*posted to website*

# Archaeology of Contemporary Migration in South Texas
# Brooks County, Texas

## Program Information

**PROGRAM SPECIFIC FIELD CONDITIONS**

**What are the average weather conditions during the time of the field school?**

During the month of June, Brooks County typically receives less than 3 inches of rain. Cloud cover and high levels of humidity are typical. June temperatures usually fluctuate between mid-70s(F) at night and in the early morning, and mid to high-90s(F) during the day and afternoons. Students should be prepared for hot, humid weather.

**Please describe the site(s) where the students will work.**

Students will be working at different sites during this project. The majority of outdoor activities (i.e. site collection visits, pedestrian survey, etc.) have been scheduled during mornings to minimize exposure to extreme heat. During these visits students will have intermittent access to shaded areas. Afternoon work will primarily take place either indoors or in shaded outdoor spaces depending on the group size and designated activity.

**Are there special features of the program site?**

This program has been designed to optimize student opportunities to visit significant cultural sites, experience South Texas scenery, have one-on-one interactions and feedback from expert program staff, and gain hands-on experience in mapping, object recovery, and ethnographic skills.

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 local experts on the topics. During the weekend students will have the opportunity to engage in community events and 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 experience a day of learning from and giving back to local organizations.

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 program faculty and other students who specialize in forensic anthropology. The FAR.Lab engages in the recovery and identification of migrant remains recovered at the U.S./Mexico border. Following the campus visit students will be driven to several sites near the border wall. These sites have been chosen due to their anthropological and historical importance.

At the closing of the program students will be tasked with providing informational presentations to local community members. This event will 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.

**Will there be other people onsite with the field school or working in the same area?**

Brooks County is an important location for migration and border studies in South Texas. It is possible that other researchers may be in the region at the same time. Our project group may also encounter ranch-hands, Border Patrol agents, and local law enforcement who have access to the ranch property.

**What does an average week look like ?**

The program schedule has been carefully planned to include a balance of lecture/discussion time, work/site visit time, and free/down time. Generally, we will start early in the morning to avoid working outside in the heat of the day. The course weekend includes structured activities, but students have the choice of the activity they'd like to participate in. Please refer to the Syllabus for a daily calendar of events.

**What are the options for students to access money?**

There are several ATMs in the city of Falfurrias. Local establishments accept credit and debit cards. Some community events or sales request payment via Venmo. Students should bring enough cash to cover the cost of designated meals (see Calendar of Activities in the Program Syllabus), and $20-$50 of emergency cash.

**ACTIVITY LEVEL & ACCESSIBILITY**

Excavation and object recovery during this program entails moderately strenuous physical activities - lifting, bending, kneeling, crouching, and carrying. Most of the walking related to the program will be on uneven terrain, including in deep sand. This project does not require excessive walking or hiking (x<2 miles/day).

**Please comment how accessible your site is for people with mobility challenges?**

Our data collection site is limitedly accessible for people with mobility challenges. The site is located in a desert environment with sandy and uneven terrain. With the exception of visits to the local town, the regional terrain is unpaved, uneven gravel. The program lodging accommodations are only accessible by two short steps and have narrow hallways that may be difficult for maneuvering some mobility devices.

We can also take an individualized approach to accessibility and see how/if accommodations can be possible. If you are interested in the program please reach out.

**PROGRAM COUNTRY & CULTURAL INFORMATION**

**What do you love about the country and area you work in? What do you think students will be most excited to discover?**



During this program students will discover the iconic scenery of South Texas where nightly sunsets paint the sky orange, and cool evenings make for excellent conditions to tell stories under the stars.

Originally inhabited by Indigenous groups like the Coahuiltecans, Lipan Apache, and Comanche, the history of the region runs deep. Students will meet community members whose families received land parcels through the system of *porciones* under Spanish rule, they will hear accounts of the Texas Rangers who patrolled the area and left a brutal and lasting legacy, and students will see for themselves the impact of contemporary immigration policy and border enforcement in the region.



Despite the sparseness of the desert environment, students will find the region to be teeming with unique ecological life. Wild boar roam the brushy terrain alongside bobcats and badgers. If students are lucky they may spot rare birds soaring overhead while taking an afternoon dip in the spring-fed lake near the program housing.

