience. Because of my experience in MMFRP, I feel that I have found my vocation: to be an immigration lawyer.

-- *Clare Appleby*

Participating in the Mexican Migration Field Research Program has been the best experience of my academic career thus far. As an undergraduate student I never thought I would have an opportunity to apply the theory learned in class anytime soon, but our field research site in Oaxaca was the perfect place to do so. I am still utterly amazed that students like myself have the opportunity to gain hands-on experience while doing field research that will promote positive change in the lives of future migrants to the United States. This program is unique because it gives undergraduates the opportunity to work directly along side like-minded and goal-oriented graduate students as well as professors Wayne Cornelius and David Fitzgerald. I feel that this program does truly train one to become an academic researcher in the field of immigration or any field you choose to enter in the future. Being part of the Mexican Migration Field Research Program is an experience that I will never forget and one that has strengthened my urge to continue learning from and giving back to underserved and underprivileged communities.

--*John Cardenas*

Como estudiante mexicana ser parte de este programa fue una experiencia maravillosa. Primero, porque gracias a proyectos interinstitucionales como los de movilidad estudiantil (COLEF-UCSD) tuve la oportunidad de conocer y colaborar con todo un equipo de trabajo interesado en uno de los

temas de mayor polémica en mi país, “la migración México-Estados Unidos”. El haber estado en San Miguel Tlacotepec me dejó además de gratos recuerdos, la mayor enseñanza que ningún curso sobre Migración Internacional me pudo haber dejado “*el escuchar de voz de los involucrados la problemática migratoria que se vive hoy en día en muchos pueblos mexicanos*”. De manera mas personal, durante mi estancia en San Miguel aprendí que la pobreza no significa pedir y recibir sino también dar, dar a los demás de lo poco que uno tiene; los tlacotepenses no sólo nos proporcionaron la información necesaria para este proyecto sino que nos abrieron las puertas de sus hogares, nos llenaron de atenciones y nos permitieron ser parte de sus vidas por unos días.

– *Bribilia Cota-Cabrera*

The Mexican Migration Field Research Program has had a strong impact on my last year at UCSD. Not only did I learn the basics of research methodology, I also better understand the history and complexities of Mexican migration to the United States. This program has broadened my perspective and has demonstrated that the effects of migration are felt in both countries and in all aspects of society. Conducting surveys in Oaxaca was difficult for me at first, but with the support of other students and the program, I felt a connection with San Miguel Tlacotepec and its citizens. I was lucky enough to hear such powerful stories of migration, tradition, and everyday life, told by those who had experienced it. MMFRP also continues to provide a space for discussion of social issues, current policy, and relevant events. The group of students involved has formed a community of people who are interested in learning, researching and growing. This program has been a great academic and personal experience and has augmented my UCSD education.

– *Nishma Doshi*

The opportunity to be published at the age of 24 is fantastic, especially when it is attached to the name Wayne Cornelius. I appreciate this opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the immigration debate, even in our own small way. The trip itself allowed me to not only better understand the way of life in rural Mexico but to create community here at UCSD. That is what I value most after this project – the close ties I have been able to make with fellow Tritons.

– *Emily Erickson*

To participate in the Mexican Migration Field Research Program has quite simply been the best choice I have made during my college career. During my second run in the program, I have improved upon the skills that were seeded during the first. This program has given me the chance to explore a wide array of interests that lie beneath immigration. From a more concrete analysis of US border enforcement and its effect on Mexican migration to a more anthropological topic on ethnicity and civic participation in indigenous Oaxaca, I have enriched my aptitude as a young and enthusiastic social science researcher. Finally, I have made long-lasting relationships with both my colleagues and my professors that I do not doubt will continue to blossom throughout my professional career.

– *Jonathan Hicken*

The value I place on my Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program experience is immeasurable. I have learned how to collaborate with a bi-national and bilingual research team, yet I've also been given more academic freedom and responsibility than ever before. This program has led me to empathize strongly with the hardships faced by migrants and their families and gave me the tools to collect the stories of these people so that they may be shared with others. Since I began my time alongside Professors Cornelius and Fitzgerald, I have greatly improved my spoken Spanish, learned the complex dynamics involved in creating and undertaking a field research project and I am currently sharpening my ability to think critically and innovatively about the data we collected. All these skills (and many more not mentioned here) will be useful in my future career in the fields

of international and environmental law. I know few other programs exist where undergraduate and graduate students of two countries can come together, travel to Mexico and to a U.S. receiving community, record the opinions and stories of people who are rarely given a voice and then create a book that enmeshes all of our findings into one cohesive piece of writing. The Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program is the opportunity of a lifetime to connect with peers, professors, community members, migrants, families of migrants and ultimately a public audience, if I could I would do this project over again twenty times more.

