

**Program for Mexican Culture and Society in Puebla  
Student Orientation Handbook (2009– 2010)**

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**1. CALENDAR 2009 – 2010** (some variation may occur)

Thursday, August 6, 2009	Program begins
August 7-10	Mexico City Orientation
August 11	Arrival in Puebla
August 12-14	Orientation in Puebla
August 15	Excursion to Cholula
August 17	Classes begin at BUAP
September 4	Last day to add a class
September 11	Last day to drop a class
October 1-4	Excursion to Cuetzalan
October 30-Nov.2	Excursion to Oaxaca
December 9	Last day of classes
December 10	Program ends
January 2, 2010	Spring program begins
January 3-6	Orientation in Mexico City
January 7	Arrival in Puebla
January 7-9	Orientation in Puebla
January 11	Classes begin at BUAP
January 22	Last day to add a course
January 29	Last day to drop a course

Feb. 19-22	Excursion to (Place TBA)
March 22-April 4	BUAP spring break
April 22-25	Excursion to Guanajuato
May 14	BUAP classes end
May 16	End of the program

## 2. PUEBLA

Puebla de los Ángeles, founded by the Spanish in 1531, is for many the quintessential Mexican city. Built in the shadows of the snow-covered volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, the city is surrounded by some of the most fertile agricultural land in central Mexico and has been a focal point for culture from pre-Hispanic times to the present.

The immediate surroundings of Puebla are rich in vestiges of the Preclassic (1500 B.C.E.-300 C.E.), Classic (300 C.E. – 900 C.E.), and Postclassic (900 C.E. – 1521 C.E.) periods of ancient Mesoamerican civilization. The town of Cholula, one of the oldest still-inhabited settlements in the New World, is justly famous for its great pyramid, the largest structure known in the ancient Americas. At the nearby site of Cacaxtla, in the state of Tlaxcala, extraordinary surviving murals show the blend of Maya, and Central Mexican cultures in the region around 900 C.E. Though such smaller cities rose and fell, Cholula continued to play an important role as an economic and religious center well into the Postclassic era, when it formed part of the Aztec Empire.

During the colonial period, Puebla grew rich from the trade with Asia and Europe, and some of Mexico’s most important colonial landmarks are to be found in and around the city. Towns like Cholula and Huejotzingo are famous for their surviving sixteenth century monasteries, while the beautifully preserved heart of Puebla itself is distinguished by ornate palaces and churches from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Chapel of the Rosary in downtown Puebla and the church in the town of Santa María Tonanzintla are extraordinary examples of Mexican baroque architecture. Puebla’s noble cathedral, inspired by the Spanish palace of El Escorial, boasts the tallest towers in Mexico. The wealth of the colonial period gave rise to inventive, new dishes

like the famous “mole poblano” and “chile en nogada.” Immigrants from Asia included Japanese artisans as well as the not-so-legendary “China poblana,” a woman from India whose apparel inspired one of Mexico’s most famous traditional costumes. Spanish and Moorish culture is evident in the ceramics and tiles known as Talavera ware. Even after Independence, Puebla remained important. The Mexican army defeated French invaders at Puebla on 5 May 1862 (now commemorated on the “cinco de mayo”), while in the early twentieth century, the city witnessed labor movements in support of the Mexican Revolution. In recognition of its historical and artistic merit, Puebla was named to UNESCO’s World Heritage list in 1987.

Today, Puebla is a vibrant artistic, cultural, and business center. It is home to several important museums, including the magnificent pre-Hispanic and colonial collections of the Museo Amparo. The “Casa del Escritor,” part of the Cities of Asylum Program of the International Parliament of Writers, welcomes yearly an internationally-recognized writer-in-residence and holds an extensive series of lectures and workshops open to all. The state-funded “Casa de Cultura” offers numerous workshops in the visual and performing arts. The city’s “Sapos” district continues to attract artists and antique dealers. Puebla has a new convention center, a wide range of commercial facilities, and major industrial investments: Volkswagen de México operates one of the largest automobile factories in the world here. The city is also the current headquarters for the proposed “Area de Libre Comercio de las Américas” agreement. At night, Puebla offers plenty of excitement, particularly along the Avenida Juárez and in Cholula, replete with trendy restaurants and night spots.

Despite its population of approximately three million, Puebla retains much of its provincial charm, particularly in the city center where many of the BUAP *Facultades* are located. Puebla remains a relatively safe city, particularly in comparison to some other destinations in Mexico, and at 7,000 feet above sea level, boasts a delightfully mild climate year-round. In addition, the city’s central location, about 60 miles southeast of Mexico City, makes it the perfect base to explore much of the country. Such important destinations as Oaxaca, Tlaxcala, and Veracruz are easily accessible by excellent and inexpensive bus companies. An extensive public bus system connects all parts of the city and neighboring towns. Puebla has its own

international airport, although it is usually more practical and economical to use Mexico City's Benito Juárez Airport, only two hours away by bus.

### 3. The Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP)

The origins of the university date to 1578 when members of the Jesuit Order established the Colegio Seminario de San Jerónimo in a building that currently houses the Department of Psychology. In 1825 the institution became a state college and was declared a university in 1937. Following a period of turmoil, the university was declared *Autónoma* (self-governing and free of governmental intervention) in 1957 and was awarded the title of *Benemérita* ("most worthy") by the Legislature of the State of Puebla in 1987.

The BUAP is today one of Mexico's leading public universities and unquestionably the premier national research and teaching center south of Mexico City. These qualities make the institution a focal point for students and scholars from states other than Puebla, including Chiapas and Oaxaca. Through its various divisions or *Facultades*, the

BUAP offers 55 undergraduate *licenciaturas* (degrees), and 86 *programas de posgrado* (graduate degrees) in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, as well as in technical fields, business administration, law, education, and health (see [www.buap.mx/oferta/index.html](http://www.buap.mx/oferta/index.html)). Just over 50,000 are enrolled at the BUAP, which includes students from all divisions.

