Students and Faculty from Wayne State and Michigan State Universities departed for Mexico on May 27th. Upon arrival at the Benito Juarez Airport, the group was transported to the Hotel Royal in the Zona Rosa area of Mexico City. The area is rich in historical artifacts, including many monuments, sculptures, churches, and architectural designs. The Alameda, a park area in the Historico Centro, and the surrounding area, house dozens of historical monuments. These include the Winged Victory monument, the Independence Monument, Sagrario Cathedral (completed in the 17th century), the “House of Tiles,” a restaurant completely covered in decorative, painted clay tiles, and a post office almost completely covered in gold, the Correo Central.

The Winged Victory monument was the site of a protest by people angered by the current government’s failure to uphold promises made during the election campaign. The sign in the background of the photo reads, “The senate doesn’t see us or hear us.” The majority of female protesters were unclothed, while the men wore undergarments; the government anticipated the group would protest unclothed and issued a statement that men had to wear something. The
government failed to issue any statements regarding the women, and as a result, women protested unclothed.

The group attempted to visit the Diego Rivera murals in the historic Center, however the National Palace and other government buildings were closed due to another protest, much larger and more organized. The protest was in the middle of the Zocalo, the main square, a common site for mass demonstrations. The protest spanned the length of a day, and marchers went on for miles as they walked some of the main streets of the Zocalo, Juarez and Hidalgo avenues.

The morning after arrival, students and faculty traveled to el Colegio de Mexico, a Mexican University, to hear a lecture on Housing and Neighborhood issues, given by professor Martha Schteingart. The lecture revolved around the process of regularizing “popular settlements,” areas on the peripheries of Mexico City where poor to middle class people are living on native lands, but without titles. During the process of regularization, residents are given official ownership of the land, and city services such as water and sewer are introduced. Many families live in homes with pipes capable of conducting water but no water services are being provided. The group also heard lectures about environmental and pollution issues, given by professor Jose Luis Lezama,
population growth and its consequences, given by Professor Gustavo Garza, and
the government structure of Mexico, given by Professor Vicente Ugalde.
The students got some hands-on experience as well when the group traveled to a “popular settlement” on the outskirts of the city. A family living in the settlement with intimate knowledge of its beginnings, construction, and evolution gave a walking tour of the settlement, then showed the group photos of how the area looked in the early 1980s when it began. Near the center of the settlement is the community center, a place where men and women can learn about sewing, computers, and other trade skills; the center also houses a daycare. Across the street from the community center is a lecheria, where young mothers can buy inexpensive milk for their children.

More hands-on experience came with a visit to the Secretaria del Medio Ambiente, where the group received a follow-up to Professor Lezama’s lecture about air pollution and air quality. The organization researches and monitors air pollution in the city with state-of-the-art technology both grounded and mobile, and issues reports to the government about the state of Mexico City’s air quality (www.sma.df.gob.mx). The City has made impressive progress since the early 1990s, when Mexico City’s air quality was at its worst and the levels of all monitored pollutants exceeded health limits 85% of the days in a year. The students learned that if a person in the City owns a vehicle over ten years old, he or she must park the car at least one day a week because older cars have higher emissions than do newer cars.
Traveling back and forth to the Colegio, to anywhere else in the city was never a dull or quiet experience for the group. The driver of an energetic man named Silverio, doubled as a guide who may have known too much about the city. Peppering his facts about the city with jokes and stories, Silverio educated the group about monuments, churches, famous homes, buildings of pretty much everything! There wasn’t a question the group asked that Silverio did not have a long and rather detailed answer to, almost always involving a story.

Another colorful event for the group was dinner every night, and more specifically, where to eat it. Among the many restaurants sampled by the students and faculty was Almandro’s, a restaurant with three locations in Mexico City. The highlight of the restaurant for the students was the “tequila cart,” a two-tiered cart rolled from table to table, boasting nearly thirty varieties of tequila. Though the tequila cart was the favorite of the group, it is certainly worth mentioning that the service was outstanding and the food was delicious as well.

The group is pictured here at Almandro’s Restaurant shortly after the tequila cart rolled through and delivered shots of tequila and sangrita, spicy tomato juice.
With a growing sense of Mexican history and culture, the group traveled to the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Chapultepec Park. The Museum is a massive structure covering an area of 79,700 square meters, 35,700 of which are in the open air. The Museum also contains a restaurant which the group sampled along the way. The museum is devoted to Mexico’s pre-Hispanic cultures, and includes information about and artifacts recovered from the Aztec, Maya, Zapoteca, Mixteca, Purépecha, and Olmec cultures.

