



Archaeology of Migration in South Texas Brooks County, Texas

Course ID: ARCH 300AB

Online Meetings: June 9-June 11th

Field: June 14th - June 28th, 2026

Academic Credits: 6 Semester Credit Units

FIELD SCHOOL DIRECTOR

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LECTURER(S)

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OVERVIEW

The portion of the U.S./Mexico border that runs along South Texas is 1,254 miles long with a 100 mile zone of enforcement running north from the border and into the state. Many people have analyzed the border and border crossing through the lenses of multiple disciplines: Anthropology (forensic, cultural, archaeological), Sociology, History, Political Science, International Affairs, and more. This project uses ethnoarchaeological methods to study and generate understandings of clandestine migration in South Texas.

Students will be tasked with the recovery and documentation of objects that have been abandoned or left behind by migrants on Texas ranchland. During this program students will receive training in ethnographic interview practices, field-note taking, survey, object cataloging, and GIS data gathering. Through the application of ethnoarchaeological methods to the recovery of objects abandoned during migrations, this project will address the following questions: 1) How do material remains inform anthropological understandings of migration experience? 2) How do the objects left behind during migration inform regional perceptions of and attitudes toward clandestine migration?



This field school will introduce students to both traditional and cutting-edge methods, such as ethnographic note-taking and approaches to mapping including HGIS (Humanitarian Geographic Information Science). By mobilizing a suite of diverse methods, students will contribute to forward-facing research while taking care to develop a deep understanding of people and place through the objects they leave behind.

Because of South Texas' unique culture and history, students will have multiple built-in opportunities to engage in enrichment opportunities. The program will begin with visits to local historical sites and the local museum. These visits will be facilitated by guides who live in the area and are experts on the topics. Students will also have the opportunity to engage in community events during the weekend of the program; the events are schedule-dependent but examples include: the local rodeo, fire department annual brisket cookout, two-stepping and country dance practice, etc. During the weekend students will also participate in a Volunteer Day with a local non-profit organization.



Students will have the opportunity to choose the non-profit that aligns most with their interests and have a day of learning from and supporting organizational leadership.

Additionally, students will be taken on a day trip to visit the Forensic Anthropology Research Lab (FAR Lab) at the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) in Edinburg, Texas. During this visit students will meet with faculty and other students who live and work at the physical border and whose areas of interest are forensic anthropology. Following the visit students will be driven to several sites near the

border wall. These sites have been chosen due to their anthropological and historical importance to the area of Mission, Texas. At the closing of the program students will be tasked with providing informational presentations to community members in Falfurrias. This event will be held in their City Hall space and be open to the public. During this event students will have the opportunity to interact with locals whom they've met during their program experience, and meet new people interested in their project. This event will capture the importance of community informed research projects and a public anthropological approach to knowledge sharing.



ACADEMIC CREDIT UNITS & TRANSCRIPTS

Credit Units: Attending students will be awarded 6 semester credit units through our academic partner, Connecticut College. Connecticut College is a highly ranked liberal arts institution with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. Students will receive a letter grade for attending this field school (see assessment, below). Students are encouraged to discuss the transferability of credit units with faculty and registrars at their home institution prior to attending this field school.

Transcripts: An official copy of transcripts will be mailed to the permanent address listed by students on their online application. One more transcript may be sent to the student's home institution at no cost. Additional transcripts may be ordered at any time through the [National Student Clearinghouse](#).

PREREQUISITES

None

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The South Texas Border Field School will train students to use ethnoarchaeological methods to study the history of migration and the U.S./Mexico border in the American Southwest, specifically in the context of South Texas.

This program has five primary goals:

- 1) To provide students with hands-on training and practical working knowledge in the techniques of archaeology, which includes survey and mapping, material culture analysis, surface-level object recovery, field photography, and cataloguing methods.
- 2) To train students in some of the basic techniques of ethnographic data collection and interviews.
- 3) To provide students with practical working knowledge of how ethnoarchaeological methods can be used to answer anthropological research questions.

4) To familiarize students with the history of the border in South Texas, and a number of the anthropological and contemporary issues that are influenced by this history.

5) To have students develop Independent Research Projects over the course of the two weeks. In addition to hands-on field training, the students will also take field trips and meet with individuals involved with the history of migration and the borderlands. This will include trips to local historical and cultural sites in Brooks County, the Forensic Anthropology Lab (FAR Lab) at the University of Texas, Rio Grande Valley, and to two border wall sites in Mission, Texas.

The objectives of the field school are, broadly, centered on enabling students to understand how archaeology and ethnography are practiced in the field and how a combination of such methods can help answer nuanced anthropological questions.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

In an effort to build understanding of ethnoarchaeological practices and applicability to migration and border studies students will:

Demonstrate qualitative ethnographic data collection skills including:

- Generating ethnographic interview questions.
- Observing project interviews with local community members, project affiliates, and Instructors.
- Developing the documentarian and note-taking practices that inform anthropological projects.

