

## International Education

International Programs Office | Queretaro, MX

Lauren S.'s Final Report

### Question Set #1 – September

What are your initial impressions of the organization and an overview and thoughts about the kind of work you've started doing; how does the work match your expectations, how does it match your goals?

When I very first arrived I was feeling impatient to receive tasks to work on. It felt like the first couple of weeks (first two weeks) I was just getting lots of little things to do like picking up packages, general organization of the office, and helping to file some of the student health insurance forms. However, now that I am in my fourth week working here I have LOTS to do. My main coordinator Claudia has given me a number of projects that I am to work on during my time here. I am supposed to help the student group AMI (sort of like Big Brother/Sister back in the U.S.) to coordinate an event each month that will bring together the Spanish-speaking and international students. I am also working on putting together a list of international contacts for all of the foreign universities that we receive students from and also send students to. But my biggest task that I have been working on so far is just getting the health insurance information from EVERY student – and there are over 300 international students studying here just this term! It is more difficult than I thought because I have to send mass e-mails requesting that the students bring their insurance forms, as well as keep physical and digital copies of all of their insurance documents.

I was expecting to speak a lot more Spanish in the office. I guess I was expecting that we would all speak in Spanish the majority of the time; however, many of the students who were arriving to the International office in the first few weeks were international students and the majority of them do not yet have solid command of Spanish and therefore it is easier to speak with them in English about changing classes etc. Also, many of the interns here in the International Programs office don't speak as much Spanish as I do and so it seemed kind of typical that our co-workers here in the office would often explain things in English in order to avoid confusion. However, I make sure to speak to them in Spanish all the time and I think this has made them a lot more confident with my abilities in both Spanish and English. Now almost all of my co-workers speak to me in Spanish, unless they forget.

What stood out to you the most regarding your arrival?

One thing that definitely stood out to me upon my arrival was the uncleanliness of many surrounding areas. Of course the campus itself is very nice and well-maintained but just seeing the variation in quality of houses and in some areas there is much trash and the roads are in disrepair. There are people who have LOTS of money here and live in very nice houses (such as many of the students who are attending this private university) and there are also many people who live more simply but are very proud of their homes and self.

It kind of grossed me out that we throw the dirty toilet paper in the trash instead of flushing it down the toilet but it cannot be flushed because the septic systems here are more delicate. Also, there are quite a few bugs (especially cockroaches which terrify me for some reason) in my house but we just use a lot of bug spray. The bug spray concerns me a bit because I imagine that it is full of chemicals and I don't like to think about what I may be breathing in...

Also, the food preparation and maintenance here is definitely of much less concern than in the United States. I don't want to say that they are not properly preparing/storing their food but there are a lot of things that I have seen done that make me wonder whether or not they will make people sick – even in my own home. But I do not want to offend anyone and so I do not say anything about these differences. However, I am slightly more careful about what I consume because I don't want to get sick and not be able to come to work!

One last surprise is that a lot of the international students really do not speak much Spanish. They also tend to be quite “clique-y” in the sense that German speaking students tend to hang out in groups of German-speakers and French-speakers with French-speakers etc. I definitely make an effort to speak Spanish as much as possible because I don't want to make myself appear unapproachable or intimidating to Spanish-speaking students.

What was your greatest anxiety prior to departing and how do you feel about that now that you have arrived?

I had a few different worries prior to my arrival including being robbed, the presence of police corruption, and also getting catcalled/yelled at by the opposite sex due to machismo. Surprising I have not experienced any lewd comments being directed towards me but have heard stories of other female students. However, many of the girls who have been catcalled at say that the Mexican men are “all bark and no bite”. I have not yet seen with my own eyes any police corruption, but again, I have heard many stories from both international students and also Mexicans living here in Querétaro.

I also feel very lucky that no one has attempted to rob me (that I know of) but this could also be due to the fact that I spend the majority of my time here on the TEC campus and there are security guards and lots of other safety measures. I have heard horror stories from another student whose bus was held up, and the passengers' bags and belongings were taken. The same student was extremely lucky as he was sitting at the back of the bus and so they did not get all the way back to him and therefore he was not robbed. I am always very careful with my bag, especially when spending time with friends at clubs/bars because I just really do not trust anyone to guard it properly except for myself.

## **Question Set #2 – September 2014**

Professional Goals: Developing office etiquette and a better understanding of the internal organization of the ITESM international office.

1. Build strong interpersonal relationships with co-workers.
2. Observing and emulating effective non-verbal communications.
3. Phone etiquette, in-person interactions
4. Shadowing different positions within the office to better understand how different colleagues work together towards successful results.
5. Understanding the different priorities within the office (i.e. advising, student placement, organizational duties, event planning, etc.)

1. How are things going at work now that you have settled in for a bit? How does this align with your professional goals that you set for yourself? What would you like to achieve in the next half of your internship?

I feel like now that I have settled in a bit I just really want to keep doing MORE in the office. A lot of the time my bosses (Claudia and Jorge) don't really assign me many tasks to work on so I feel like I really need to be self-motivated and come up with my own ideas for projects to work on and kind of create my own schedule. I do feel like I am getting a much better feel for the different priorities of the International Programs office and really paying close attention to what different tasks the different positions work on throughout the week.

