

Border Immersion: A Note

MARCH 14, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))

Hello to all our friends, family, and participants looking into our blog!

My name is Mikaela Cole and I am the co-coordinator of the extremely successful 2016 Border Immersion. Over the week as we were experiencing the Border we did have our participants buddy up with a 'blog buddy' so it was possible for each person to have a chance to put something on the blog. However, due to technical difficulties coming from how the upload worked we lost some of our posts into the darkness of the internet. I have finally figured out the problem a day after our return and will be doing my best to try and update everything I can. Thankfully many of the participants saved their blog posts to the OneDrive set up by Border Blog master Kelsie McKee which has allowed me to recover a majority of them.

I apologize for this inconvenience and am personally sad at all the work that we have lost because of the tech issues. Hopefully this will not occur in the future. However, please feel free to share with family and friends the amazing work, photos, and stories we encountered along our immersion in Tucson, Arizona. They are worth sharing!

Thanks!



Group Photo From Landing in Tucson!

Border Immersion Day 1: All About Travel

MARCH 7, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))



We were all so excited to be up at 5:30am!



So close to flying out of Portland and hopefully to the sun!



Misplaced with nowhere to sit, the group claims our sport on the ground at the San Diego airport.



Noah is the best selfie taker! Everyone is so excited to finally be done with planes and airports

It is official! The 2016 spring Border Immersion is underway!

After months of preparation, 16 University of Portland students are ready to take on the sun in Tucson in order to learn about immigration policies and human rights. Multiple meetings and several seminars later where do these 16 beautiful people find themselves? Going to the airport at 5:30am.

The day started out bright and early as we made our way to the Portland Airport for the first leg of our journey to Tucson. A 7:00 flight to San Diego was the beginning for us and after a glum, rainy layover we found ourselves within our final destination. Luckily the sun was out but the weather was mild. There is even a chance of rain tomorrow and possibly later this week! Good news for Tucson, a little sad for Portlanders who dream of heat and sunshine.

We got to meet our delegation leader, Sabina Trejo, when she picked us up from the airport and took us to our home for the week: Borderlinks. The building is pretty standard and our dorm area is reminiscent of summer camp. The area is separated by cubicles and there are sets of bunk beds in each. The three boys get a room to themselves and the girls are mixed up in three different

rooms. It's pretty cozy but this new home is pretty awesome. They feed us really good, home cooked meals so that's awesome!

Our first day here has been mostly orientation, so jet lagged participants fought the urge to nap throughout our introduction to Borderlinks. Among other things we set rules for the group and better got to know the itinerary we have planned for this week. We went over how blogging this week would go, each day a set of "blog buddies" will take on the responsibility of telling the outside world all about our activities and adventures while we are here.

Since today is the first day, myself and Noah Webster – the two student coordinators of this trip are taking on the blog. Personally this trip has become like a dream come true. After so much work it's amazing that we are finally here! I am so excited for everything we are about to experience here in Tucson. Noah will probably add in his account later because now it is 10:00 and lights out!

Stay Tuned to hear more!

~ Mikaela Cole

Border Immersion: Day 2

MARCH 7, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))

Today was our first full day of learning about immigration. In the morning we met with Mo Goldman, an immigration lawyer. Goldman educated us on the immigration process and lawful immigration. His talk was eye opening as it revealed the extensiveness of the immigration process.



“All smiles after a much needed presentation on immigration law.”

We also did an immigration simulation in which we assessed different circumstances of emigrants wishing to apply for residency in the U.S. This gave us a greater understanding of the situations people face and the reasons in which they are or aren't allowed to enter. We also learned about NAFTA, or the North American Free Trade Agreement, and its effects on the Mexican culture and growing immigration numbers.



“Learning the in’s and out’s of corn farming and “free” trade”

In the afternoon, we met with Genevieve, a volunteer for the Missing Migrant Project (Coalicion de derechos humanos). Her talk explained the difficulties that missing, undocumented workers face while crossing the border. She helps families of missing migrants locate their loved ones that might have gotten lost in the desert. We learned that crossing is extremely dangerous and many people disappear during their journey. This is a harsh reality that many families face. But organizations like the Missing Migrant Project helps them reconnect with their families.



“New motto: humanitarian aid is never a crime.”

Overall, we built a foundation for further learning on immigration issues and struggles that immigrants face.

-Sarah and Mercedes

Border Immersion: Day 3

MARCH 8, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))

Today was definitely an early day. We met with minister John Fife, clad in cowboy boots and denim from head to toe. Minister Fife of the Sanctuary Movement spoke to us about some of the different organizations that he was involved with. He was an active participant of the sanctuary movement in the 1980's. As a response to this movement he helped create the group "Humane Borders" that put jugs of water in the desert for immigrants. In 2002, he formed a group called the "Samaritans" which was designed to be more proactive than the earlier group. With the Samaritans he would go out into the desert to search for people and provide them with humanitarian aid and medical assistance.



"We just met the rootinest' tootenist' sanctuary movement leader!"

Later we went to a federal court proceeding called Operation Streamline where non-violent immigrants are charged of felony and misdemeanors in groups of up to 70. We witnessed 51 people go through this proceeding in a little over an hour and we saw people being sentenced to 180 days for non-violent crimes. We felt like we wanted to help but we were powerless. One of the men mentioned that he was married, had three step children, and had tried to get legal residency but was denied. This opened our eyes to the realities of deportation.



