**CHIAPAS: INDIGENOUS LITERARY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS**

Summer Abroad/San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas  
August 3-September 1, 2017  
NAS 184 (4 units)  
NAS 202 (4 units)—graduate credit  
NAS 198: Group Study (4 units)  
NAS 298: Group Study (4 units)

**Instructor: Dr. Inés Hernández-Avila, Professor, Native American Studies**

*This syllabus is subject to possible (slight) revision.*

**COURSE GOALS**

To introduce students to contemporary indigenous social, cultural, and literary movements of Chiapas, with a focus on the Zapatistas and their strategies for creative transformation which are impacting Mayan-Zoque communities, Mexico, and the world. This course will consider the themes of identity, community, culture, language, history, story, and representation in the context of historical and contemporary political struggle. Guest speakers whose works we will be reading will visit the class, and we will visit some of the sites where they work, such as CELALI, the Centro Estatal de Literatura, Arte, y Lenguas Indígenas [State Center for Literature, Art, and Indigenous Languages], which is administered and staffed by Mayan intellectuals, and FOMMA, Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya [Strength of Mayan Women], the Mayan women’s theater troupe and women’s center. We will visit at least one of the Zapatista autonomous communities as a class, as well as at least two community cultural centers, and the sacred site of Palenque. Our field trips will further our understanding of the contemporary situation of indigenous peoples in Chiapas, as well as give us insights into the creative/critical processes of the activists, writers, and artists themselves.

**READINGS**

Course Reader  
*Chiapas Maya Awakening: Contemporary Poems and Short Stories*, ed. Nicolás Huet Bautista and Sean Sell

**COURSE FORMAT**

Class meets Monday-Thursday, from 10:30am-1:00pm. Sometimes we will have field trips during the week and these will be in place of class meetings. On Fridays, we will take short field trips to sites in San Cristobal or the immediate surroundings. The longer field trips (overnight stays) will take place on the first and third weekends of the course (Saturday and Sunday). The first weekend field trip will be to Las Grutas [the Caves], Amatenango del Valle, Cascada de El Chiflón (main site of overnight stay and site of Welcome Dinner), and the archeological site Chinkultik. The second weekend trip (on the third weekend) is to the archaelogical site of Palenque, with stops at Agua Azul and Miso-ha. Students will be able to swim at El Chiflón and at Agua Azul. There will possibly be one other weekend (day) field trip, to be determined as we get closer to the dates of the class. The last weekend is a “free” weekend.

Please note: the last time I taught the class, we were invited to paint a mural at one of the nearby cultural centers, in Zinacantán, which is a short taxi drive from San Cristobal; this project took up our last week and our last weekend. I will not plan for this, since each class is different, so we have to be open to possibilities.

During class meetings, the course structure is a circle. Each day will include class discussion of the assigned readings. We will also have guest speakers. Students should consider the interrelationship between the readings, the class discussions, the guest presentations, the field trips, and what you learn on your free time. Often students will work in groups to prepare their points for discussion leadership.
GRADING PERCENTAGES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Class Attendance 5%
Class Participation (group work; discussion leadership) 10%
Journal (one entry each Monday, 500-750 words) 20%
Midterm 15%
Portfolio 15%
Creative Project (15% Project; 5% Presentation) 20%
Final Exam Essay 15%

GRADING PERCENTAGES AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

JOURNAL: The journal entries are to be personal reflections, in particular about field trips that we take as a class. They are to be written in your voice. You may write creatively, or using stream-of-consciousness, or letter form (as in a letter to a family member, friend, or to someone like Emiliano Zapata, or the Zapatistas, or the women of FOMMA, or the Queen of Palenque). You may also write in reference to images you have taken or created on the trips, or connections you have made between seemingly disparate things.

PORTFOLIO: Your portfolio should bring together materials that you gather during the weeks we are there. Some of you might like to draw, sketch, paint, take photographs, write personal reflections, poetry, songs. While you are there you will be discovering inexpensive decals, buttons, and other materials that address the social issues that matter to Mayan and Zoque communities in Chiapas. You will also find lots to see (and perhaps buy) from street vendors, and at the many markets. The Portfolio should demonstrate what you have noticed, what has caught your eye, what matters to you about what you are learning and experiencing. You should come see me with your Portfolio in the second week of the course, and especially when you come to meet with me to talk about your ideas for your Creative Project. This portfolio will help you prepare for your Creative Project. Please note: the Portfolio is a way to bring together your thoughts, notes, materials, that you are collecting for the Independent Study aspect of this course.

CREATIVE PROJECT: The creative project is meant for you to manifest your own path to consciousness during the time we are here, your own path of the heart, your own path to truth(s). The project is meant for you to have a way to manifest your cara-y-corazon, your own face-and-heart (this term is from the ancient Nahuatl tradition). You must check in with me about your ideas for this project. Students will present their projects to the class during the third week of the course. In the past students have written poetry; one student did photographs and analysis of the graffiti on the walls of San Cristobal; another student did a paper maché figure of a Zapatista Caracol (snail), with small figures of Zapatistas living, working, and demonstrating on the snail, as if the snail was the mountains of Chiapas; one student took a tourist magazine that he found from San Cristobal and re-made it into a social movement magazine, by pasting in political decals, photos, etc.; another student wrote a short story about a young Mayan girl and her mother, focusing on the dangers of drinking too much Coke, and she read this to some of the street vendors she had befriended; another student did a photograph/writing album. There are many possibilities.

FINAL EXAM ESSAY: This essay will be 1000 words in length (4 pp.), and will require analysis and reflection about the course materials and the course experience.

TOPICAL OUTLINE:
1. How does the Zapatista movement frame everything you are learning from this course?
2. What relationship does the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenuous Peoples have with the San Andrés Accords?
3. What are the culture/philosophical underpinnings/foundations of the EZLN?
4. When the Zapatistas put down their arms in January, 1994, they took up the word as their weapon. What does this focus on language (and the articulation of this revolutionary movement) tell you about the significance and power of words, of language?
5. How is the indigenous literary movement in Chiapas related to the Zapatista movement?
6. How is the work of CELALI (Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte, y Literatura Indígena), the State Center for Indigenous Languages, Art, and Literature have to the San Andrés Accords?
7. How are sociopolitical, cultural, spiritual themes addressed in the literature of indigenous writers in Chiapas?
8. How is the theme of landbase, or geo-center, addressed in contemporary social, political, cultural, literary movements Chiapas?
9. How are indigenous writers in Chiapas contributing to language revitalization movements in their communities? Why is this important?
10. How are the Zapatistas and contemporary indigenous writers in Chiapas addressing issues of violence, both imposed (by the state and the military) and internal (such as domestic violence and gender discrimination)?
11. How are traditional cultural teachings represented in Zapatista literature and in the literature of indigenous writers of Chiapas?
12. How do indigenous writers of Chiapas represent their communities in their work and through their lives?
13. What are the cultural/historical/spiritual frameworks that influence indigenous writers and activists of Chiapas?
14. How do issues of gender, class, ethnicity and other factors of difference manifest in the literature?
15. How have the Zapatistas and contemporary indigenous writers of Chiapas been influenced by oral tradition and storytelling?