Wednesday, Day 1: Depart Austin for Oaxaca; Dinner as group with local partners

Students will travel together from Austin and collectively experience landing in Oaxaca and their first glimpses of Mexico. The volunteers will travel to the city center and get settled in their hotel rooms. After an in-country briefing among all students and group leaders, we will meet up with staff from local partner EcoLogic for dinner at a representative restaurant. Each night the students will be briefed on the following days’ schedule and itinerary.

Thursday, Day 2: Overland travel from Oaxaca City to Tuxtepec; Overnight in Tuxtepec

After breakfast at the hotel, the group will have a couple of hours to explore Oaxaca together, guided by our local partners. After lunch we will board a bus for the 5 hour ride to Tuxtepec, the city closest to the project area and the second largest city (after Oaxaca City) in the state. Students will have a change to chat on the bus with one another and take in some of the mountainous landscapes and people of Oaxaca. The group will check in to a local hotel and will enjoy a traditional Oaxacan dinner in Tuxtepec with staff from EcoLogic and review specifics of construction plan and village life. An early bedtime will be suggested due to an early start the next day.

Friday, Day 3: Travel to San Isidro Naranjal; Begin construction at worksite

Upon arriving at the village, leaders will help students get organized and settled in their accommodations for the week long stay. They will then meet the construction team members they will be working alongside for the week, begin receiving instruction on the plan for the week and lessons in the various jobs that are available to try and then will jump right into construction. Students will begin leaning on one another as well, as they help each other figure out how to master each job. That evening the village will also hold a welcome ceremony and party to celebrate our arrival, typically consisting of traditional food, music, and dancing. Each night, students will have a chance to hear each other’s thoughts, either through an organized reflection exercise or spontaneous conversations, and each will realize that they are having similar reactions to the food, their surroundings, and the welcome ceremony.

Saturday, Day 4: Full workday on site

Our first morning in the village will start early (typically 7:00 am), and after quickly washing up and having some breakfast the students will walk to the construction site (no more than 15 minutes away). Each day on the work site will follow a similar plan. Wake-up, eat breakfast, and begin work on the construction site. We will typically break around noon to eat lunch and take some additional time to rest. Students will get a chance to rotate and work in different pairings
or groups. This is when a lot of volunteers really get to learn about one another, as you alternate
turns with a pick axe or shovel. Putting sweat equity into a project together is the quickest way
to feel camaraderie with your fellow students.

Sunday, Day 5: Day of Rest; Hike, Swim, and Explore Nature

Sundays are non-working days in the village; accordingly student volunteers will have an
opportunity for a day off to explore the local area. San Isidro Naranjal is located in a tropical
ecosystem resplendent with swimming holes, hiking trails, and exotic flora and fauna. The
“cascadas” or waterfalls are a popular destination. We will likely also explore Zuzul, a town 1
hour away, that features a natural spring swimming hole as well as hiking alongside waterfalls.
Students will return to the village before sunset and spend the night there in preparation for
returning to the construction site the next day.

Monday, Day 6: Full workday on site

As the week wears on, students will sense how their efforts on the work site have begun to earn
the respect of the skilled laborers on site. We tell students to view themselves as interns on a
week-long assignment, and that the full-time crew may view their help with skepticism. Without
fail the volunteers do feel a sense of kinship, not unlike a class of interns, as they get more and
more comfortable on the work site and see the tangible process of their efforts. They will also
feel a greater bond with the community, as the local people realize the hard work they are
c孝uting to better their village and openly express their gratitude.

Tuesday, Day 7: Work on site, activities in community

With greater acceptance by the construction team and the community, this creates the
opportunity for the students to interact with the local people in more meaningful ways. We will
start spending less time on the work site, and more time teaching kids in the school, or
interacting with village elders. Whether buying goods in the market, playing a game of soccer, or
reading a book with a child, the students will have many memorable exchanges with the
community and each other. The discomforts of the accommodations and the food are largely
forgotten and students have entirely acclimated to their surroundings and each other.

Wednesday, Day 8: Depart village in afternoon, group celebration that night

On our final day in the village, the students will be given the morning to spend as they wish;
write in their journals, play with the children, or lay a few more rows of bricks on the construction
site. Much of the day will be spent snapping photos, exchanging contact information with the
villagers, and be filled with lots of hugs and handshakes. The collective gratitude of the village
can be an emotional experience for the students as they realize how much their efforts have
meant to the local people. It is a powerful feeling of accomplishment for both each individual and
for the group as a whole, as we depart the village after lunch and travel to Oaxaca City for a
group dinner and celebration. En route we will explore the lush mountains and valleys in between the village and Oaxaca City.

Thursday, Day 9: Vacation day at resort style hotel in Oaxaca City

The last full day in Oaxaca will be spent at one of the nicer hotels in the city. This gives the students a very well deserved day of fun, relaxation and exploration before traveling home. Hot showers, comfortable beds, and excellent restaurants are a welcome reward to the hard work they put in all week. As a group we will investigate the artistic, historical, cultural and culinary delights of the city. Oaxaca City and its surroundings have both pre-Columbian and Spanish colonial history to discover (Monte Alban for example); and Oaxacan cuisine, especially the mole, is highly regarded by chefs worldwide. Students will have a chance to hang out in an environment they are much more used to; feeling so at ease with each other and wanting to celebrate, their experience in the village has been an intense one, and their connection to one another reflects that.

Friday, Day 10: Depart Oaxaca City, return flight to Austin

When the day to travel home has finally arrived, the students will board the plane back to Austin, knowing each other vastly better than when they boarded the flight to Oaxaca only 10 days earlier. Far from the strangers they were when they began the trip, most have become very close friends, and have the feeling they've known each other for far longer than a week. People often say that traveling with another person is the best way to get to know them. Traveling to Mexico and living together in a rural village for a week, only expedites that process and enhances the experience. The bonds that these student have formed with each other via this experience will last throughout their two years at McCombs and well beyond graduation.