

U.S. – Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange

The U.S.-Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchange, COMEXUS, was founded on November 27, 1990, in Monterrey, Nuevo León, by means of a bilateral agreement, signed before the presidents of both countries.

The goal of the Commission is to promote mutual understanding between Mexico and the United States by means of educational and cultural exchanges. In order to achieve this goal, COMEXUS offers distinct scholarship programs for students, researchers, university professors, public school teachers and administrators, and professionals of both countries.

The Commission is a Mexican non-profit organization that receives its funding from both the U.S. and Mexican governments. Additionally, the Commission is managed by a Board of Directors composed of five Mexican citizens and five United States citizens. Within each group of five, two are public servants and the rest are representatives of the private sector and academia.

The United States government's flagship academic exchange program was established in 1946, thanks to the initiative of then Arkansas Senator, J. William Fulbright. Soon after, it became known worldwide as the "Fulbright Program." Under an agreement by the Board of Directors in January of 1992, all of the Commission's scholarship programs financed by both governments from this date on were to be henceforth named "Fulbright-García Robles," thus incorporating the surnames of Mexican Ambassador Emeritus and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Alfonso García Robles.

"Promoting bilateral understanding through educational exchange"

A. GRANT ADMINISTRATION INFORMATION

I. Grant Benefits

Fulbright-García Robles ETA grantees will receive the following basic package of grant benefits:

1. Special allowance for the purchase of research and educational materials to be donated to the host school.
2. International transportation
3. Welcome orientation

II. Your Mexican visa / Tarjeta de no inmigrante cooperante

During 2010, visa requirements with the Instituto Nacional de Migración (INM) changed. Your Mexican visa is now composed of two different items: visa authorization and the Tarjeta de No Inmigrante Cooperante. Before you arrive in Mexico, you will be required to pick up your visa authorization at a Mexican Consulate in the U.S. Once you arrive, you have 30 days to switch over to the Tarjeta de No Inmigrante Cooperante.

As part of your grant, SEP (Ministry of Education) is responsible for completing the paperwork required to obtain your visa authorization. This process should be completed on average one month before your scheduled departure to Mexico however, this is a complicated and time-sensitive process, so we ask for your patience and understanding from the outset.

How it works: In order to obtain your visa authorization at your nearest Mexican Consulate, you will need to present the following documents:

1. Valid Passport
2. Reference number of visa authorization (you will receive this number from your Program Officer when your visa authorization is ready to be picked up).

Once you have gathered the necessary documents requested above for your visa authorization, you will be required to contact the Mexican Consulate closest to you and determine if they have any additional requirements. This process (requirements, timing, etc.) may differ from consulate to consulate depending on its own rules and procedures. Unfortunately, the Commission has no control over these issues.

After contacting your local Mexican Consulate and securing the necessary documents, you will have to go to the Consulate in-person and present your documentation. The Mexican Consulate will then provide you with your visa authorization (this is in form of a sticker that goes in your passport). Please keep in mind that they may not issue you the visa the same day of your visit.

When you first arrive in Mexico (mostly on the plane) you will receive a FMM form, make sure you select the “Cooperante” option under the section “Actividad No lucrativa”.

III. Health Care and Insurance

As part of the Fulbright-García Robles award, the U.S. Department of State (Department) provides health and accident insurance, entitled the Accident and Sickness Program for Exchanges (ASPE), which is administered by Seven Corners, Inc. This insurance is not all-purpose health insurance; it is subject to specific limitations and grantees are covered only while in Mexico, and during direct travel time to and from the host country at the beginning and end of the grant period. This insurance plan requires policy holders to initially cover all medical expenses and then file a claim to the plan administrator for reimbursement.

This coverage is not intended to replace any insurance a participant may already have, instead its intent is to supplement existing coverage and to ensure that a participant's basic health is protected in a foreign country. Grantees are strongly urged to continue private health insurance and/or obtain additional insurance to cover pre-existing conditions, medical costs that exceed the Department's \$100,000 coverage, or to cover conditions specifically excluded from coverage. Grantees who drop their own medical coverage may find it difficult to re-enroll after they return to the United States. In the case of a medical emergency, grantees may also

request special emergency assistance from the Department for medical treatment not covered by the health and accident insurance policy.

