

## “¡Integrando a México!” 2011: Peace Through Leadership, Teamwork, and Social Activism (University of Florida)

Mexico currently suffers from many social problems, as 47.4% of its population lives in poverty and suffers from the impossibility of fulfilling their basic needs. This, along with the concentration of 41% the country's wealth in 10% of the country's population, has generated deep social inequalities and consequently societal tensions. As a result of these tensions and the lack of optimal conditions of life for millions of its citizens, Mexico has high rates of corruption and crime, and poverty levels keep increasing. With this in mind, in 2010 we started a new initiative called “**¡Integrando a México!**”: a three-week project that brought together 29 young adolescents from 11 different cities in the country and provided them with tools to create local initiatives of their own that could improve their communities' conditions of life. Our initiative is rooted in the values of leadership, teamwork, and social entrepreneurship, as we believe that a solution for Mexico's social problems and a path to a more peaceful country is to integrate young Mexicans of different socio-economic backgrounds, origins, and ideologies; encourage and generate understanding and tolerance between them; and help prepare them to become active leaders and agents of social change in their communities and around Mexico. Therefore, we think that through practice of the aforementioned values and the acquired skills and knowledge in “**¡Integrando a México!**”, young Mexicans can come together to reflect and respond to some of the social problems that their own local communities face –they will share these experiences with Mexicans from other regions and ultimately this will give them a better understanding of the complex situation that shapes their country's social tensions.

In the summer of 2011, we want to sustain our initial initiative in a four-week summer course, this time with at least 50 participants from all over the country that we will select through the evaluation of an application form that prospective participants have to submit. The aim of “**¡Integrando a México!**” 2011 is to keep promoting local, national, and intercultural understanding; leadership; teamwork; and social entrepreneurship in Mexican youth. The project takes place in four different stages for which a theoretical framework has been developed in the last year. The first two weeks will address conflict resolution and community service. The third week will seek to open a dialogue between the participants, so that they can think about the most radical social issues of the Mexican society. Finally, the fourth week will provide a framework to the participants to develop their own community projects. The timetable of the project will be as follows:

**Week 0 (June 27 – July 10):** In San Miguel de Allende, the hometown of Patricio, we will meet with 14 volunteers from UWCAC<sup>1</sup>. During this week we will finalize the planning of our activities and workshops, making sure we are all fully prepared for the daily activities and our duties as facilitators. We have established a collaboration with a local university called Instituto Tecnológico SSC and they will provide us with their school's facilities to carry out all the workshops and activities. Furthermore, we will contract the food with Concepción Granados, a local cook whose grandson will be participating in the project. The participants will be living for the four weeks in a building of a residential complex with the necessary sanitary and sleeping facilities.

**Week 1 (July 11-July 17)<sup>2</sup>:** The first stage of the course will center on conflict resolution. Through practical and theoretical workshops, the participants will learn how to solve conflicts between individuals and groups of people through the application of values such as respect, teamwork, and dialogue.

**Week 2 (July 18-July 24):** The second week will focus on community service and the use of creativity. In the mornings, participants will take part in community service sessions helping out with local organizations in the city of San Miguel de Allende. The projects will be: Construction of a House, Design and Realization of a

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<sup>1</sup> United World College of the Atlantic (UWCAC) is an International Baccalaureate school located in the United Kingdom and founded in 1962 that forms part of United World Colleges, an organization that selects students from around the world based on merits and gives them scholarships to study in one of the 13 schools of the organization. All the volunteers from UWCAC will take care of their accommodation, food and transportation costs.

<sup>2</sup> In the last year, we have developed all the material and activities we will be using in each workshop. We would be happy to provide a copy if you request it.

Mural in a centre for disabled children, and Conservation Work in the community's botanical garden. In these, participants will understand the value of public service for a community in need such as San Miguel de Allende. Furthermore, in the afternoons, the participants will engage in creative workshops. The workshops will be: Radio Production, Newspaper, Film, Visual Arts, Music, and Theatre. In them, participants will either acquire or reinforce creative skills while exercising their individual and collective creativity in developing projects that reflect their perspectives on the course's themes of leadership, teamwork, and social activism.

**Week 3 (July 25-July 31):** This stage of the course will center on youth participation and the acquisition and promotion of knowledge of different social issues in Mexico. As one component, participants will take part in Civic Engagement Workshops. These workshops aim to make participants more aware of their role in their society's political life and help them engage effectively in their society's political life. Parallel to these workshops, the participants will be involved in Social Issue Activities. In these activities, participants will obtain deeper knowledge about social issues in Mexico and use it to collectively generate documentation that can raise awareness about them around Mexico. The issues will be covered separately in each Social Issue Activity, and they include: Drug Trafficking, Ecology, Education, Nutrition, and Poverty.

**Week 4 (August 1-August 7):** The final week will focus on the development of community projects. During this stage, the participants will learn a method of developing community projects and will then mix inspiration and creativity with the aforementioned method to create their own project. After learning the method, participants will focus in an area of social life where they want to develop a project. These areas are: Culture, Education, Environment, Justice and Human Rights, and Health. In these areas, and with the assistance of the facilitators, participants will brainstorm, research, and design projects that they will subsequently carry out after the end of the project. In each area, we will choose the best two projects and allocate an initial contribution of \$200 to each of them (for a total of \$2,000).

**General notes and outcomes:** From our personal experience as graduates of UWCAC, we learned that people can have a better understanding of their differences when they are able to work together and solve daily problems, and we learned to make friends and share our perspectives about international and local conflicts once we were open to talk in the dining hall or in our community services, leaving behind false stereotypes and common prejudices. We want these 50 young Mexicans to make friends that come from different cultural backgrounds and regions and work together in common initiatives, in the same way we did in UWCAC; and we also want them to be able to articulate daily conflicts of their own communities and become leaders for social change.

Finally, at the end of the course, participants and facilitators will organize and carry out an Open Day for members of the community of San Miguel de Allende and other communities. The Open Day will give participants and facilitators a space to present their experiences and their projects in the course to the community. First, they will exhibit the results of the documentation produced in the different activities and of the contents of all of these. Afterwards, they will present community project initiatives to potential sponsors and collaborators from local and national NGOs in order to obtain support to carry them through after the end of the course. Ultimately, we, as members of the “**Integrando a México!**” team, will supervise periodically the participants' projects and support them in whatever way we can in order for them to carry out their projects successfully.

### **Partners and sponsors**

1. **United World Colleges (UWC) International:** UWC will promote the course through its website and will allow us to use the UWC International brand in the course's title and in promotional material.
2. **UWC México:** UWC México will promote the course through its website and will give us logistical support.
3. **Instituto Tecnológico SSC:** The Instituto Tecnológico SSC will support us by lending us their facilities for free, and personnel of the university will assist us in different activities of the course.