

# **“Comparative Research of the Various Roots of Agrarian Struggle: Mexico and Colombia”**

## **Theory to Practice Grant Proposal: Spring 2017**

**Matthew Mehaffy**

### **Project Objectives**

Here I propose a Theory-to-Practice Grant to participate in a conference and research program titled “Economía Solidaria en Latinoamérica” that I was invited and accepted to attend in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, May 6-11, 2017. There are five objectives for this project. First, this project serves to give me more professional experience in academia through presenting at a new conference. Second, participation will help me connect and network with other academics within my field. Third, this experience will provide a new opportunity to put into practice my Latin American Studies and Spanish majors by being able to present my ongoing research in Spanish and learn about further themes within Latin American and Caribbean Studies from other academic professionals. Fourth, this project will provide me with crucial research material for my current independent research with Professor Bush that I have been working on during my entire senior year and will work on post-graduation in a job I have accepted in Mexico. Finally, this project will give me research material for another research project that I have been working on since studying abroad in Colombia in February 2016.

### **Description**

On May 4, I will have finished my only final exam of the semester, and thus will have completed all academic classwork. I hope to depart on May 5<sup>th</sup> to arrive to the Dominican Republic on the same day to have time to settle in for the conference and research program, which begins the next day.

On May 6, conference registration is open between 9 am to 11 am. I will have lunch afterwards, which is provided by the conference. Afterwards, all participants will go to their assigned rooms to present research with other academics and student researchers in their respective, assigned groups. Each assigned group has its own theme related to Latin American and Caribbean topics. I will be attending the

“Campesino y Solidaridad” group, which focuses more on solidarity economics and the importance of social movements to promote agrarian reform in Latin America. These presentations will occur from May 6-7. On May 8, the conference has “round-tables” where each group discusses their respective research and how it relates to the broader theme of their assigned group. For my group, the theme focuses on various topics related to agrarian social movements. In particular, it focuses on how agrarian social movements can continue to create and maintain alternative development practices that reduce land inequality and better the welfare of rural communities. We have a group discussion on how our research relates to this theme and about our experiences within this topic to explore these questions regarding agrarian social work and alternative development practices in rural communities. From May 9-10, the assigned groups will together watch, read, and analyze different research material related to the theme of our group, particularly those that have been recently released that provide new information about agrarian social movements and alternative development practices in Latin America. Some of the material may come from an international agrarian organization called Via Campesina, while other material will come from other important agrarian organizations. These final two days are a mix of group discussion regarding the material introduced, how it relates to our research and the broader theme of our group’s research theme, introducing us to new and important material. On May 11, I will take a morning flight to return to Ohio Wesleyan University.

Furthermore, this project aligns well with the goals of Ohio Wesleyan University and the OWU Connection Office by offering an opportunity to put into practice different theories I have learned over the last 2 years in studying social movements and alternative development. In particular, it allows me to study how alternative development works and the challenges of alternative development practices of different agrarian movements in Latin America. As a Latin American Studies major, I will be able to learn from other professionals while presenting my research and interacting in discussions regarding different research on the theory that alternative development from agrarian movements has often addressed some of the problems of rural communities, like land inequality or low wages in agricultural work.

## **Evaluation, Assessment, and Sharing**

I will evaluate my first, second, and third objectives by how well I am able to network with other professionals in my field, how well I present my Latin American-based research to them in Spanish (my majors), and also by how much I learn from their presentations and our subsequent group discussions and the research material that we are provided. I will evaluate my fourth and fifth objectives by comparing the material from my two research projects to the research that I review and analyze at the conference. I will also evaluate these objectives in terms of how helpful this experience is in improving knowledge of my research and becoming published in an academic journal, which I am in the process of doing.

I will share my experiences in a number of different ways. First, I have been working all year on a book with Professor Bush, and I plan on publishing it. Second, I am working with a research advisor that I met in Colombia and will publish research that relates to this project with his help. Therefore, I will share this experience and my research beyond OWU. Third, I will record my presentation and any research material that I gain from this experience and provide it to the Latin American Studies department at OWU as this project will help my LAS thesis. Fourth, I will also do a presentation on campus about different agrarian movements in Latin America to share my overall experience in this topic before I would leave for the Dominican Republic. By doing this, I will provide my Post-Completion On-Campus Activities report based on this presentation before I would leave for the Dominican Republic.

Importantly, I will make sure to share my experience and all important documentation of the project before I attend graduation on May 13<sup>th</sup>. I will provide most of the financial documentation of the trip, including the Project Report, before I would leave for the Dominican Republic, and I will provide any remaining receipts that may exist once I return on May 11<sup>th</sup>. From what I understand, most of the financial costs, except taxis, can be paid online before leaving to the Dominican Republic, which means I would provide all receipts before I leave for the Dominican Republic and will provide the remaining taxi receipts when I return on May 11<sup>th</sup>.

## **Personal Statement**

For several decades, numerous agrarian movements have risen in Latin America to represent the interests of agrarian organizations and farmers around the world that struggle to achieve agrarian reform, reduce land inequality, and achieve fair prices for their agricultural products. For example, one of the biggest agrarian movements of Latin America is the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil, which seeks to reduce land inequality. The Zapatista movement is one of the most notable ones in Mexico, which gained prominence in 1994 in the fight for agrarian rights and to reduce land inequality. More recently, Colombia's biggest agricultural movement, Dignidad Cafetera, protested in 2013 to increase wages for farmers and reduce poverty among the rural coffee producers.

