Hmong Language & Culture in Thailand

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: ALL 3773
Number of Credits: 4
Language of Instruction: English
Contact Hours: TBD
Instructor: Bee Vang-Moua
   bvang@umn.edu

Course Description

Hmong in the United States trace their story of diaspora directly to Thailand as the most recent country of immigration. While many traced their refugee stories to Thailand, before immigrating to the United States and other countries, Thailand is also a country where many Hmong settled. Thailand is a country of many Hmong stories, intertwined with settlement, immigration, social economic struggles and successes, language development, and more. This study abroad course will focus on learning, observing and exploring the Hmong diaspora through language and culture in Thailand. The course will explore the historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts of Hmong settlement and immigration in Thailand as well as comparison to contexts of Hmong in the United States.

Course Objectives

During this course, students will become better global citizens and:

1. Learn about the differences between the Hmong diaspora in Thailand and the Hmong American experience. Students will learn and engage in analytical thinking and application of experiences from interactions with the local community as distinct from information learned through readings.
2. Will be immersed in Hmong terminology, both formal and informal contexts, in everyday social settings, and through music, art, and songs. Students will have hands-on opportunities to learn from the locals and present the values of their learning to peers and locals.

3. Learn in depth about Hmong history and cultural experiences in regions of Thailand, pertaining to language, culture, social structures, and more. Students will understand how historical experiences greatly affect communities and those around them. Students will apply these experiences to their own experiences back home and learn how they, themselves, are agents of history.

4. Discover the similarities and differences among social norms, clothing, art, and customs of the Hmong in Thailand compared to those in the US. Students will learn how to respect and appreciate the differences and similarities between communities abroad and back home. Students will apply what is learned abroad on site visits, homestays, and excursions to their own home experiences and learn about how to help maintain communities through differences and shared experiences.

5. Apply learned Hmong to connect with students and teachers abroad. Students will have opportunities to be fully immersed in Hmong language and culture. Many of these experiences will be in cultural art exchanges of songs, dance, speeches, and more. Students will engage in exchanges with locals abroad to build community and a sense of kinship through language, arts, and shared experiences.

**Methodology**

**Liberal Education: Global Perspectives**

This course will also fulfill the liberal education guidelines in order to give students a holistic approach to learning. In particular, this class satisfies the Global Perspectives theme by teaching students to analyze the “why” and “how” of the Hmong diaspora journey and how it affects communities beyond just Hmong in Thailand. Designated themes of ethnic communities and tourism, the environment and sustainable living, as well as refugee communities and host countries will be discussed in depth. Students will be journaling daily on reflections and learning, as well as work on the final project presentation topics.

This four-credit course is offered every other summer and taught by a regular faculty member in the Hmong Program.

In addition, students will develop the following habits of mind:

1. **Thinking ethically about important challenges facing our society and world:**

The *Hmong Language & Culture* course is structured to help students understand the experiences of refugees and communities of diaspora, in particular, the Hmong experience. Experiences of diaspora and displacement are issues affecting not only that community, but the communities around them—and ultimately, our world. The diaspora of the Hmong in Thailand is not unique to just one ethnicity, nor country, but an experience that can be applied to many communities of people. Understanding the Hmong’s experience in diaspora through immersion
in learning about the language, culture, and history can help students understand about others and the world around them.

A great example of this is the booming immigrant communities in Minnesota. Learning about the Hmong experience will not only enrich students’ understanding of how all human experiences are linked, but will also teach them to understand about other communities in diaspora as well. The course provides ample opportunities for students to read articles, research through our many on-site excursions and homestays, and be fully immersed in authentic language and cultural experiences of the Hmong community in Thailand. Discussions are then led by the lead teachers and on-site professors, but driven by students’ findings, to ethically and analytically apply to their own experiences. Students will be able to learn and apply global experiences with one another, as a class, and with other students of the host country.

2. Reflecting on the shared sense of responsibility required to build and maintain community:

This course has many assigned personal and group reflections scheduled. Experiences are not to be observed and dismissed, but rather to be observed and discussed to cultivate learning. As students learn through the many seminars, readings, and on-site experiences, students are given opportunities to reflect, share thoughts, and build connections with others. Some of the required methods of reflections are journaling, video and audio reflections, class reflections and discussions, and the final project. Journals are required for daily entries while class reflections are at the beginning, middle, and end of the course. Through these many channels of processing, recording, and sharing of information students are given the chance to express values of what they learned and share ideas with one another.

For example, one village we will visit is Doi Pui. This village used to be a quiet Hmong village but has turned into a bustling tourist attraction. The Hmong community here has changed over time from quiet daily family farming and living to everyday bustling of tourist sales and interactions. Students will read about economic and social issues affecting the Hmong and apply them to villages such as Doi Pui. They will be able to reflect about how the Hmong experience has changed Thailand and how our own experiences abroad have changed the Hmong in these areas. Questions of maintaining community and maintaining culture will be discussed and reflected on. Students learn best from peers, and these methodologies aim to give that space for them to be accountable to each other’s experiences, guiding them to understand that they must work together to maintain a strong community.

3. Connecting knowledge and practice:

This course is very interactive. There are as many seminars as there are hands-on experiences and practice of applied knowledge. Through readings and seminars, students will learn about the Hmong experience in Thailand, the historical context of Hmong in Thailand, as well as the language, culture, and diaspora of the Hmong. Discussions of Hmong history from China, to Laos, the Secret CIA war, and the exodus into Thailand will be led in seminars as well as on the site excursions. Students can cultivate information from the land, the people, and the settings around them in order to process and apply what they’ve learned in the classroom. Students going into this course are required to at least understand beginning Hmong oral language, thus they will have at least a beginning level of knowledge about the Hmong experience. This course aims to give them the opportunity to apply what they know through
stories, media, and second-hand interactions—to actual experiences of the Hmong community in Thailand. Opportunities are then given in the classroom and on site to discuss presumptions, hands-on learning, and post-reflections. This will make them better global thinkers and global citizens.