– *Emily Hildreth*

Coming to UCSD as a graduate student with much experience working directly with migrants, but little experience studying migration, I learned an incredible amount about doing such research. The work in the fall was excellent preparation for the work we did in Oaxaca. Despite this, I went there with some anxiety, not entirely sure how we would be received and how I would fare as a field researcher. During the two weeks we spent in San Miguel Tlacotepec, my confidence in my ability to gain the confidence of and establish rapport with interviewees grew tremendously. As an aspiring anthropologist, I am convinced that, in order to understand an issue, one must witness it firsthand. Participating in the MMFRP program proved this to me once again. I come away from my time in Oaxaca with a tremendously improved understanding of what migration means for migrants themselves. Having seen its impact firsthand, I feel an improved confidence in my ability to speak to the realities of migration.

– *David Keyes*

Professionally, this program is a unique opportunity to interact with and learn from distinguished professors and passionate students, at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Never in my time at UCSD have I had the opportunity to work so closely with professors, to think so critically with other students. Likewise, the chance to contribute to a published book on Mexican migration, as an undergraduate, is a golden opportunity for any student. More than that, though, the trip to Mexico to conduct field research is, in my opinion, the most compelling part of the program. On my trip to Oaxaca, I got the chance to connect with other students, and make friends with many driven and fascinating people that I might otherwise never have met. Most importantly, though, field interviewing in Mexico opened my eyes to so many aspects of global migration, entrenched poverty, and human nature. I felt blessed to have such an opportunity to converse with people in the town, so different from myself in terms of socioeconomic and educational opportunity, who nonetheless showed incredible generosity, character, and resilience. The trip was one that touched me profoundly, and changed many aspects of my professional and personal goals. I would recommend this program to any student who wishes to learn more about migration, to delve into an interesting subject with professors and students, and to challenge preexisting views of the world.

– *Laurel Korwin*

The field research program has allowed me to explore immigration not just as an issue but as a subject that deserves critical thought and academic exploration. I am grateful because the program allowed me to engage in critical analysis of the realities of immigration, which I know will help me in my future public policy advocacy career. I strongly recommend the program not just because of the expertise that you gain but also for the relationships that you establish with other students and the personal growth that you achieve by exploring a very important issue with a sensitive academic perspective.

– *Grecia Lima*

Going into the MMFRP program as a sophomore with an interest in Mexican Immigration but little background on the topic, I had only a vague idea of what to expect. It soon became clear to me that I would be collaborating with a group of driven and dedicated students, and I had little doubt that I would be challenged academically over the course of the class. The most important revelation, however, did not come until we began the fieldwork segment of the project. Suddenly my fellow students whose credentials had impressed me at the beginning of the quarter but with whom I felt I had little in common became my friends. This may have been the inevitable outcome of our close collaboration, however, in my opinion, it has been one of the most important components of what I would consider (thus far) the success of our project. Organizationally speaking, the close-knit nature of the group made for a (relatively) efficient and organized two weeks of field research. Just as importantly, however, our friendly group dynamic carried over into the field and contributed greatly to our overwhelmingly positive reception in San Miguel Tlacotepec. The importance of personal relations cannot be overemphasized in the context of field research, particularly when the researcher's motivations may be met with skepticism and, on occasion, outright hostility. Developing a healthy rapport with individuals and, more generally, a positive reputation in the community at large, is of utmost importance. My friends in the MMFRP program guided and supported me as I learned these nuances of field research. While at times I found it difficult to justify the lack of immediately tangible benefits for our subjects, my faith in the importance of our efforts was confirmed time and time again as my tentative greetings were met with the genuine kindness of a chair in the shade and a cool glass of water in the afternoon, or a warm plate of mole on a chilly Oaxacan evening.

– *Gabriel Lozada*

My experience in the Mexican Migration Field Research Program was incredible. I grew up along the Calexico/Mexicali border sector, but I never had the opportunity to discuss issues concerning migration in an academic setting. The readings and lectures developed my understanding of the effects of border policy on migration patterns and behavior. It is fascinating to learn and helpful in understanding the predicaments migrants inhabit while working in the United States. The push factors of Mexican migration including poverty were manifested in our trip to Oaxaca. I really appreciate the opportunity to travel to Mexico and conduct research in a rural pueblo because seeing why people choose to migrate is more provoking than reading about it. I admit I was a little intimidated about conducting interviews daily in Mexico. What I have developed through daily interviews is a sense of confidence in social networking, which will benefit me in my future profession in law. More importantly, I have developed a strong sense in helping those less fortunate. We all did our part in Oaxaca; we were not passive observers. I developed close relationships with many of those I interviewed. To be honest, I never expected a class could ever affect me the way the Mexican Migration Field Research Program has. I strongly recommend students to apply to this program because I genuinely feel that I am more motivated and confident because of it. – *Miguel Mendoza*