The city campus is divided into two primary areas: one in Puebla's historic downtown which houses programs dedicated to the humanities and most social sciences, and the other in the newer "Ciudad Universitaria" on the outskirts of town, which houses programs dedicated to natural sciences and information services, as well as the sports facilities. Both campuses are easily accessible by public transportation from almost anywhere in the city.

Together with its extensive course curriculum, the BUAP relies on several research institutes that bring together prominent scholars with an interdisciplinary focus. Many of these scholars work with advanced students on specialized research projects (see <http://www.buap.mx/investigacion/index.html>). Of particular interest to program students will be the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (ICSyH) where scholars focus on eight primary areas: language sciences, Latin American studies, cultural conservation, regional studies, history, social cultural studies, sociology and political science, and (soon to be added) art history. PMCSP students will be permitted not only to use the extensive resources of the ICSyH, but will be able to call upon the expertise of resident scholars (currently numbering 90). Other research centers of interest include the Centro de Investigaciones Jurídico Políticas (legal and political studies); the Programa de Semiótica y Estudios de la Significación (semiotics); and the center for Ciencias Ambientales del Instituto de Ciencias (environmental studies).

Public Mexican universities have a long tradition of social awareness and involvement. Quite a few specialized degrees require a period of internship in either an urban or rural setting. The BUAP has been at the forefront of this commitment. As bonafide students at the university, PMCSP participants may wish to collaborate in one of many service activities focusing on health, literacy, and social awareness coordinated through the university.

The BUAP hosts an impressive array of concerts, lectures, dance performances and academic symposia to which interested PMCSP students will have access. For a glimpse into the current year's programming, refer to calendar listings at [www.buap.mx/cultura/index.html](http://www.buap.mx/cultura/index.html) and [www.buap.mx/eventos/index.html](http://www.buap.mx/eventos/index.html). Through the schools of music, dance, and drama, the BUAP sponsors two Mexican folkloric dance troupes, several choirs, and an active dramatic performance series—all of which would be open to PMCSP students depending on interest and achievement.

### 4. ACADEMICS

**One of the driving principles in the creation of PMCSP was that of direct matriculation of students in conventional Mexican university classes, thereby offering the greatest possible immersion in the host culture and a truly authentic learning-abroad experience. Consequently, students enroll in regular BUAP courses appropriate for undergraduate students. The expectation is that students, before arrival in Puebla, and in conjunction with their major advisor and home-**

**institution coordinator, will have developed a tentative listing of courses of interest. During program orientation and the first week of classes, each student, in consultation with the on-site resident faculty director, will finalize a program of study that effectively addresses individual, intellectual interests and academic requirements.**

Since the PMCSP student will not be limited by a list of “program” courses, he or she will be able to select from an extensive array of courses in a variety of disciplines. These offerings are listed according to individual departments or schools (facultades) at the BUAP available at [www.buap.mx](http://www.buap.mx) under *Oferta educativa*. It would be impossible to reproduce those listings here; however, a listing of courses taken by the 21 students participating in the program’s inaugural fall term (2004) will give an idea of options. The BUAP is quite strict in terms of class attendance. Attendance is regularly taken in class and affects the final grade. In accordance with policy, students who have not attended 80% of class meetings will not be permitted to take final examinations. It should be noted that in addition to BUAP classes, all students must attend a weekly group meeting with the Resident Director that will focus on processing experiences in Mexico and will feature guest speakers focusing on Mexican culture and society (see course description for “Contemporary Language and Society” below).

Recognizing that students may bring with them different levels of Spanish fluency and varying degrees of background in terms of the various subject matters offered, PMCSP will identify six courses—within the hundreds of possibilities offered by the BUAP—that will be highlighted as *cursos intensivos* for the fall semester. In these courses, program students will still participate in the regular meetings of the course with Mexican peers, but will also be offered an additional hourly meeting with the instructor (or someone he or she designates) for further discussion and analysis of course material. For Fall 2005, it is anticipated that the following BUAP courses will be offered as *cursos intensivos* for PMCSP participants: ANT 225 Mesoamérica; TDF 100 Técnica de la danza folklórica (with additional academic research project); HIS 223 México contemporáneo; LRI 444 Relaciones México—Estados Unidos; ACP 352 Sistema político mexicano and FIL 406 Historia y filosofía del arte mexicano del siglo XX. A final listing will be available in advance of the fall term.

In order to receive home-institution credit equivalent to a semester of study, a student must satisfactorily complete a program of study consisting of four individual courses. Grades received in conventional courses according to Mexican grading policies will be transferred to US equivalents. A grade of C or better is required for transfer credit to a consortium institution.

The following is a listing of BUAP courses taken by PMCSP students during the last five semesters. Again, this listing represents only a small fraction of the many course offerings available at the BUAP. It is important to discuss options with the Resident Director in order to become familiar with past student evaluations of individual courses.

