

Cross-border collaboration at USMEX



Four USMEX Fellows detail how their fellowships are not only supporting multidisciplinary research projects but the vibrant community of scholars they've discovered at the center

By Rachel Hommel | GPS News



The [Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies](#) (USMEX) at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) boasts one of the largest residential fellowship programs in the U.S. and the numbers are impressive. More than 670 scholars

have come through the program since its founding, including 26 in the [2017-18 cohort](#).

New this year, and with an increased effort to promote cooperation between our two countries, the center and the US-Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange (COMEXUS) created a new chair to allow a fellow to study and teach topics related to Mexico. The center welcomed the first Fulbright-García Robles COMEXUS Mexico Studies Chair holder Alejandra Trejo-Nieto this winter.

Below we asked Trejo-Nieto and three others pen their fellowship experience and what led them to pursue a residency at the center.

Urban and regional economic development



“I am an economist and my research focuses on the economies of cities, metropolitan areas and regions. Whereas macroeconomists look at the economies of countries, I am interested in how the economies of cities like Washington, D.C., Mexico City or San Diego perform.

I came to the fellowship with an open mind, expecting to enhance my ability to look at the functioning of cities in a more global and international perspective. Looking closely at the urban life of different cities and countries allows you to become aware of the diversity of problems, opportunities and challenges and also the different ways citizens and governments face them. The Fulbright program will help me to undertake a small project where I propose to examine key questions with regard to public finances and how economic development takes place in metropolitan areas in Mexico.

It is well known that UC San Diego is one of the world’s leading public research universities. At USMEX, you get involved in different activities (academic and non-academic) and get to know a wonderful international community. I am glad to have the opportunity to participate in a multidisciplinary team of experts in their areas of research. The strong ties with GPS also enrich the opportunity to engage with an amazing community of scholars.

As the first Mexico Studies Chair holder, I believe the Fulbright program is a perfect way to help promote cooperation between educational institutions in the U.S. and other countries.”—[Alejandra Trejo-Nieto](#), professor, Center of Demographic, Urban and Environmental Studies, El Colegio de Mexico

Transborder collaboration and migration expertise



“My research focuses on how social movements and coalitions of citizens and unauthorized migrants push for more humane migration policies and practices. I was drawn to the center because of the unique opportunity it offered me to meet scholars specifically invested in the study of Mexico and the U.S. from a transborder perspective.

By being based in San Diego, I have been able to remain connected to a network of immigration lawyers and activists who are part of broader coalitions working with refugees and asylum seekers claiming rights on both sides of the border.

I feel inspired by the long tradition that has made the center a home for academics committed to social justice and critical scholarship. I have really enjoyed the support, collegiality and critical thinking of my fellow peers, who have been tremendously generous in reading my work, helping me prepare for the job market and overall collaborating with me in multiple ways.

I am working on a peer-reviewed journal article on the history of sanctuary practices in Mexico, as well as collaborating with another fellow in residence on a shorter policy-focused article on the policing of migration in Mexico. My residency at USMEX has provided me with ideal conditions to advance in my writing process.

The interdisciplinary nature of USMEX has allowed me to remain in conversation with larger problems and questions that affect Mexican society and politics today, enriching my understanding of the hemispheric migration circuit.”—[Martha Balaguera](#), Ph.D. candidate in political science, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Cross-disciplinary research and climate mitigation



“The center has created an environment of good faith. This translates as a willingness to share information and knowledge with a keen interest in connecting people to collaborate.

I’m working on Mexican farming systems. My goal is to identify bright spots - farming systems in Mexico that have proven to be resilient to climate change - in order to pinpoint the key success factors. Then analyze the factors underlying these climate resilient bright spots to identify pathways to designing more resilient agriculture in the future.

As a fellow, I’m surrounded by researchers and colleagues that work in Mexico but in different areas and projects. This wide array of projects and perspectives means that every time I talk about my project or attend a seminar, I find interesting and new approaches to the Mexican ‘reality’. I use that to improve and strengthen my own research.

I have loved the USMEX seminars, they are fantastic. I’ve tried to meet people outside of my research area. UC San Diego has faculty working in almost every area of science and the center is a great gateway to meet them.”—[**Charlotte Gonzalez-Abraham**](#), **postdoctoral fellow in ecology, Centro de Investigaciones Biologicas del Noroeste**

Exploring boundaries of belonging and Mexican solidarity



“While I am a multidisciplinary humanistic anthropologist, my scholarly and personal identity is also defined by a strong connection to Mexico and Latin America. USMEX has been a great fit for developing my research in a vibrant community of scholars.

My current research asks a set of questions related to long-time U.S. residents who migrated from Mexico as children and then as adults were incarcerated in U.S. prisons, designated 'criminal aliens' and expelled over the northern Mexico border. In Nogales and Puerto Peñasco, I conducted street ethnography and interviewed deported people and others in their homes, places of work and on the streets.

The people I work with mobilize U.S.-Latino identities to carve out narrow spaces of belonging, building solidarity with other deportees and those struggling to make a home in northern Mexico. In December 2017, I wrapped up 18.5 nonconsecutive months of community work in the Arizona-Sonora borderlands. I want to look into the ways citizenship, race, gender and criminalized identities configure multiple boundaries of belonging.

If I had to give advice to other future fellows, I would recommend seeking out unexpected opportunities to develop your projects around campus and in the broader community. Also, be intentional about the contribution you make to enrich life at the center, GPS and beyond.”—[Tobin Hansen](#), **Ph.D. candidate in anthropology, University of Oregon**

The responses included here have been shortened and edited lightly for clarity.