The Mexican Migration Field Program has been one of the most enjoyable experiences of my college career. I feel as if I *actually* learned and analyzed real world events while utilizing all of my previous education. Immigration affects our everyday lives--migrants and immigration are in your face on the news, behind the scenes picking your fruit or even right next to you in your UCSD classroom. The program gently pushed me to bridge whatever cultural or generational gap there might have been between me and the families I interviewed and learned from. Virtually all of the families I interviewed, both in San Miguel Tlacotepec and in Vista, Calif, became part of my extended family as they shared their life histories, experiences, food and festivities. Given the uncommon opportunity to meet and interview people in another country, not only did I learn an immense amount from the class and the field research, but I also learned from my peers. Their passion and

enthusiasm is contagious and inspiring. The program made me to grow personally, socially, and academically. The professors and the staff are amazingly dedicated, patient and approachable. I feel fortunate to have participated in such an amazing program; it is unforgettable.

– *Tanya Menendez*

Participating in the Mexican Migration Field Research and Training Program has been the most significant experience I have had at UCSD. This program was a unique opportunity to work with a diverse group of students as well as to learn from the experience and knowledge of two great professors. My fieldwork experience in San Miguel Tlacotepec allowed me to see the realities of migration and the needs of a community who received us with open arms and hospitality. Yet, this experience did not happen without challenges or difficulties. It was clear that we would struggle to perform the second phase of our fieldwork in Vista, CA considering that migrants whose legal status could be at stake would be hesitant to cooperate. However, our commitment to social awareness together with the goal of understanding migration in order to influence fair policy went through as we conversed with each person. This program will give me a strong research foundation, an invaluable experience and the desire to use the power of education and leadership to create a more understanding and equitable society.

– *Nancy Moreno*

Participating in the Mexican Migration Field Research Project has been one of the most valuable experiences of graduate school. I have learned first hand how to design a research project, create the tools and materials for carrying out field research, identify and interview informants, and write up the results. My experience with MMFRP has enabled me to obtain funding for independent research projects, and to make rapid advancements in my pre-dissertation research. I am confident that everything I have learned as a participant in the MMFRP will help me excel as a graduate student and a future academic.

– *Leah Muse-Orlinoff*

The Mexican Migration Field Research Program has been, without question, the most influential and beneficial experience for me in all my undergraduate studies. I had the opportunity to do other research as an undergraduate in Economics, but I really did not get a true feel for research and research design until I worked with Professor Cornelius and Professor Fitzgerald in this program. The level of expectations is high, but their help is tremendous, and I grew so much while participating in this program. My experience in the town we were researching, San Miguel Tlacotepec, is one that will stay with me throughout life. I met amazing people there during our research, and they taught me a lot about economic and family struggles. Part of the reason I am so appreciative of the program is its ability to not only teach me academic truths, but priceless life lessons as well.

– *Peter Nichols*

For me, participation in the MMFRP was an ideal way to begin my graduate career at UCSD. There are few research projects as ambitious as this one that offer student participants the opportunity to influence the direction, design, and implementation of the research. Most projects tend to limit the role of student participants to data collection and entry. Yet as a participant in the MMFRP I was able to collaborate with prominent scholars, design survey questions, work autonomously in the field, conduct data analysis, and publish the results of my work. The intensive training I received will be invaluable as I develop my dissertation proposal in the coming years. This program is also unique in that it approaches migration issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. As a student of Political Science, I am fully aware of the theoretical and methodological partitions that exist within the social sciences. Through collaboration with students from different disciplines, I gained a

nuanced understanding of the migrant experience that allows for cultural, social, and political interpretations of migration. Working in the field greatly expanded my intellectual imagination. I would recommend this program to anyone who wants to challenge themselves beyond what they encounter in the classroom.

– *Kristen Parks*

The fieldwork portion of the Mexican Migration Field Research Project was truly a privilege and wonderful experience for me as an incoming graduate student at UCSD.

Talking with family and community members from San Miguel Tlacotepec, I gained a greater understanding of how migration influences the lives of migrants and non-migrants alike, bringing change to and requiring sending communities to adapt to the absence of family and community members. The experience also ingrained in me the importance of understanding where migrants come from, the factors that influenced their decision to migrate, and the history, people, and experiences that shape their lives in the U.S. and in Mexico. As a graduate student, the MMFRP presented me the opportunity to strengthen my field research skills, providing me with a larger toolbox for designing and implementing research and gathering quantitative and qualitative data. Beyond the academic experience, this project allowed for and encouraged the exchange of time, ideas, compassion, and hope not only with Tlacotepenses, but also with other students from UCSD and UABJO who aspire to contribute with the education gained through this experience. We all came to the table with different expectations and levels of experience but collectively emerged with a greater understanding of the experience of migrants and migrants' families and communities and with a great respect and gratitude for those we met and those we worked with.

