

University of Pennsylvania  
School of Design  
Department of Architecture

**Study Abroad Program in Mexico City  
Summer 2007**

**Mexico City: Beyond Megacityness**

May 14<sup>th</sup>-June 8<sup>th</sup> 2007

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Course Instructor: Jose Castillo

**Introduction:**

Mexico City is one of the most dynamic and complex cities in the world today. With close to 20 million inhabitants, remarkable urban and population growth still taking place, an active yet dual economy, a sophisticated cultural life, and a palimpsest of material histories centuries-old, it is quite a case study for architecture and urban planning today.

The summer program **UPenn@Mexico City** provides an introduction to the issues and conditions faced by a large city such as Mexico and relates them to contemporary practices and theories of architecture and urban design. This is done through a series of lectures, site visits, case studies as well as short but intense analytical/design exercises. In addition, the comprehensive program presents some of the dominant architectural, urban, historical and geographical narratives that shape the built environment in the city today.

As a new initiative of PennDesign, this program is conceived with a multi-year research agenda through which a resource base will be established for working in and on the city in future design studios. It is intended that the results of this research will be made public – both in Mexico City and at Penn – through means such as an exhibition and/or publication.

**Design and Research Agenda:**

The purpose of the UPenn@Mexico program is to open up the social, cultural, physical and technological matrix that create urban phenomena such as Mexico City. We are interested in presenting and uncovering the particularities of the megacity, its effects in procedural and formal aspects of architecture and urbanism and the exploration of its intrinsic potentialities for design. We are interested in finding not only what is unique or relevant to Mexico City today, but how these facts and issues build up knowledge about cities in general and the architectural practice in particular.

**Structure of the Program:**

The 4-week program will dwell on a broad range of interests organized around four short modules, one week in length each. Each module will be structured around one topic or geography in the city. The four topics are ***Architectures, Centralities, Peripheries, and Infrastructures***

While the first topic, architectures, should serve as an introduction to Mexico City, the remaining three will be explored through a three-tiered procedure:

Knowledge/Technique/Exercise

a) The **knowledge** section is comprised of lectures, readings and site visits. A minimum of two lectures per week will be given to the students, usually one by a local architect while the other one will be delivered by someone outside the profession, allowing a broader understanding of the forces shaping Mexico City. Some of the guest lecturers will come from art, real estate, business and government. In addition, a number of site visits will be made each week to distinct places and buildings in Mexico City.

b) We will reflect on, study and develop analytical **techniques** to approach, represent and act upon the city, taking a cue from historical and contemporary precedents. These techniques will follow from a variety of sources, quantitative and qualitative, digital to experiential. The techniques will range from charts, databases, photographs and videos, and will take the form of maps, archives or prospects.

c) Students will be required to prepare two short **exercises** during the course of the summer program that connect the specific knowledge of a site or condition with the analytical technique developed. These exercises will be a form of proto-design,

During each week, there will be pin-ups and group discussions in order to reflect and evolve on the exercises. At the end of the program each student will put together a short portfolio/report that gathers their work together.

### **Preliminary Schedule:**

#### **Saturday May 12<sup>th</sup>-Sunday 13<sup>th</sup>**

Arrival to Mexico City. Visits to the Anthropology Museum and the Museo del Templo Mayor are encouraged prior to the beginning of the program

#### **Week 1: Monday May 14<sup>th</sup> to Friday 18<sup>th</sup>**

##### **Architectures**

From the beginning of the program, we will immediately immerse ourselves into architectural production in Mexico City. We will start with a lecture on 500 years of architecture and urban production in the Valley of Mexico as a way to set the stage for the production of the last 100 years. For this week we will do a selected survey of the most notable Modern and Contemporary Architectures produced in Mexico City. We will focus along three lines:

##### **1. The modern agenda**

This will include visits to works by Mario Pani such as the The National University Campus and his multifamily housing units, Diego+Frida's Studios by Juan O'Gorman, and Barragan's work.

##### **2. Foreigners in Mexico: (Mies, Candela and Goeritz)**

Visits to the Bacardi plant by Mies Van der Rohe and Felix Candela, as well as El Eco museum by Goeritz. We will inquire into the relation between foreign modern practices (both by choice, or exile), and their local manifestations in the context of social and political transformation in Mexico.

