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Through my internship in Mexico I worked with an organization called Union de Museos Comunitarios (Union of Community Museums). I traveled to a few different indigenous villages in the region to help with collecting information and carrying out interviews about the towns, their cultural histories and legends, as well as other information they would like to display in small cultural museums. This project is important to them for numerous reasons, but perhaps the most critical is to prevent the loss of their cultural history to globalization and westernization, whose impacts are most visible in the younger generations. Additionally, if they do not protect the artifacts they have found over the years, the towns are in danger of losing these items to larger organizations that often come in and take them away to be put in national museums.

During my time as an intern I covered a lot of ground. I mainly traveled to four different villages each week: two were far enough away that they were overnight trips, and two were close enough to be day trips. The overnight trips were challenging, but it was fun and incredibly interesting to see how the people live (I learned to travel with my own roll of toilet paper and to expect neither clean bathrooms nor much food that I am used to). I usually traveled with just one other man, Francisco, who worked for Museos and was responsible for collaborating with the committees in the different villages. He was extremely nice and a great source of help and support.

I did a lot of different jobs depending on what village we were in and what stage of development they were at with the museum. One of my responsibilities was the little *talleres* (workshops) that we did with middle school children. In one town we had them talk about some of the important legends and myths that they remember being told by older people in the village.

We asked the children to interview those people and have them re-tell the story and answer some follow-up questions. We recorded this information, which Museos is planning on using when they put together some of the exhibits. In another town, we talked about its archaeological sites and important historical places, as well as what we could learn by looking there. During the next two visits, we walked around those sites to take pictures and were able to hear about a great deal of their history.

Another big part of my job was taking and organizing pictures of whatever activity we were doing. The fact that I had a camera and a laptop was one of the ways in which I was most helpful to them as an intern, because that doubled the amount of technology they had! I also used my laptop to type up some information for them, such as notes from meetings or transcripts of the legends that I mentioned above. On days when we were not traveling, I would often meet with Francisco to go through all the material, organize it, and transfer it to his computer.

One challenge I definitely did not expect with the job was that the people I worked for did not speak English. Agustin, the internship advisor I was assigned through ProMexico, was helpful in organizing all of my trips and meetings with my superiors at Museos, but he did not accompany us when we traveled. There was another American student working with me for four out of the eight weeks I was there, but it was hard for both of us. I definitely feel, however, that my Spanish improved tremendously since I was forced to use it so much.

Aside from the language barrier I would say the biggest challenge for me was the fact that they did not really have a set plan or project for me as an intern. I believe this was due to the nature of the organization in general, in that the creation of a museum, especially in a rural indigenous village that does not have many resources for such a project, is a very slow and complicated process in any country. Because I was only there for eight weeks, during which I

was only able to visit each town about four or five times, I was able to be involved in just a small fraction of the process. Although I was not naïve in thinking that we were going to be able to fully establish a museum in those eight weeks, it was often frustrating when I would simply sit in on a meeting and observe; I would find myself thinking, “Why am I even here if I am not doing anything?”

Thankfully, that feeling was much more common at the beginning of the trip than throughout its entirety. Looking back on it now, I understand why this is so. When I first arrived I had a basic understanding of what Union de Museos does, but I was not familiar with the complexity of the total process. So, while I did just observe a great deal during my first couple of trips, I was setting myself up to be a lot more active in future trips. Having seen different parts of the process, I was able to contribute to activities or even to conversations simply by saying, “Oh, that is similar to when we went to this town,” or “We did this before, that worked really well,” or “That did not work at all.”

I do feel as though I was as helpful to the organization as I could have been during my internship. As I said before, the fact that I had a camera and was another person taking pictures and storing information on my computer was very helpful. Coming from a more fast-paced way of working, it is easy for me to think that I did not accomplish much, but after living there for eight weeks, I do believe we were productive as an organization based on what they had hoped to accomplish.

For me, the experience was incredible and I learned much more than I had anticipated. Going into this internship I was given very little information, again due to the nature of the organization and the way things are generally run in Mexico. But if you go in with an open mind and are willing to work hard and become a student at whatever you are doing—because

everything is a learning experience—you will see, absorb, and enjoy so much. As an Anthropology and Spanish major, this internship really suited my learning goals because with Union de Museos, I definitely saw a lot of anthropology in action. By traveling to the villages I was able to learn about how these people live, their indigenous cultures, their heritage, their history, and how they are fighting to keep that heritage alive. Their efforts are truly amazing. It was also so great to be able to see a different Mexico outside of the city life of Oaxaca. I hope to remain connected with the people that I met, the villages I visited, and the project of their museums. I would recommend this internship to anyone who is open to do a lot of learning, observing, and reevaluating of how they view many aspects of the world.