Bigel Application

**Migrant Miles: Volunteer Voices on the U.S.-Mexico Border**

Is this request for (please select one): an internship, field school, original research, or other?

**An original research project**

Please explain the anthropological significance of your research project/internship/field school:

**The significance of this project is to understand the views and actions of the volunteer communities on the U.S.-Mexico borderlands in Tucson, Arizona. The narratives of volunteers working with U.S.-Mexico migrants has not been extensively studied, so this study would provide new insight into this form of activism and their continuous work with migrant communities. The influx of migration into the United States impacts local communities on the border every single day. The experiences that volunteers supply will allow for an important understanding about this impact on both the local communities and for the migrants themselves. The anthropological research that has taken place in the Sonoran Desert has involved several fields within the discipline of anthropology. Jason De Leon’s research focuses on various aspects of culture on the border as well as archaeological artifacts found in the desert which highlight the evolution of migration throughout the years. This project focuses on cultural and linguistic patterns, and uses anthropological field methods including: field notes, semi-structured interviews, photography and participant observation to better observe and understand these patterns.**

<personal information removed>  
  
\*If your application differs from the committee’s suggested criteria (see FAQ), please explain why you are still a qualified applicant (e.g., GPA is improving, have taken an archaeology methods course instead, etc):

**I have not taken a basic methods course but I have taken a Selected Issues in Anthropology course: Language, Power and the Expression of Identity ANTH 414, in which I planned and carried out an ethnographic study on campus working with various field methods (participant observation, qualitative interviewing, and field notes) and IRB Human Subjects approval.**

**GRANT PROPOSAL**

*Migrant Miles: Volunteer Voices on the U.S.-Mexico Border*

***Abstract:***

I am applying for Bigel Grant funding in order to participate in The Migrant Trail. It is an annual event hosted by a non-profit organization in Tucson, Arizona, that allows volunteers to participate and shed light on the harsh conditions and treatment of migrants making their way into our country. The 75-mile walk between Sásabe, Sonora, (Mexico) and Tucson Arizona will include a wide range of volunteers engaging in activism together over a week-long period. Volunteers span across the country from various ethnic, cultural, spiritual, and racial groups in order to speak up for this cause that they believe in. I will interview volunteers during The Migrant Trail and at various other volunteer organizations whose mission is to help migrants and improve safety.

***Background/Inspiration:***

One of the foremost topics on the news and in politics today is the border wall and the national “problem” of illegal immigration from Mexico and South America into the United States. This topic is largely argued and there are many opinions that surround this constant debate. However, being over 2,000 miles away from the Mexico-Arizona border we, the community of Montclair, lack an understanding of what is really taking place on the border and how people in these communities feel and act. I am applying for the Bigel Grant to fund my participation in The Migrant Trail in Tucson, Arizona. This funding will provide me with the opportunity to go to Arizona and get a first-hand look into the work of volunteers working to provide safety to migrants on the border. Volunteer discourse will give me insight into how people eager to support migrant causes discuss the issues on the border and policies implemented to deter migration into Tucson.

My inspiration for this project is based off the work of anthropologist Jason De Leon (2015) and his work within the Sonoran Desert of Arizona. De Leon began his work in and around Mexico and Arizona documenting the stories of migrants making the walk through the desert to hopefully make it to the States. The Sonoran Desert is a unique spot for migration into the United States. The use of Prevention Through Deterrence is the main method of stopping immigration through this section of the Sonoran Desert. The use of Prevention Through Deterrence (PTD) was implemented by the U.S. government in 1994. This deterrent method utilizes the unrelenting and harsh conditions of the desert terrain to stop or even kill migrants who attempt the hard journey. This natural land has been turned into a weapon by the U.S government and continues to be the source of thousands of deaths and disappearances each year. With such an inhumane and cruel tool used to stop migration, my plan is to discuss these issues and topics with people who work in the name of human rights.

***Purpose:***

The purpose of this research is to understand the thoughts and attitudes of the communities that live and volunteer near and around the Mexico-Arizona border. I hope to determine the local ideologies and narratives that surround migrant-born non-citizens. I also plan on determining the impact migration has on communities and volunteer lives on a day to day basis. Volunteers work tirelessly to provide clothing, food, water, shelter, and safety to the migrants risking everything to make their way into our country. The volunteer perspective would be an amazing and intricate view on all that takes place on the border. There is relatively little anthropological research published based on the perspective of volunteers in this field of activism. Adding to the research on volunteer perspectives on the border would help to better understand the work that they are doing and why they do this work. Participation in The Migrant Trail (described below) would provide an immersive experience into the hardships of migration into Arizona for thousands of migrants. It would allow me the opportunity to immerse myself within a strong group of volunteer and advocate individuals participating for the rights of migrants and to shed light on their stories.