##### **3. Recent Productions and Discourses**

We will visit some of the most notable and interesting buildings and projects developed recently in Mexico City. Work by Legorreta, Gonzalez de Leon, Ten Arquitectos, Kalach, amongst others will be visited. Visits to some of the architectural offices will also be a part of the program.

Lectures by Fernanda Canales and Alejandro Hernandez

#### **Week 2: Monday May 21<sup>st</sup> to Friday 25<sup>th</sup>**

### **Centralities**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> week will start by looking into one of the most complex environments in the city today; the historic center. We will look at the palimpsest of material, social and economic histories that have shaped an incredible urban form and are still being played out every day in a small but intense geographical area. In addition we will look at two other major issues relevant in the (re)development of central areas of the city today; redensification through housing and the creation of new public spaces.

**Knowledge:** Carlos Monsivais texts, Alejandra Moreno Toscano's lecture

**Techniques:** Situationists Derives, Francis Alys 'walks',

**Exercise:** Mapping the hidden in the Historic Center

### **Week 3: Monday May 28<sup>th</sup> to Friday June 1<sup>st</sup>**

#### **Peripheries**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> week we will look at the vast peripheries of Mexico City, both formal as in the case of Santa Fe, and informal as in the case of Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl. We will try to explain how this form of city making has become the norm rather than the exception, but will also try to make a case for more effective planning and architecture techniques that recognize this situation.

**Knowledge:** Praxis Journal article by JC, Enrique Martin-Moreno's lecture

**Technique:** The urbanist as archivist and cartographer | the architect as bricoleur

### **Week 4: Monday June 3<sup>rd</sup> to Friday June 8<sup>th</sup>**

#### **Infrastructures**

The final week we will look at one of the most problematic and yet defining aspects of the city; infrastructures. We will present some of the pathologies and abnormalities manifested in physical form that arise out of the relations between the city and water, waste, energy and transportation. We will inquire on how they inform and shape, the city and speculate on whether they can relate more to architectural and urban design decisions.

**Knowledge:** Lecture by Gabriel Quadri and Gustavo Lipkau

**Technique:** Data Maps/Flows/Spatial Economies and Ecologies

**Exercise:** The effects of alternative infrastructural solutions on city' peripheries.

### **Logistics:**

The program will be fully organized to facilitate the efficient use of time and resources while in Mexico City. Accommodation, travel and living information will be given out before the program starts. Accommodation for students during the length of the program will be arranged most probably in a hotel in downtown Mexico City.

Transportation for the different site visits will also be taken care of by the program organization. Other transportation requirements will be the responsibility of the students.

The Iberoamericana University will serve as our host institution, and we will be able to use their studio space including computing and model-making resources. The Iberoamericana University is located in Santa Fe, the western outskirts of Mexico City, 30 to 45 minutes from the downtown area.

Students are expected to bring a laptop computer to work on. A digital camera and/or video camera is strongly recommended. Additional material and printing solutions can be arranged while in Mexico City.

### **Estimated Budgets:**

A full budget estimate is still being prepared. Living expenses should be in the order of \$1500 USD

### **Travel Fellowships:**

Penn graduate students will be eligible to receive a travel fellowship from the Department in the order of \$1500 USD.

**Academic Credit and Evaluation Criteria:**

Student will register for ARCH 786 Study Abroad – Mexico City, which is worth 1 credit unit towards the degree requirement.

Students will have three additional weeks, after the end of the program on June 8, to submit their final work in the form of a small booklet (digital and hardcopy) that includes the exercises developed during their stay in Mexico, as well as a short essay on a subject of the student's choice. The evaluation will be made on the basis of the quality of the work presented in the booklet and participation during the program. More information on course requirements will be given later on.

**Selected Bibliography**

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### ***Some relevant internet sources on Mexico City***

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[www.edomexico.gob.mx](http://www.edomexico.gob.mx) State of Mexico's Government

[www.presidencia.gob.mx](http://www.presidencia.gob.mx) Federal Government

[www.inegi.gob.mx](http://www.inegi.gob.mx) Official Statistics from Federal Government

[www.mexico-travel.com](http://www.mexico-travel.com) Official Tourism Site

[www.cidac.org](http://www.cidac.org) Research Institution