


11 [OPEN-MINDEDNESS]

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AVENIDA
JUAREZ

Avenida Juarez street sign

Countries, in many ways, are like people: a reputation precedes them. Perhaps no country experiences this as much as Mexico, where beautiful beaches are juxtaposed with thoughts of violence and poverty. These stereotypes weighed heavy on my mind before going to Puebla, Mexico, where OU has a study center. *What if I feel unsafe? What if my Spanish is not good enough? What if I do not like Mexico?* These were all questions I had leading up to my departure. In many ways, I expected Puebla to be a sort of rough, old city. It turned out to be

a lot different than that. I have now studied in Puebla for three semesters, and through a never-ending process of trying to remain open-minded, I have come to appreciate and love Mexico.

When I first arrived in Puebla, I was pleasantly surprised at how the city blends its rich history with a modern atmosphere. Puebla is a place where you can discover 500-year-old churches and modern architecture just a few blocks from each other. Going to the main mall in Puebla, I found luxury stores like Prada and Williams

Sonoma. Early in my experience, I realized that my previous notions of old and rough had been wrong, and this forced me to keep an open mind going forward about the things I saw.

In the beginning of my first semester in Mexico, I also noticed another cultural trait that differed from our own in the United States: public displays of affection. In Mexico, it is common to see young couples kissing in parks or on the sidewalks. Although not public displays of affection, kisses on the cheeks for greetings and goodbyes are common not only in Mexico, but also in pretty much all of Latin America. I was intrigued, confused and baffled by this, but now in my third semester, I do not even notice.

An image I chose to represent my time in Puebla is a sign of Avenida Juárez, a main thoroughfare in Puebla. This street, for me, encompasses Mexico. Walking down this road, you see all sides of Mexico: taco stands, business men and

women, upscale restaurants and old buildings. Walking up Avenida Juárez, you realize that Mexico is much more than many may think. The street ends at a park, one that separates the colonial center from the newer part of the city. For me, this represents both Puebla and Mexico in general, the mix of the old and the new.

Without an open mind, I do not believe I would have learned about and appreciated much of the culture and identity that makes up Mexico. Because I did, I feel that I was able to understand and appreciate the beauty and complexity that is Mexican culture. Open-mindedness can be difficult when studying abroad, but if I had to use my time in Puebla, Mexico, as an example, I would say it is important to have one at all times—the results can change your appreciation of a society and culture, and maybe even change your entire worldview.

View of Puebla