### **Anthropology**

ANT 205 Antropología y Arqueología

ANT 225 Mesoamérica

ANT 240 Grupos Étnicos de Puebla

ANT 300 Antropología mexicana

ANT 307 Concepciones del mundo

ANT 315 Marxismo

ANT 323 Neoevolucionismo y marxismo

ANT 327 Antropología económica

ANT 395 Razas y racismo

ANT 414 Teoría de la identidad

ANT 504 Etnografía del altiplano

ANT 527 Cultura, sexualidad y género

### **Dance**

TDF 100 Técnica de la danza folklórica

TDF 115 Técnica de la danza clásica

### **Economics**

ECO 269 Economía internacional

ECO 285 Agricultura y sustentabilidad

ECO 531 Economía mexicana

### **Engineering**

ITO 315 Recursos y regionalización de México

MEE 355 Mecánica de flúidos

IME 507 Recursos y necesidades de México

IME 542 Vibraciones mecánicas

### **History**

HIS 106 Historia del mundo medieval

HIS 111 Temática de la Colonia

HIS 118 Mesoamérica

HIS 119 Temática de Mesoamérica

HIS 206 Crisis Colonial de la Segunda República

HIS 220 Historia de América Latina I

HIS 233 México contemporáneo

HIS 238 Historia de América Latina II

HIS 241 Revolución mexicana

HIS 290 Arte moderno siglo XX

HIS 510 Historia y género

### **International Relations**

LRI 200 Historia de México

LRI 300 Derecho internacional público

LRI 400 Derecho económico internacional

LRI 415 América Latina: Política económica y social

LRI 440 Política exterior de México

LRI 441 Política de los Estados Unidos

LRI 444 Relaciones México—Estados Unidos

LRI 500 Derecho ecológico

LRI 520 Política exterior de Estado Unidos

LRI 531 Organismos internacionales

LRI 533 Dinámica de la empresa transnacional

LRI 538 Fronteras y geopolítica en América del Norte

LRI 539 Problemas ecológicos que inciden en la relación con los EEUU

### **Literature**

LLH 180 Seminario: La Teoría literaria feminista

LLH 222 Romanticismo II  
LLH 225 Sociología y literatura  
LLH 241 Tendencias contemporáneas  
LLH 271 Seminario de análisis literario  
LLH 292 Poesía hispanoamericana y española siglo XX  
LLH 298 Seminario: Don Quijote  
LLH 299 Seminario: La poética del relato fantástico  
LLH 510 Seminario: La Celestina  
LLH 579 Literatura de la Onda  
LLH 583 Historia y novelística mexicana siglo XX  
LLH 589 Seminario: Novela política

### **Mathematics**

MAT 217 Cálculo diferencial de varias variables  
MAT 333 Probabilidad II  
MAT 348 Estadística I

### **Music**

TMU123 Instrumento: Guitarra  
TMU 123 Instrumento: Violín  
TMU 124 Instrumento: Piano  
LMU 214 Canto II  
MUS 324 Instrumento: Piano  
LMU 363 Historia del arte II  
LMU 590 Historia de la música de México  
LMU592 Música Antigua

### **Philosophy**

FIL325 Ética y Política  
FIL 405 Historia y filosofía del arte mexicano  
FIL 416 Filosofía de México Siglo XX  
FIL 427 Historia del arte contemporáneo

### **Physics**

LNF 142 Métodos matemáticas de la Física I  
LNF 204 Introducción a la física contemporánea  
ELE 510 Electrónica  
ELE 561 Laboratorio de electrónica

### **Political Science**

LPO 333 Estados Unidos: Historia de sistemas políticos  
LPO 343 América Latina: Historia de sistemas políticos  
ACP 352 Sistema político mexicano  
LPO 429 Problemas de la democracia

LPO 433 Cultura política en México

**Psychology**

PSI 207 Psicopatología interaccional

PSI 215 Procesos psicosociales

PSI 303 Sociedad y educación

**Sociology**

LSO352 Pensamiento social de América Latina

LSO 406 Economía y política de México y América Latina

LSO 410 Estratificación y clases sociales

LSO 412 Teorías del cambio social

LSO 415 América Latina: Política, economía y sociedad

LSO 491 Sociología urbana

LSO 493 Sociología de las religiones

LSO531 Migraciones

LSO 535 Sociología de la educación

LSO 541 Políticas públicas: Educación en México

**Theater**

LAD 130 Iniciación actoral II

It should be emphasized that a large, public, urban, Mexican university will necessarily provide a very different experience than a US liberal-arts institution. What may be particularly surprising is that many professors—and some students—do not tend to be as punctual in arriving at class as is the case in the US. Also, and despite the fact that students are required to attend 80% of class meetings, it is not unheard of for professors to suspend class meetings while they are at professional conferences or other academic or professional events. It is expected that while faculty are away, students will meet in small study groups (sometimes with a specific group project assignment that will culminate in one or more oral and/or written presentations). Students are also expected to keep up with readings—which, as many found out, can't be left to the last minute. In short, a lot of the “pacing” of material is left up to the student—as opposed to a US model where a syllabus defines precise tasks at specific times.

In planning the program, there had been a great deal of worry before the inaugural semester began as to whether or not students would encounter significant linguistic problems in participating fully in conventional Mexican university courses. As it has turned out, language issues have not turned up much at all. After about two weeks of adjustment to Spanish *everywhere*, students have not tended to encounter significant difficulties in terms of language. What has surfaced as more of a problem has been one of not always feeling that they had the same background in a given subject matter as Mexican students (particularly in courses in history and politics). As mentioned below in a discussion of the Mexican educational system, students elect a given specialty (law, history, psychology, international relations, etc.) upon entering college and study a rather rigid, shared curriculum that would presuppose a certain degree of shared knowledge on the part of the teacher—and other students. Program students have certainly been able to fill in these gaps—as demonstrated by the high marks received by most; but it has meant that some attention should to be given to course sequence in terms of the given discipline when selecting courses. These are all topics that will be covered fully by the resident director once in Mexico and will be important to consider when selecting upon a final listing of courses. As part of this process, the program recommends that students visit several courses before settling on a specific schedule.

It should be emphasized that teachers at the BUAP—as probably most places—exercise a wide variety of teaching styles. While some are accustomed to lecture-format teaching (which can strike the US liberal-arts student as a bit dry), others run seminar-style classes where students end up doing most of the talking, while

still others strike a delicate balance between communicating subject matter and creating a space for discussion.

At the same time, it should be emphasized that the degree of what might be called for lack of a better term “nurturing” found in elite US liberal-arts institutions is not at all the norm in terms of university education throughout the world as a whole. Although non-US faculty and administrators certainly care about the education of their students (otherwise—particularly in light of the low salary characteristic of the educational field [and especially in developing countries]—they might well have chosen a more lucrative business), the degree of importance given student services (especially non-academic), student evaluations, and other features of a small liberal-arts college has simply not been the subject of focus as in the US (for both historical and economic reasons). Students will need to come to terms with difference not only in terms of day-to-day cultural life in a different society, but also in the academic sphere.