Develop ethnoarchaeological data collection skills such as:

- Designing and conducting pedestrian surveys
- Recovering surface level objects that have been discarded during the migration journey.
- Cataloguing, documenting, and preliminary preservation of recovered objects.

Demonstrate foundational mapping skills in project and field settings such as:

- Understanding data needed to create GIS analysis and how GIS analysis has contributed to migration studies in South Texas.
- Gathering and documenting data necessary for GIS analysis.

DURABLE SKILLS

In an effort to both personal growth and growth as an aspiring social scientist, students will receive support and guidance in developing numerous widely applicable skills. Students will:

Practice Cultural sensitivity and awareness.

- Students will be immersed in the cultural and physical environment of South Texas. It is the hope of Instructors that this program be an opportunity for students to develop empathy, cultural sensitivity, and awareness.

Demonstrate Effective, responsible, respectful communication.

- Students will share challenging and meaningful experiences alongside local community members, project affiliates, Instructors, and their peers. It is the hope of the program that all project members engage in effective and respectful communication regardless of discussion topic and audience.

Cooperate and work in groups.

- Field programs and projects temporarily limit one's social circle. Students will live, study, share meals, and work with their peers, local community members, and the project staff.

Disagreements can, and will, arise, but it is the expectation of project leadership that conflict be resolved in a respectful manner.

DYNAMIC EXPECTATIONS

To ensure an enjoyable, inclusive, and engaging learning environment, students are expected to openly share their ideas and express their opinions in class; respect the opinions, values, and backgrounds of their classmates, instructors, and local community members; and honor the open environment of the program by respecting confidentiality when appropriate. Students are expected to do their best work, meet assignment deadlines, engage regularly in class discussion and activities, uphold the Community Expectations as created by the project team, and treat other members of the class and community with courtesy and respect.

ASSESSMENT

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

1. Preparation & Participation – 40%
2. Independent Research Projects – 30%
3. Field Journal – 15%
4. Community Event – 15%

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Course Readings and Materials

Supplemental readings/articles/videos/materials provided to students via links in the Syllabus (below). All materials will be accessible via a Shared Google Drive that students and Instructors will have access to leading up to and during the program.

Preparation & Participation

As a component of their preparation grade, students will be required to read, watch, and complete materials provided in the Pre-Field Preparation folder in the program's Shared Google Drive. This folder will include readings listed in the Syllabus, as well as a link to a documentary, a reading response assignment, and the Roommate Compatibility form. Students are expected to engage with and complete these activities prior to entering the field.

During the program students will be required to schedule two, one-on-one meetings with an Instructor. The first meeting needs to have been completed by June 19 and the second needs to have been completed by June 25th as a way to check in about their progress with their Independent Research Project, program experience, and well-being. More information will be provided about this later.

Independent Research Project

Students will be individually tasked with generating a project that reflects their personal work and experience in the program. Examples of Independent Research Project outcomes can include writing

pieces, data tables with analyses, photo-ethnographic pieces, videographic pieces, and others. These projects should reflect and engage with themes explored in the program including (but not limited to): South Texas history, border studies, regional migration, policy, ethnoarchaeology, ranch culture, etc.

Field Journal

Students will be required to maintain a notebook where they document their experiences, record observations, and pose questions that come up throughout the program. Field journals will be periodically reviewed to ensure active participation and critical engagement with the project and program themes. Students are expected to reflect thoughtfully on their experience in the program and their engagement with program activities and topics including ethnoarchaeological practices, materiality, qualitative data collection, border and migration studies, and engagement with South Texas communities. See Field Journal Rubric below.

Community Event

In groups of 3 or 4 students will create short PowerPoint presentations (~5 mins each) that will be presented at a community event. The event will be open to the public and held on the final Friday evening of the program. Students will be assigned to a Program group, Project group or a Findings group. The Program group will present about the program itself engaging with questions like: what is anthropology, what is IFR, what schools are students visiting from, etc. The Project group will present about the methods and goals of the program project. The Findings group will present findings from the project and discuss future field seasons and research questions. Community members will be invited to participate in a short Q&A with students and Instructors.

Calendar of Activities, Course Assignment Dates

All IFR field schools begin with an orientation that addresses local and program protocols concerning student behavior, appropriate attire, local practices and sensibilities that may be unfamiliar, potential fauna and flora hazards, IFR harassment and discrimination policies, and the student Code of Conduct.

Please note that the schedule outlined in this syllabus can be disrupted by unforeseen circumstances, including weather, revisions by local permitting agencies, or conditions onsite. While this schedule represents the intentions of the program, adaptability is an intrinsic part of all field research, and necessary alterations to the schedule may happen at any time.

