After breakfast, our first stop of the day is at Llano Grande. We are dropped off in front of the Church. The newly built playground sitting directly in front of it is exciting for us to see and great way to start the day. It gives us hope that maybe our work here this year might help contribute to such a project. Enrique, from Universidad Albert Einstein, and Sarah, an architect that worked on the project last year, are with us and we are also met by Lola, a community leader in Llano Grande. Lola informs us of the most pressing matter in the community: the church may need to be rebuilt because the roof is beginning to fall. The pollution of the watershed comes up early on in the discussion. Lola recognizes the importance and complexity of this problem but expresses that it is difficult to motivate the community to act because they do not see that they have much to gain personally from a cleaner watershed. Enrique, Sarah and Lola are the three main participants in the conversation while the students mainly seemed to listen to the various issues and solutions that are brought up.

Our second stop is at El Trafico. We are welcomed by community leader Senora Enedina in her home. We learn that a government sponsored food program has just been implemented in the community and is already very popular. Senora E also expresses that she is having issues with the new ejido commissioner. This commissioner is asking for payment in exchange for signatures giving her the permission to carry out new projects, an issue she never had with the previous commissioner. This issue sparks a discussion about the complexity of land tenure in
Mexico. There is federal, private, and ejido land. The different laws that apply to each type of land create vast disparities in resource allocation and infrastructure. We then take a short bus ride and walk around El Trafico so Senora E can show us what projects she has recently been working on before returning to Pueblo Bonito.

Finally getting to see Llano Grande and El Trafico after wondering what the communities were going to be like for months felt fulfilling in and of itself: I had made it to the start. Although I feel like I learned a lot today, the feeling that lingers with me at the end of the day is that I know nothing. Not having ever done this type of work before, it is hard to not question my place here. Can I actually be of use? Will I be able to connect with the community in a meaningful way? Despite my insecurities, I am excited to begin forming a more complete picture of what life is like within these communities and to better understand the social bonds that connect the members within the communities.

Most of our experience with the community was limited to exchanges with community leaders. They seemed eager to begin working together and opened up quickly, telling us about important issues. There are vast differences between each of their leadership styles. Lola, not having been a leader very long does not have as much political clout or confidence as Senora E. She was very open about the community’s various issues and priorities. She does not seem to have any particular personal agenda and there isn’t any issue that seems to be off limits. Senora E on the other hand seemed to be much more in control of the conversation. She clearly has her own priorities for the community. Our brief interactions with community members seemed positive as we were met with courtesy and kind smiles, even in Llano Grande, where last year’s group was initially met with much distrust.

Above: While walking around El Trafico, Senora Enedina shows us the new school that is being built, as well as several roads she helped get paved.
Today started with a visit to Albert Einstein University. The campus is located even higher in the mountains than our Hotel, Pueblo Bonito, and nestled among trees. The organic shape and warm materiality of the buildings as well as the welcoming attitude of the faculty and staff made me feel immediately at ease. It seemed that our entire group felt pretty comfortable there from the start.

The university director first gave a presentation about the University’s mission and peace studies program. He mentioned that the program is evolving as the university staff and students learn more throughout the years. This comment resonated with me since it is in line with PRA methods.

Although everyone seemed to be at ease, both UT and UAE students seemed to be somewhat shy to make the first approach towards one another. Enrique might have noticed this, and whether planned or not, had us carry out an ice breaker. We talked to a student from the other school one on one for a couple of minutes and then switched partners. We ended up talking to about three students or faculty each. Once the interaction was prompted conversation flowed quite easily.

We were then given a tour of the campus. From an architectural point of view it was interesting to see the importance of symbols throughout the buildings, especially in the main building. Outside was a Grecian style agora, the building culminated in a dome as found in Muslim traditions, a 1000 petal chakra sat in the middle of the circular room, embedded in the floor. The combination of all these symbols in such a small space was interesting; to me it ultimately expressed acceptance and love of all cultures and people.

Upon returning from the campus tour Dr. Wilson gave a presentation on different types of community engagement, focusing on Participatory Research Action. The UAE students seemed to relate to certain aspects of PRA in particular. They all nodded their heads in accordance when Dr. Wilson said something to the effect that people are the experts of their own realities. The students also seemed to be concerned with issues relating to security. All the students nodded when Dr. Wilson described participatory mapping of secure and non-secure
zones of communities. The one question asked by a UAE student during the presentation concerned their safety in Llano Grande.

We then chose which communities we wanted to work in for the two weeks: Llano Grande or El Trafico. I was surprised to see that an overwhelming majority of students initially wanted to work in Llano Grande. Being open to work in either community, I chose El Trafico. We were easily able to establish a balance between the number of students in each group as several students decided to switch to El Trafico without expressing any reluctance or disappointment. I believe Senora E’s firm grasp of El Trafico may have deterred some of the UT students from wanting to work in the community. I am interested to find out why most of the UAE students were also interested in working in Llano Grande.

