

# Noragachi, Mexico adobe building project

Last July, **Sue Ann Pemberton**, CoA senior lecturer, took a group of 12 students to Noragachi, a small village in Chihuahua, Mexico. For the next four weeks, from mid-July to early August, students spent their time learning from the isolated Indian community as well as learning a unique building technology and how to be fully self-sufficient.

Initially funded by **Mexico-North Research Network Inc.** (a non-profit group of U.S. and Mexican universities, museums, etc.) and a **Ford Foundation Grant**, the five-year-old program is now conducted by Pemberton through her own fundraising. Her commitment helps to raise funds and contributions from local foundations and friends. **Tetco**, **Alvarez Foundation**, and the **San Antonio Masonry Contractors Association** are just a few of the groups that have assisted in saving the culture of this historic Indian village. An agreement with the village locals especially helps in making this program possible.

The first week is spent in class at UTSA CoA conducting research on the culture and techniques of building adobe structures and the use of other alternative materials. Then a caravan takes the students to the rugged and vast region of Copper Canyon Mountains in the Southwest corner of Chihuahua. They make their way to the Sierra Tarahumara region of the mountains where Norogachi is located and immediately start checking the site for any damage sustained to the site (due to weather) since the previous summer's four week stay. Working with mostly hand tools but also a couple of compacting machines, the local people help teach the students how to physically make the adobe bricks (out of pine needles and earth) to be put in the walls of the buildings. Currently, every summer is spent making mass amounts of adobe bricks for a boarding school to be used by the **Tarahumara Indians** for housing and teaching 50 Indian children. When not working, the students stay in an adobe or log house with some electricity and enjoy taking day trips. For instance, they visit Sinforosa Canyon (a park with amazing views) as well as Spanish colonial mission churches in remote mountain locations as well as Creel, Chihuahua. By the end of the program, the village is closer to having its school and the CoA students are left with a life-changing experience. Four years ago a student stayed in Norogachi after the summer was over, participated in an independent study, and went on to win a design competition.