I have built fairly good interpersonal relations with some of my co-workers but feel like some others, are a lot harder to interact with. Sometimes I feel like a lot of what I do goes unnoticed here especially because no one really checks in on me but I try to just be satisfied with my own accomplishments and hard work.

In the coming months of my internship I just want to spend even more time learning about specific tasks within the office; specifically I would like to learn more about successful event planning and also I would like to know more about the application process for Mexican students who want to study abroad. I could also use more practice answering the phones and interacting with students face-to-face but the problem is I am usually sitting at my computer in the student office (usually working on Excel documents and health insurance information) and not assigned to spend much time at the front desk or answering the main phone.

Personal Goals: To develop my Spanish language skills by establishing strong friendships with Spanish-speaking colleagues and international students.

1. Read a news or magazine article at least once a week. Find and define 5-10 new vocabulary words within the article. Create flashcards of these new words and review them.
2. Create a reference sheet of business Spanish terms. Include technological terms, names of items, greetings/farewells, etc.
3. Every two weeks, try to write a short essay about a new and unfamiliar topic and have a friend or co-worker look it over for grammatical mistakes.

2. How are things going relative to your personal goals? In which areas have you made progress and where do you still have some room to expand? What do you want to make sure you address before you leave?

For my personal goals I have been making progress but could definitely be working to make even more progress. I spend time reading a lot of news articles on the internet but often don't take the time out of my work day to write down all the new/unfamiliar words that I see in an article. One thing that I have been doing with my fellow interns which is very helpful is that we always write new Spanish words/expressions on the white board in our office so that we can see them and try to use them in our interactions.

I do also keep my own personal notebook full of new words/expressions but it can be difficult to keep this notebook organized into sections. I think that one thing I could do is start to create word documents when I could then print and refer back to in order to really expand my vocabulary and spend some time typing out and therefore further embedding new vocabulary into my daily routine.

I have not really had much free time to write short essays either with all my assignments keeping me busy and work and then spending time with my host mother when I am at home here. I have written a few things (work assignments) in both Spanish and English and then had a coworker look them over but usually she just says they are "fine" and doesn't give me much feedback. Each week I write a 1-2 page summary to send to my major coordinator, back at SOU and so maybe I should print some of these summaries out and review them myself for grammar mistakes. If I was comfortable sharing them with others here in the office, or my Spanish-speaking friends, then I could have them correct them for spelling and grammar mistakes. I really should spend more time working on my grammar and writing before I leave Mexico because I really do have greater resources here for learning and correcting my Spanish since there are so many native speakers here.

Cross-Cultural Goals: Use journaling and analysis of my writing to minimize intercultural misunderstandings.

1. Write a journal entry at the onset of a "conflict" to reflect on it. Give it some time to work itself out. When, and if, the conflict becomes resolved somehow, write another journal entry after the resolution of the conflict.

2. Analyze journal entries to try to find patterns. Try to re-understand or re-interpret past misunderstandings.

3. Ask a mentor or friend to speak with me about the way the conflict was handled. Ask for advice to make the best decisions in future conflicts.

3. How are things going relative to your cross-cultural goals? What kinds of experiences have stood out to you so far? What do you want to ensure to experience before you leave?

I find the personality of one of my coworkers challenging to work with. Other co-workers have indicated to me that this is just the way that person is. I feel that if another situation comes up where this person disrespects me or accuses me of misunderstanding instructions then I will make an effort to talk to her about the issue face-to-face because I want to meet her expectations and have open lines of communication.

I feel that I could definitely learn a lot from speaking with my co-workers about various expectations and also how to best deal with conflicts in the office. I hope that I can continue to grow closer to my fellow interns and especially to my co-workers here in the office. I want to continue to prove that I am hard-working and making a sincere effort to fit in and minimize conflict here in the office. I really should keep a more detailed journal of various social situations and feelings that I experience here in the office in order to be able to look back and gain an expanded perspective of these situations and emotions.

### **Question Set #3 – September 2014**

1. Describe a day in your life – what is your work schedule like, what do you do after work, how do you balance your time between work and exploring life outside of work?

On a typical work day I wake up at 6:45 in the morning in order to get to work between 8 and 8:30. I take a shower and since I live with a host mom she usually prepares me something for breakfast – most mornings she makes me two sandwiches, one to eat for breakfast and another to take with me to work. Other mornings we will eat tacos or eggs with chorizo/ham or have an oatmeal type drink. I get all my things ready to take to work and then try to leave the house between 7:55 and 8:05 in order to arrive at the office before 8:30. I spend my work day working on Excel files, student surveys, or many other different tasks. For me there are really no two work days that are alike because once I finish a project I am usually given new projects to work on. I have worked on creating an international contacts list, sending e-mails to international students, creating a student satisfaction survey, sending packages of promotional materials abroad, and many other tasks.

