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### Mi Experiencia Intercultural

Time and time again I tried to visualize myself boarding the plane and returning to the city of over eight million people, but visualizations were nothing compared to the real experience. I had visited Mexico City, Mexico for a week two summers ago to expand my knowledge of the Mexican business system and to do a bit of touring. The Mexico City I encountered during that week was very different from the one I saw this summer during my eight week long internship sponsored by the Center for Women's Intercultural Leadership.

I received an offer to participate in an internship with the Federal Competition Commission (FCC), Mexico's national anti-trust agency, during a visit to the FCC the previous summer. I was the first person to have been offered an internship at the Commission, and I went entirely by myself. Independence and friendship making have never been an issue for me, so I greeted the plane with a head held high and enough high-heeled shoes to last me a lifetime. My family, friends, and professors had prepped me on security, what not to eat and drink, and even how to smile, but slowly all of this became second-hand knowledge. I lived in Santa Fe, the most "developed" suburb of the City, and it was; I have never seen so many fancy cars and ivy in my life. I lived on a neighborhood built into the side of a mountain with a family of two, a mother and her son, and after a few weeks was able to walk to and from work each day. My work experience at the FCC was amazing, but my intercultural experience changed everything about me, with the exception of my morals. My book bag, sweats and sneakers were left

at home in exchange for black and red suits, high-heeled shoes and a brief case. My exuberant smile when greeting people became a slight nod of the head to avoid giving unwanted feelings of attraction. As I learned, age was important in the Mexican business system, age and money. In the United States, money may get you places, but so will determination, and very talented young people can go very far by applying themselves. In Mexico, things are different. When I told coworkers I was a student, they thought I was working on my masters or PhD, but when I told them my real age, I lost any inkling of having work friends: age meant you were taken seriously, given opportunity and respect, and I was the youngest person at the Commission. For the first time in my life, I felt shunned, and my feelings were physically based too. Not only was I not introduced to people in the office, but I was placed in a (very nice) cubicle away from everybody; hardly any knew I was working at the Commission until my fifth or six week when the loneliness started taking over me. My work pace slowed at the request of my boss who would tell me to relax and enjoy my work. My eating habits changed from breakfast at nine, lunch at noon, and a large dinner at six to a small breakfast at eight, large lunch at two, and very small dinner at nine or ten at night. The majority of people walked to work, which is typical in a big city, but the food was **real** (few added sugars and fat extras), and so my body trimmed down quickly. I would kiss on the cheek in exchange for shaking hands or hugging, and I learned it was really not safe to travel by myself—perhaps the most frustrating hinder of my stay.

Although I was unable to travel far by myself, I am able to spread the word of my experience to other students and family. My experience was interesting, not what I expected, but perhaps all the better for this reason.