The “cursos intensivos” are intended to help negotiate this introduction to a very different academic culture. They provide additional support services, yet still offer the authentic experience of conventional Mexican university classes. Through the additional weekly session, it is hoped that students will be address any areas left unclear in the regular class meetings and permit greater exploration of material. At the same time, it is hoped that not all participants will take only the enhanced-format classes, but that students will strike a balance between these courses and the hundreds of course offerings at the BUAP. After all, the goal of the program is for students to experience as authentic an academic and cultural experience as possible. Unlike “island” programs (where classes are offered for Americans by local faculty, but in classes separate from the rest of the students), the purpose of an immersion program is to facilitate learning in an environment that is autochthonous to the culture one is learning about. Past students have agreed—across the board—that being able to actually study as a “Mexican” in a conventional Mexican class—with all the good and not-so-good that entailed—was a deeply illuminating experience, one that would not have been possible had they been in classes only with other Americans or in classes tailored for non-Mexicans.

## **5. OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES**

PMCSF staff will assist students in identifying additional learning opportunities and cultural activities in the Puebla community. As mentioned, the “Casa del Escritor” and the “Casa de Cultura” offer a wide variety of workshops focusing on the arts. Staff will also assist in identifying opportunities for service learning, including collaboration at one of the many NGOs in Puebla. As mentioned previously, students receive funds to help cover the cost of individually-determined activities and to assist with transportation costs.

In the past, PMCSF students have undertaken various volunteer and additional learning programs as part of their experience, including: training with the BUAP “Lobos” women’s basketball and men’s soccer teams, tutoring English and music at various elementary schools; child-care at “La Casa del Sol” (orphanage) and “La Casa de la Niñez Poblana; working at the Instituto Poblano de la Mujer; interning in emergency and internal medicine at the Hospital Universitario; Arabic dancing and language classes; print-making; traditional Mexican embroidery classes; jazz dance ensemble (including participating in an international jazz competition in Mexico City); salsa and other ballroom dance classes; dancing in the Ballet Folklórico of the BUAP; Kung Fu lessons; and musical recitals at the School of Music—to name a few.

## **6. HOUSING**

Students will normally reside with Mexican families who will provide all meals, linens, and laundry facilities in a comfortable home environment. Spending several months with a family offers a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in Mexican life and to practice Spanish language skills. It is important to point out, however, that living with *anyone* for four months will have both good and not-so-good moments. Most students will come to Mexico used to a considerable absence of rules and accustomed to great independence in college dorms (guests at most any time; eating whenever preferred; not being expected to share information on where one is going or with whom, etc.) and will need to readjust to some of the expectations common “at home.” Maximum flexibility and communication with the family and program staff is essential

In Puebla, as is the case in most Latin American cities, the middle classes have long since fled the historic centers of cities and settled in communities either adjacent to the historic core or in suburbs. Consequently, while the downtown area may be bustling during the day, streets can be almost abandoned at night. Puebla is exceptional in that the historic center does continue to attract visitors in the evening and on week ends (the

“Sapos” area in particular can be quite lively on weekends). Most middle-class residences, however, are not in the city center. This urban reality means that students may have to take public transportation to classes and other events. Puebla has an extensive bus system that makes transportation during the daylight hours relatively simple. (It should be added, however, that there is no unified map of public transportation—although the recently-elected mayor has insisted it is one of his priorities. As part of orientation in Puebla, host families offer instruction on identifying routes.) Program students will be furnished with a generous transportation allowance for bus and taxi use within the Puebla area.

At the same time that living with a family offers a unique immersion in Mexican culture, it is essential to keep in mind that you are a guest (albeit a paying guest) and that you will have to make every effort possible to be a “welcome guest.” The following are some useful suggestions to maintain a friendly relationship:

Always speak Spanish, especially with your host family. Although some of the members of your family may speak some English, they believe that your goals in studying in Puebla are to perfect your Spanish and become a part of “Poblano” culture. They may well think less of your commitment if you speak English. Also, and particularly if they do not speak English, they may think you are saying things about them if they hear English.

It is essential to speak with the family and Resident Director regarding any eating issues. Although the main meals are provided, you should not expect your family to provide between-meal snacks, soft drinks, exotic foods, etc. (although some may do so on occasion) or feed your friends on a regular basis. Eating is in the kitchen or dining room and not in a bedroom or living room. Be on time for all meals and definitely notify your family if you are not going to be present for a meal. If you would like to invite a friend to a meal, consult that possibility with your family in advance.

Mexican families tend to be conservative in terms of pre-marital dating and the like. It is essential to consult with the family before inviting someone to spend the night (and most families will not be all that happy with the idea). Members of the opposite sex are not usually permitted to spend the night. Visitors are certainly allowed—within reason—but they should not stay after 9 or 10 p.m. And, at least at the beginning of your stay, and until informal rules of the house mutually understood, it would be best to entertain guests—especially guests of the opposite sex—in common rooms. If your family from back home is planning on visiting Puebla, the host family will probably invite them over for a drink or a meal. It is not usually the case that they will offer them housing, however.

As meals are included, it will be viewed as a bit odd if you cook much in between meals. If you plan on doing so, discuss the matter with your family or ask the Resident Director to verify policies. In any event, you will notice that kitchens in middle-class homes are kept immaculate. If you do use the kitchen, you will have to leave it in the same condition that you found it. You would need to pay for any and all ingredients for the preparation of any additional items not provided as part of regular meals. Be very careful with the use of any appliances, as you would be held responsible for any damages.

Keep in mind that utility costs can be higher in Mexico than in the US—particularly vis-à-vis comparative income levels. It is essential that lights be turned off when not needed, that showers are as brief as possible, etc. Other than the issue of cost, water-heaters are usually not as large in terms of capacity as in the US. Telephone charges are also much higher than in the US. You will usually be able to receive calls at home (although warn callers about time-zone differences, appropriate calling hours [including meal times], overly-long conversations), but it will be problematic to make calls and especially long-distance calls from the family’s home. If you will be using a calling plan that will not incur ANY charges for the family, you will need to explain the process and ask them to check for any unknown charges. If the calling service requires that you establish a local call, the family will be charged a fee for that call. You will be issued your own personal cell phones with a minimum balance that you can increase. Also, you will find various pre-paid calling cards available.