Pre-Field Content:

Date	Schedule	Assignments/ Activities
6/9	Zoom 9:00-12:00PM CST	Welcome, virtual introductions, ice-breaker, course overview and expectations
6/10	Zoom 9:00-12:00PM CST	Ice-breaker, methods discussion, introduction to Independent Research Project, ethics and professionalism in the field

		Methods reading due: TBD
6/11	Zoom 9:00-12:00PM CST	Ice-breaker, discussion of <i>The Real Death Valley</i> film, introduction to South Texas Viewing due: Weather Channel. (2022) "The Real Death Valley" Film. https://features.weather.com/real-death-valley/

In-Field Content:

Day	Date	Location	Activities	Assignment Due
0	6/14	McAllen	Arrivals (students are responsible for their meals)	Reading due: All pre-field materials
1	6/15	Brooks County	Morning: Reception, visit Falfurrias and Heritage Museum Afternoon: Don Pedro Jaramillo Shrine Tour Evening: Free Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Downtown (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	Reading due: Ferguson, Wes. (2020) "How Curandero Don Pedro Jaramillo Became a South Texas Legend." <i>Texas Highways</i> . https://texashighways.com/culture/history/how-cu-arandero-don-pedro-jaramillo-became-south-texas-legend/
2	6/16	Brooks County	Morning: Site safety and collection training Afternoon: Visit Brooks County Sheriff's Office	Schedule 1:1 Meetings with Instructor (by 6/19)

			Evening: Free Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Downtown (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	
3	6/17	Brooks County	Morning: Using GIS in the field lesson Afternoon: Using QGIS in the field activity and site visit Evening: Group debrief and discussion Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	Readings due: Miranker, M., & Giordano, A. (2022). "Towards Humanitarian GIScience: Myriad Maps in an Applied Forensic Humanitarian Context." Retrieved from https://cartogis.org/autocarto/autocarto-2022/program/presentations Giordano, A., & Spradley, K. (2017) "Migrant deaths at the Arizona–Mexico border: Spatial trends of a mass disaster," Forensic Science International, Volume 280, Pages 200-212, ISSN 0379-0738, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2017.07.031.
4	6/18	Brooks County	Morning: Site visit and artifact collection Afternoon: Discussion of readings Evening: Organization of artifacts, group debrief Breakfast: La Copa (project)	● Have had 1:1 meeting with Instructor (by 6/19) Readings due: SELECTION FROM Diaz-Barriga, and Dorsey. (2020). <i>Fencing in Democracy: Border Walls, Necrocitizenship, and the Security State</i>. Durham: Duke University Press. Palamenghi, A., Cattaneo, C. (2024). "The response of the forensic anthropology scientific community

			Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	to migrant deaths: Where are we at and where do we stand?" <i>Forensic Science International</i>. Volume 364, 2024, 112235, ISSN 0379-0738, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2024.112235.
5	6/19	Edinburg	Morning: UTRGV FAR Lab (Forensic Anthropology Lab) visit (schedule dependent Day 5, 8, 9, 10 or 11) Afternoon: Border wall visit Evening: Free Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	Midterm Independent Research Project outline due
6	6/20	Brooks County	Weekend cultural activities (schedule dependent but examples include: local rodeo, fire department annual brisket cookout, two-stepping and country dance practice, etc.) Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Downtown (student meal ~20)	

			Dinner: Downtown (project)	
7	6/21	Brooks County	Volunteer day: students will spend the day volunteering with a local organization of their choice (Organization options include The South Texas Human Rights Center, The Falfurrias Heritage Museum, or a proposed organization approved by Instructors) Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Downtown (student meal ~20) Dinner: La Copa (project)	
8	6/22	Brooks County	Morning: Site visit and artifact collection Afternoon: Organization of artifacts, group debrief and discussion Evening: Free	

			Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	
9	6/23	Brooks County	Morning: Site visit and artifact collection Afternoon: Organization of artifacts, group debrief and discussion Evening: Interview activity and designing questions Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	Readings due: SELECTION FROM <i>Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork</i> (2007) by Allaine Cerwonka and Liisa H. Malkki SELECTION FROM <i>Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis</i> (1989) by Renato Rosaldo
10	6/24	Brooks County	Morning: Site visit and artifact collection Afternoon: Organization of artifacts, group debrief and discussion Evening: Interview activity and student observation	Have had 2nd 1:1 meeting with Instructor (by 6/25)

			Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	
11	6/25	Brooks County	Morning: Site visit and artifact collection Afternoon: Organization of artifacts, group debrief and discussion Evening: Free Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: La Copa (project)	
12	6/26	Brooks County	Morning: Independent Research Project presentations Afternoon: Community event Evening: Community event Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Downtown (student meal ~20)	• Independent Research Projects due • Community event

			Dinner: Downtown (project)	
13	6/27	Brooks County	Morning: Reflection and transference Afternoon: Site wrap up and artifact organization Evening: Free Breakfast: La Copa (project) Lunch: Packed lunch (project) Dinner: Downtown (project)	
14	6/28	McAllen	Departures (students are responsible for their meals)	Requested flight time after 11AM

REQUIRED READINGS

PDF files of all mandatory readings will be provided to enrolled students. Program participants are expected to be prepared to engage in discussions led by facilitators, all of whom will be looking for compelling evidence that students have read and thought about the assigned readings prior to the scheduled day on which they are first discussed.

