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 group will travel to the city center and let get everyone settled in their hotel rooms. After an in country briefing with all students and group leaders, we will meet up with staff from 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 to village; Meet community and get set up

After breakfast at the hotel, the group will have a couple of hours to explore Oaxaca together, led by our local partners. After lunch we will board a bus to travel together toward the project area. This will give the students a chance to chat on the bus with one another and take in some of the mountainous landscapes and people of Oaxaca. Upon arriving at the village, leaders will help students get organized and settled in their accommodations for the week long stay. The town 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.

Friday, Day 3: Begin construction at worksite

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). They will then meet the construction team members they will be working alongside for the week, and begin receiving instruction on the plan for the week and lessons in the various jobs that are available to try. Students will begin leaning on one another as well, as they help each other figure out how to master each job.

Saturday, Day 4: Continued work on site

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 Off; Hike, Swim and Explore Nature

Sunday’s 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. Students will also have opportunity to travel to nearby town to freshen up if they so desire before returning to begin the remainder of the week’s labor.
Monday, Day 6: Work on site, teach in the school

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 contributing 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 with kids in the school, or with the 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 villages, 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 and travel to Oaxaca City for a group dinner and celebration.

Thursday, Day 9: Vacation day at resort style hotel

The last full day in Oaxaca will be spent at one of the nicer hotel resorts 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. 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 students have formed with each other via this experience will last throughout their two years at McCombs and well beyond graduation.