

Spending Spring Break in the **YUCATAN**

by Lindsey Stevens

Jessica Metzger contributed to this article

For many college students, spring break may be spent lying on the beach, shopping, spending time with friends or getting away to a tropical destination. Although seven students in the College of Nursing did travel to a tropical destination, lying on the beach was not on the itinerary.

These students spent their break at the Universidad Autonoma de Yucatan (UADY) in Merida. Associate Professor Sharleen Simpson, PhD, ARNP accompanied students on the trip to the Yucatan as part of an exchange partnership with the UADY. This is the third year that UF nursing students have traveled to the Mexican state of Yucatan.

Although the students may expect a different way of life than their own, Dr. Simpson noted that students are always startled when they observe first-hand how people of the Yucatan culture live and how resourceful they are.

"I think it's really important for them to see how people elsewhere are coping," she said. "One of the things we emphasized is how much they're able to do with so little."

So what was a typical day like for these students?

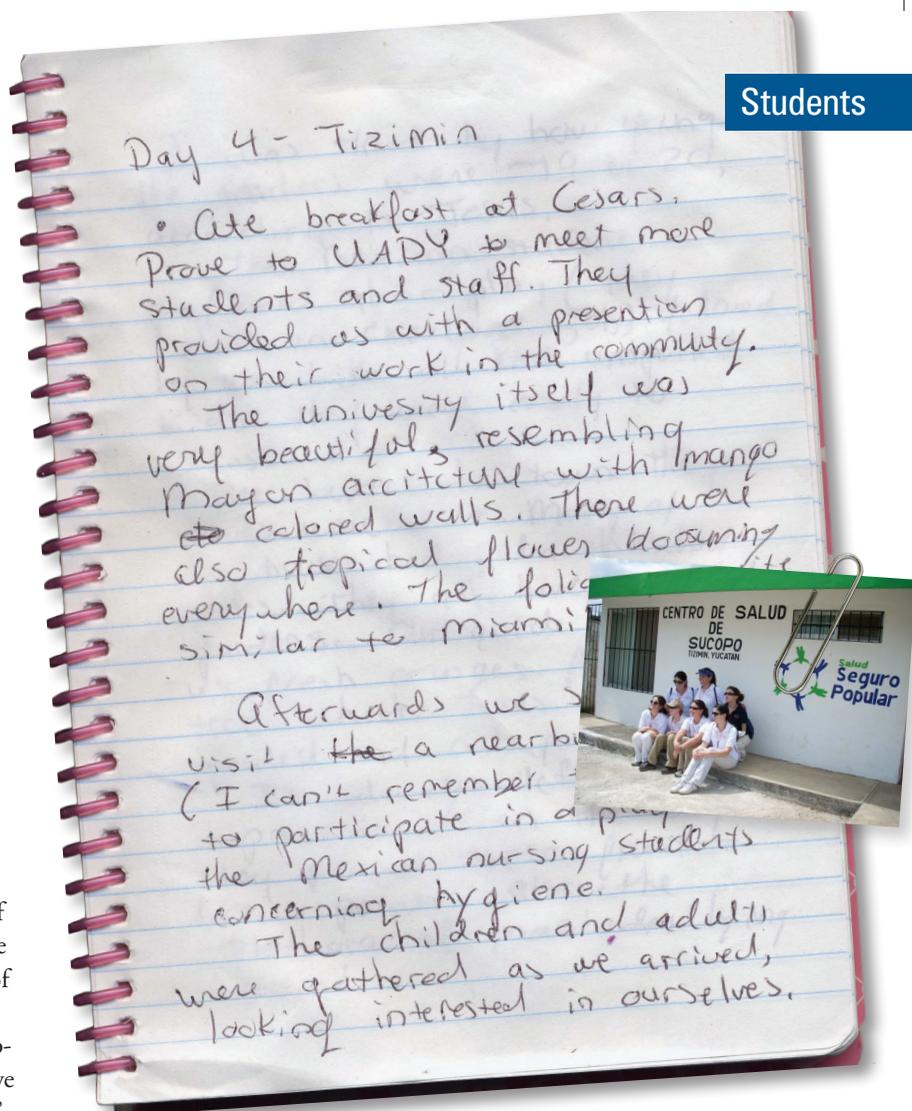
"Our day was always jam-packed," said Bryce Crouch, now a senior BSN student. "We woke up at 6:30 a.m. and were not in bed until midnight. But it was worth it. We were exhausted,

but it didn't make a difference. We'd start our day off working with the community, doing health assessments. We traveled to Succopco (a neighboring town) with the other students from the area to measure height and weight and to really work with students in the classroom. Then we were able to work hands-on with the families."

Dr. Simpson was glad the students were able to experience more aspects of the nursing role as Crouch described.

The students recalled a few moments that would leave an everlasting impression.

"The most eye-opening moment for me was when we went to the ER of the local hospital," said now senior BSN student Courtney Youngs. "We're so used to the ER in the



Students kept journals of their trip. Pictured are UF nursing students in front of a clinic in Succopco, Tizimin in the Yucatan.

United States, where there are individual rooms, it's quiet and air-conditioned, and all of the patients' charts are confidential. In contrast, their ER was overflowing. People were lined up on stretchers in the hallways. Some of them didn't even have blankets, and if they did, they were dirty or torn. The patient charts were literally taped to the wall above them. There were no individual rooms or air conditioning. There were needles and syringes on the counter tops, and only the most critical patients had IV's."

Crouch couldn't believe the number of patients the nurses were seeing.

"I thought it was interesting that the nurses there would see literally hundreds of patients a day," she said. "Patients come in the morning and pick a number, and if you got there at 5:30 a.m. before they opened, and you didn't get a number, it didn't matter how sick your child was, you would not see a doctor that day."

Although the trip is in their past, the knowledge gained will help them as future nurses.

"I think there is a drastically different culture in Mexico, and it was really great to see those differences," Crouch said. "You gain experience you're not going to get in the classroom or from a textbook."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DR. SHARLEEN SIMPSON

Students interviewing mothers in the Succopco village about their children's diets for a nutrition survey.