

Week One: Research and Travel Preparations

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Hi everyone!

My name is Rachel Butler, and I'm a rising Tulane senior studying Economics and Latin American Studies. This summer, I will be working as a research intern and collaborating with Professor Melanie Huska of Tulane's History Department on the history of sex education in Mexico. This interdisciplinary project examines sex

education in Mexico, beginning with the state's earliest attempts to implement sex education policies in the 1930s throughout the 20th century. More generally, the project analyzes the various means through which people access information on sex, sexuality and gender and the ways in which sex education has shaped societal attitudes towards gender roles and cultural identity in Mexico.

I am incredibly excited to have the opportunity to investigate a topic that combines many of my academic interests. Though the focus of this project is history, it also relates closely to economics. In Mexico, not everyone has equal access to health services, education, and other social services. This research has important implications for inequality, as more equitable access to sex education and family planning resources may help to alleviate poverty and create sustainable development. Due to the limited success and coverage of state-implemented policies, we will also examine popular culture (including comic books, telenovelas, and radio programming), which has served as important informal methods of sex education.

In the beginning of July, I depart for Mexico to begin field research. Until then, I am knee-deep in preliminary research and travel preparations. This week I began reading through secondary sources in order to gain a better understanding of the historical and political context of the period I am studying. I soon realized that sex education in Mexico is a topic that has largely been neglected in academic research. This presents a new and exciting, albeit slightly daunting, challenge.

In addition, there is an element of uncertainty involved in field research. I will spend five weeks in Mexico collecting materials from a number of state archives located in Mexico City, including the Ministry of Health and the SEP (Secretaría de Educación Pública). There is no way of knowing exactly what materials and sources we will find. In fact, the availability of sources can sometimes alter the direction in which a project takes. Once I have returned to the U.S., I will begin analyzing these materials and data I have collected from INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía) and the Bank of Mexico.

This internship is an incredible and exciting opportunity for me to challenge myself, learn, and immerse myself in a Spanish-speaking environment. Stay tuned for my next update from Mexico!