Each day I am finished with work by 6:05 in the evening and then I usually take a taxi home because I feel very tired from working all day. Optimally after work I try to take a nap but a lot of the time this doesn't happen because when I get home I usually spend time with my host mother or log onto Skype for a bit to take with my house-mate back home. I try not to go out very often on week nights because I know that I have to get up very early each morning and want to be able to have energy and also be able to work hard while I am at work.

On the weekends I really enjoy going out with friends during the day and also in the evenings. I prefer to go out with Spanish-speaking friends because I don't like isolating myself from Mexican people by only speaking in English. Luckily I have been making a lot of new friends who, even though they are international, make the effort to speak Spanish all the time and it makes me very happy to be with these people. I love going dancing (bachata, cumbia, salsa, banda, etc.) and trying new foods. Sometimes it is difficult to balance work and fun only because I feel like I am very often sacrificing sleep in order to fully enjoy myself with my friends. However, I have gotten pretty used to only getting about 6 or 7 hours of sleep each night instead of my usual 8 or 9 that I would get back home. On the weekends I sleep in very late though and I am extremely happy that my host mom allows me to do so!

2. Housing: What is your living situation like? Knowing what you know now, are there other options you would have chosen instead? If you can provide some resources for future interns, that would be most helpful.

I really enjoy living with a host family and definitely feel that it is the best option I could have chosen. Another intern, Travis, lives in the guest house of Carla Diez de Marina and he really doesn't get to spend any time with her or her family. In my host family situation I just have a host mom, no one else lives with us, but I love it because when I come home in the evenings we get to spend a lot of time together and I also get to see her in the mornings. She is very easy-going in the sense that if I do want to go out with friends, or stay out late, she lets me go without resentment and just tells me to be safe and take care of myself. She never seems to be angry when I come home late or if I don't spend enough time with her but I definitely make an effort to respect her by not making lots of noise if I arrive late and I also try to spend time with when whenever I can.

I think living with a host family is really the best option for any student or intern who wants to integrate fully with the Mexican culture. Living with a host family allows you to speak Spanish all the time when you are at "home" and also you have the opportunity to try lots of different Mexican foods that are home-made! I have been trying to learn how to cook different Mexican dishes and I always write down new vocabulary words that I learn in conversations with my host mom, or from movies or television shows that we watch together.

I notice that a good majority of the international students tend to live with other students and I think in a way they are isolating themselves from a lot of the best parts of life in Mexico – speaking the language, eating the traditional foods, and just generally spending more time with Mexican people instead of people from their home country. I notice that the international students that live together tend to stick together and don't really tend to make as many Mexican friends. When they stick together they tend not to speak as much Spanish and therefore I think this is why they are not approached as often by Mexican people. I know their experience is just different from mine and they are still enjoying their stay but I am extremely glad that I live with my host mom and always make the effort to speak Spanish in order to integrate as much as I can in the university, community, and home settings.

3. Finances: How is your budget working out for you? Are you spending more or less than what you expected? How much do you typically spend on food, recreation, travel, etc? What would you do differently knowing what you know now?

I didn't exactly make a super detailed budget before I came but I think I am doing a good job making my money last here. I would say I spend about 900 -1,500 pesos (\$70-115 USD) each week overall. This includes taxi rides home after work (40-45 pesos), eating lunch off campus (30-70 pesos depending on the place), buying random snacks or soft drinks during the day and maybe going out once (maybe twice) during the week to a club or bar (100-300 pesos). The one thing that I recommend for saving money is walking or learning how to take the bus to get to many places because the taxi rides are where it really adds up. If I walked home each day after work instead of taking a taxi I could save about 200 pesos (\$15) each week. I have been trying not to spend a lot of money on traveling outside of Querétaro only because weekends seem too short to go and really enjoy a new place. I would say that most of the money that I spend goes towards food and transportation but those things are definitely essential!

4. Travel and Transportation: How do you typically get around town and to work? Are you satisfied with that choice? Would you recommend other options? Do you have time to explore the surrounding area on time off? How do you manage that? What do you recommend for travel options? Where do you recommend exploring?

I usually take taxis to get to most places since I have not become very familiar with the bus system here. The bus is really the cheapest way to get around since it is about 6-7 pesos (50 cents) per ride. I prefer to use taxis though because they are safe, there is no wait time and also because I can tell the driver exactly where I am going. Even if it is a new place that I am unfamiliar with, the taxi driver will be able to find it because they have an extensive book of maps that they use. Also, if I can share my taxi ride with friends then it makes it cheaper for everyone. I wish that I could use the bus more and taxis less but I really do like the safety and efficiency of getting a ride and think that it is well worth the price.

I feel like a two-day weekend is really not enough time to go to the places that I wish I could go. Soon I would like to try to make some day trips to San Miguel de Allende and also Guanajuato because these places are actually not very far from Querétaro, just a few hours by bus or car. I am very eager to visit the beaches here but I feel that I will not be able to do this until my internship is finished because they are further away and I want to spend a good chunk of time there. I have had the

opportunity to visit the pyramids at Teotihuacan, hike la Peña de Bernal, and also have been to a nearby city called San Juan del Río. I definitely recommend exploring Teotihuacan and also the small town of Bernal and the peña that is there for hiking and beautiful views. I tend to stick close to Querétaro only in order to save money. I wish I had unlimited money to spend on travelling because then I would be able to visit a lot more places but I am happy to explore the city and surrounding areas with friends and my host mom.