Students will have a topic to research and present on for final grades. These presentations will be the culmination of information learned through readings and seminars, as well as the collection of qualitative data learned through the interactions with locals, villages, and communities abroad. This will also enable the instructor(s) to evaluate learning milestones reached by students.

4. **Fostering a stronger sense of our roles as historical agents.**

This course is based in the city of Chiang Mai, Thailand, but will lead students to many areas affected by the Hmong community’s experiences. These sites of towns, villages, markets, and more have stories embedded in many ways that talk about the history of the people and how they came to be in Thailand. Students will be given opportunities to interview, interact, and learn about these experiences and learn to analyze these experiences as a global citizen. Student reflections will also give them opportunities to do self-reflections of their own roles as a member of the global world and how their roles have been affected by or affect the experience of the diaspora. Discussions and seminars will also help students process and analyze how we, as global citizens, continue to affect the world around us as historical agents.

One of the final sites to visit will be the Ban Vinai refugee camp of Thailand that was closed in the mid-1990s. Students will read and discuss about the history and social and political initiatives of this camp and how it affected the Hmong and communities around them. A good majority of the Hmong from this camp have since settled in the United States. The visit to this site will enable students to reflect on how the experiences there affect them and how they, themselves, are agents of this experience and other like experiences of the world.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to locate and critically evaluate information about the Hmong diaspora experience in Thailand, and other events surrounding the settlement in Thailand. Through the many readings, discussions, and seminars, students will be able to identify key elements of Hmong language and culture, pertaining to the diasporic journey. Students will participate in graded class discussions, journal entries, as well as a final project—presented at the end of the semester abroad.

**Attendance**

Students are required to be present and on time for each session. All absences are unexcused except for illnesses, which must be directly discussed with the instructor ahead of time, when possible.
Homework & Projects
There will be assigned readings that must be completed before sessions and seminars. **Journal entries are required to be completed each day.** Students will be assigned a final project, to be presented at the end of the semester.

Accommodations
Any student needing accommodations for any part of the class should talk to the instructor at the beginning of the semester. All students will have equal access to lessons and learning.

Course Prerequisites
This course is designed for students who are able to speak beginning-level Hmong. No reading/writing skills required. No previous Hmong language courses required.

Required Reading / Materials
Any texts needed will be provided by the instructor. Students are required to bring a journal for daily journaling.
## Grading Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Score or Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93–100</td>
<td>Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90–92</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87–89</td>
<td>Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83–86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80–82</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77–79</td>
<td>Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73–76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70–72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67–69</td>
<td>Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60–66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0–59</td>
<td>Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.</td>
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</tbody>
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Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Percentage of Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance/participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall grade</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Course Content

This is the tentative course schedule for summer 2024.

Travel Days

- May 11: Depart MSP for Chiang Mai
- June 9: Depart Chiang Mai for MSP

Week 1

Orientation & Context of Hmong Diaspora in Thailand

- Day 1: Check in, Orientation
  - Seminar 1: Hmong in Thailand (Demographics, Language, Social, and Cultural Context)
- Day 2: Survival Thai, Basic Culture and Norms
Seminar 2: Experiences of Hmong Diaspora in Thailand (Past and Present)

Day 3: Field Experience: Doi Pui
  • Field Seminar: Assimilation, Acculturation, and Tourism


Day 5: Seminar 4: Language, Dialects, and Literacy

Day 6: Weekend Guided Exploration of Chiang Mai (Optional)

Day 7: Weekend Guided Exploration of Chiang Mai (Optional)

Week 2

Community & People

Day 1: Field Experience: Hmong Market (Cultural Arts and Language Exchange)
  • Piyawat Center (6–8 p.m.) Immersion

Day 2: Field Experience: Fabrics and Arts Factory (Socio-Economic Application)
  • Piyawat Center (6–8 p.m.) Immersion

Day 3: Field Experience: Mae Tang (Health & Healing)
  • Piyawat Center (6–8 p.m.) Immersion

Day 4: Homestay: Doi Inthanon
  • Language and Culture Immersion

Day 5: Homestay: Doi Inthanon
  • Royal Project, Economic Shifts, and Self Sufficiency

Day 6: Return & Guided Exploration (Optional)

Day 7: Guided Exploration (Optional)

Week 3

Securing Culture & Existence

Day 1: Seminar 5: Traditional Practices

Day 2: Homestay: Mae Sa Mai
○ Mid-Course Reflection

● Day 3: Homestay: Mae Sa Mai
● Day 4: Homestay: Mae Sa Mai
● Day 5: Return
  ○ Seminar 6: Homestay Reflection
● Day 6: Guided Exploration (Optional)
● Day 7: Pre-Trip Briefing

Week 4

Remnants of Diaspora (Discovering the Past, Framing the Future)
● Day 1: Depart for Loei Province (2 a.m.)
  ○ Arrival Chiang Khan
● Day 2: Field Experience: Ban Vinai and Mekong River
● Day 3: Return Trip
● Day 4: Field Debrief
  ○ End-of-Course Reflection
● Day 5: Open
● Day 6: Depart Chiang Mai to MSP
Policies

Attendance Policy
Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures
Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty
Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an “F” or “N” for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct
The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found on the Learning Abroad Center website.