

English 3374 (CEL)
Mexican-American Folklore (Folklife)
Fall 2020
Hybrid Format (Meets F2F once a week)
Hudspeth Hall 300

Dr. M. E. Abarca
Office: Hudspeth 307
Office phone: 747-6249
Email: mabarca@utep.edu

Office Hours: TBA

I keep an open door policy during office hours. While I am usually in the office at other times, please keep in mind that I need such time/space to conduct research, prepare classes, grade students' work, and fulfill committee service responsibilities. In advance, I thank you for your understanding.

What are the stories, beliefs, and traditions that make and shape the culture of a community from the ground-up?

How are peoples' daily practices, beliefs and stories part of a history that defines a community?

Why do these questions matter?

COURSE GOALS

This (CEL)* course's aim is to familiarize you with the wealth of Mexican American folklore/folklife by exploring and answering these questions. We will learn about different aspects of folklore and will read how and why scholars, as well as non-academic scholars, write about their folklore. **Most importantly, this course is a "hands-on" one in that every one will become a folklorist: one who gathers, preserves, and shares people's cultural practices and knowledge that define a history from the ground-up. The**

ultimate goal is to “bring individual and family stories to the forefront” of history through the gathering of folklore in the form of oral history and to contextualize it within its traditional and contemporary cultural and historical significance.

Folklore/folklife is generally studied and categorized in these overlapping areas:

- 1) **The study of customs**, everyday practices, social and cultural life: this includes food, healing, dance, music, games, ceremonies, rites of passage such as birth, death, marriage, etc., and other forms of rituals; it also includes other forms of material culture such as architecture, dress designs, and numerous folk arts and crafts.
- 2) **The study of spirituality**, cosmology and belief systems: traditional religious practices, superstitions, mythologies, the sacred.
- 3) **The study of linguistic expression**: folktales, literary traditions (oral and written), *dichos*/sayings, proverbs.

*The “CEL” designation for this course stands for “Community Engagement & Leadership” and is part of a new certificate program in the College of Liberal Arts (full details to be provided in class). The purpose of this CEL course is to strengthen students’ understanding of their role in society as engaged citizens and to build the knowledge and competencies that will enable them to be socially responsible and participating community leaders. Please also note that course assignments and assessments are developed in line with UTEP’s “Edge Advantage” goals.

CLASS OBJECTIVES

With this understanding of folklore, students will

- Participate in gathering, preserving and sharing a person’s folklore through developing an oral history
- Expand the academic and public record of cultural knowledge that forms part of the everyday fabric, and thus, history of the El Paso-Cd. Juarez area.
- Study the methodology of an oral history framed within a folklore focus
- Appreciate how cultural practices simultaneously maintain and change traditions

As a result, students will gain experiences in

- Valuing the history-making process embedded in everyday practices, stories, and beliefs. (An EDGE objective: Social responsibility)

- Increase communication skills: oral (speaking and listening), digital, and written (An EDGE objective: Communication)
- Gain methodological skills to conduct an Oral History project that requires knowledge of subject, ethics and humility to recognize that the expert of a folklore practice is the person being interviewed, not the researcher. (An EDGE objective: Social responsibility)
- Improve team skills through the collaborative process of the oral history gathering, and by working with classmates for final course presentation. (An EDGE objective: Teamwork)
- Improve critical thinking skills as well as interpersonal ones. (An EDGE objective: Critical thinking)

CLASS PROJECTS (ASSESSMENTS):

In order to accomplish the goals and objectives stated above, there are **three** main projects throughout the semester.

1) Collecting, preserving, and sharing a person's folklore gathered by doing an oral story project. This project acts as the Final Research Project.

The goal here is to gather an oral story that focuses on an aspect of folklore/folklife from a member of El Paso-Cd. Juarez area. Students will be provided with different sources from which these stories will be gathered. One will be from connections I've established with organizations such as Bienvivir, for gathering cultural knowledge from elders in our community; Eric Boseman, founder of a non-profit organization for musicians in El Paso, for gathering music-based folklore; Roman and Adriana Wilcox, co-founders of the non-profit "Planty for the People," for food-based folklore; and through a network of contacts, I've created by being an engaged member of this community. Also, from individuals that students might know would be perfect to gather and learn from their folklore/folklife knowledge—this list can include members of their own family.

Six part project:

- a) Fill out necessary permission forms to gather and archive oral histories at The Institute of Oral History and The Borderlands Public History Lab at UTEP

- b) Proposal: identification of topic and a list of three possible people to interview. Address what you hope to learn and why this is an important subject for others to know about this person's knowledge.
- c) Formulation of questions for interview and schedule of confirmed appointment. You might have to do this more than once. Overall interview should be about an hour.
- d) Summary, index, transcription of the oral story
- e) Submitting digital recording of oral stories to The Institute of Oral History
- f) A short critical research analysis (6 to 7 double-spaced/12 point font pages) contextualizing one aspect of the folklore shared during the oral story within a larger cultural and historical frame.
- g) Public presentation of learning experience in conducting the oral story. Format and Time: TBA. (Due to each course specific dynamics and opportunities that might present themselves during a given semester, this part often changes, and it often involves a short video presentation.)

2) *El dia de los muertos*: physical or digital altar project. This project acts as the class Midterm.

As a class we will create an altar that will be either physically displayed in the English department, or at a specific community site depending on the theme we, as a class, select to give this altar. Or it could also be a digital altar that can be shared through different forms of social media. Through this project we will learn about the significance of traditions and rituals and how to use 21st –century technology to share them with a global community.

TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

- Abarca, Meredith. *Voices in the Kitchen: Views of Food and the World from Working Class Mexican and Mexican American Women*. College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2006. [ISBN 13:978-1-58544-531-8]
- *Chicana Traditions: Continuity and Change*. Norma E. Cantú and Olga Nájera Ramírez, Eds. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002. [ISBN 978-0-252-07012-9]
- Mulcahy, Joanne B. *Remedios: The Healing Life of Eva Castellanoz*. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 2010.

- Trotter II, Robert and Juan Antonio Chavira. *Curanderismo: Mexican American Folk Healing*. Second Edition. Athens, Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1997. [ISBN 0-8203-1962-7]
- West, John O. *Mexican-American Folklore*. Arkansas: August House Press, 1989. [ISBN 087483-059-1]
- Selection of a few articles on popular culture, folklore, oral history, and digital humanities
- A recording device (preferably digital)
- A photographic device (a camera, preferably digital)
- A video recording device

In most instances, through the IOH and my own resources, a recording device will be provided to students.

PROCEDURES FOR MEETING COURSE GOALS AND STUDENT EVALUATIONS:

1. **Reading assignments:** You are to complete reading assignments before coming to class on the date listed by the reading. You are responsible for keeping up with the reading schedule and any changes I announce during class or on Blackboard.
2. **Reading quizzes:** There will be a series of short quizzes throughout the semester. All quizzes are based on reading material. There are no make-up opportunities for missed quizzes. *However, the good news is that all points earned on the quizzes count as extra credit—adding up to a total of 20 points. All quizzes are unannounced.*
3. **E-Discussions:** In this course we also will be using Blackboard in a number of ways.

A) **Question of the Week:** Each of you is responsible for posting a question for the week's reading/class discussion by no later than **Sunday at 8:00 PM**. These questions need to be critical and open-ended; they must reveal your cultural and intellectual engagement with the course material. They also need to be "set up"; meaning, do not simply ask the question but explain why or what has led you to ask that particular question.

For this section we will be using a Class Blog that is set up by week. While you are not required to respond to questions posted by your classmates, you are welcome to do so, extending class discussions. **Total of (10) questions (10 X 5 = 50 points)**

B) By-Weekly Ethical Reflections: These follow the format of keeping a journal where you reflect on ideas introduced by the course material—readings, lectures, and aspects of the two central projects of the course. You may use questions from the “Question of the Week” to guide you in writing these. These will be between 300 to 350 words, submitted through a Blackboard journal link. **There are a total 7 (7 x 10 = 70)**

4. *Dia de los muertos* altar project

Identify and select an item to be placed on the class physical or virtual altar (as a class we'll select which one we do). Also, you'll have to document the story behind the item. **(30 points)**

6. Oral story (history) project

- A) Proposal **(10 points)**
- B) Questions **(20 points)**
- C) Conducting the oral story interview **(40 points)**
- D) Summary, Index, transcription **(30 points)**
- E) Archiving **(10 points)**
- F) Critical Reflective Research Blog **(40 points)**

7. Presentation (as class Final)

Format & Time: TBA **(30 points)**

POLICIES

Attendance is necessary for your success in this course; be here for each class session. I follow the university attendance policy as stated in the Undergraduate Catalog. Excessive absences will result in your being dropped from the course; “excessive” is defined in this course as more than **six** class meetings. You must attend the **FULL CLASS MEETING** to receive attendance credit. Therefore, you must be on time and stay until class is over.

Make-up work: All work is due as assigned. There are no “make-ups.” Once again, I follow the policy found in the Class Attendance section of the Undergraduate Catalog.

Plagiarism: This is against the law. I prefer to teach and not act as a police officer. I will report anyone suspected of committing such a crime to the Dean of Students. Just leave criminal behavior out of the course, please. This action only stifles your own intellectual, social, and personal growth.

Cell Phones & Text Messages: Turn your phones off and wait until after class to read/send messages. I promise I will do the same.

Disability Statement: If you have or believe you have a disability, you may wish to contact the Disabled Student Services Office (CASS) to show documentation of a

disability or to register for testing and services. Students who have been designated as disabled must reactivate their standing with the CASS yearly. If you feel that you may have a disability requiring accommodations and/or modifications, contact CASS at 915-747-5148. You also can visit the CASS website at www.utep.edu/dsso or the CASS office in Room 108, East Union Building.

Prerequisites/course credit: Junior and senior-level students with good academic standing; 3-credit course.

Time Management: The rule of thumb for time planning for a course is approximately 3 hours for every credit hour taken. This is a standard figure recommended across the board by American universities. So, for this course you should expect to spend 3 hours of class time + 9 hours of study and prep time = 12 hours per week.

GRADING:

Reading Quizzes (as extra credit up to 10 pts.)

1) E-Questions of the Week 10 x 5	50
2) By-Weekly Ethical Reflection	70
3) <i>Dia de los muertos</i> project	30
4) Oral Story/History Project (six parts)	150
Proposal (10 points)	
Questions (20 points)	
Conducting interview (40 points)	
Summary and Indexing (30 points)	
Archiving (10 points)	
Critical Reflective Research Essay (40 points)	
5) Final Presentation	30
6) Class attendance and participation _____	20
	Total 350

- 350 – 315 = A**
- 314 – 280 = B**
- 279 – 245 = C**
- 244 – 210 = D**

Below 209 = F

Note: You are responsible for keeping track of your own grades.

Please record here the names and phone numbers of two other students in class so that you will have someone to check with should you miss class.

1. _____
2. _____

Syllabus is subject to change at professor's discretion.