Travelling with friends is definitely the best way to go because then the price of your lodging and transportation is usually less (if you rent a cabin or room together and also a vehicle). However, I think it is very important to keep safety in mind if you are travelling with a big group of internationals and not many people speak Spanish. I prefer to travel in a smaller group of friends who all speak Spanish so that we are less of a target for potential thieves. I feel like I'm a bit more paranoid than the average traveler but I just know that here if you are in a big group of foreigners speaking English then people will assume that you have a lot of money and may be much more likely to take advantage of the situation by trying to steal from you or trying to get you to pay more for things.

#### **Question Set #4 – October 2014**

Professional: How well did your coursework prepare you for your internship? What knowledge of your field has been most important so far?

My knowledge of Spanish grammar and vocabulary has really helped me to socially interact with my coworkers and also new friends here in México. Since I have not been taking classes I have not had much of a chance to apply my knowledge about world/historical events in Spanish-speaking countries but that is okay with me. I feel proud that I am able to speak as much Spanish as I do because I have been able to meet so many new people and communicate with my Mexican coworkers with minimal misunderstandings. Also my education back home has taught me to be independent and self-motivated which has been extremely helpful here in the office. Sometimes I do not have the answers that I need, or maybe I am missing certain necessary materials, but instead of just giving up I ask questions or do my own research online to find out what I need to know.

I feel that the knowledge that has been most important to my internship experience is just my familiarity with speaking and writing in Spanish since I do a lot of face-to-face interaction and preparation of various documents here in the office. Also, my knowledge of English has been almost as important as my knowledge of Spanish. Since I work in an international office and often am interacting with students from countries outside of Mexico it is very nice to be able to use English as a language that helps to bridge the gap. Basically all of the students from countries in Europe, North America, and even Asia speak English to some degree and so I am able to communicate with each and every person that comes into the office. My knowledge of English has also allowed me to be a resource to my peers and co-workers – I have done lots of proof-reading of documents/assignments in English in order to help correct errors of non-native speakers. I have really enjoyed being able to produce assignments in both English and Spanish so that a large number of people are able to understand what is being shared with them.

Personal: What are the most important things you have learned about yourself thus far through this experience? What has been the greatest personal challenge? What has been the greatest reward?

I have learned that due to my cultural upbringing in the United States I crave structure, organization and also feedback regarding my work. I also crave gratitude for the work that I do because I feel that I work extremely hard and sometimes I feel disappointed when it is not recognized.

Challenges:

It was somewhat difficult to adjust to the more relaxed structure and schedule here in Mexico. In the beginning I would always arrive for things exactly on time only to realize that everyone else would be arriving late. At first it was very frustrating having to wait for everyone else to show up after my on-time arrival but now I have gotten used to things and don't mind showing up a bit later as well. Work here does not actually start at 8 because when I would arrive at that time no one was here and I couldn't enter the office until someone arrived to unlock it. Now I enjoy that I can take just a little extra time to get ready in the morning. I can show up around 8:20 and still be one of the first people in the office and ready to start working on my office projects.

Also I would become very frustrated when people would tell me that we were going to do something and it would take forever (hours!) for us to finally go and do it. I felt very lonely because I was always trying to make plans and then they either wouldn't turn out or things would end up starting so much later than I was hoping. Now I realize that every day is an adventure and I should not expect my friends to be on the exact same schedule that I am. Instead of having everything planned out to the hour or minute, it can be really nice to just experience the day spontaneously. Instead of trying to rush on to the next activity I find myself really taking the time to just talk with people and stop worrying about when I have to be somewhere else.

Rewards:

As I previously mentioned it has been very rewarding to not worry as much about my plans and just experience the day spontaneously as it unfolds. Some of the most fun days I have had here did not go according to a defined plan and rather just ending up happening very spontaneously. It is also rewarding to stop worrying and just start really speaking with people. Instead of trying to cut a conversation short with someone I ignore the clock (or phone) and just enjoy interacting with the person (or people) that I am with.

#### **Question Set #5 – October 2014**

Please describe the organizational structure at your host organization (think of an org chart) and who you worked with during your internship. Describe the workplace culture at your host organization. How does your personal cultural lens work within the culture of your host organization?

Head of the office – Carla Diez de Marina (directora)

Support staff

*Jorge Osvaldo Tandy* – Coordinador de Estudiantes Internacionales

*Claudia Ugalde Osornio* – Coordinadora de Estudiantes Internacionales, Eventos y Residencias/Hospedaje

*Montserrat Bañales, Keren Hernández y Nate Longoria* – Coordinadores de Estudiantes Salientes

*Elsa Méndez* – Secretaria de recepción (trabaja en la entrada de la oficina)

*Miguel Ángel Telles* – trabaja en la oficina de CAD (Centro de Apoyo al Desarrollo) pero es coordinador de todos los programas de interns

Otros

Myself (intern of Claudia y Jorge) – full-time intern (no classes)

*Travis Goins* (intern of Keren y Veronica) – full-time intern (has one class during the week)

*Seungmin Nam* (intern of Montserrat, Keren y Nate) – part-time intern (has three classes during the week)

Other interns (o becarios – scholarship students) that come sporadically throughout the week: Maria Clara, Paola, Luis Carlos, Isela, Fernanda, Melba, Marta, Pepe, Estefania, Eduardo, etc.