**How large is the community where students will be staying? Will students have opportunities to interact casually with local residents? Please describe.**

Students will have ample opportunity to interact or engage with the local community. While the ranch we will be staying on is geographically separate from the main city of Falfurrias, we will take frequent cultural and historical site visits to the city proper. Students will have the opportunity to meet with and potentially interview local community members from varied positions in the community: ranchers, law enforcement, first responders, educators, historians, elected officials, store managers and others.
The program will conclude with a Community Presentation that will facilitate an exchange of knowledge from the students to community members and vice versa. This event is designed to orchestrate community awareness and understanding of academic projects in the region, while also giving students the opportunity to dialogue with individuals from diverse backgrounds that may be significantly different than their own.

**Primary languages spoken by people in the area:**

The primary languages spoken by people in the area are English and Spanish.

**What are some things students may find surprising about the local culture?**

The local culture is heavily influenced by the region's proximity to Mexico. Students will hear both Spanish and English being spoken regularly and used in local signage. Community members regularly visit cities in northern Mexico to seek medical care, enjoy nightlife, or visit family. However, the region is also significantly influenced by *vaquero* and Western ranch culture. Cowboy hats and boots are standard wear for ranch-hands and local elected officials, and the nearby rodeo attracts ropers and riders from across the state of Texas. The predominant religion in the region is Catholicism and religious iconography is commonplace in public establishments.

**Are there cultural aspects that students should be aware of before they come, particularly behaviors that could be offensive or misinterpreted?**

Students and program staff are expected to act as guests to the region during the project. The program expectation is for students to behave and present themselves to the local community in a professional manner. Recommendations on dress have been made in the Packing List section. Long pants and t-shirts are recommended due to cultural and safety aspects of the region and desert environment.

**What cultural enrichment opportunities are students likely to have outside of the program?**
Because the length of the program is short, students will have minimal time to explore local areas outside of the program. However, students will be given the opportunity to attend cultural enrichment opportunities during the weekend of the program. These activities will depend on the schedule of local events but could include cookouts, rodeos, fundraisers, live music and other exciting experiences.

## ACCOMMODATIONS & MEALS

**Please describe student accommodations.**



Students and staff will be guests on a South Texas ranch. The lodging is similar to that of a hostel or shared dormitory. Depending on the size of the program, students will either be sharing their room with one or two other students. The lodging can be described as renovated mobile home units – each equipped with multiple bedrooms, a kitchen area, a common area, a laundry area, toilets, and showers. The units are equipped with A/C. Limited wifi is available on site.

There are barbeque pits available for use, as well as outdoor picnic tables for communal

dining. Students will have access to the nearby fresh-water spring-fed lake during free hours for swimming.

**Please describe how/how often students can do laundry.**

Students will be able to freely access laundry throughout the program. Combining loads in order to minimize water usage is encouraged.

**How are room assignments made? If rooms are assigned according to gender, how will you assign rooms for non-binary, trans and queer students?**

Students will be required to complete a roommate compatibility form prior to the program start date. This form will allow students to specify their personal preferences and comfortability in terms of potential room assignments. The instructors will make a concerted effort to be as accommodating of room assignments as possible.

**Are there options for single rooms?**

Single rooms are not available for this project season.

**Will the program provide meals? If not all meals, please specify which meals students will be responsible for, and what facilities are available for them to get groceries and prepare meals.**

The majority of the meals will be provided through the program and will be prepared collaboratively in the kitchens present at the lodging facility.

Students will be expected to prepare their own “sack lunches” for the days specified in the Syllabus. To do this, students will be supplied with breads, meats, vegetables, chips, nuts, and other ingredients for assembling lunches that accommodate dietary needs and allergies.

Breakfasts will take similar form with coffee and tea being available at the lodging site. Project staff will also supply fresh fruits, granola, and other ingredients that accommodate dietary needs and allergies.

Dinners will either be cooked in a communal kitchen, or purchased at nearby restaurants. Students will be responsible for some meals (see the Syllabus). These meals will take place during days when the group is working in the city area where many food options are available.

**Please describe typical meals that are offered by the program.**

In addition to the “sack lunches” and breakfasts described above, typical meals might include: barbeque (vegetable and meat options), tamales (vegetable and meat options), lasagna and make-your-own salad night, etc. These meals will be prepared, cooked, and served communally. Dietary needs and allergies will be accommodated.

Local restaurants have no known Kosher or Halal options. Dietary needs and preferences may be accommodated on a case-by-case basis. If you have questions or concerns please reach out.

**TRAVEL (TO AND DURING THE PROGRAM)**

**If students will fly, what airport should they fly into?**

Students should fly in and out of McAllen International Airport. Students will be met by program staff at the airport upon their arrival. Students will be driven to the McAllen International Airport at the end of the program.