UAE students and faculty as well as several professionals all came to Pueblo Bonito with us for lunch. I am especially excited about the fact that UAE students will be working with us. This comes as a great surprise. I feel that working together with students that are from the area will make our group much stronger. Despite my excitement I failed to reach out to the UAE students and faculty during lunch. I was disappointed in myself because my actions were not in line with my emotions in this situation.

The El Trafico and Llano Grande groups then broke up to discuss their plans of actions for the following day. Everyone in our group seemed to be on the same page and respect one another as equals regardless of their level of experience or backgrounds. I was excited to see Uriel, who works for the watershed commission, participating and being very vocal for the first time as he had a lot of great ideas to share. The meeting left me feeling excited about working with community members for the first time.
Looking back on today I feel extremely happy about my first day working in El Trafico. We all got out of the bus when we stopped at Llano Grande to drop the team off before heading to El Trafico. Enrique and Patricia spotted Maite, a woman whom they had met last year. Enrique had some of the bags the women in El Trafico make using recycled plastic bags and took this opportunity to show them to Maite. As she looked at them, her eyes lit up. She inspected them carefully to see how they had been made. We mentioned that women from El Trafico might be able to come to her community to teach the women how to make them. She responded positively to the proposal. It was exciting to see that it might be possible for the women of the two communities to form a relationship in which they could engage horizontally.

The day started out with a lot of anticipation and curiosity. What is our group’s first attempt at using PRA methods going to be like? When we arrived at Senora E’s house, a waiting for us, and sitting in chairs arranged in a circle! On the bus ride over, I had felt that we had a plan and a basic idea of how we were going to start the morning off together. Interestingly enough, as soon as I got there, all recollections of this plan evaded my memory. I felt extremely vulnerable and unprepared. It seemed that no one really knew how exactly we should start interacting. After and awkward minute or two, Awais pulled the earrings he had made using recycled plastic bags out of his bead box and showed them to the women. As we observed their faces we could tell they were interested. That was all it took, the ice had been broken! From there everything flowed quite easily. We broke into groups talking to two or three women at a time. Several women

Community members show us “barrancas” where a lot of trash ends up. Since there is no drainage system, two households have made their own plumbing systems which join at the bottom of the barranca.

Above Left: Patricia and Enrique showing Maite a knitted plastic bag.
Above right: While walking around El Trafico.
expressed interest in reusing PET bottles as they have collected many but have nowhere nearby to drop them off at. There were also many children who seemed interested in learning to make handicrafts. Talking to women that had been present last year was interesting. Two of the ladies first question when we met was “What will we be doing this year?” Although I could not give them a definite answer I was pleased to see that they were eager to learn more. We finished up the first portion of the day by announcing that we would be back the next day at 10:00 am to begin the jewelry workshop and let the women know what materials to bring. These one or two hours of the day marked me most strongly. In the moments that I felt most uncertain and insecure something always happened that kept things moving forward. As for now, this is how I understand emergence.

We then went on a walk through El Trafico. We were relieved to see that Senora Enedina did not come with us. This would allow the women to show us what they wanted rather than what she wanted us to see. As we walked through the town the women pointed out many issues relating to the lack of drainage and to all the trash in the barrancas, cliff like slopes or valleys at the bottom of which waste water and rainwater flow. Trash was scattered all along them and most inhabitants had no drainage systems in their houses. There were several places along the barrancas which seemed to be extremely problematic. In these areas people have to walk through them daily since there is no bridge to get them across.

Once back at Universidad Fidel Velasquez we all sat in a group and talked about how our first day in the communities had gone. Although neither of the groups felt that things had gone as planned, everyone still seemed overjoyed about their experiences earlier in the day.

This type of work is entirely new to me and has me thinking in ways that I am not used to. I am grateful to say that only three days in I already feel that I have experienced and learned a lot.

Below Left: Sign we put up on Senora Enedina’s gate announcing the jewelry workshop the following day and a list of materials participants were encouraged to bring. Below Right: Debriefing session at Fidel Velasquez University.
A lot of really wonderful things happened today. The time we spent in El Trafico was full of positive energy. I left feeling like we are all full of momentum and very excited for what is to come in the next week and a half.

It was almost 11:00 when we got to El Trafico so our time was cut short by almost an hour. Only 3 people were at Senora Enedina’s when we arrived. We started to get ready for the jewelry making workshop and as we did this people slowly flowed in. By the time we were ready to begin, all the seats surrounding the three large tables we had put together were filled! We started out by going around the table and introducing ourselves. The introductions helped create a sense of community from the start, and also gave us the opportunity to get to know a little bit about the women that had not been present the previous day (this was the majority of the participants). Two of the women there had stumbled upon the workshop and stood at the perimeters to watch. Once we let them know that they could participate even if they did not bring their own materials they pulled up chairs and sat with the other women at the table. Awais then proceeded to begin showing the women how to make the jewelry as Gibran sat beside him and translated. They both did a wonderful job of leading a clear and concise workshop for the women to follow. While Gibran and Awais spoke the rest of us participated in various ways: speaking to the women as they made the jewelry, passing out the materials they were lacking, making earrings of our own, experimenting with PET . . . Both facilitators and participants seemed happy to be working together in the space. The activity gave us all something to work on individually which took away the pressure to connect and in turn allowed us to connect in a more natural way. I counted twelve women sitting around the table from beginning to end, five of the ladies from the kitchen stood around the table and participated the entire time, and about five others also participated more informally. Awais also showed them the bracelet he had made using plastic bags and asked them if they would be interested in making them tomorrow. All the ladies seemed to respond yes.