Across the street from the Anthropology Museum is the Castillo de Chapultepec, the palace built by the Viceroy around 1785. Throughout its history, the castle has been used for many purposes, a Spanish Military Academy, an Imperial and Presidential residence, an observatory, and a museum. Chapultepec Park, which houses both the Museum and Castle, spans an amazing 1,600 acres of land. The group also visited the Fundacion Amigos de la Letra Impresa, or the Foundation for the Friends of the Printed Letter. The Foundation promotes reading and writing in existing spoken and written languages in Mexico; in other words, the Foundation believes in instructing children in their native languages first. The Foundation is a mere year old, and already the administrators have several plans in the works: a national conference about the best practices to teach reading and writing, a national index of the 50 cities highest in literacy in Mexico, an indigenous languages study and promotion fund, and a technical University of the Graphic Arts. The Foundation is currently working with the Central
University in New Britain, Connecticut, to compile the index of most literate cities in Mexico.

http://amigosdelaletraimpresa.org/convenio_ali_unam/discurso.htm

Back at the Colegio, the American students had the opportunity to meet with a group of Mexican students, where both groups practiced speaking the others’ language. The Mexican students’ English was much better than the American students’ Spanish, but the students mingled well, and over lunch in the faculty dining room in the Colegio they communicated about academic ambitions, current courses of study, and American culture, music, and entertainment, which is popular in Mexico. Also among the conversations were the sights the group had seen while in Mexico City, and a few of the Mexican students were happy to learn the group would soon be traveling to a sight that could not be missed, pyramids.

On Saturday, June 2\textsuperscript{nd}, the last day in the Mexico City area, the group visited the pyramids at \textit{Teotihuacan}; the trip and transportation by motor coach was organized by professor Jose Luis Lezama. Jose, his wife Elsa, and their daughter, Natalia, visited the pyramids along with the students and faculty. Jose wanted the American students and faculty to understand the depth of Mexico’s history by visiting just one
of several civilizations that emerged in the B.C. era. The pyramids at *Teotihuacan* emerged between 300-100 B.C., and remained until around 750 A.D. The name *Teotihuacan* means “place of the gods,” though what the peoples of the time named their city or what language they spoke is unknown.

The site boasts several massive structures, including the Pyramids of the Sun and Moon and the Temple of the Feathered Serpent, all organized down a north-south axis known as the Street of the Dead. The reasons for the decline and eventual death of both the peoples of *Teotihuacan* and their city are unknown, but most anthropologists agree that some sort of natural, climatic shift brought about a lessening of the food supply, a drying out of the land, and a loss of water sources, which ultimately resulted in the abandoning of the city.

After leaving the pyramids, the Lezamas treated the American group to lunch at a nearby Club Med. The meal began with a round of *cervezas*, Spanish for beer. Bread and salad were brought next, but *cactus* salad would be difficult to find in the states!
After the salad came a mushroom-based soup, also delicious. The main course was chicken and cactus wrapped in a flavor-sealing shell with a side of Mexican rice; the shell was not edible but it added beautifully to the presentation. With everyone claiming they could not find room for dessert, coconut ice cream came to the table. Everyone quickly found room for dessert and agreed it was some of the best ice cream they had ever had.

On Sunday morning the students and faculty traveled to the Benito Juarez Airport once again, but this time to board the *Estrella Roja* bus to Puebla. The ride to Puebla from Mexico City took about an hour and a half. The largest difference obvious between Mexico City and Puebla is one of population; Mexico City’s population is nine million while Puebla’s is one. The group felt that difference bussing to places in Mexico City while walking areas of downtown Puebla. Other notable differences between the cities are the visibility of families and the general intimacy of a smaller place like Puebla. Both cities certainly had an air of hustle and bustle, but families strolling down sidewalks is a much more common sight in Puebla. Puebla is also one of the most affluent cities in Mexico, as students quickly learned by browsing a number of high-end shops and stores.