For questions regarding your ASPE Health Benefit coverage, to process claim forms, print ID cards, download forms, find physicians and hospitals, update your contact information and more, please consult the Seven Corners-ASPE website, <http://usdos.sevencorners.com>.

We suggest visiting the web page of the National Center for Disease Control for their recommendations on any vaccinations or shots for Americans traveling to Mexico. <http://www.cdc.gov>

It is recommended that grantees obtain adequate insurance for personal property.

If you are taking specific long term medications, it is recommended to bring them with you, you may not find the exact same formulas in Mexico.

The Commission does not assume responsibility for any injury, accident, illness, loss of personal property, or any other contingency which may befall the grantee or accompanying dependents during, as a result of, the stay abroad, travel or other activities related to the grant.

IV. Money and Banking

All major U.S. credit cards are accepted in Mexico (American Express, Visa, Mastercard), however, gasoline credit cards are not accepted. Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are common in the capital, major cities and tourist areas and with more frequency in other small cities; the CIRRUS system being the most common. Prior to arrival in Mexico, you should obtain a list of corresponding Mexican banks on your ATM network. Most grantees have used ATM cards to withdraw Mexican pesos from their U.S. account, however, it is recommended that you check if a fee for this service will be charged. Although major credit cards are accepted in Mexico, the economy is still largely cash only and you should not expect to be able to pay with a credit or debit card everywhere you go.

In larger cities it is not necessary to bring large amounts of cash or traveler's checks from the U.S. since Mexican pesos can be obtained through ATM's and supermarkets using your U.S. card. However, dollars may be changed at banks or at "casas de cambio." Check the official exchange rate to be sure of getting a good one. Be aware that in some cases Traveler's checks are difficult and expensive to cash.

The following are major banks currently operating in Mexico:

Banamex: www.banamex.com

Santander: www.santander-serfin.com

HSBC: www.hsbc.com.mx

Bancomer: www.bancomer.com.mx

Banorte: www.banorte.com

Scotiabank: www.scotiabankinverlat.com.mx

V. Housing

The Commission is not responsible for finding housing for grantees. We will make suggestions and offer contacts and references from former grantees, but it is the grantee's responsibility to find housing.

Your first and most valuable source of information for these logistics will be your host contact at your institution in Mexico. The classified sections of major newspapers (Reforma, El Universal) are excellent sources for vacancy announcements or local newspapers your host will suggest.

We recommend the following websites for more information:

www.vecasas.com.mx – El Universal classifieds.

http://avisos.reforma.com/portada_bienes.asp - Reforma classifieds.

www.segundamano.com.mx - A major print and online publication.

<http://mexicocity.craigslist.org> - Mexico City page of *Craig's List*.

www.metroscubicos.com.mx – Real estate search engine.

www.lepetitjournal.com/mexico.html - An online French publication with roomshares.

www.compartodepa.com.mx – Website that specializes in finding roomshares.

Most rentals require a one or two months deposit and each month's rent paid in advance. Prior to signing a rental contract make certain that any and all required repairs have been made. Mexicans renting an apartment usually undergo a fairly complete credit check with references required and a cosigner ("fiador"). Fortunately, many Fulbrighters have found landlords who will accept a letter from the Commission attesting to the grantee's Fulbright status in lieu of credit references and a fiador. Nevertheless, COMEXUS **is not able** to act as a fiador for your rental agreement.

Furnishing a house or apartment can be expensive as there is not much of a tradition of selling used furniture and appliances in Mexico. For this reason, we suggest that it is best to rent a furnished apartment.

NB: The Commission is unable to assist grantees in finding schools for their dependents. Again, your host institution former US grantees are your best sources of information.

VI. Transportation

If you arrive in Mexico City by plane, be sure to take an official taxi cab from the airport, known in Spanish as a "sitio taxi." There are currently two sitio taxi companies operating inside the airport and one is considerably less expensive than the other. We recommend you use *Sitio 300*. You can pay for taxis inside the airport just outside of the baggage claim area.

