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Reflection Paper

I felt that the Mexico Study Abroad program was an excellent experience. There are many things that I will take away from this program and the associated project. I feel that I have grown and learned in the technical area, the cultural area, and in my personal character and development as well.

First of all, I feel that I have grown immensely in a technical sense. I learned a great deal about framing an environmental engineering problem. Typically, these problems cover a large area and are a result of many problems. In this particular case that was the situation. Our particular project dealt with an area of approximately 2 km<sup>2</sup>. This was of particular interest to me because I am planning on going into the water resources area. The situation stands that there is an area that is currently being developed where the city of Guadalupe and Zacatecas are growing together. There are flash floods in the area right now and they are going to get worse as more development occurs. This was an excellent real world storm water runoff problem. We were able to analyze what the current conditions are right now with HEC-1 and HEC-HMS and also make an estimate of what the flows are likely to increase to. This was a great chance for me to learn additional software and apply hydrology and hydraulics principles that I have already learned. Also, the flows progress downgrade until they terminate in a detention basin that was constructed some 300 years ago. The basin was in working order until 4 years ago when a child became stuck in the mud and drowned. They took the gates off the detention structure and the water has since gone right through the basin and out into the neighborhood. My technical vocabulary in the Spanish language has definitely been enlarged. Along with the work that I did personally, I was exposed to a number of different projects involving water quality and sediment transport. This increased firsthand perspective on some of the problems that people in the world face and how they deal with

these problems. I also am better equipped to offer service in resolving these problems in the future.

Secondly, I feel that I have learned a lot from a cultural perspective. I returned from my mission Spanish speaking in Arizona almost four years ago now. It was a wonderful experience, but it was lacking something. It was like the difference between a casual observer of art admiring a painting vs an artist enjoying a painting. The former is able to appreciate the beauty and is probably enriched by the experience. The latter however, sees how the brushstrokes were able to create the desired effect, sees the perspective and why it was optimal for the subject matter, and is able to appreciate the time that was put into creating what they are currently admiring. I was able to appreciate the culture and love the people before, but now I know where they were coming from, literally and figuratively. I see why they did some of those quirky things. I know the quality of life some of them had and did not have. I have a better perspective of what they were thinking as I interacted with them. I got some interesting opinions from some of the students about what they think. One incident in particular that I was very surprised about was when we were talking about people coming up to the States to work. A student said something to the effect of, "I don't believe that we have any right to tell the United States what to do with their border." That was a surprise coming from someone who lives in a state where almost half of the men are up in the United States working. We were able to talk about everything from work to religion to education and engineering to what we do for fun. It was great.

Finally, I feel that I have grown personally. I have a greater appreciation for what I have been blessed with. I have heard many a missionary return home from a far off land and talk about how materialistic we are here, but I had never really experienced that in person on a scale that I did down there in Mexico. It was interesting to see just how much we take for granted here in the States. At the same time it was an excellent opportunity to put things into perspective for me. I had the chance to literally step away from everything and think about what really matters to me and it was interesting what came of it. I had many great chances to talk about the gospel with people. I would say that I am more

motivated to make a difference in the world now as a result of this trip. Many people that came along with us, upon seeing the conditions down there said that they felt helpless and what little they could do is likely ineffective. I would say that this experience had the opposite effect on me. I know that the tools I have been equipped with will improve the lives of many. Of course no, you can't pull people from poverty and move them to middle class all at once, but you can increase their quality of life little by little. I feel that this is the true mission of Brigham Young University. The challenge of, "Enter to learn, go forth to serve" is magnified by this program. We are not just tourists down there, but making a difference in both their lives and ours. I have also been improved as a person with this project.

I would like to thank Dr. Nelson and the school for making this trip possible. I have learned a great deal in the things I have seen, places I have been, and things I have done. I feel that not only am I a better person, but that I have made a difference for good in the world. I have grown in knowledge, culturally, and in character.