Re-conceptualizing the US Mexico Border:
Comparative and Global Perspectives.
Ethnic Studies 289

Roberto Alvarez
Spring 2007-08
SSB-223

Office Hours:  Weds. 2-3
Thurs. 2:3-3
858-534-1739;
oloberto@ucsd.edu

This course explores the construction of the US-Mexico Border and the communities, peoples, and identities that have evolved on both sides of the international demarcation. A principal objective here is to interrogate the standard notions and ideology of “the border” and explore new conceptualizations of the geo-political through a comparative and global lens. The understanding of the lives and social contexts of border people is paramount here, but the class will also query the novel advances of the nation-state and new forms of hierarchical power vested in the control of national boundaries. One of the primary comparisons is the southern Mexican border/frontier as well as national borders and boundaries in other countries. This is a graduate seminar that integrates ethnographic portrayals and explanation of border folk and communities, film (popular and documentary) and literary works. The foundational premise here is that the border has been constructed in academic and scholarly ways that need new challenges and interpretive designs. The course will include a sojourn across the U.S. Mexico Border.

Requirements for the Course:  This is a seminar in which reading and discussion are the basis of our exploration. All participants are expected to attend and be prepared each class period to discuss the assigned readings, projected films and your ongoing research.

Course Assignments:

1) Reading response papers. For each week’s assigned reading, all class participants will write a response paper not to exceed two pages (double-spaced with one inch margins). These assignments are to be handed in at the end of each class on the day that reading is scheduled for discussion. Late papers will not be accepted. The purpose here is to provoke discussion and questions that arise in readings and film screenings.

2) Reading Review: Each week one class participant will be responsible to review the assigned readings for that week. This will include a primary review of basic themes and a critique of the reading.

4) Term Paper and Presentation. Each student will be required to undertake a research project that will aid in identifying specific readings and other non-assigned material that adds to our exploration of the Border and Borderlands. You are responsible for a term paper of about 10-15 pages in length on a topic that is pertinent to new understandings of the US-Mexico border. In addition to the written paper, each student is required to make a 10-15 minute in class presentation.
Optional Field Trip to Mexicali and UABC
This course includes an excursion across the US-Mexico Border. We will schedule a trip to Mexicali to visit and explore the research of the Centro de Estudios Culturales- Museo de la Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Mexicali, Baja California. This trip will include a tour and lecture at the Centro and a tour of Mexicali.

Course Credit and Grading
Class attendance and discussion 10%
Reading response papers 35%
Research Paper 35%
Class Presentations 20% (this includes both the discussion and the formal research presentation).

Schedule of Classes

January 10 Introduction. Background, The Border and Geopolitical Demarcations

17 The US Mexico Border: Survey and early understandings
   film: Chulas Fronteras

24 The New Reality: NAFTA, Border Militarization and the undocumented
   Film: Maquilapolis

31 The New Reality II: The Glocal
   Reading: Sadowski-Smith 2001 TBA, Chavez 2007; Lugo 2000
   Film: Lone Star

February 7 Greater Mexico and the Transnational: re-imaginations
   Reading: Saldivar
   Film: excerpts from The Ballad of Gregorio Cortez
   Ballad of an Unsung Hero

14 The Other Border: Mexican South
   Reading: Hernandez-Castillo;
   Film: The Rising Sun

21 Nation, State and Identity: international frontiers
   Reading: Wilson and Donnan, 1999;
   Film: Border Bride

28 Nation, State and Identity: International frontiers
   Grison and Vila 2002; Heyman and Campbell 2004
   Film: TBA

March 6 Culture, Music and Identity
   Reading: Simonett 2001; Pena 1996
   Film: Narcotraficante

13 –In Class REPORTS
**Required Texts.** (Available at Groundworks Books)

Hernandez-Castillo, R. Aida
2001 *Histories and Stories from Chiapas*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Martinez, Oscar

Nivens, Joseph

Sadowski-Smith, Claudia, Ed.

Saldivar, Ramon

Simonett, Helena

Wilson, Thomas M. and Donnan, Hastings Eds.

**Required Articles** (available on PDF files from Dr. Alvarez)

Alvarez, Robert R.

Copland, David B.
2006 *Unconquered Territory: Narrating the Caledon Valley*. Department of Social Anthropology. P.B. 3, University of the Witwatersrand, Wits 2050, South Africa

Chavez, Leo

Flynn, Donna K.

Grimson, Alejandro and Pablo Vila

Heyman, Josiah McC. And Howard Campbell
Lugo, Alejandro  
2000 Theorizing Border Inspections. Cultural Dynamics 12(3) 353-373

Pena, Manuel  

**Recommended Texts**

Anzaldúa, Gloria  

Arriola, Daniel and James R. Curtis  

Cook, Scott  
1998 *Mexican Brick Culture in the Building of Texas, 1800s-1980s*. College Station: Texas A & M

Edberg, Mark  

Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia  
1983 For *We Are Sold, I and My People. Women and Industry in Mexico’s Frontier.*

Flores, Richard R.  

Klein, Alan M.  
1997 *Baseball on the Border: A Tale of Two Laredos*. Princeton University

Garcia, Mario T.  

Heyman, Josiah McC  

Limon, José  

1994 *Dancing with the Devil: Society and Cultural Poetics in Mexican-American South Texas*. Madison: University of Wisconsin

Martinez-Novo, Carmen  

Martinez, Oscar  

Ortiz, Victor  
2004 *El Paso: Local Frontiers at a Global Crossroads*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota

Pastor, Robert A. and Jorge G. Castaneda  
Peña Manuel
1985 *The Texas-Mexican Conjunto*. University of Texas: Austin

Peña, Devon Gerardo
1997 *The Terror of the Machine*. Austin: University of Texas CMAS

Prieto, Norma Iglesias
1997 *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora*. Austin: University of Texas.

Saldivar, José David
1997 *Border Matters: Remapping American Cultural Studies*. University of California: Berkeley

Salzinger, Leslie

Velez-Ibañez, Carlos

Ward, Peter

Velasco Ortiz, Laura

Vila, Pablo
2003 *Ethnography at the Border*. University of Minnesota Press.