

Looking Past the Fence and Into the City: UCSD Students Go Beyond Tijuana's Tourist Trek in Border-Crossing Class

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Photo Credit: *Jason Campa*

How does the border fence between San Diego and Tijuana shape the characteristics of the Latin American city? How is the Latin American city different from the city in the United States? These are the questions posed by a new course offered by Sixth College at UC San Diego, Cultural Art and Technology 124: Border Crossing.

The class is taught by Columbian artist Patricia Montoya. Students enrolled in the course are required to make frequent trips to Mexico, where they investigate the characteristics of Tijuana as it is represented by local artists in the areas of film, popular music and literature.

Students are expected to be self-guided and make a commitment to interacting with Tijuana residents. They also participate in lectures, discussions, labs and fieldwork.

There are 15 students in this fall quarter course; together they visited a shelter in Tijuana, took public transportation and explored the museums in the city. "I hope this class has an impact on the students," Montoya said. "It is about experience -- the students are poets and the class is designed for them to experience what the different aspects of the city offer for the creation of art and poetry."

Jenny Gottesman is a senior in Sixth College who said she loved the class.

"This class has totally changed my perceptions - there were things I saw in Tijuana that I wouldn't have seen as a tourist," Gottesman said. "Patricia takes us to places that she's been to and she thinks we should see through the eyes of an artist."

Photo Credit: *Jason Campa*

Gottesman said there are several benefits to taking the course. For example, it fosters bonding among the students because they get to travel together and it allows them to get a guided tour of Tijuana.

She said Montoya is a knowledgeable tour guide for the students.

"She knows the city very well and knows what she wanted us to see," Gottesman said.

Jason Campa said he enrolled because he is a Mexican-American and thought it would help him learn more about his culture.

"Overall, I feel it's been pretty active within and outside of the classroom," Campa said. "It has helped me understand political, cultural and societal influences that exist in Latin American cities, such as Tijuana in relation to San Diego and the border."

Although he had traveled to Tijuana several times before, he learned to view the city from a different perspective. In addition, he could communicate freely with the city's residents because he is fluent in Spanish.

"Youth in Tijuana appear to be more educated politically and active," he said.

He saw evidence of Tijuana's active youth in paintings by university art students.

Gottesman signed up for the class because it relates to her major, International Studies.

She said she hopes it is offered to all students because she can see it benefiting them in various ways, especially those majoring in International and Latin American Studies.

Gottesman added that Montoya shows students films on cities and has them read about how to walk around in urban areas and how to look at those areas so they are aware of what they are seeing.

"Before this class, I've never gotten beyond what I call the 'Red Brick Road' of TJ," she said. "What I mean by that is the main shopping district that the mayor wants all the tourists to see: The clean parts."

The course is designed to engage students primarily through experience; but students are required to complete course readings and watch topical films as well.

Students also work on different creative projects throughout the class. They might, for example, produce a video or sound piece or a series of interventions or journalistic essays utilizing the theories discussed in course and their experience of the city.

"The class is a break from classroom boundaries, your peers, and even from yourself," Campa said. "Because it allows you to engage in a foreign place."

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