AMI – a student group that works to unite international and Spanish-speaking students from the Tec, they are in charge of the Big Brother/Sister program (pairs up international students with Spanish-speaking Tec students) and also plan lots of different student events

The organization of the international office is pretty unique from my perspective because we require so much cooperation between all the members of the office. Carla is the head of the office but a lot of the time she isn't physically here because she travels a lot to other universities abroad with whom we have study abroad agreements. The other members of the support staff are here consistently every day because each person deals with a certain area and all the areas sort of coordinate with each other because we deal with incoming, current, and outgoing students. Claudia is also in charge of events and so she helps to plan the trips for international students and campus events such as the Welcome Lunch, Closing Ceremony or events with the student group AMI.

Jorge and Claudia deal with the international students currently studying here by helping them with their class schedules, finding housing, and answering any other questions that they may have. The two of them also do a lot of work with the incoming students by helping them to fill out their applications, letting them know about deadlines/requirements and again answering any pertinent questions. Montserrat, Nate and Keren help the students who are inquiring about or applying for international programs at other foreign universities. Elsa also plays a crucial role in the office because since she is the first person that you see as you enter the office, along with Rebecca, the both of them have to have knowledge about all the different areas of the office because they are the ones that inform the student who they need to speak with regarding different types of questions/inquiries.

All of the interns in the office, myself included, have to be very flexible and knowledgeable because we need to know where different materials are and are usually working on different tasks for different people every day. Since all of the support staff members are generally very busy doing their jobs we are asked to do lots of different tasks that can help the support staff to get things done

quicker and easier. The interns have to work together as a team because often if we need help with a task, or have questions, we tend to try to ask each other for help/answers before we go to a support staff member since they already have a lot to do. Also the becarios (scholarship students) that come sporadically throughout the week can be available to help us interns with tasks we are working on, or they will get asked to work on certain tasks based on the skills that they might have in specific areas. For example if a becario has Photoshop/design experience they might be asked by any of the staff members to help design brochures/posters. English-speaking interns can be valuable resources when there are documents that need to be written/revise or translated into English.

**Culture:** I feel that the culture of our office can be described as friendly and flexible/spontaneous. We all try our best to greet each other and talk to each other when there is time (such as in the morning when there is not as much student traffic, or during lunch) but generally during the day we are all busy working on lots of different projects. The culture is flexible and spontaneous because, as previously mentioned, there are such a wide variety of different assignments that need attention here in the International Programs office. Sometimes things need to be translated, brochures need to be created, events need to be promoted, questions need to be answered, and above all the students (incoming, outgoing and current) need to be attended to in different ways. Effective communication is also a key factor in the office because often we need to communicate with multiple staff members or organizations within the campus in order to generate effective outcomes.

**My Cultural Lens:** I feel that in the United States effective communication is a crucial component to many professional positions. When I work on tasks here in the office I make an effort to let people know what I am working on, inform them if I need assistance, and let them know when the task has been successfully completed. I never like to remain confused and delay progress on a project so I am quick to search for answers or assistance if I am unsure of something I am working on. Also I consider myself to be very organized and definitely prefer to have a lot of structure in the assignments that I work on; this can sometimes make things difficult. I would describe the office as pretty chaotic at times because there is so much going on and so I have found that I cannot expect everything to be perfectly organized and structured. It is also harder to be organized and time-efficient here because things tend to start later than expected and having many people collaborating on the same project can cause a little bit of confusion and disorder at times. What is important is moving past these moments of chaos or confusion and using your own knowledge, as well as the help of other people whether they are staff, fellow interns, or scholarship students, to successfully complete tasks as they are assigned.

What words of advice do you have for future interns as they prepare for this internship and living in your host country/culture?

### **Internship Prep**

- Be prepared to be very flexible and to multi-task on many different projects.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help if you feel overwhelmed but also be prepared to search out answers to your questions without always having to ask for help from a staff member. Everyone has a lot to do and staff members will appreciate it if you try to be somewhat proactive and independent in finding the answers to your questions (when possible).
- Try to talk to your co-workers as much as possible, greet them in the morning, say goodbye to

them when you leave. They will appreciate the effort and you can learn more about their personalities and working habits.

- If you feel frustrated try to see the bright side of situations. Sometimes I felt frustrated because I wasn't getting to use my Spanish all the time in the office but this taught me how valuable my English can be in certain situations. Embrace challenges and try to see the progress that you're making.