Throughout my time at OWU, I have researched and learned from each of these social movements in their fight for agrarian reform. In my freshman year, I visited the Zapatista movement in Mexico to learn from their movement. Due to this influential experience, I have spent all my senior year conducting research on the Zapatista movement through 3 independent studies and a directed readings class. With the help of Professor Bush and Professor Dean, I have written 100 pages so far for my research regarding how the Zapatista movement reduces land inequality. I plan on publishing my research as a book next year as I have accepted a job offer to continue my research in Mexico with academics that specialize in the Zapatista movement. I also visited the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil during fall 2015 where I wrote research regarding their movement. Furthermore, I studied abroad in Colombia during spring 2016, and with the help of a local academic in Pereira, Colombia (Yolanda Agustina), I conducted research regarding the Cafetera Dignidad movement. I have written about 30 pages so far, and am still working with Dr. Agustina to expand on my research by comparing Cafetera Dignidad to the Zapatista movement, and with her help, will get my research published soon.

These research experiences have prepared me for this project in various ways, and will help my future as an academic as well. First, I plan on presenting research that compares and contrasts different

development methods between the Zapatistas and Cafetera Dignidad for my presentation. I believe I have the experience for doing this presentation as I have done field research on each movement and visited representatives of both movements. This year I have been conducting research on both, and have about 100 pages written so far on the Zapatista movement and 30 on Cafetera Dignidad. Second, I have previously presented on research that I have done in Spanish, and as Spanish major, I believe that I have enough preparation to present even more. Third, I am prepared for this project as I have already been invited and accepted to participate at this conference/research program in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic by Dr. Agustina. Fourth, given that I have already attended research programs and conferences before, I know from experience that they are very helpful as they allow for learning from other academics and access to research that I would not have otherwise been privy to. Previous experiences have been tremendously helpful in prior research I have done, and I have been successful in incorporating prior research programs into my research.

Finally, this opportunity will further my research in important ways. First, it will assist my studies on both the Zapatistas and on Cafetera Dignidad, allowing me access to research material on agrarian development practices and solidarity economics that I would not have otherwise had, while allowing me to learn from other professionals. It also allows other academics to critique my research, important given the goal of continual improvement. More importantly, this opportunity will provide me with important research material and learning experiences to conclude and publish my research on Cafetera Dignidad. It will also be helpful for my Zapatista research as it focuses on how they work in an international context, and this program will offer insight into how many agrarian movements, like the Zapatistas or Cafetera Dignidad, do so to achieve their goals. In doing so, this project will help my post-graduation goals by better preparing me for the research on the Zapatistas that I plan to do after I graduate with my next job. It will also give me more experience to network with other academics and gain experience in attending a conference. Overall, that will aid my goal in eventually becoming a professor of economic geography and working in academia. Therefore, this opportunity will help my immediate research projects while also preparing me for my career goals.

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**Theory to Practice Grant Budget: Spring 2017**

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<b>Budget</b>	
Airfare	Total: \$700
Hotel and Program Fees	Total: \$1800
Taxi to and from airport (\$40 x 2 taxi trips) =	Total: \$80
Taxi to and from airport (\$80 x 2 trips)	Total: \$160
<b>Total: 2,740</b>	

**Budget Explanation:**

For airfare, current costs indicate that a roundtrip flight between Columbus, Ohio and Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic would cost \$600 for May 5<sup>th</sup> to May 11<sup>th</sup>. Therefore, I estimated it to be about \$700 in case prices increase by the time that I would be able to purchase a ticket. Also, I have traveled to the Columbus airport by taxi before from Delaware, and it normally costs me \$80 or more. I included the cost of traveling to and from that airport. Finally, I have been told that it costs about \$40 to travel to and from the international airport in Santo Domingo.

For “Hotel and Program Fees,” I listed the price that I was given by Dr. Agustina who explained that there are two different options for attending this program. First, there is the \$1,800 fee that is the cost of attending the research program. It covers food, hotel, registration fees, and additional fees for participating in roundtable and research aspect of program beyond the presentations. On the other hand, there is an alternative option for those who wish to just attend the conference to present their research from May 6-7. This fee includes hotel and participation in the program for only the first two days to present research. It doesn’t include food nor does it allow participants who pay this fee to attend the roundtable group discussions, to interact with other academics in the field, nor the opportunity to look at and review new research in the topic that I would not have access to.

**Therefore, I am applying for both a TPG and a SIP grant. If the TPG is approved, I will use only the funds from this theory-to-practice grant to attend the full conference and research program. In this case, I would use the TPG funding, and not any of the SIP funding, to attend this**

conference and research program. On the other hand, if the SIP grant is approved and the TPG grant is not approved, I would attend this conference for just the first few days to participate in the conference and present my research. For this reason, I am applying for both a TPG and a SIP grant, and I have no intentions of using funds from both of the grants to attend this conference. If provided a TPG grant, I would only use those funds to participate in the full research program that I have been accepted into. If provided only the SIP grant, then I would just attend the first few days of the conference to present my research.