

## Border 2012

March 8, 2012 By [borderplunge](#) ([Edit](#))

Happy Almost Spring Break, everyone!

I'm Melissa, one of the Accompanier's for the Border Immersion, and I'm here to welcome you to our trip! We don't leave for a few more days, but things are a whirlwind here on the bluff, with students finishing up midterms and starting to pack for the trip. We've been prepping for weeks, but I know for me it didn't seem real until we received our itinerary a couple of days ago.

The 18 of us (14 students, two Immersion leaders, and two accompaniers) have an amazing experience ahead of us. I'm sure I can speak for all of us when I say that, beyond the warmth we Portlanders so desperately need, we are excited for an experience beyond imagination – something that is clearly going to teach every single one of us something.

Hopefully, you'll hear from most, if not all of the students. You'll probably also hear from myself and Pat, the other accompanier, and Theresa and Vince, our fearless leaders, and get some pictures of what we are experiencing. Make sure you follow along with us as we experience the trip of a lifetime.

Over the last few weeks, we have been spending a lot of time together, getting to know one another and learning more about Immigrant Rights and Immigration in general. We've talked about Catholic Social Teachings and how they relate to Immigration, watched movies about immigration/the border, and spoken to professors about what the situation is like on the border. We've sold hundreds of 50/50 Raffle tickets and tamales, did some Spring cleaning, and even babysat one Saturday night.

I've got a lot left to do to prepare. I bought a "Conversational Spanish" book several months ago that I only opened once (I took some Spanish in high school, but that was nearly 8 years ago) that I should probably look at, I need to finish some work, and I definitely need to do laundry/pack. We begin our journey at 3:30 AM on Sunday the 11th in the Public Safety parking lot. See you there!

-Melissa

## The Beginning

March 11, 2012 By [borderplunge](#) ([Edit](#))

Today was the first day of our week long journey in Arizona. I started out *very* early, 3am to be exact! It was really hard to feel the excitement because of the lack of sleep. Our travels took us from Portland → San Francisco → Tucson. The flights went by so fast because all we did was sleep on the plane. Once arriving in Tucson we were promptly picked up by the Border Links workers. When we arrived at the place where we would be staying most of us wanted to go

outside and take advantage of the sun while we had it. The next thing we knew it was time for lunch and I was so confused because I thought that it would be 2pm by now. I and my fellow border plungers obviously felt this way because we were up so early.

After having lunch we were formally welcomed to the Border Links facility and given a tour. It would be wrong not to admit that most of us including myself were falling asleep during this due to the lack of sleep. I think I speak for all of us when I say that we will all sleep wonderfully tonight. I can't wait to see what tomorrow has in store for us as we continue our adventures to learn together.

- Jessica Morales

## **No Human Being Is Illegal**

March 12, 2012 By [borderplunge](#) ([Edit](#))

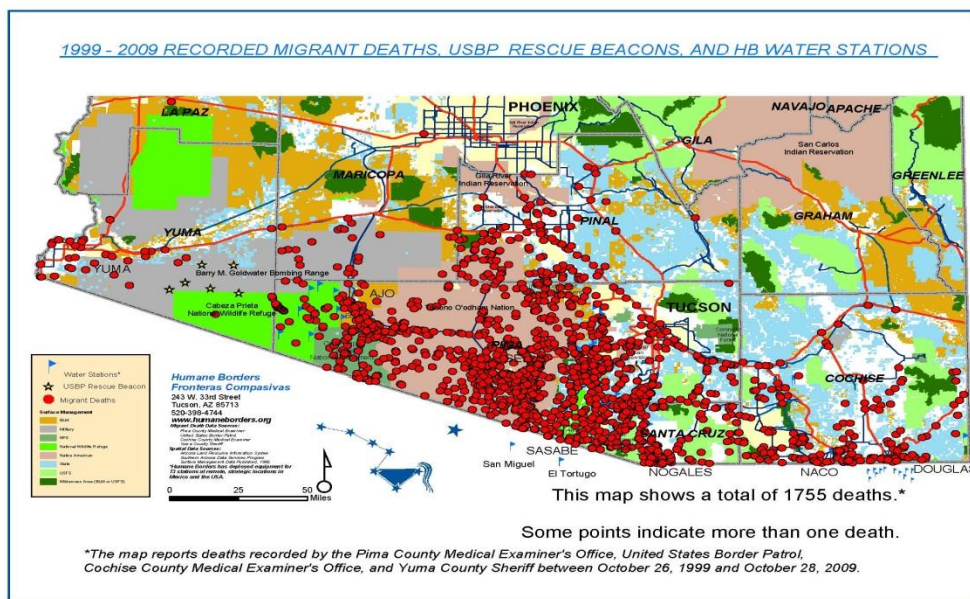
**Day 2** of the Border Plunge started off on a full nights rest. It was wonderful for us all to finally get some rest!

