

Prof. Megan Sheehan is an anthropologist with a longstanding interest in Latin America and years of experience living, studying, and conducting research in Chile. Megan's research and teaching interests include migration, urbanization, food studies, ethnographic research methods, and applied anthropology, and she looks forward to directing the study abroad program in Viña del Mar.

COLG 385: Exploring a Diverse and Multicultural Chile

Course Overview

Stretched along the western backbone of South America, Chile is a nation insulated by desert to the north, the formidable Andes Mountains to the east, and impassable glaciers and fjords to the south. This isolation has impacted the nation's history and cultural development, and for centuries societal norms emphasized notions of national homogeneity. Led by a forceful scholarly critique of this idea, the last several decades have been marked by growing recognition of the nation's diversity along ethnic, racial, cultural, and national lines. In this course, students will study Chilean culture, approaching culture from a critical perspective as dynamic, contested, in flux, and multiple. We will explore the ways in which diverse communities and cultural influences have shaped the nation's history, economics, politics, and the arts. We will also examine how significant social distinctions—such as ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic class—impact life for people in Chile. Questions addressed in the class will include: How and why does the Pinochet era—a period that ended three decades ago—continue to shape life in Chile? What can we learn about the fluidity of gender, relationship, and sexuality norms when we also consider that divorce was only legalized in 2004 and same-sex civil unions were legalized another decade later? How are transnational migration, indigenous activism, and a growing interest in multiculturalism changing notions of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity? The course will combine seminar style discussions and guest lectures with experiential engagement at service-learning worksites. Assignments will incorporate the use of ethnographic field methods to reflect upon what students observe in their everyday routines, service, study, and recreation in Viña del Mar. Students will keep a field journal of their observations, engage in participatory mapping exercises, conduct several interviews with Chileans, analyze their notes, and present their insights along with a reflection on what can be learned through cross-cultural experiences.