### **Cultural Prep**

- Time is much less structured in Mexico and so prepare for many people to be "late" to events (according to U.S. standards). People are not trying to offend you or slack off by arriving late, Mexican time works differently.
- Yes can often mean no. Mexicans do not like telling people no (maybe they feel bad if they do) and so instead of offending you by declining an invitation they might accept but then not show up later. I think the best thing to do is just try to be extremely spontaneous with your planning. When I first arrived I was very frustrated because I always wanted to make plans and then the plans wouldn't (more often than not) work out. It is better to just take things as they come and not get mad and frustrated when plans change or are cancelled. Some of my best days here were days that I had no plans and just did things spontaneously – it's an adventure, embrace it!
- Be prepared to greet and say goodbye to (with a cheek kiss) each and every person who you come into contact with. Don't be in a rush to leave; you are on Mexican time and you should be prepared to socialize and not worry so much about getting to your next event on time.
- Speak as much Spanish as possible! I recommend living with a host family instead of other students if you really want to improve your Spanish language skills. Try to participate in as many student activities and events as you can in order to meet new people and have more opportunities for friendship, learning, and fun.

### **Question Set #6 – November 2014**

Professional: Have you learned about any new possibilities for career paths? Have you done any informational interviews (formal or informal) to learn about the field?

Since this internship is one of the last parts of my undergraduate studies before receiving my bachelor's degree I have spent a considerable amount of time thinking about what steps (towards my future career path) I might take upon my arrival back in Oregon. Although I have not done any formal interviews to learn more about the field of international education I have had the opportunity to meet and speak with some of the international visitors (from universities around the world) that we have had to the International Programs office here in Querétaro. In fact last week I had the opportunity to go to dinner with two visitors from the study abroad office of the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign – Brandon Lanners and Jennifer Ewald. It was a great experience because I was able to talk to each of them about what they studied for undergraduate and graduate studies and how those studies relate to their current positions working at the University of Illinois. I asked for their contact information and definitely plan to send them an e-mail this week to ask if I can speak with them more about their educational backgrounds and see if they might share with me more about their

experiences travelling, speaking Spanish and working with international programs students.

Some of the different options I have considered to continue learning and gaining experience are obtaining my TEOFL certification in order to travel and teach English abroad, starting to learn German in order to possibly study at the master's level in Germany or possibly applying to the Peace Corps in order to gain even more experience learning and experiencing different ways of life overseas. Brandon specifically gave me some helpful advice for when I return to Ashland encouraging me to seek out businesses or services (for example, the Department of Health and Human Services or maybe medical facilities) where my Spanish skills could make me a valuable resource for working with Spanish-speaking individuals who need help in order to obtain the resources/services that they need. I want to stay in contact with Brandon, who has his master's in education; because he mentioned that he was able to obtain that degree in the United States by working as a teacher's assistant and receiving a discounted rate on the tuition for his education. I just know that I want to continue to learn and travel and gain experience and am very excited about the variety of opportunities that I could take advantage of in order to achieve these goals.

Cross Cultural: Looking back at your pre-departure journal or notes, how have your impressions of the host culture changed? What is the most frustrating aspect of your host culture? What is the most rewarding aspect?

### *Changes in Expectations/Impressions*

When I look back at my first set of questions that I answered it seems that some of my biggest concerns were regarding personal safety, corruption and cleanliness of my food and surroundings. Regarding my personal safety I definitely feel very safe living here in Querétaro. I have always been very careful to pay attention to my bag/money and to make sure that I am aware of my surroundings and have not had any problems with theft or any threats to my personal safety. These days I feel almost as safe in Querétaro as I do back home in Ashland. I think the most important thing is just to be aware of what is going on around you, and this applies in any location, and instead of worrying about what could happen to just deal with things as they come up. Mexican people are extremely friendly and helpful and I have not met anyone who was openly rude or hostile towards me.

In terms of corruption I have not experienced any instances of police corruption firsthand. Although during my time here there has been a lot of media coverage and public outrage about the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa in the state of Guerrero. It has been difficult to really wrap my head around the political situation here because there truly is a startling amount of corruption and sometimes it is difficult to understand this tragedy from the number of perspectives that are represented in Mexican and international media coverage. I feel that I have come to understand better the corruption problems that are present here, but even more difficult is trying to come up with possibly effective solutions to these problems. The political system here is extremely complex and it is hard for me to understand since I have not had the opportunity to learn about politics and corruption first-hand in a classroom but rather must use my own critical thinking skills to analyze the multitude of information that is represented both within and outside the country via the media.

Regarding cleanliness of food/surroundings I have come to realize just how paranoid and organized we can tend to be in the United States. I was concerned with my host mother's food preparation (and whether or not it might make me sick) but I have not had one instance of illness due to food after my first couple of weeks here and my initial dietary adjustment. I have come to realize that perhaps we are just tend to be overly concerned back home about the way that we clean and

store our food. Also, I am happy to say that my house is relatively bug-free these days and no longer have to worry about cockroaches or crickets. I feel that these concerns that I initially had with cleanliness are mostly just related to my own cultural perspective and I can see now that they do not have as much significance as I originally gave them. While it is nice to have things be very clean it is better to spend your time in a host culture trying to enjoy the food and the experience than worrying about everything and comparing it to what you may be used to in your native culture.

