Culture & Community Health
In Oaxaca, Mexico
An ISL Program of Rutgers Study Abroad

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Jersey Roots,

Global Reach
Peter Guarnaccia, Professor I

• Medical Anthropologist
• Professor in the Department of Human Ecology at the School of Environmental & Biological Sciences
• Investigator at the Institute for Health, Health Care Policy & Aging Research at Rutgers University
• Completing 27 years as a Professor at Rutgers
Peter Guarnaccia, Program Leader

- Has worked in Mexico for many years
  - Undergraduate fieldwork in Chiapas in 1970’s
  - Graduate research in the state of Mexico in 1983
  - 3 trips to Oaxaca in past 3 years for research, program development, and planning the Study Abroad program
  - Directed program last 3 summers
Our Partner

• SURCO is a non-profit grassroots organization
• SURCO believes that knowledge is not only meant to interpret the world, but to change it
• SURCO integrates formal education and activism to provide dynamic and diverse opportunities for program participants
• Is an active partner in a wide range of local networks that tackle social and environmental justice issues
Provides

- Customized academic and non-traditional learning programs and consulting
- Organizes community service projects
- Arranges for homestays with local families
- Provides facilities for Medical Anthropology & Reflection seminars
- Organizes community excursions
- Provides support and local coordination of program
Map of Mexico
State of Oaxaca

- Rich state in cultural diversity
- One of poorest states in Mexico
- Rich tradition of crafts: weaving, ceramics, woodcarving, baskets
- Famous for its foods, esp. *moles*
- Famous for regional dances and festivals
- Most immigrants to New Brunswick, NJ from Oaxaca
Oaxaca City

- Named a World Heritage site in 1987 by UNESCO
- Wonderful climate
- Very walkable city with rich cultural and social resources
- About 6 hours by bus and 1 hour by plane south of Mexico City
- Base for the Culture and Community Health Program
Community Health in Oaxaca, Mexico

Program Overview
Key Elements of the Program

• Overall: 5 week program, with 3 days orientation
• Medical Anthropology Seminar on health in Mexican communities
• Course in Spanish -- focus on medical vocabulary and dialogues
• Community service projects in community health settings
Key Elements of the Program

• Integrative seminar to link the community activities to course readings
• Cultural visits to archaeological site, craft and eco-tourism communities
• Homestays with Mexican families
• 6 credits from Rutgers Study Abroad [3 community health; 3 medical Spanish]
Medical Anthropology Seminar

• **Medical Choice in a Mexican Village** – Introduction to Medical Anthropology, anthropological studies of help seeking

• **Susto: A Folk Illness** – Introduction to Psychiatric Anthropology, Studies of cultural syndromes

• **Physicians at Work, Patients in Pain** – Anthropological study of physicians in health care systems

• **Fixing Men** – HIV/AIDS in global perspective and in Mexico
Community Service Sites

- **Secretaria de Salubridad y Asistencia Clínicas:**
  - Public healthcare system for citizens who are generally the poorest in Oaxaca
  - Participants work in smaller clinics alongside nurses and doctors

- **Amemos Vihvir (We Love Life):**
  - HIV/AIDS advocacy organization that works with the local AIDS Hospital
  - Students help with the web site, health education, and community outreach

- **CORAL:**
  - Offers hearing-impaired children a full range of low-cost hearing rehabilitative services and programs
  - Volunteers work with teachers at CORAL to facilitate education and help with fundraising

- **Horse Therapy Project:**
  - Provides high quality equine therapy to children of all ages with a range of mental, emotional and physical disabilities
  - Students work in community rehabilitation, assessing the patients and implementing the appropriated therapy
Final Reflection Paper

• At the end of the program, students write a 5 page paper that reflects on their learning along several dimensions:
  • What did you learn about health in Mexico?
  • What did you learn from living in Mexican culture for a month?
  • What did you learn about yourself in terms of your skills, cross-cultural strengths and weaknesses, and future interests?
  • What did you learn across all your experiences: community service projects; classes in Spanish; course on the medical anthropology of Mexico; reflection seminars; homestays with Mexican families; cultural excursions; and other experiences living in Oaxaca for a month
SSA Clinic in San Antonio
Health Education murals in Vicente Guerrero
CORAL

School for Children with Hearing Impairments
Amigos del Sol Language Institute
Monte Alban, archeological site
Weaving village of Teotitlan del Valle