Our first activity of the day was going to mass at Casa Maria. It was a beautiful bilingual experience in which we witnessed God's joy, love, and hospitality in the faces of the diverse Casa Maria community. We had planned on helping serve at their soup kitchen but, unfortunately, our services were not needed. We were struck by their appreciation for us taking the time to come down to Arizona to learn about the immigration issues. They urged us to share what we learn here and our experiences with people back home and how that simple act can actually make an impact on changing people's perspectives of the reality of immigration issues. We had a great discussion with a man named Stewart who enlightened us about the South Tucson community. We learned about all the resources, such as Casa Maria and other churches in the area, who help the migrant community find jobs, housing, access to medical aid and other basic human needs. The people who work at Casa Maria also help advocate for just reforms, such as the preservation of low public transportation fares which are essential for low income family, immigrant and citizen alike. We were shocked to learn from Stewart that it is illegal to drive undocumented immigrants in the midst of medical crisis, such as if someone is sick or even dying. Fortunately, the Tucson Police and local Border Patrol are progressive in their relations with organizations with places like Casa Maria who provide humanitarian aid in that they do not harass them even though they may know that many undocumented immigrants come there for help.

After Casa Maria we came back to Border Links and participated in an immigration simulation. We learned shocking facts about restrictions on immigration policies. Those who are extremely wealthy or have celebrity status have the highest likelihood of gaining legal documentation. Those who are poor, married or with families, have few connections in the United States, and are considered "unskilled workers" have the most difficulty entering the country legally, which is the majority of desperate families who need the opportunity most. This simulation revealed to us the truth behind the common anti-immigration argument, "Why don't they just come here legally?" The number of work visas offered by the United States each year

is extremely limited and it is nearly impossible for anyone who does not fit the highly selective requirements to gaining legal documentation, which again is the majority of people who need the opportunity most.

Next we heard a presentation from Kat who works for the Coalition for Human Rights, which is an organization dedicated to protecting and advocating for human rights as well as educating people about the rights they do have. She explained how the militarization of border and the construction of the wall has not diminished immigration, rather simply shifted it to the areas that have not a physical wall. And why is there no wall in certain places? Because the harsh and dangerous desert environment acts as a natural wall. The conditions there are quite literally deadly. Hundreds of people die from dehydration, hypothermia (in the night), heat exhaustion (in the day) and drowning in flash floods each year in these desert areas. This striking image (below) is a map of *found* human remains, which touched many of us. The dots on this map represent the locations of where at least one human remain was found. The desert conditions and animals will cause the bodies to disappear very quickly, therefore, it is often only remains that are found. Often times there's not even enough of the remains to determine the sex of the person. This map, however, does not account for those who have died crossing but their remains were never discovered or those whom have died since 2009, which is another 250+ people. We also learned that the news very infrequently reports on these deaths that happen, on average, nearly twice a day, because it has become a "normal" occurrence. It is heartbreaking to see human death in this manner become "normalized."



Interesting fact we learned: The REAL ID Act (which was passed), Section 102, allows our US Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (an appointed, not voted in, position) to have the power to waive ANY law in the interest of homeland security. Shocked? So were we!

Imagine this situation: A gun is pointed at you and you are told to take a sum of drugs from point A to point B. Your options seem pretty limited don't they? You are now what is considered a "mule." This is the common reality for many migrants trying to cross the border. They are often

either bribed or forced into smuggling drugs into the United States when all they were planning on trying to do was simply cross the border to find a job in the United States. They never wanted to be caught up in the drug trade, but if caught by law enforcement are demonized and prosecuted as a drug dealer rather than an innocent victim trying to find a way to create a better life for themselves, and/or their family.

Despite all this heavy and disheartening, though important information, we came to an understanding about the power we hold for change. We learned that if you can change the way people talk, you can change the way they think. By making simple changes in the way we speak of these topics as the immigration *issues* rather than *problems* and the people as *undocumented* rather than *illegal aliens* we can change the connotations that are evoked to promote a more humanized and just portrayal and understanding of the situation. It also recognizes the human dignity that each person has because as UP's own Professor Sanchez says, "Human dignity is a gift from God, not from citizenship."