– *Elizabeth Perry*

Participating in the field research program has been an absolutely rewarding experience. I have always been interested in conducting and gaining research experience. This program does that and more. The main reason field research in San Miguel Tlacotepec was such a pleasurable experience was because it allows you to get a personal view of how other people live and the impact that migration has played in their lives. We were able to view the effects of migration first hand, in the process creating impacting memories. Being invited into peoples homes and hearing their personal stories, their gains, and their losses allowed us to immerse ourselves into their world for two weeks and see things from their perspectives. This is something that cannot be experienced through readings or lectures. This program allowed me to gain insight and experience in research and at the same time grow as a person. I don't think you can leave as the same person after participating in this program. I highly recommend it to everyone.

– *Miguel Pinedo*

Participating in the Mexican Migration Field Research Program for the second time as an undergraduate student has been an absolutely invaluable experience for me. In terms of my personal reflection, participation in this year's program has enriched my understanding of the migrant experience by providing me with the opportunity to develop personal connections with another sending community and it's incredibly resilient people. Academically, the Mexican Migration Field Research Program has provided me with a new set of challenges in allowing me to further refine my research and writing abilities through the data synthesizing that I will engage in this year. Likewise, participation in this year's program has assisted me in developing my professional marketability by providing me with numerous opportunities to refine my team work, communication, and analytical skill set that will make me a strong asset to any organization. I am primarily interested in pursuing a career in strategic consulting and ultimately plan to achieve a Masters in Business Administration. While my career interest does not seem to be an obvious crossover with the program, the analytical, communication, and teamwork skills that I have gained

through two years of participation in the program have positioned me for a successful career within the consulting industry. Similarly, like all of my colleagues, I have been profoundly affected by the experience of participating in this program and am passionate about immigration and the overall immigrant experience. As such, my ultimate goal is to use my position as a consultant to work with bi-national governments on improving the immigration system, the Mexican economy, and thereby the livelihood of people like those I met in San Miguel. – *Andrea Rodriguez*

The opportunity to participate in MMFRP served as the "pull factor" that led me to migrate to UCSD from the East Coast. A doctoral student at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, I had long been looking for a research project that examined migration from its source in Mexican sending communities to the receiving contexts where migrants settle in the United States. The MMFRP offered a unique opportunity to conduct this type of cutting-edge research. Having now spent nearly a full academic year in the program, the MMFRP has provided me this chance and a lot more. From my participation in the project, I have learned valuable skills in research design, quantitative and qualitative investigative methodologies, data analysis, research writing, publishing, and team work. The program has also exponentially expanded my knowledge base of Mexican migration and the impact of our nation's (and Mexico's) policies towards migration. I now feel that I can speak with a great deal of confidence on a broad range of issues related to immigration policy and the complex dynamics of Mexican migration to the United States. Given how valuable this experience has been for me as a fourth year PhD student, I can only imagine the step-up it gives to UCSD undergraduate students as future researchers, policy analysts, health and human services practitioners, and citizens. As for me, I plan to make use of my MMFRP experience in both my upcoming doctoral dissertation and in my future career as an academic who studies the intersection of immigration and education policy.

– *Adam Sawyer*

My experience in MMFRP has been very interesting and eye-opening. I really didn't know what to expect when I signed on for the class, except that I would be working with a group of people equally interested in learning about the real effects of immigration policy on one of the populations most affected by it. The two week trip to Oaxaca was the culmination of our efforts, as we spent the entire time interviewing members of the town who were most affected by other people (mostly spouses and fathers) migrating, and the role remittances played there. In San Diego, we were able to see the other side of the migration circle, because we were able to interview migrants from the same town who are now living in the US. Being able to compare the two groups was perhaps for me the most important part of the research that we have done, because it allowed me to see the real effects of current immigration policy on real migrants on both sides of the border and make it personal.

– *Arielle Smith*

The Mexican Migration Field Research Project has proven to be an enriching part of my academic and personal experience at UCSD. As a student, I value the opportunity to do extensive research in which I can pursue my own academic interests while working with a team of other highly motivated and qualified students from both UCSD and universities in Mexico. The project allows students to design their own research questions and then carry out extremely enriching field work in both the sending and receiving communities in order to answer those questions. I am very thankful for the connections and friendships I've made both at UCSD and in the communities we are working with. I am grateful for this experience and strongly encourage other students to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

– *Christina Velazquez*