Mexico City: Due to the security issues that accompany a city of roughly 22 million inhabitants, we urge you to take only sitio taxis by either calling ahead of time or going to a sitio taxi stand. Do not flag down cabs on the street and avoid the green VW Bug cabs that are most common on the streets. The sitio cabs are more expensive but much safer. Taxis Radio Union, A.C. – 5514-8124/8074/7709/7861; RET Taxi, S.A. de C.V. – 8590-6720/6721. Although these warnings apply specifically to Mexico City, these are general rules of thumb that should be used all over the country.

Public transportation is much more common than in the U.S and the national bus system is quite efficient. Local buses, otherwise known as “peseros,” are very common in major cities. The rate varies from \$3.00 to \$5.00 pesos in Mexico City and route destinations are usually displayed on the front windshield.

The Mexico City metro is modern, safe, and economic but it is often crowded, especially during the rush hours. Metro tickets cost \$3.00 pesos and route maps can be obtained within the station.

VII. Airline Tickets for Grantees

As part of your grant benefits, the grantee will receive roundtrip international airfare from your city of residence in the US to your host institution in Mexico for the dates covered by your grant. AED will contact you for more details on the logistic of airline tickets purchase.

Grantees are also given the option of driving to Mexico. In this case, please notify your main contact in AED and your Program Officer, if you intend to choose this option.

IX. Diplomatic Pouch Mail Service

The Diplomatic Pouch System is a postal service designated to U.S. Government employees in the Foreign Service. Due to a special arrangement with the U.S. Embassy in Mexico, Fulbright-García Robles Grantees have been granted access to this system. This does not mean that a grantee is a U.S. Government employee.

Fulbright-García Robles grantees may send books and educational materials to Mexico via the diplomatic pouch on a one-time (outbound ONLY) basis. Use of the diplomatic pouch is a privilege which, if abused, can be withdrawn by the U.S. Department of State and it is important that grantees adhere to the rules governing use of the pouch. Again, the pouch is a one-time, one-way privilege. The pouch may not be used for return shipments.

Please adhere closely to the instructions below. Boxes rejected by the Department of State because of improper size, contents, or packaging will be sent back to the return address on the box. There is no way to insure boxes or to trace items lost in the pouch mail system. Neither the Commission nor the Department of State are able to retrieve and repack overweight/oversized boxes and are not responsible for lost items.

Contents:

Packages must contain **only** books, magazines, notes or other similar educational materials required for the grantee's teaching or research program overseas. Computers and electronic equipment **may not be sent** by pouch. Packages **may not** contain personal effects of any kind. The Department of State may open packages suspected of containing prohibited items. If prohibited items are discovered, the box will be returned to the sender. Grantees should not enclose items that are irreplaceable. The Department of State assumes no responsibility for lost or damaged packages.

All Fulbright boxes are considered "official mail" and for that reason are subject to security scanning for contents and irradiation to guard against biological (i.e. anthrax) contamination. CDs, books and bound documents have apparently not been damaged by scanning. Photographs and single sheets of paper may be damaged, becoming yellowed and brittle. Slides or any thin plastic materials such as transparencies are destroyed.

Number, Weight, and Size Limitations for Boxes:

No more than **four boxes** per grantee may be sent through the pouch system.

Each box must not exceed **17x18x32** inches. Each box cannot exceed **50 pounds**.

Please note that this 50 lbs. weight limit is an increase from 45 lbs. in 2003 and 40 lbs. in 2002. US Post Offices maintain their own records on weight limitation to certain destinations, and it is possible that your local post office still has the 40 lbs. limit on file. If your boxes weigh between 40 and 50 lbs, we encourage you to check with your post office before you bring your

Shipping:

Packages can be shipped through the U.S. Postal Service. United Parcel Service, Federal Express, DHL or other small package carrier that will ship to P.O. Boxes may also be used. Grantees are responsible for paying domestic postage – postage from their home to Brownsville, TX. **Grantees should anticipate that packages will take 3 to 4 weeks to arrive at the Embassy or Consulates in Mexico.**

X. Taxes

Grantees will be responsible for determining their individual U.S income tax liability resulting from the grant.

