

Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies

Building Peace



Endowment for the Trans-Border Institute: **\$1 million**

Background

The Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies is seeking \$1 million to establish an **endowment for the Trans-Border Institute**. Mexico is facing an acute crisis of violence and corruption, but it also an historic opportunity for democratic participation and international collaboration. Mexico's cultural and social dynamism is a magnet for 20 million tourists and \$20 billion in foreign investment each year. However, it's also a place of chronic violence that has produced 100,000 deaths and 30,000 forced disappearances and pushed Mexico to the bottom 12 percent of the Global Peace Index, next to Lebanon, Yemen, and Libya.

People in our region must see ordinary Mexican citizens living through this maelstrom, not as passive victims or potential threats, but as determined survivors and potential partners.

The Trans-Border Institute (TBI) addresses this crisis and capitalizes on this opportunity by leveraging the institute's expertise to empower students and partners on both sides of the border to come up with solutions by: engaging students in the protection of individual asylum seekers from Mexico in the U.S.; training the next generation of peacebuilders in Mexico; and promoting innovative local alternatives to the war on drugs and the militarization the border.

TBI trains and deploys teams of undergraduate researchers to provide expert testimony for asylum claims filed by individuals fleeing persecution in contemporary Mexico. Working with the most important national and local networks of pro bono immigration attorneys in the country, the students assist TBI Director Dr. Ev Meade in verifying and strengthening the most important facts and claims in each case, and preparing effective, thorough, and well-documented testimony.

Student researchers learn:

- To write compelling prose, supported by evidence that will stand up in court, on hard deadlines;
- To flip the classroom, actively seeking out the knowledge and information they need from experts, witnesses, and other authorities;
- To examine broader phenomena through the prism of individual cases and the humanity they impart to abstract issues;
- To thrive in an imperfect world where strongest cases don't always win; the persecuted don't always tell the truth; and many of the parties involved have motivations other than making the world more peaceful and just.

The work of TBI student researchers has:

- Won a majority of the cases in which TBI has been involved, despite the fact that the grant rate for asylum seekers from Mexico is only 4.7 percent;
- Protected vulnerable individuals from persecution by organized crime in the most infamous hotspots of the present drug war and setting precedents that will protect others;
- Strengthened TBI's relationship with leading immigration lawyers, such that they are more willing to take cases from Mexico and share confidential data with TBI; and
- Enabled TBI to serve as a trusted source of research and analysis on Mexico cited in: the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Austin American-Statesman*, *The San Diego Union Tribune*, KPBS, NPR, Fox News, and many other outlets.

Objective

The Trans-Border Institute is part of the only school of Peace Studies in the United States located on an international border. Combined with a 20-year track record as a leading source of information on U.S.-Mexico relations, the location allows the TBI to develop

and deploy cutting-edge peacebuilding methodologies in direct collaboration with partners in Mexico.

The endowment will:

Transform TBI's peacebuilding seminars into a full-fledged certificate, degree, and mentoring program that engages, empowers, and supports the next generation of peacebuilders in the areas of Mexico most affected by violence, and provide Kroc School students with a unique opportunity to apply their classroom learning in real-world situations for the foreseeable future.

Establish a digital transparency archive to collect, curate, and preserve the work and papers of at-risk, persecuted, and disappeared journalists from Mexico and Central America; and publish a related book.

Build a real-time, interactive map of alternatives to the war on drugs and the militarization of the border, showcasing successful grassroots efforts, rather than re-hashing the same tired critiques.

Engage USD undergraduate researchers in the protection of individuals seeking safe haven from violence in Mexico, here in the United States, through a comprehensive summer training and internship program.

Underwrite a book of translated work; relevant photographs, documents, and artifacts; and scholarly analysis of at-risk, exiled, and disappeared journalists in Mexico and Central America.

Sponsor the TBI's annual documentary film festival, Border Film Week.

Create an interactive photo-documentary workshop and exhibit for USD students and community partners.

Impact

Ask a student to investigate drug cartel violence in Mexico, and you have given her homework. Ask a student to help save a young woman's life by verifying her claims about drug cartel violence in Mexico, and you have given her a mission. You have invested the same task and skill set with purpose, personal responsibility, and real-world consequences. This kind of connection is the cornerstone of applied peace education at the Kroc School, and a key component of TBI's work.

For More Information

Diana Kutlow

Director of Development

Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies

(619) 260-7803

dkutlow@sandiego.edu

leadingchange.sandiego.edu