Before making any changes to the decoration of a room, consult with the family. In general, it is forbidden to make any holes, paint, or use adhesives that leave marks.

Families understand that students have a social life in Puebla. However, it is important to not disrupt the family’s sleep when returning late (and certainly no showers at 3 a.m.). Families must be notified in advance (or as soon as possible) if a student will be away overnight. All out-of-town overnight stays must be made known to the families and the Resident Director. There is no reimbursement for missed meals or lodgings.

## **7. TRAVEL TO AND WITHIN MEXICO**

Students will be reimbursed for the actual cost of a round trip ticket to and from Mexico up to \$500. Since students will be coming from a wide range of U.S. (and world) destinations, there will be no single departure city. Instead, students will meet at the Benito Juárez Airport in Mexico City (before 6 p.m. so as not to miss the “Welcome Dinner”) on the opening day of the program each semester and will be transported by shuttle to the program hotel. Students arriving on other days or by other means of transport will meet at the hotel itself. In order to recoup the expenses of travel (up to actual cost not to exceed \$500) students must present proof of ticket purchase (“proof” is normally understood as the following: the airline receipt that can only be issued at check-in the day of travel at the airport [in the case of an e-ticket] – you must ask for it, and actual boarding-pass stubs for all portions of travel affixed to an e-ticket itinerary that includes a price total.) The receipt must be presented to the RD within the first week of the program in Puebla. Students will be reimbursed in Mexico in pesos.

As part of the orientation in Mexico City, students will visit significant cultural and historic sites in the “Distrito Federal” and surrounding areas, such as the pyramids of Teotihuacán, the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the murals of Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco, and major museums. During the semester, students will participate in selected excursions intended to complement coursework (e.g., Cuetzalan, Michoacán, Veracruz and Guanajuato). Students should keep in mind that travel must not interfere with required course work and class attendance. Guests are normally not permitted on excursions.

The address for the hotel in Mexico City will be mailed to participants in early July.

Students who chose to travel independent of the group are encouraged to think about traveling with a friend or small group. Puebla is well-situated for travel to various parts of Mexico. Excellent bus service is available at affordable prices.

## **8. MEXICAN STUDENT VISA**

Students are required to obtain a Mexican student visa, normally from the Mexican consulate with jurisdiction over the state in which they permanently reside. Links to individual consular web pages can be found at [www.sre.gob.mx](http://www.sre.gob.mx). Consular web pages list required materials. Normally, an official letter of acceptance is required from a recognized Mexican institution. This letter is provided for students by the BUAP upon acceptance to the program. Individual school coordinators will assist students with securing the required visa.

The student visa is issued free of charge by the Mexican consulate when secured in the US. The student visa, once obtained, normally needs to be used within a few weeks (so don’t get your visa too early but do not wait until the last week since every consulate has different requirements). You should also know that once you enter Mexico you have one month to register your student visa at immigration in Puebla (the program will assist with this registration). Students arriving in Mexico early should know that they will have to pay a penalty if the visa is registered late.

Normally, it is possible for students—particularly citizens of the US and Canada—to convert a tourist visa into a student visa once in Mexico. However, this requires a complicated process (which includes the intervention of an attorney). Students who arrive without the student visa in hand and need to secure the student visa in Puebla will be assessed \$150 US to cover attorney fees, photographs and processing).

## **9. WHAT TO BRING**

For some, the thought of going to college with only two suitcases and a knapsack is borderline insanity. This is, however, the situation that will confront you very soon. So . . . what to take, and what to leave?

To make this decision there are two things that might be of help in deciding: (1) the styles and (2) the weather. There are no special norms in Mexico with respect to dress. Mexican students usually wear jeans or dress pants with a shirt or top. There is a stress on neatness, and the baggy athletic style will certainly point you out as an American. It's a good idea to pack a variety of shirts, skirts, dresses and slacks that you can mix and match. Both dress and athletic shoes are common, although (especially for women) there is a preference for comfortable leather shoes for classes and going out. There is an energetic night life in Puebla, and in those situations styles are a bit dressier. Women might want to bring one or two items for receptions and dressy events; men may find it useful to bring a coat and tie. Remember to bring underwear, pajamas, socks, stockings, swimsuit, etc., Leave your good jewelry at home.

What does need to be kept in mind is that Mexicans—regardless of social standing—tend to dress conservatively and that there is an emphasis given to neatness in appearance. It is very rare for a Mexican to wear shorts in a city and those wearing skimpy clothing should be prepared for public (and very vocal) recognition of their appearance. It is not unusual for those wearing what may be viewed in Mexico as overly revealing clothing to be denied access to churches and other institutional buildings.

Although Puebla (and a great part of the central area of Mexico) boasts a mild temperature year-round, and most afternoons from March to late October are in the 70s [more in the 60s from November to February], early mornings and late nights all year round can be quite chilly. A warm coat or heavy sweater will be welcome in cooler hours. Umbrellas and light raincoats are very useful. Given the mild climate, buildings don't usually have central heating or cooling; consequently, there can be times during the cooler hours that a sweater can come in handy indoors. Think about layering clothes so to adapt easily to changing temperatures.

Other things to bring: Depending on personal situations, students may wish to bring prescription drugs, vitamins, stomach medicines, a money belt, a backpack for travel, and a battery-operated alarm clock. Electrical voltage and plugs are the same as in the US (110V). A small album of photos of friends and family in the US is a nice way to stay connected, and a good way to share stories with your Mexican family and friends.

Students will take many pictures while in Mexico. It is always nice to have a good camera; however, bulky camera systems, i.e. lots of lenses, attachments, and large camera bags, may become more of a hassle than they're worth.

A CD player or ipod may be useful for those who enjoy music. A laptop computer can be very useful and give you greater independence and flexibility in paper-writing. Families are required to provide internet access but not a computer. There are ample computer facilities at the BUAP and extremely inexpensive cyber cafes in the downtown near the university.