The Fulbright grant is taxable income but to what extent is the responsibility of the grantee. **IRS Publication 970 “Tax Benefits for Education”** explains the tax on grants and fellowships including Fulbright. **IRS Publication 54 “Tax Guide for US Citizens and Resident Aliens Abroad”** provides additional information regarding treatment of Fellowships Abroad. You can get more information from the IRS webpage at www.irs.gov. We also suggest that you consult a tax advisor or the International Division of the IRS at 215-516-2000, then choose option 1 (foreign entity), then option 3 (for information) prior to travel abroad.

Please note that COMEXUS will not make any deductions from any payment made to a grantee. Therefore, you will **not** be issued any official tax document such as a W-2 or 1099. We recommend that you refer to your signed grant document for official tax purposes.

For tax advice within Mexico, the Commission suggests contacting the following tax expert in Mexico City who used to work in the tax division at the U.S. Embassy:

Mr. Leonard Purcell: Londres #75-402, Col. Juarez, Mexico, DF. 5525-1764 or 5525-1765

APPENDIX I
Directorio de Consulados

Importante: Favor de consultar la página electrónica de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores (S.R.E.) para revisar los datos actualizados de cada Consulado Mexicano.
<http://www.sre.gob.mx/>

www.sre.gob.mx/acerca/directorio/consulados/dirconsulados.htm

Albuquerque www.sre.gob.mx/albuquerque/	Miami www.sre.gob.mx/miami/
Atlanta www.sre.gob.mx/atlanta	Nogales www.sre.gob.mx/nogales
Austin www.sre.gob.mx/austin	Nueva York www.sre.gob.mx/nuevayork/
Boston www.sre.gob.mx/boston/	Omaha consulmexomaha@qwest.net
Brownsville www.sre.gob.mx/brownsville	Orlando http://portal.sre.gob.mx/orlando/
Chicago www.consulmexchicago.com/	Oxnard http://portal.sre.gob.mx/oxnard/
Dallas www.sre.gob.mx/dallas/	Phoenix http://portal.sre.gob.mx/phoenix
Denver http://portal.sre.gob.mx/Denver	Portland http://www.sre.gob.mx/portland
Detroit www.sre.gob.mx/detroit	Presidio http://portal.sre.gob.mx/presidio
Douglas http://portal.sre.gob.mx/douglas/	Raleigh www.sre.gob.mx/raleigh/
Del Rio consulmexdel.titular@wcsonline.net	Sacramento http://portal.sre.gob.mx/sacramento
El Paso www.sre.gob.mx/elpaso	San Antonio http://www.consulmexsat.org/
Eagle Pass consulmxeag@sbcglobal.net	San Bernardino www.sre.gob.mx/sanbernardino/
Filadelfia www.sre.gob.mx/filadelfia	San Diego http://portal.sre.gob.mx/sandiego/
Fresno http://portal.sre.gob.mx/fresno/	Seattle http://portal.sre.gob.mx/seattle
Houston www.sre.gob.mx/houston	San Francisco www.sre.gob.mx/sanfrancisco
Indianápolis http://portal.sre.gob.mx/indianapolis/	San José www.consulmexsj.com
Kansas City http://portal.sre.gob.mx/kansascity	San Juan consulmx@prtc.net
Laredo www.sre.gob.mx/laredo	Santa Anna www.sre.gob.mx/santaana/

Las Vegas http://portal.sre.gob.mx/lasvegas/	Salt Lake City www.sre.gob.mx/saltlake/
Little Rock http://portal.sre.gob.mx/littlerock	Saint Paul http://portal.sre.gob.mx/saintpaul/
Los Angeles www.sre.gob.mx/losangeles/	Toronto www.consulmex.com
McAllen www.sre.gob.mx/mcallen/	Tucson http://portal.sre.gob.mx/tucson/