By David C. Butty

Deneen White had never traveled outside of the United States before, and as such, she left home feeling very nervous, but at the same time excited. “It was hard at first because I did not know what to expect,” said Deneen, a Secondary Education student at the Wayne County Community College District’s (WCCCD) Northwest Campus. The mother of four, and a full-time student, Deneen was one of 33 WCCCD students who traveled to Guanajuato, Mexico, for a week of intensive Spanish language classes and to study Mexico’s social, political and cultural system at the don Quijote School of Spanish in Guanajuato, Mexico, about 200 miles south of Mexico City. The school is headquartered in Spain, but also has locations in Granada, Cusco, Peru and Guanajuato, Mexico.

Most students think the food was the hardest to get used to. But overall, said Deneen, “It was worth going to see other cultures and learn a new language. I made a couple of good friends. I missed my children and I missed the French fries, hamburgers and some regular Coca-Cola,” said Deneen, who wants to one day earn a Ph.D. in Secondary Education. Most students got their fill of American food at the airport in Chicago where they satisfied their appetite with double whoppers and fries. “It never tasted so good.”

John Bolden, WCCCD’s Vice Chancellor for Student Services said the Study Abroad Program is on target. The District has sent students to Ghana, West Africa, Sidney, Australia, and now this year, to Guanajuato, Mexico.

Thirty-three Wayne County Community College District students experience life, culture in Guanajuato, Mexico

“Yo hear students talk about their experiences and it never stops,” Bolden said. “We will continue to expose our students to the world of cultures and languages to expand their learning horizons. We believe that nothing can best describe in full the insights and personal experiences of the students gain from living, speaking, and becoming a part of another culture. Not only does Study Abroad open their minds to a more global perspective, it also gives them a much deeper understanding of the different kinds of people and cultures that exist outside of the United States,” Bolden added.

While in Mexico, the students also took Mexican culture and government classes. “It was an intensive week,” Deneen recalled. The students tried to use all the new information they learned in class as they traveled the streets of Guanajuato. You can hear them greet passersby with Spanish phrases such as Buenos dias, or como estas?

Researchers say that learning another language or experiencing another culture opens up a whole new world as you begin to experience and appreciate people from a different background than your own… all because you took the time to learn about them. That is why WCCCD has taken an educational step to bridge the cultural divide through its Study Abroad Program. Already, WCCCD students have studied in Ghana, West Africa, Sidney, Australia, and the trip to Mexico was the third time the College has sent students to study in another country.

The classes were mostly interactive, which was nice,” said Rodney Banks, a student from the Eastern Campus. We were constantly working on exercises or role playing in front of the class using the Spanish phrases such as Buenos dias, or como estas? Banking, an Accounting major, said experiencing another culture is one of the key goals of the program. “The program helps students to become closer friends when they return.”

“Almost every student I talked to said they were surprised at how much they learned and how much they were challenged,” said Tera Palmer, a Dental student plans to matriculate to the University of Detroit Mercy to obtain her bachelors degree one day. She said what she saw in Mexico needs to be imported here in Detroit. “The people may be poor, but they sure know how to keep their city and streets clean. They sweep the streets and even mop the sidewalks.”

Yolanda M. Brock, said before going to Mexico, she was ignorant and her view of the country was based on the images in the American media, such as illegal aliens and migrant workers. But the study abroad program changed her mind. “It was a trip full of adventure, beautiful sights, interesting and educational occurrences. Even the walking was an experience for most people. The study abroad program is one that I would recommend to almost everyone. At other colleges, it is not always possible due to financial inabilities, but thankfully, our WCCCD group was blessed with the necessary privilege, and I say a big ‘Thank you to Mr. Bolden and the WCCCD administration for the this rare opportunity.” Deneen White is also thankful to the College for the opportunity to study and experience another culture. “As a result of this trip, I now know the importance of being bilingual, and I have decided to take more Spanish classes and build on what I have learned, which, I know will help me greatly. I will never forget my study abroad trip to Guanajuato, Mexico.

Bienvenidos!

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