

Mexico Shoulder to Shoulder

Lasell College International Service-Learning

Program Highlights 2008-2009

January 2009 marked the seventh year of Lasell College's Mexico Shoulder to Shoulder International Service-Learning Exchange.

This year, eleven Lasell students traveled to Coatepec and Orizaba in the state of Veracruz to live, work, and study alongside Mexicans for 13 days.

We work by day and hold class at night, knowing that cultural immersion and community service projects expose students to complex issues of global economics and social justice.

Our goal is educational and our method experiential. We work to train and educate students who will one day take the lead in creating just international relations. This first-hand experience offers new respect for our neighbors' culture, history and lifestyle.



Taking a break on construction materials

A New Home in Coatepec



cement with shovels, dug a foundation, carried hundreds of blocks, and took dozens of photos of the children. They also learned about Abel, Gloria and their hardworking neighbors and had conversations about the many factors that sustained their poverty.

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Hotel California, Cold Play and the Beatles



A sing-along at Casa Hogar Boys' Home in Orizaba

In Orizaba, we continued work with the boys' home that provides a permanent residence for 30 young men and boys who were formerly on the street. Many are survivors of violence in their families of origin.

We began with an impromptu sing-along in the chapel, where the Friar insisted Lasell students offer a song of their own. Stumped but given no way out, students finally hit on some universal classics. Not bad for a command performance: even where the verses were weak, the chorus was strong.

Each year has brought new developments in what is now a multifaceted and rewarding year-round partnership with several sites. In honor of our four year partnership with the Casa Hogar Boys' Home in Orizaba, the head Friar presented Lasell College with an elaborate woodcarving bearing the insignia of the home and the Franciscan order.

This gift was made by a man who grew up in the home and now has his own woodworking shop in the capital, Xalapa.

How Do Students Respond?

Now that we've seen all this, I feel it's our duty to share what we've learned.

Not only did I learn how the people of Mexico live, but I got to see and experience first-hand the hardships many must go through to simply make a living.

The discussions at the end of the day helped us explore solutions and form conclusions. Everyone should do it! Take a chance and grow as a person, and bring those lessons learned back home to share.

--Kyley Dolan, Mexico 2009



Ginnelle Gaulin-McKenzie entertains the youngest members of Abel's family.



Twenty Students Receive Scholarships

The first students who traveled to Mexico in 2003 returned inspired. They formed a nonprofit organization that could give directly to the educational needs of the children they had met in Coatepec and Orizaba, naming it “Niños de Veracruz, Mexico” (Children of Veracruz).

That first year, we raised enough to give a single scholarship to a sixth grade student. At seventh grade the cost of uniforms, shoes and books is prohibitive for many, and young students tend to drop out to work in the cane fields or in domestic service. The money they earn benefits the whole family.

In 2009, Niños de Veracruz awarded 20 scholarships to keep students in school. The Mayor of Coatepec hosted a ceremony at City Hall to formally recognize the recipients as well as the many committed partners, businesses, and families who have made Mexico Shoulder to Shoulder a success.



Award ceremony at City Hall



I volunteered with Mexico Shoulder to Shoulder in 2008. Undergraduate students build basic housing, harvest coffee and sugar cane, and study alongside members of the ejidal farming community of Coatepec in Mexico.

Community-based strategies for the reduction of poverty engaged me directly in problems I had only seen managed indirectly through United Nations resolutions or the analysis of statistics and policies. I could feel in physical, analytical, and emotional ways this hard social situation.

The experience furthered my drive to combine practical knowledge of poverty with the knowledge I obtained in my internship and academic study. It reinforced my resolve to continue work in sustainable international development.

--Jorge Varuk, Intern, United Nations General Mexico Office

First-Hand Views on Immigration

In the indigenous Nahuatl village of Atlahuilco we spent a day painting and playing with school children. After lunch, the parents’ organization sat down with us for an open exchange. Many shared their own experiences or that of family members who travel to Canada and the US each year for work. Lasell students had the opportunity to ask direct questions and hear first-hand perspectives on poverty and migration.



Lasell College

Mexico as a Model for Education in Nicaragua and Ecuador

Faculty Exchange: Mexico Shoulder to Shoulder has always supported the opportunity for reciprocal exchange that can bring our partners to Newton. This has not only deepened the commitment and understanding of our Mexican partners, but it has extended the program's impact on faculty and students here.

Several of our Mexican coordinators have traveled to the US to spend short and long term stays in Massachusetts, studying, presenting, or teaching at Lasell College. Dulce Brenda Méndez, Reyna Hernández, Professor Cuca López, and Fulbright Scholars Teresa Romero and Tito Mata have all been visible and active presences on campus over the course of seven years.

On to Nicaragua and Ecuador: Professor Aaron Toffler, Legal Policy and Environmental Studies, traveled to Mexico this year to study the Shoulder to Shoulder model from an educational and logistical standpoint. Over the past four years, Lasell's International Service Learning Think Tank has worked to identify and assist faculty leaders like Professor Toffler as they seek out new international partners and locations based on the Mexico model.

Nicaragua Shoulder to Shoulder was launched successfully in 2008 under the direction of Brennan Library faculty Lydia Pittman. Professor Toffler and Ms. Amy Greene will lay foundations for an environmental study site in Ecuador in 2010.



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is
the real world