“Operation Streamline, destination: courthouse”

After going to Operation Streamline we met with two federal public defense attorneys. They talked about what they do on a day to day basis and their opinions on Operation Streamline. It was interesting to talk to lawyers who especially don't like Streamline. They discussed the key function that they play in the judicial system and how they try to help their clients.



“We can all learn to defend those in need.”

After dinner, we got to meet Carolina, a Mexican transgender female who works with the organization “Mariposas Sin Fronteras”. She spoke to us about her experience as an immigrant trans female and the hardships and cruelty she went and continues to go through both in jail and when living her day to day life. She prepared us for tomorrow when we will go visit people in the detention centers.



“Meeting our first Mariposa.”

Border Immersion: Day 4

MARCH 14, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))

Today we drove an hour and a half to Florence to visit one of the many detention centers in Arizona. When we arrived we needed to register to visit with people staying at the detention center. All the security guards needed from us was a photo I.D., a couple of signatures, and we were ready to go but apparently a few years ago they also required your social security number! Half of the group was able to go in and meet with detained immigrants soon after we arrived, however the other half of the group needed to wait until the next group was ready. After a quick chat with the locals we found out that nearby was Casa Grande, a national monument and historic ruins site. At this historic wonder, we discovered an ancient – or nearly ancient – ball court that was once used by the Hohokam people! When this particular ball court was in its prime, it is believed that almost every event occurred in this area – from sports to ceremonies to trade. This unexcavated ball court was, to the untrained eye, nothing other than a shallow crater. However, this ball court held and still holds great importance to the locals in this area.



The “Ball Court”



After this quick excursion, the second group returned to the detention center to meet with a new group of detained immigrants. Our goal for this experience was to hear first-hand stories about what these people go through when they take this journey across the border as well as the emotional and physical tolls. Mariposas Sin Fronteras was the group that helped us get to meet with the people in the detention center. This group seeks to end systematic violence and abuse of LGBTQ people held in prison and immigration detention. The two-hour visit of back and forth translations from Spanish to English and English to Spanish was emotional – we laughed and held back tears as we listened to his heartbreaking, yet inspirational story. As we spoke with him, we couldn't help but notice his kind nature, beautiful smile, and optimism.

Today, like many of the other days of this immersion, was extremely intense, but we were lucky to spend time with some incredible people and enjoy some amazing traditional food. YAY FULL BELLIES!!!



The Beauty of Arizona

Peace,
Jess and Hannah

Border Immersion: Day 4 (2)

MARCH 14, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))

Today we drove to Nogales to see the Mexico/U.S. border. The visual of the wall is a powerful sight. The first image is a memorial for Jose Antonio. He was a young boy that was playing on the Mexican side of the border and was throwing rocks at the wall. Apparently the Border Patrol agents felt threatened enough to shoot the boy 10 times. The boy was at least 30ft. below the wall (this part of the border is up on a hill). We were told about this story before, but seeing the wall in person highlights how stretched their excuse for shooting the boy is. There were not rocks big enough in the area to cause damage. The cross in the second image is on the Mexican side of the border. It is down the road from Jose's memorial with a message of peace. We were able to take a panoramic image of the wall. It was surprising to see how the wall literally split a town. We saw kids at school, people walking on the side walk, people driving around. What is the difference between these two sides? The only difference I saw was that on the U.S. side there were white vans patrolling the wall as if it were a prison, and on the Mexican side there was no patrolling whatsoever. There have been many walls throughout history. It is sad to know that this horrible history has repeated itself in our country.



"In Memory of Jose Antonio"



“All They Want is Peace and Justice”



“The Dividing Wall”

Border Immersion: Day 5

MARCH 10, 2016 BY VOLSTU14 ([EDIT](#))

Thursday afternoon, we went to Arivaca to meet with a humanitarian group fighting against immigrant deaths in the desert, corrupt border control agents, as well as providing aid to those in need. Our speaker, Sophia, informed us about militia men in the Arivaca community threatening the lives of immigrants and residents. The humanitarian group has sparked a revolution, gaining national attention and even being addressed by the chief of border patrol at a conference in

Washington, D.C. Their work has helped keep many immigrants from dying from the intense conditions of the desert.

After meeting with the humanitarian group, we took a long drive to a migrant trail that has lost popularity due to the border patrol checkpoints outside of Arivaca. The trail was rocky, windy, grassy, and treacherous. We walked for about an hour and a half and the whole group was exhausted. The experience really helped us to gain perspective about the conditions of the immigrants' travels. It was a very surreal experience, especially when seeing the cans leftover from previous visits. It was hard for us to imagine what it would be like to do that trail for multiple days, without much food and water—especially when we were so worn out from just an hour and a half of walking.

The day was an informative one, allowing us to gain perspective and really put ourselves in the shoes of the immigrants who cross such dangerous paths just for a little freedom.



Can leftover from migrant traveler.



View from migrant trail.

This excursion has really tied together all the topics we have talked about over the week. With only two excursions left, the group has learned so much about immigration.



Travel to the US/Mexico Border on Spring Break to learn about immigration, the global economy, environmental and human rights issues. Visit social service agencies, local farmers, legislators, and Border Patrol to examine all sides of immigration issues. The trip may include service projects and home stays with working-class Mexican families.