### *Frustrating Aspect of Host Culture*

In my fourth set of reporting questions I talked about adjusting to the relaxed structure and schedule in Mexico and I would have to say that this has been the most frustrating aspect of the host culture. Things just don't start on time here and it is also very difficult to plan activities ahead of time because plans always seem to be changing. Sometimes it is hard to deal with the disorganization because it is very common for meetings to be cancelled or changed to another day with only very short notice, often the same day of the meeting. Also, it is better to always show up to events 10-20 minutes after they are said to start because if you show up exactly on time you will most certainly be the first person there and then just feel impatient waiting for everyone else to arrive. I no longer try to plan events ahead of time because more often than not it will just not end up happening. It is much better to just go with the flow here rather than trying to structure everything and becoming frustrated when it falls through.

### *Rewarding Aspect of Host Culture*

I now realize that every day is an adventure and I should not expect my friends to be on the exact same schedule that I am. Instead of having everything planned out to the hour or minute, it can be really nice to just experience the day spontaneously. Instead of trying to rush on to the next activity I find myself really taking the time to just talk with people and stop worrying about when I have to be somewhere else. Some of the most fun days I have had here did not go according to a defined plan and rather just ending up happening very spontaneously.

Another rewarding aspect of Mexican culture is just the warmth and kindness of the people here. People are almost always happy to answer questions about the language, culture, music or food. Mexican parties are also fantastic because it seems like people are really able to let loose and just enjoy themselves. At parties that I have been to it is very common for everyone to dance (without inhibitions that are so common in the U.S.) to salsa, bachata, cumbia and banda music. Guests also seem intent on making sure that everyone is having a good time and feeling included in what is going on regardless if the person speaks Spanish or not.

Personal: The period of cultural adjustment is often represented by a "W" curve with various peaks and valleys: Honeymoon (peak); Initial Culture Shock (valley); Cultural Adjustment (peak); Further Culture Shock (valley); Further Adjustment (peak); Re-entry Shock (valley). Outline your cultural adjustment thus far marking the highs and lows with approximate dates and descriptions of events that represent some of these phases (recognizing of course, that you are still in process).

#### *1. Honeymoon (peak) – Aug. 5 (arrival date) through Aug. 17*

I was very excited about my initial arrival in Mexico and was having so much fun participating in events such as the Welcome Lunch, orientation days, etc. Also, since everything was so new I was just trying to meet as much students (both international and Mexican) as possible. It seemed like

everyone wanted to go out all the time in order to get to know each other and it felt like every time I met a new person we would almost immediately exchange contact information. All of the food was new and exciting even though I felt a bit ill during these first couple of weeks since my body was still getting adjusted. It seemed like everyone was very open because we all wanted to make as many new friends as possible in order to have people to talk to and things to do for the rest of the semester. It felt like there was so much going on and I was trying to soak up the culture and participate in as many activities as possible.

### *2. Initial culture shock (valley) – end of August through beginning of September*

I began to receive more assignments in the International Programs office and felt a bit overwhelmed since I didn't know my co-workers very well at that point. I felt like things were very disorganized in the office and felt frustrated when I would show up to the office on time (exactly at 8) and no one was even there yet to unlock the door. I also felt disappointed that I wasn't getting to speak as much Spanish in the office as I had originally been expecting. I was surprised at how many of the International students had no previous experience speaking Spanish and tended to only hang out with each other in order to use English as common denominator language. Making plans with Mexican students was also frustrating me because I would text them to see if we could do something together and the plans usually didn't work out. I started to realize that people would always say yes to things instead of just being honest and politely declining. I also realized that people would much rather make excuses than be direct and have to tell someone no.

### *3. Cultural adjustment (peak) – end of September*

I started to realize that I needed to get used to Mexico time. I started showing up at the office at 8:20 instead of 8 and stopped trying to make specific plans with friends. I started learning to be more spontaneous with my plans and would wait to see what might happen during the weekend rather than trying to plan for it in advance during the work week. I was finally used to the food and was able to try many new, and delicious, cuisines since my stomach was no longer upset.

### *4. Further culture shock (valley) – October*

On weekends when plans didn't work out I would feel pretty lonely and frustrated. Usually I like to do things on the weekend with friends and would become disappointed when all my friends were out of town doing trips in big groups or wouldn't respond to my messages. I also felt some further frustration regarding the disorganization of the office when I would have to be responsible for sending mass e-mails letting people know that we had rescheduled meetings or cancelled events due to unforeseen circumstances. I remember a particular weekend that some friends and I saw a post on Facebook letting us know that there would be a farmer's market in a particular place and time on Saturday. We took a taxi to that location on Saturday and it turned out that the market was not even open until the next weekend but ended up turning it into a fun day anyways by going to explore the downtown area instead.

### *5. Further adjustment (peak) – November*

Now I know that if I want to make solid plans with someone then I should make those plans with my International friends rather than Mexican friends. I recognize that a lot of the international students didn't necessarily come here to learn Spanish because they choose to live with other students and most (if not all) of their classes are in English. I also recognize that an exchange program

is what you make of it and I have chosen to focus a lot on speaking Spanish and trying to learn as much as possible about the Mexican culture rather than choosing to spend time most of the time with other English-speakers, spending most of the time travelling and going to rowdy parties. Every international student is different and the priorities of each person differ greatly. I feel grateful for the amount of Spanish that I am able to speak and have been able to practice and try to respect that not everyone wants to learn Spanish or they might just feel uncomfortable when they are practicing with a native speaker.