Pre-field/ Preparation Materials:

Weather Channel. (2022) "The Real Death Valley" Film. <https://features.weather.com/real-death-valley/>

(SELECTION FROM) Valerio-Jiménez, Omar (2013). *River of Hope: Forging Identity and Nation in the Rio Grande Borderlands*. Durham: Duke University Press.

(SELECTION FROM) Leutert, S. and Rendon, M. (2023). "Clandestine Migration and Migrant Smuggling in South Texas". Report published by the Strauss Center for International Security and Law.

Ferguson, Wes. (2020) "How Curandero Don Pedro Jaramillo Became a South Texas Legend." *Texas Highways*.

<https://texashighways.com/culture/history/how-cuarandero-don-pedro-jaramillo-became-south-texas-le-gend/>

Ethnoarchaeology / Qualitative Data Collection Pre-field Preparation Reading:

Methods:

Bejarano et al., Chapter 1. *Decolonizing Ethnography: Undocumented Immigrants and New Directions in Social Science*. Duke University Press. (2019). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv11smmv5.6>

Baker, Victoria J. "Pitching a tent in the native village: Malinowski and participant observation." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 1ste Afl, 1987: 14-24

Materiality:

McGuire, Randall. (2020). "The Materiality and Heritage of Contemporary Forced Migration." *Annual Review of Anthropology*. 49. 10.1146/annurev-anthro-010220-074624.

De León J. (2013). Undocumented migration, use wear, and the materiality of habitual suffering in the Sonoran Desert. *J. Mater. Cult.* 18(4):321–45

Vogt, W. (2013), Crossing Mexico: Structural violence and the commodification of undocumented Central American migrants. *American Ethnologist*, 40: 764-780. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12053>

GIS Lecture:

Miranker, M., & Giordano, A. (2022). Towards Humanitarian GIScience: Myriad Maps in an Applied Forensic Humanitarian Context. Retrieved from <https://cartogis.org/autocarto/autocarto-2022/program/presentations>

Giordano, A., Spradley, K. (2017). "Migrant deaths at the Arizona–Mexico border: Spatial trends of a mass disaster," *Forensic Science International*, Volume 280, Pages 200-212, ISSN 0379-0738, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2017.07.031>.

UTRGV Visit:

Palamenghi, A., Cattaneo, C. (2024). "The response of the forensic anthropology scientific community to migrant deaths: Where are we at and where do we stand?" *Forensic Science International*. Volume 364, 2024, 112235, ISSN 0379-0738, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2024.112235>.

Wall Visit:

SELECTION FROM Diaz-Barriga, and Dorsey. (2020). *Fencing in Democracy: Border Walls, Necrocitizenship, and the Security State*. Durham: Duke University Press.

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Bemis, J., Molomot, L. (2020). *Missing in Brooks County*. [Film].

Leutert, S., Carver, D., Diaz, C., Lindbeck, J., Morales, J., Moseley, E. (2024). "Migrant Deaths and Search and Rescue Efforts in Brooks County". Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs *Policy Research Project Report*, Number 227.

Soto G. (2018). "Object afterlives and the burden of history: between "trash" and "heritage" in the steps of migrants." *Am. Anthropology*. 120(3):460–73.

Squire, V. (2014). "Desert 'trash': posthumanism, border struggles, and humanitarian politics." *Political Geography*. 39:11–21

Miranker, M., & Giordano, A. (2023). Map silences and chronic humanitarian crises: Spatial patterns of migrant mortality in South Texas, 2009–2020. *Forensic Science International*, 353. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forsciint.2023.111861>

Spradley, K., Hamilton, M., Alberto, G. (2012). Spatial Patterning of Vulture Scavenged Human Remains. *Forensic Science International*, 219 (2), 57–63.

Correa, J. G., & Simpson, J. M. (2022). “Building Walls, Destroying Borderlands : Repertoires of Militarization on the United States–Mexico Border.” *Nature and Culture*, 17(1), 1–25.

ACADEMIC EQUIPMENT LIST

Software:

- QGIS
 - Download prior to arrival via this link- <https://qgis.org/download/>

Technology:

- Laptop computer
- Cell-phone

Other:

- Field Journal / Notebook