There are some great trendy shops in Puebla, such as Zara and Mango, and quite a few large department stores in the malls (Puerto de Liverpool, Palacio de Hierro, Walmart, etc—not to mention quite a few street vendors) that can supply many needed items.

## **10. MONEY MATTERS**

The currency of Mexico is the “peso.” 100 “centavos” make up one “peso.” Coin fractions are 10, 20 and 50 “centavos.” Banknote fractions are 20, 50, 100, 200, 500 “pesos” (there are also notes for 1,000, 2,000, 5,000 and 10,000 “pesos”—but these are not commonly seen). One US dollar currently buys around 10-14 pesos. (Changing rates are available at <http://www.x-rates.com/>.)

Housing and meals are included in the program. Consequently, personal funds required will depend on individual lifestyle and travel plans. Costs are usually lower than in New York or Boston, but on a par with those in the Midwest and the Southwest. Whatever the amount of personal money involved, students should plan ahead for its management. Once in Mexico, students should not carry large amounts of cash.

Students should give serious consideration to handling their personal finances through traveler's checks, credit cards and ATMs. Even if a student is planning on accessing funds primarily through an ATM, some traveler's checks are a good idea in the event of any problems with an ATM card. Money can be sent via Western Union and similar agencies, but the fees for this service can be high.

Students will receive individual “reembolso” funds totaling \$550 US to assist with academic course materials, cultural activities, and transportation within the city of Puebla. Receipts will be required for payment. Specific category amounts and procedures for reimbursement will be detailed as part of the orientation program.

## **11. MEDICAL INSURANCE AND MEDICAL CARE**

Students are required to carry full medical insurance for the entire duration of the program and will be asked to submit proof of such coverage.

Students are responsible for their own medical expenses. They should carry a valid insurance identity card. Before leaving for Mexico, students should confirm to what extent they are covered for expenses while outside the US and what documents they need to turn in for reimbursement.

Medical and dental services are available at various facilities in Puebla. All medication is the responsibility of the students. Students will enjoy, however, a discount at the BUAP's “Alexander Fleming” pharmacies.

It is important that students understand that living in a foreign country may involve health risks greater than those encountered while living in one's own country. Students should exercise all reasonable care in guarding against such risks, and keep Program officials informed of any health problems that may emerge during their participation in the Program.

Useful information on medical emergencies abroad, including overseas insurance programs, is provided in the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs Brochure, Medical Information for Americans Traveling Abroad, available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page [<http://travel.state.gov>].

The most up-to-date information on vaccinations and other health precautions recommended for Mexico may be obtained via the Centers for Disease Control Internet home page [<http://www.cdc.gov>]. Once there, click on the region of most interest to you (Mexico is included—interestingly enough—not primarily in the area for North America, but in “Health Information for Travelers to Mexico and Central America”: currently, <http://www.cdc.gov/travel/camerica.htm>.) You will notice that on that site there is not a great deal of distinction given the individual differences in regions and that urban and rural regions are not always taken into consideration. Students are encouraged to follow the recommendations given there in terms of vaccines; at the same time, it is recommended that students discuss their individual health conditions, needs and any appropriate inoculations with their individual physicians who will be able to give more individualized advice.

Our experiences during the inaugural semester of the program suggest that the most common medical problems were gastro-intestinal in nature (primarily what is commonly called “traveler’s diarrhea”). The Centers for Disease Control devote a useful section of their site to the matter at:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/travelersdiarrhea\\_g.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/travelersdiarrhea_g.htm) One of the most important things to remember is that prevention can be your best tool. The CDC recommends in this respect:

“Travelers can minimize their risk for TD by practicing the following effective preventive measures:

- \* Avoid eating foods or drinking beverages purchased from street vendors or other establishments where unhygienic conditions are present
- \* Avoid eating raw or undercooked meat and seafood
- \* Avoid eating raw fruits (e.g., oranges, bananas, avocados) and vegetables unless the traveler peels them.

If handled properly well-cooked and packaged foods usually are safe. Tap water, ice, unpasteurized milk, and dairy products are associated with increased risk for TD. Safe beverages include bottled carbonated beverages, hot tea or coffee, beer, wine, and water boiled or appropriately treated with iodine or chlorine.” Also, as stated on the site: “CDC does not recommend antimicrobial drugs to prevent TD.”

**Carrying Medication:** The Physical Examination Report will be placed on file in the PMCSP office in Puebla and consulted if necessary. For those on permanent medication or with special medical concerns, it is advisable to bring copies of a prescription. Any medication carried across international borders should be in its original prescription bottle.

**In case of emergencies:** No matter what time of day or night, whether in Puebla or traveling, the Resident Director should be informed of any emergencies immediately.

## **12. TELEPHONE, MAIL and EMAIL**

When calling a land-line phone in Puebla from the US, it is necessary to dial 011 (international access code), 52 (code for Mexico), 222 (code for Puebla), plus a seven digit individual phone number.

Students will be entitled to a personal cell phone upon arrival in Mexico that will carry a modest pre-paid balance. This phone can be particularly useful for friends and family to contact participants in Mexico. Additional amounts can be added to the student balance as needed and as the student wishes. These pre-paid phones can accept calls made from outside Mexico and can make calls to anywhere in the world (though at expensive rates). Due to the significant difference in charges for calls made to cell phones in Mexico versus those made to landlines, once in Puebla families might find it less expensive to call students at their host homes. (See “Housing” section for further information on telephone etiquette at the home.) Once in Mexico, students will receive full information on Ladatel and other pre-paid calling cards that can save money on calls home. It may be helpful to keep in mind that calls from the US to Mexico are usually

significantly less expensive than calls from Mexico to the US. Families and friends in the US may want to investigate various options and programs for saving money in calls to Mexico.

Students will normally receive mail at their Mexican home address. Mail can be received at the PMCSP office, but experience has shown that the home address is a more reliable option. Receiving packages at any address can be complicated, however, due to international standards and requirements, added taxes, and unreliable delivery. Because of this, sending packages to students studying in Puebla is not recommended unless absolutely necessary.