We will leave you with one last food for thought, given to us today by Kat from Coalition for Human Rights: "Si no pensamos diferente, todo será igual" (If we don't think differently, everything will be the same.)

Feel free to comment and let us know your thoughts!

Paz a ustedes,

Nicole Fleury and Kelsey Reavis

## [Lost in the Desert](#)

March 13, 2012 By [borderplunge](#) ([Edit](#))



This morning we had the opportunity to listen to representatives from I.C.E. — Immigration and Customs Enforcement. We definitely had some mixed feelings during the presentation. We learned a lot about the program in general, and eventually got down to the immigration side of things. It didn't take very long after that to stir up all of our emotions. We felt like the representatives evaded a lot of our questions and always spun them into a rehearsed answer that made them seem like the protagonists. One hot button issue was when we asked Rudy if he would mind not using the word 'alien' to refer to undocumented immigrants during the presentation. He replied by saying that because the word was in legalized documents, it was not at all wrong or offensive. It seemed at some points as though we were talking to machines, even when we asked them about their personal feelings regarding immigration. At one point Jason asked what their motivation was to go to work every day, and Rudy turned to the power point and read the I.C.E. mission statement! They were also adamant that they were 'rescuing' the immigrants from the poor situations that they were in, such as the drop houses that they are often found in. We thought that was ironic, since they find the immigrants and then deport them back to Mexico, where they were to trying to escape from in the first place.

This meeting was the first opportunity that we have had so far to learn about the policy side of things, and it really showed how separate both sides of the immigration issue are. It always seems to come down to human rights versus the law, and the two just seem to get more and more distant the closer we get to the heart of the issue. It is disheartening to realize how complicated this issue has come to be. Those that fight for human rights are advocating for the basic rights of human beings, and organizations such as I.C.E. are working against the crime and drug issues. Somewhere along the line these two things have become tangled together yet have arrived at opposite ends of the spectrum. I.C.E. focuses on crimes and drugs, but undocumented immigration has become caught up in it, and now an administrative violation has become a felony of the worst kind. It seems that human rights have been lost somewhere in the desert.

The more we learn, the more we wonder — How will we ever be able to create a solution when we are nowhere near close to compromise?

-Cassie Van Lier

## [Operation Streamline](#)

March 13, 2012 By [borderplunge](#) ([Edit](#))

Rounding out our morning of frustration we decided to add a dose of depression by attending the local court to see a program called Operation Streamline. This program, which focuses on quickly processing arrested immigrants through the legal system, began in Texas and has spread here to Tucson, Arizona. Every day a judge sentences seventy undocumented immigrants in just a few hours. It's basically the fast food of the legal system. Those sentenced can face jail time, if they have a past criminal record, or are granted a "sentence served" which is a fancy way of saying that they will be deported as soon as possible.

This experience was my main draw to participating in the Border Immersion. As a political science student I have always been very interested in the legal side of our immigration problems.



While the past few days have shown me much in the way of the immorality of our immigration system, mainly the high number of horrific desert deaths, spending an afternoon at Operation Streamline combined the two. I saw our legal system and I saw how immoral it truly is.

I'll admit it, I cried. The tears began almost the moment I walked in but they truly gained momentum when the judge entered and we were all asked to rise. The sound we experienced was not the scuffle of shoes as people stood but instead it was the clanging of metal as seventy immigrants, shackled at the wrist, waist, and feet all rose. It was that sound, a sound I would associate with the the worst of criminals, such as murderers or rapists, that ultimately broke my heart. Looking at the defendants, who had not even been given the dignity of a shower, was heartbreaking. All I kept thinking was "I am no better than these people so why is it that I am sitting on this side of the court unshackled?" The answer is that I was lucky enough to have been born into the U.S, into a life away from poverty and into a country lush with opportunities. Yet, we are all human beings, and we all deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Operation Streamline takes neither of those ideas into consideration.

After being arrested, the undocumented immigrants are detained as border patrol then selects groups of seventy to appear in Streamline. While border patrol says the selection is random, one of the public defenders we spoke with stated that it was more likely that they would attempt to choose immigrants who had a past record, who may have immigrated illegally before and have been caught again. This ensures that many of the immigrants will receive a jail sentence, which border patrol can use to pad their statistics. Once chosen for Streamline, the defendants are appointed a public defender who then only has about thirty minutes to explain the whole legal system to his client. This in itself angers me to no end, as I have been studying our political system for about two years now and feel as if I have only scraped the surface. How can someone, who has lived in an entirely different culture, who doesn't speak English, be expected to understand and make a plea decision in less time than an episode of Lost?