Somewhat surprising to the students and faculty was the difference in accommodations between Mexico City and Puebla,
though both hotels are operated by the same corporation. While in the City the
group stayed in the equivalent of a four-star hotel, with spacious rooms and
bathrooms, glass elevators, marble countertops, a gym, pool, spa, and bar
overlooking the city, and a high-end restaurant on the bottom floor. Upon arrival to
the hotel in Puebla, the group found cramped accommodations, next to no water
pressure in the sinks, toilets, and showers, a television that seemed to change in the
amount of cable programming every time it was turned on, no gym, pool, or spa,
and a restaurant located fifty feet from the check-in desk. Needless to say, the
group was somewhat shocked by the differences between the hotels, but they made
do; most were happy, however, that the majority of the stay was in the Royal in
Mexico City and not the Aristos in Puebla.

With some free time in the Zocalo of the city, students and faculty were able to shop,
sample some local cuisine, and photograph parks, monuments, homes, and churches.
Pictured here is a fountain in the middle of the square covered in decorative, colorful
tiles.

Puebla is an area also rich in historical and
cultural artifacts. On a bus tour of the city in
the early morning, the group listened as a
guide told of the history behind the celebration
Cinco de Mayo. Meaning the fifth of May, the
holiday refers to the day in 1862 when the
Mexican Army overtook the French at the
Battle of Puebla. Not strictly a riding tour, the
bus stopped multiple times throughout the city
for the students and faculty to see fountains,
forts, mountains, volcanoes, churches, and other points of interest, such as the
governor’s home, where a gathering of political figures was evident on that morning.
The group noticed several expensive cars including a Maserati, which many of them had not even seen in the United States.

The students had another opportunity to meet with a Mexican student, but this time one from the University of Puebla. Juan showed the group the interior of the University and the government offices nearby. The students and faculty learned much about the way the Puebla University worked, and as it turned out, things are run much differently than here in the States. Though there are no accommodations “on campus,” an option many universities in the United States have, the cost per semester for tuition at Juan’s university was around $50 U.S. dollars! The students marveled at how “cheap” the cost of education is in Mexico, though as Juan soon pointed out, not only are Americans paid more money for work in the United States, the job market is much more competitive for graduating Mexican students; Juan told a story of a job opening for one person that received thousands of applications.

On the last day of the trip, the group again found themselves in a van for a tour, but this time traveling to a unique pottery producer in Puebla, pyramids of a different sort on the periphery of the city, and a handful of churches in close proximity with notable structural differences. The tour began with a demonstration inside the *Talavera Armando* pottery center, where the group witnessed the work, care, and precision it takes to make a single piece of pottery. All pieces are
hand-made and hand-decorated, and each piece takes between two and three months to complete. Between the mixing, shaping, baking, painting, baking again, coating, and painting of each piece, the final product is nearly scratch-proof and safe for microwaves and ovens. The group learned that there are very few certified talavera pottery centers, and after seeing how much work goes into a single piece, they understood why it might cost $150 for a serving platter.

http://talaveraarmando.com

Next on the tour was the Great Pyramid of Cholula, one of the more interesting stops of the trip. The temple-pyramid complex was built over many dozens of generations, from 200 B.C. to the early 1600s. The Great Pyramid of Cholula is actually the largest pyramid as well as the largest monument ever constructed anywhere in the world, even larger than the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt (in footprint, not in height). The pyramid is so interesting because it first appears to be a hill with a church on top. The church is called the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, or the Church of Our Lady of the Remedies. The Spanish covered the layers of pyramids with earth in the 1590s and built the church on the top of the mound. Because of the historic and religious significance of the church, the pyramid has not been excavated and restored, as have the pyramids at Teotihuacan. However, inside the pyramid are over five miles of tunnels excavated by archaeologists, which the group was able to walk through.
Lastly, the group photographed some local churches before heading back to the hotel. The most interesting of the churches was the one dubbed the “face church” by the group. This church was so interesting because the faces of the natives who built the church had been incorporated into the architecture, as the picture shows.

The photographing finished no sooner than the skies opened. The weather had been exceptionally cooperative the entire trip, with moderate temperatures, sun, and no rain. The rainy season looms at the end of May, and on the way back to the hotel the rain was coming down so hard that the streets were flooded within minutes. On the morning of June 6th, the group made the hour and a half trip via Estrella Roja back to the Benito Juarez Airport in Mexico City. The students and faculty arrived safely back at the Detroit Metro Airport at 7:30 p.m. on June 6th.

More photos of the group’s trip to Mexico can be found at

http://www.clas.wayne.edu/~up599907/index.html