### **13. RESPONSIBILITY ABROAD**

Although study abroad can be one of the most rewarding of educational and cultural experiences, participation in a study-abroad program involves risks not found at the home institution and for which PMCSP is not liable. These include risks in traveling to and within, and returning from, international locations; foreign political, legal, social, and economic conditions; different standards of design, safety, and maintenance of buildings, public places, and conveyances; and local medical and weather conditions. PMCSP does not act as an agent for, and cannot control the acts or omissions of, its host institution, the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, host families, transportation carriers, hotels or other providers of services involved with the program.

Although a faculty member of one of the PMCSP consortium colleges or other U.S. college or university is the resident director, the students in the Program are responsible for their personal safety at all times, especially when not in class and not on program-sponsored trips. Students in the program must assume an important personal obligation to conduct themselves in a manner compatible with the program and its reputation, with local laws and regulations, and with the regulations for student conduct at their home institution. It is expected that students in the program will act responsibly in a way that is not deemed reckless or inappropriate by the program and will agree to take the advice of the resident director regarding personal conduct.

It is the student's responsibility to become aware of all local laws. PMCSP cannot be made responsible for a student who breaks the law nor can it defend a student in court. The resident director retains the right to return a student to the U.S. if he/she feels that the student poses a threat to his/her own safety or that of the other participants, or if his/her behavior is in gross violation of program policies.

**It is also the student's responsibility to maintain him or herself aware of general travel conditions and of any specific travel advisories issued by the US Department of State. For Mexico, these can be found at <http://travel.state.gov/mexico.html> For a review of security issues related to travel visit For security issues related to travel, visit: <http://www.TSATravelTips.us>**

Staff members of the program may occasionally take pictures and video footage of students in the program for use in future promotional and orientation materials. If you would prefer to not be photographed or appear in any of these materials, please notify the Resident Director in writing.

### **14. ILLEGAL DRUGS**

While in a foreign country, a U.S. citizen is subject to that country's laws and regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from those in the U.S. and may not afford the protections available to the individual under U.S. law. Penalties for breaking the law can be more severe than in the U.S. for similar offenses. Persons violating Mexican law, even unknowingly, may be expelled, arrested or imprisoned. Penalties for possession, use, or trafficking of illegal drugs in Mexico are strict, and convicted offenders can expect jail sentences and fines.

### **15. EMERGENCY EVACUATION ACTION PLAN**

In the event of any local or national emergency that could represent a potential threat to the health or safety of PMCSP students, the following Evacuation Plan is to be implemented.

#### **Stage 1. Stand-fast – impending emergency, remain at site.**

When information is received by the Director indicating potential threat to the health or safety of students, he or she will assign “stand-fast” instructions to all students. Students will be contacted by the Resident Director of the program or a member of the office staff, who will notify them of the nature of the impending emergency, and provide them with instructions to remain in their usual lodgings as they await further news

and instructions. Students will be asked to keep their cell phones turned on and within easy access (all students are in possession of program-issued cell phones).

Upon notification of a “stand-fast” communication, students should make prudent preparations, including collecting all necessary identification and travel documents, return trip information (photocopy of itinerary and/or ticket), money and one emergency bag of essentials (see below). Students should make an inventory of other property that may have to be left behind. (The program staff has already in hand photocopies of student passports, including green visa booklets indicating date of entry.)

(The recommendation to students to move into Stages 2 and 3 of the plan shall be made, whenever possible, in close consultation with the Executive Director, and the chief administrative officers in charge of students abroad from each of the participating institutions [or his or her delegate]. Each participating institution should make the decision as to whether or not evacuation will be recommended or required for its students and communicate that decision to its PMCSP coordinator, the Executive Director, and the Resident Director. It will not be possible for the Resident Director to require a student to evacuate without specific orders to that effect from the student’s home institution.)

**Stage 2. Consolidation Phase – go to a pre-arranged assembly point, prepare for withdrawal.**

If the situation deteriorates, the Resident Director will notify students (presently 13 in number) to move to a pre-arranged consolidation point, namely the RD’s apartment at 3 Poniente No. 314, between 3 y 5 Sur, Colonia Centro, in Puebla. General meetings of the group will take place at the RD’s apartment which is equipped with one fixed phone line (plus three mobile phone numbers), a fax, a DSL line with computer hook-up for permanent internet access, and cable television service. Food and essential supplies are also available at the 3 Poniente location. The Resident Director will be in charge of communication updates with the US Embassy and with the appropriate officials at relevant consortium schools in collaboration with the RD Assistant at the time. Dr. Carlos Contreras, our BUAP liaison, will keep in touch with officials at the BUAP and the local government for any developments and notify the RD. Genoveva Cajica Flores, Administrative Assistant, will primarily be responsible for community contacts, food preparation and local errands, as well as reporting student absence.

**Stage 3. Evacuation Phase – leave as a group for safe haven.**

If an evacuation of American citizens from Mexico is imminent, or the threat escalates to the point where the program is cancelled by all of the participating consortium schools who have students in the program, students and non-Mexican staff will be expected, if possible, to travel as a group to the nearest operating international airport that would afford the best possible chances for securing transportation to the US or another safe haven outside of the country. In the case of Puebla, the nearest airport is the Puebla airport at Huehonzinlo (PBC), about 1 hour away by car; however, a far greater number of flights depart from Mexico City, about 2 hours away by car. In consultation with the Executive Director, the Resident Director will determine which of the two airports would afford the best opportunities for departure. If airline transportation is not available, the directors, in consultation with the US Embassy and individual college officials, will assess alternative means of transportation.

**Appendix**

Emergency Bag Essentials – suggested items to be prepared at the Stand-fast Stage.