There are two options the detained immigrant can make; to plead guilty or to fight the charge. If an immigrant pleads guilty then they will receive a misdemeanor and be deported instantly. If he or she should choose to plead not guilty, and fight the charge, then the case will not go to court for at least thirty days and the chances of winning will be bleak. If you cannot claim U.S. citizenship you have very little in way of arguing your case. The few occasions where these court cases do occur generally are when a public defender can tell something is wrong, as in the example given to us by the public defender. He shared a story of a woman who had been violated by a border patrol official and who, after admitting to the incident, was able to go to court and speak out against the abuse she endured. Yet the occurrence of these immigrants choosing to fight their charge is rare. The system causes this as why would you choose to stay in jail for thirty days to wait for a case you will most likely lose when you have the opportunity to leave right away?

I have plans to attend law school in the future and this experience only enhanced my aspiration. I recall a moment of sitting in the court room and thinking – "this has to be changed, how can I change it?" I hope that through my education in law school I will be given the tools to proved better opportunities to the immigrants I hope to represent and that I might be able to advocate

positive reform in our immigration system. It's been a day of frustration and anger but also a day of hope as our group looks toward the future and how we can make an impact.

Renee Ambacher

## [Speaking with the Heart](#)

March 14, 2012 By [borderplunge](#) ([Edit](#))

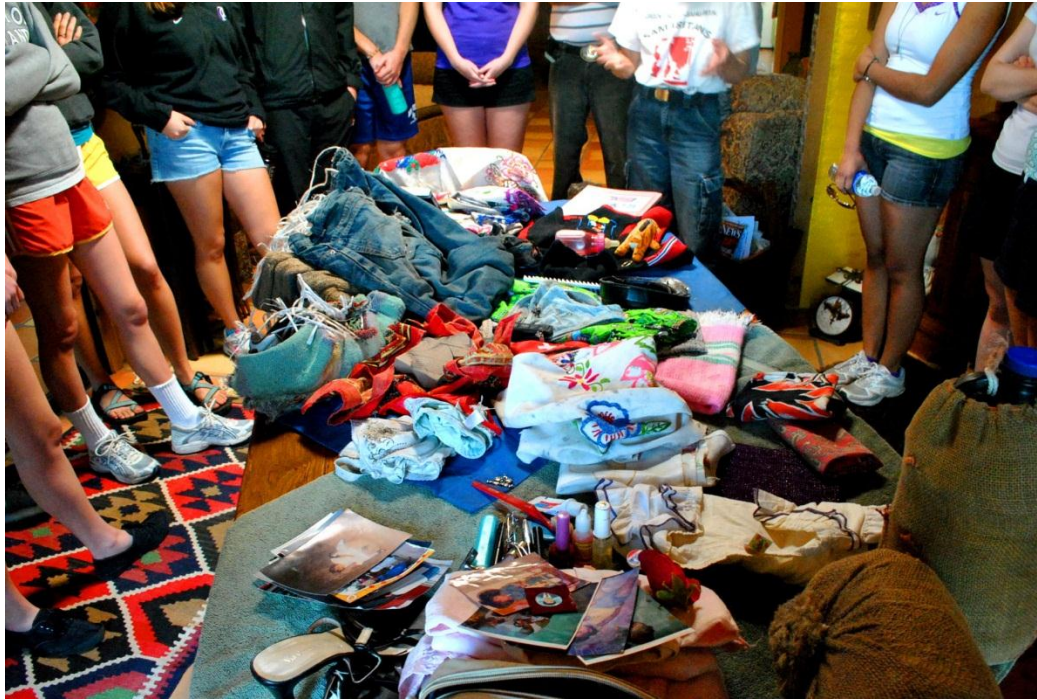
Well, it has been just 3+ days down here in Tuscon and today as well as last night were quite incredible! Last night we each had a home stay. 13 of us in one house with Rosalinda and her husband Tony, and the other 7 stayed with Guadalupe.

I (Maddie Justin) stayed with Rosalinda with the big group and it was fantastic!! As we pulled into the driveway and rang the doorbell Tony and Rosalinda welcomed us with open arms and hearts, telling us that hot food was ready for us on the stove that involved chicken in our pasole; after not having meat at Borderlinks it was quite a treat to have some in our home cooked warm meal. After dinner and some informal fun chats with everyone, Rosalinda sat down with all of us around the dining room table and told her incredible journey to the United States and how she has now ended up where she is, as well as encouraging us to pursue our dreams and not let anyone tell us we are less than anyone. It was a lot more than that but i can only say so much through words on a blog.