***Research plan/Methods:***

My research plan consists of two main parts:

1) Participation in The Migrant Trail, a guided 75-mile walk between Sásabe, Sonora (Mexico) and Tucson, Arizona by volunteers and activists.

2) Short-term volunteering and semi-structured interviews with volunteers at local migrant advocacy organizations, such as Humane Borders. This is an organization that provides services to migrants in the desert such as providing water stations in areas of the Sonoran Desert and educating the community on issues of immigration and human rights.

**Methods:**

-      Informal and semi-structured interviews with Migrant Trail participants and volunteers in Tucson

-      Participant observation during the 75-mile Migrant Trail and during short-term volunteering

-      Daily field notes to recount my observations, feelings, and experiences as they take place during and after the walk and during follow-up volunteering in Tucson

-     Photos during The Migrant Trail and volunteering, as well as around Tucson, to document volunteer work and the conditions throughout the desert and within the Tucson community.

After I return to New Jersey, I will review all the data I have collected, including audio recorded interviews, field notes, and pictures. I will organize and review these materials. Once that is done I will begin transcription of audio recorded interviews and find patterns in speech and use of terminology. To choose the most significant parts of this research I intend to hone in on linguistic aspects in volunteer speech. I hope to establish patterns and draw some overlapping themes within their interviews.

**The Walk and Work:**

The Migrant Trail (https://azmigranttrail.com) was established in 2004 by a group of advocates who had been discussing the walk as a form of protest and public awareness to the topic of illegal immigration. Their mission coincided the work of the advocacy organization No Mas Muertes (No More Deaths) which is another group located out of Tucson looking to provide an understanding of the harsh realities of migrations into the United States. Their goal is simple: they continue to walk annually to express their solidarity for the migrants and to advocate for positive change in the borderland communities. Their mission has continued for fifteen years and will continue until real change comes to the communities on the border.

Participating in the walk will give me a full, in-depth experience and opportunity to build rapport with other volunteers. My plan prior to the walk is to do research of different narratives that have come from the border such as the ones contained in the two books *The Devil’s Highway* and *Border Patrol Nation.* These two books will give me important additional background information in understanding the border, migration, and volunteers' discourses.

Finally, Tucson is a pivotal location for this research because it is a hub for migrant activism in the state of Arizona. Many advocacy groups such as No Mas Muertes and Humane Borders are located in the city of Tucson. It is the location where The Migrant Trail will end after the seven day walk through the Sonoran Desert.

**Timeline: Summer 2019**

22 May: arrive in Tucson

26 May: orientation for The Migrant Trail

27 May - 2 June: duration of The Migrant Trail

3 - 7 June: interviews with volunteers from various organizations whose goal is to help migrants

8 June: depart for NJ

***Goal/Outcome:***

My overall goal in this research is to bring back my findings of border attitudes, language, and advocacy back to Montclair to educate the people of MSU about the struggles on the border. My participation will allow me to bring back a sample of the struggles immigrants face as well as those fighting for migrant rights. As citizens of this country we are involved in this issue whether we like it or not. Living so far from the border, Montclair might not feel a connection to this cause, which is why I believe this research is so important. With my findings, I hope to connect each one of us to this huge human rights issue taking place in our very own country. One of my other goals is to give a voice to volunteers who make it their mission to help migrants and allow them to tell their stories. To shed light on this topic from the point of view of people who fight for change might inspire people to take more action to help this human rights problem.

**Reference**

De León, Jason. & Wells, Michael. (2015). *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the*

*Migrant Trail*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

**Budget**

**Travel/Transportation: $700**

Flight: $550 - Round trip flight from New Jersey to Arizona

Bus/Uber: $150

**Room/Board: $600**

Meals and Incidental Costs ($40/day for 9 days outside of Migrant Trail) = $350

Room (Most of the time outside the walk I will be staying with a friend. The lodging cost will be used for days she is unable to house me.) = $250

**Books:  $15.25**

Reference books for background information on migrant experience

*The Devil’s Highway $11.00*; *Border Patrol Nation $14.25*

**Supplies: $400**

Digital audio recorder- $50 (I won’t be allowed to use my cell phone while on The Migrant Trail.)

Sleeping bag- $30

Hiking boots- $100

Hiking socks- $30

Batteries (AAA, AA) - $20

Light backpack- $20

Other supplies (sunscreen, hat, notebook etc.)- $150

**Migrant Trail Application Fee: $200**

The fee for the week-long walk.

**Passport: $150**

Passport application fee (to go into Mexico at the beginning of the walk)

**Total = $2,065.25**