1. Money, travelers checks, checkbooks, credit cards, etc.
2. Return trip information (photocopy of itinerary and/or ticket)
3. Passport, driver’s license, ID cards (together with photocopies of these)
4. Change of clothing
5. Personal hygiene products
6. A bottle of water (or two)
7. Prescription drugs and medical supplies
8. Flashlight/batteries
9. Address book
10. Radio

11. Keys
12. Easily portable dry foods (crackers, cookies, candy, etc.)

## **16. MEXICAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM**

Mexican university education is primarily organized according to “Facultades” (Faculties) that offer prescribed sequences of courses leading to the “licenciatura” (generally considered equivalent to a US BA or BS degree) which normally takes four or five years of full-time study to complete. Normally, the program of study is quite inflexible and there are few opportunities for elective courses. Students decide early on in their lives the “carrera” (course of instruction leading to the “licenciatura”) they will undertake. Depending on the institution, instruction can tend to be lecture format and in large classrooms with large enrollments. Attendance is normally mandatory; however, attendance may or may not be monitored. Graduates take on the title and style of their area of study—most often that of “licenciado” in the case of the humanities, law, and the social and natural sciences; “arquitecto” in the case of architecture; “ingeniero” in the case of engineering, etc. Those with a master’s degree are called “maestro” and those with a doctorate “doctor.” These titles are rigorously used in most all situations, both social and professional.

Mexican university students oftentimes take five “asignaturas” (courses) per semester. Due to the stringent curriculum by discipline, it is rare for a student to take courses at a “facultad” different from his or her own (with the exception of shared requirements, such as English language). Currently, most universities divide the academic year into two semesters (although full-year courses are still common). Normally, the Fall semester begins in early to mid August to very early September. For schools that begin before September, the first semester tends to end well before Christmas. Those schools that begin in September may have exams and coursework through January (with a two-week Christmas break). Spring semester begins in early to mid January in the case of those schools who have ended the term before Christmas and runs until mid May. Those who have not completed the first semester until January would not begin the Spring semester until early March and end in the summer. Classes are not held during Holy Week (the week before Easter Sunday) and the following week.

Tuition is extremely low for Mexican nationals to the point of being a negligible factor. Not having to work and being able to study, however, is a factor for many. Private institutions run into the thousands of dollars per year. Grading is on a ten-point scale with ten the highest grade possible. Six is usually the passing grade. Normally, full-time students take between 4 and 5 years to complete a “licenciatura.”

Entrance is by examination administered by the each individual university (particularly rigorous in the case of the BUAP where only about a third of applicants are accepted—certainly an acceptance rate on a par with our consortium institutions). In order to attend a university, students must have completed the “bachillerato” (literally, “bachelors”) that is awarded after completion of three years of “preparatoria” (preparatory school). Unlike other nations where the “bac” examination is decisive, the “bachillerato” is awarded simply upon successful completion of required coursework. Leading up to preparatory school, a student would have completed six years of primary education and three years of “secundaria” (high school).

Mexican students generally live at home, with relatives, or in individually-secured apartments and pensions. Mexican universities do not generally provide dormitories or other housing arrangements.

What may strike the visitor to Mexican academic communities is the inclusion of the adjective “autónoma” (autonomous) to public universities (e.g., Univ. Nacional Autónoma de México, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán, etc.). The title is zealously guarded and indicates that while funding is public (and collected by the state) the governance of the institution is to be free from state intervention.

## **17. IMPORTANT ADDRESSES**

### **In the US:**

#### **Executive Director, 2009-2010**

Dr. Patricia Gonzalez Gomes-Casseres  
Professor of Spanish, Smith College

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**Smith College**

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**Wheaton College**

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Dean for Off-Campus Study  
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**In Mexico**

Program for Mexican Culture and Society

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PMCSPP office telephone: (52) 222-229-5641

PMCSPP office fax: (52) 222-229-5642

(Office hours are normally 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., Central Standard Time, Monday through Friday)

**2009-2010 Resident Director**

Prof. Bernadette Houldsworth (Wheaton College)

Mail for Prof. Houldsworth should be sent to PMCSPP office.

Resident Director residence:

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72000 Puebla, Puebla

México

Cell phone in Mexico: (52) 222- 354-0345

Cell Phone USA (774) 249-2922

Home phone: (52) 222-242-4893

Email: [pgonzale@email.smith.edu](mailto:pgonzale@email.smith.edu)

BUAP Staff (all may be reached through central PMCSPP office line):

BUAP Director PMCSPP

Dr. Carlos Contreras Cruz

Email: [ccontrer@siu.buap.mx](mailto:ccontrer@siu.buap.mx)

Administrative Coordinator

As mentioned previously, students normally receive mail at host family addresses.

## 18. FURTHER READING

It would be difficult—and even misleading—to give an “overview” of all things related to Mexican culture, economy, government, politics, racial dimensions, and customs. Rather, students are encouraged to read as much as they can in preparation for their experience in Mexico. To further that goal, several suggestions for reading—both in print and on the Web—are listed below.

A thorough summary of Mexican history, geography, society, economy and government is found as part of the series “Country Studies” published by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress (written between 1986 and 1998): <http://countrystudies.us/mexico/>

For a thorough overview of education in Mexico see: <http://www.angelfire.com/ms/camm/sem.html>

Useful links to various areas of interest are found at both <http://www.mexonline.com/> and <http://www.mexconnect.com/>. A good review of history is found on the History Channel page: <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/mexico/>

In terms of the BUAP, be sure to spend some time reviewing: <http://www.buap.mx> for a good overview of offerings and cultural activities.

For the city of Puebla see <http://www.ixeh.net/travel/puebla/puebla.html> For the state of Puebla, see the official tourist site at: <http://www.turismopuebla.com.mx/> Needless to say, there are many pages dedicated to Mexican tourism in general, and Puebla in particular. Take some time surfing the web looking for subjects that may be of interest to you.

In terms of books, the following are useful starting points that are easily found in bookstores in the US:

For general tourism: John Noble, et al., *Lonely Planet Mexico*, most recent edition.

An historic overview: *Mexico: A History* (Norman OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985).

The most up-to-date analysis of current politics—and *essential* for understanding current political issues in Mexico: Julia Preston and Samuel Dillon, *Opening Mexico: The Making of a Democracy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

For a sensitive account of life in Mexico based on interviews with a cross-section of society: Patrick Oster, *The Mexicans: A Personal Portrait of a People* (1989; New York: Rayo [HarperCollins], 2002)