I (Sarah Hansell) stayed with Lupe with six other girls. It was challenging for me because me and two of the other girls didn't speak any Spanish, and Lupe spoke only Spanish. But with three other girls translating for us, we still managed to talk with her about what we'd learned so far, her work with Derechos Humanos, the human rights organization which advocates for immigrant rights and reform that we'd learned about earlier in the week, and chat with her about everything from ourselves to the 2012 presidential candidates. She fed us delicious and flavorful beans, rice and this zucchini and corn dish, and chorizo, eggs and tortillas the next morning. We also got to play with her little black miniature bichon frise Negra.

The next morning we drove to the Green Valley retirement community, where we met the co-founder of the Green Valley Samaritans, Shura, who had moved to Arizona from Berkeley, where she worked with the homeless, to a house in the retirement community with her husband. The desert where immigrants die every day was literally in her backyard. She co-founded the Green Valley Samaritans thinking it would be a small group, especially since she and her husband lived in an ultra-conservative area. However, the group now has 180 members who go out into the desert looking for immigrants, bringing water and food, and also looking for what others overlook—what the immigrants leave behind. She has a table in her house that has little children's shoes' and clothes, water bottles with burlap sewn around them, books, family pictures, underwear...the list goes on. We learned some facts that shocked us—such as the fact that many women start taking birth control a couple months before they try to cross because it's not a matter of **if** they'll get raped (usually by the coyotes—the men who charge them to guide them through the desert, but sometimes by others in the group) but **when** and how often. The fact that women would not only **risk** rape, but fully acknowledge and in a way accept that this will

happen to them if they cross, and yet still make the decision to cross, demonstrates just how bad their poverty or conditions are in Mexico.



Walking through the desert was also an eye-opening experience. It was crazy that we found so many remnants of human life lying sun-bleached and torn to pieces in the desert — clothes, water bottles, children's backpacks, shoes.... Just think, what is someone going to do in the desert, surrounded by cacti, possibly scorpions and snakes, and under the up-to-120 degree sun, without shoes? What made the whole thing real for me was when Shura was leading us through the desert and stopped in the middle of her sentence because she saw someone who she thought might be an undocumented immigrant in the desert. She raced toward where she had seen someone calling out in Spanish, don't be afraid, I'm here to help, do you need help? In that moment our group dropped silent, and the reality of this situation hit me. This wasn't some desert hike, and these weren't backpacks and shoes that had been thrown away like trash because they weren't needed anymore. These were the bare necessities for survival that people had left behind because Border Patrol had come, because they'd had to run, or for some other reason we can't ever know. Although the people Shura ran after were just Americans, they **could** have been undocumented immigrants in desperate need of water, food, and help. It was eerie to be in a place where people had died, will die, and may have been dying as we traveled through it.





Later in the day, we went to Casa Mariposa, an intentional community of people living together simply and sustainably. Casa Mariposa offers hospitality to those in need—specifically immigrants who have just been released from detention centers, often at nighttime, and have legal documentation to be in the US, at least temporarily. The people they take in have no place to stay, at least for that night, and in some cases have been being held in the isolated detention centers for years. Some still have to show up to their court date to see if they can stay in the US. Some are seeking asylum from countries they are afraid to return to. One man who is still in a detention center but is in contact with Casa Mariposa is afraid he will die there because he has kidney problems, and has seen another man die there. Another man, Marco, has been there for six years. He is afraid for his life in his home country, Brazil, because of his sexual orientation, and would rather stay in the detention center, basically imprisoned indefinitely, than return to his home country. To pay for Marco's bond to get him out of jail, Casa Mariposa must raise \$7000 more. Imagine being in jail, possibly in contact with no one because you can't afford a phone call, or everyone you know is in a different country or undocumented, dealing with the physical and mental stress of imprisonment, not knowing when you will get out.

We learned so much today, and my brain is still reeling from all the new information. But we saw and learned things that gave us hope amidst all of the injustice and suffering we learned about and witnessed. We saw Shura, a passionate woman who could be spending her retirement

golfing and playing pinochle, but instead chooses to go into the desert trying to save lives, sometimes six days a week. This is a woman so full of life, passion, spark and sass that she inspired all of us. We saw the people of Casa Mariposa creating a home whose soul purpose (oh, puns) is to deny the American idea of a house with fences meant to preserve one's own domain, and embrace the idea of a house meant to share with others — anyone who needs its sanctuary. If we as Americans could start seeing our time and space this way — as something beautiful to share with others — then we could begin to change the way people think.

Maddie Justin & Sarah Hansell