

Jose Jimenez leads summer 2008 Mexico Program



On the stairs of the Universidad de Guanajuato

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In 1987 UTSA CoA and the **Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)** created an architecture exchange program for undergraduate (now to include graduate) students from both schools to share culture and ideas with one another. For the past 10 years **Jose Jimenez**, Associate Professor of Architecture, has been taking a group of students to Mexico to participate in a design studio with UNAM students every summer. UNAM's Faculty (School) of Architecture (located in Mexico City, Mexico) offers a five-year professional program that has 16 separate "workshops" (industrial design, urban planning, housing design, etc.) that a student is involved with for the full five years of study. This differs from architecture programs in the United States thus offering an intriguing learning experience. Last summer, Jimenez initiated taking 12 students to San Miguel de Allende, Mexico (a small historic town 170 miles northwest of Mexico City) as opposed to other summers in Mexico City in order to be closer to the project site.

The students began the summer by working on an expansion for a young girls orphanage located in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico. The young girls and the Madres (nuns) were vastly growing in number and in desperate need of new living quarters. The project, Santa Julia Girl's Home, called for dorms for the girls, nuns, and helpers, a laundry room, and a cafeteria (kitchen and dining). Designs varied among student groups. When not working on the project, the CoA students took day trips to see modern Mexican architecture as well as the multitude of important historical architecture that Mexico has to offer. In the subsequent five weeks, the students returned to UTSA along with five UNAM architecture students to participate in another project, a farmer's market located in downtown San Antonio to promote Texas produce. The idea was to create a new master plan for the existing space between Houston and Commerce Streets in between the Alameda Theater and Kline Building. An open air theme with shops, art galleries, and possible water works or gardens were suggested.

Ultimately, the students were inspired and enjoyed their time in Mexico. There was little culture shock due to our proximity to the country as well as most of the students and professors being bilingual. Jimenez is keeping the 21-year-old exchange program thriving by taking another group of CoA undergraduate and graduate students to Mexico City next summer to participate in a new design project.