#### 6. *Re-entry shock (valley) – December 20th (returning home)*

As I prepare for my return home in some ways I am looking forward to it and in other ways I am really not. I am dreading going home because I know that it could be somewhat difficult to find fluent Spanish-speakers to practice with. I also am dreading the extremely cold winter weather and am going to be so sad to leave the amazing sunshine here in Querétaro. I also know that when you are an exchange student you feel special and exotic in certain ways and then when you go home you feel like you are just your boring normal self again because no one truly understands the amazing things that you experienced during your time abroad. I am glad that I live with one of my best friends at home because I know that he will be happy to listen to the stories of my successes and adventures here in Mexico. At the same time I also don't want to go back and have people be annoyed with me if I am talking about Mexico too much and have them think that I am trying to brag about it.

There are also a lot of things I am looking forward to when I return home. I feel like a lot of the things I am looking forward to are just comforts and luxuries such as my nice soft bed/pillows, good water pressure in the shower, being able to clean my house and do laundry, etc. I am also really looking forward to spending the Christmas holiday with my family and friends – eating delicious holiday food, seeing all the decorations, and spending time together. You don't truly appreciate what you have in life until you spend time without it and I feel like that strongly applies to experiences living abroad. You realize how good you have it once you spend time living a different type of life on a different schedule. I have a feeling that I am just going to feel so spoiled, almost in a bad way, when I get home.

### **Question Set #7 – December**

Now is the time to begin thinking about how to articulate all your experiences you are gaining for the job search when you graduate. Identify 3-4 accomplishments or successes in your internship of which you are most proud. These can be professional, personal or cross-cultural. Explain them briefly below.

After identifying 3-4, pick two of these and expand on them with the following:

- Outline the context of the situation
- Describe any challenges you faced
- Describe the actions you took to overcome the challenges

Restate what the final outcome was (your accomplishment you mentioned above).

The idea is to create a statement that will succinctly express your achievements abroad that will set you apart after this amazing experience. A *possible* formula is:

verb + quantified result + by + specific actions

*Example:* I oversaw initial processing of around 200 enrollment applications in a complex international

workplace by implementing efficient processing and filing procedures in order to .

- Became more accustomed to working on loosely structured tasks – finding out the information I need rather than having everything provided in the beginning. Additionally I learned to deal with a more relaxed structuring of time – things generally take longer to get done, things don't start right on time, etc.
- Expanded my office/business vocabulary by interacting with various staff members and visiting guests in the International Programs office. Picked up on more formal language (greeting guests, answering the phone, writing formal e-mails) and applied it in an international work setting.
- I improved my Spanish language skills in an international and professional environment.
- Learned more about event logistics and promotion by helping to plan trips for international students and helping to promote various activities/contests/trips.

1. I assisted with the logistics and promotion of five events for 300+ international students during my internship: these events included the Welcome Lunch, Closing Ceremony, visit to Niñas y Niños de México and International Programs trips to Teotihuacán and Oaxaca. I helped with the logistics of these events by verifying the medical insurance of each student, having participants sign trip agreement forms, arranging transportation, and revising special dietary requirements of students. In order to promote these events I posted related photos and announcements on the International Programs Facebook page, made announcements in classrooms, and helped to administer surveys after each event in order to improve each event for future groups.

Challenges: Making sure that we had medical insurance from all of our 300+ international students – keeping both paper and digital copies of this insurance; getting enough students to attend each event.

Overcoming Challenges: Using an organizational system to keep track of all 300+ medical insurance copies; uploading PDF copy to Google Drive and printing a PDF copy for files. Going to classrooms to promote events; making visually interesting posts on the International Programs Facebook page; creating posters for events and posting them around campus; encouraging international students to tell their friends about upcoming events; thinking of innovative new ways (videos, photo contests, etc.) to attract the attention of the international students.

2. I improved my Spanish language abilities by translating relevant documents, sending formal e-mails and interacting with my Spanish-speaking colleagues. I was responsible for creating informative sheets (written in Spanish) about the universities from which we had visitors from International Student Offices, helped to create an updated version of the incoming student acceptance letter (in both English and Spanish), and created translations (from Spanish to English) of course syllabi for inquiring professors/international students.

Challenges: Avoiding informal language/slang; using professional phrases and vocabulary with communicating with important visitors, professors of the school, or co-workers; confirming that intercultural communication is effective and the specific messages are understood by all involved communicators.

Overcoming Challenges: Making an effort to study business-related vocabulary in my free time and using that vocabulary whenever possible; practicing my formally written Spanish by writing e-mails/letters and having my Mexican co-workers revise them; asking questions about specific words/phrases to gauge their formality/informality; reviewing previously created versions of professional documents; practicing my communication skills (active listening and speaking) in Spanish as often as possible with both students and co-workers.