**If there are other ways students can get to the program, please describe.**

If local, students may use ride-share or other means of getting to the airport. If you have questions or concerns please reach out.

**Where will you meet students? If not at a primary arrival point, like an airport, how should students get to the meeting point?**

Program staff will meet students at the McAllen International Airport. Students will provide their flight information and arrival time to staff prior to their travel. An exact group meeting point will be shared with students before the project start date.

**If the field site is not close to student accommodations, how will students get there? How long does it take?**

Students will be transported to the lodging site by staff in program vehicles. The drive is approximately one and one half hours.

**Are there any other aspects of the program, site, or location you want students to be aware of before they arrive?**

As anthropologists, our goal is to appreciate and study human diversity and experience. Given this, students may be exposed to cultural norms or emotional scenarios that are different from their own.

Exposure to emotional scenarios: Students will be directly engaging with, documenting, and thinking deeply about material items related to clandestine migration. Depending on the field site material items may include children's clothes, clothes with bodily fluid stains, wallets, jewelry, and other items that may hold emotional/ interpretive weight. It is normal for students to have emotional responses to these items, but students with personal or familial ties to migration experience are sometimes especially impacted.

The likelihood of encountering human remains or groups engaged in active migration is seriously low given recent remain recovery numbers and apprehensions in the area (Gonzalez 2025). In an effort to avoid such an event, the field sites will have been selected based on proximity to roads and other infrastructure that active migrant groups typically avoid. Regardless, protocols and best practices for encountering human remains or migrant groups will be discussed with students early in the program so that everyone is aware.

Exposure to cultural practices and norms:

It is inevitable that students will encounter cultural experiences and individuals with beliefs that differ from their own during this field school. Staff members have developed several practices to assist students in navigating exposure to cultural differences and norms:

- Students will be assigned readings prior to the start date of the program so that they have a foundational understanding of the region and how and what cultural norms have shaped the region.
- Every site visit day will also have a group facilitated discussion and debrief to collectively process the encounters and experiences of the day.
- Students will be required to schedule two one-on-one check-ins with staff during the program during which emotional well-being related to the program will be discussed.
- Finally, the program will conclude with *transference* which is a time specifically dedicated to reflecting on and processing the program, prompting students to consider how to incorporate their program experience in their work moving forward.

As students of Anthropology, they will be expected to treat other members of the class and local community with professional courtesy and respect despite potential differences.

**EQUIPMENT LIST**

Software:

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

Technology:

- Laptop computer
- Cell-phone with geo-location capabilities (i.e. Apple Maps; Google Maps, etc.)

Other:

- Field Journal / Notebook

**PACKING LIST**

Please read the “Calendar of Activities” in the Syllabus closely and pack shirts, pants, underwear, and pajamas accordingly. The following items are additionally required:

Footwear:

- Shower sandals / shoes to wear after swimming
- Comfortable shoes for day-to-day walking

Tops:

- Layer for cool nights

Bottoms:

- Two pairs jeans or long pants for visits to the local city

Excavation (site visits):

- Thick soled hiking boots

- Thick/ comfortable socks to wear with boots
- Lightweight/ breathable sun repellant layer(s) for site visits (preferably bright colors; example: link)
- Breathable outdoors/ hiking pants (Example: link)
- Sun hat (Example: link)
- Rainjacket or water-repellant poncho
- Snake gaiters (Example: link)
- Backpack to carry sack lunch and excavation supplies
- 32 oz. water bottle or Camelback (Example: link)
- Leather (or comparable) gloves (Example: link)

For student safety, yoga pants and shorts *WILL NOT* be allowed during excavation (site visits)

**Recommended Items**

- Sunscreen
- Chapstick with sunscreen
- Tick repellent (Example: link)
- Insect repellent
- Toiletry items for length of stay (ie. tampons, toothpaste, etc.)
- Prescription medication, enough for the full program duration
- Swimwear
- SPF Swim-Rashguard (Example: link)
- Bandana (Example: link)
- Quick-dry towel (Example: link)
- Extra glasses or contacts, if worn
- Personal journal or notebook
- **Camera

Students should *NOT BRING* firearms, weapons, substances illegal in the state of Texas (Texas Health and Safety Code), or unnecessary items of high value (i.e. jewelry, keepsakes, etc.).

Students may wear shorts and tank tops while at the lodging site, but it is *highly recommended* to wear t-shirts or sleeved tops and long pants during visits to the local city.

**Students are welcome to bring cameras but it is *recommended* they bring camera cases and other protective equipment due to environmental conditions.