Once we were done making the jewelry there seemed to be a lot of excitement in the air. Most of the women stayed a little while longer to chat. One of the women I talked to who is part of the group that meets on Fridays told me that her grand daughter started making earrings with the knitted plastic bags and that she had come up with this idea all on her own. It appears that the
knitting group is turning into something larger. I also had the opportunity to talk to Senora Enedina about a possible visit to Llano Grande. As she had told us on our first visit, Friday at four was a good time, but this time around she seemed much more eager.

I was touched by one woman in particular today; I believe I am not the only one who was touched by her presence. Juana was one of the women who had stumbled upon the workshop. She had initially come to Senora E’s house to eat, but she had arrived at the wrong time. At first she was not sure if she would be able to make the earrings because she can not see out of her left eye. She ended up staying and Uriel helped her make the first earring. To his surprise when he came back around the table to chat with her a little while later she had completed the second earring on her own. I asked her if she was going to wear the earrings or if she planned on giving them to someone. She told me she wanted to give them to me. I told her I would finish the earrings I had started making and give them to her in return. I hope to see her again tomorrow.

During our El Trafico group meeting in the afternoon we agreed that we would have another workshop tomorrow in order to demonstrate how to make the bracelet but that it would be shorter than today’s workshop in order to free up time for other activities. We all agreed that it is important that we get an idea of what the women really want and need in their community. The fact that finding out what a community needs is not as easy as it seems to be came up. This is something I hadn’t reflected on although as soon as it came up it made perfect sense. It seemed that this idea gave us all some food for thought. We discussed the importance of asking the right questions in order to uncover salient issues. When we finished the meeting none of us were exactly sure what the “right” questions were. I am still not sure. I look forward to tomorrow and hope that action will bring some clarity to this thought.

Above left: One of the participants melting the plastic to create a bead. Above Right: Example of an earring made using a recycled plastic bottle (bottom bead)
Today we held another jewelry workshop at Senora E’s house. Awais showed the women and children attending how to make bracelets using the same technique of hardening plastic bags over a flame as yesterday. The fact that the most of those attending were already familiar with this technique was extremely beneficial. Rather than solely focusing on making jewelry the women also discussed various topics while making the bracelets.

The conversation that arose was entirely spontaneous and natural. None of the facilitators had to ask questions or prompt conversation to get it going. We all sat in a square around 3 large tables again. The older women that work in the cafeteria sat and stood together at the corner of the table. The rest of the women occupied two other edges of the table. The women from the cafeteria were the most vocal since they already knew one another. The younger women, many of whom brought their children listened or chatted more softly with the person sitting next to them. I hope that with time the younger women will feel more at ease so that we may hear their opinions and ideas.

The women talked about the cafeteria and how it not only serves the purpose of feeding people but also of educating them about nutrition. Through the program those that eat there can learn about portion control and how to eat a balanced diet. Security came up when the women talked about how safe they felt when the soldiers implementing the program were in town. They talked at length about snails, which many of the women eat in order to stop from eating their plants. They discussed different ways snails can be prepared and joked about them being slimy and dumb. This seemingly uneventful conversation was actually both fun to listen to and informative. Senora Perla was able to relate the conversation to composting, since snails can be used in this process. This conversation along with various other conversations I have had about local foods has made me realize how resourceful and ingenious people of the area are with food. Yesterday, for example, Alberto, one of the students in our group from UAE, told me about the various parts of the cactus and when they are eaten, during the dry or rainy season. This made me think that this resourceful and problem based thinking that revolves around food can be related to and used for other issues such as waste and even larger ones, like those concerning the watershed. Finding solutions to major issues is in part a matter of shifting focus.

An adorable young girl sat next to me at the table. Her name is Andrea and she is eight years old. While walking past Senora E’s papelleria the previous day she saw the sign we had put up announcing the workshop. Neither of her parents could attend but she still came to the workshop alone. She was very mature and autonomous, only asking for help with the most complicated steps. Although she was a bit shy at first, I could sense that she was slowly growing more comfortable around me. When the workshop ended, she tapped on my shoulder and asked if we would be back at the same time tomorrow. I assured her that we would and she said she would be back. This was another moment that resonated with me as being magical.

Towards the end of the jewelry workshop Eva brought up the questions we were planning on asking the women about El Trafico. I was disappointed that the questions were asked in a way that highlighted the negative aspects of the community. I would have preferred that they asked the women how they believe their community can be improved. I was happy Eva brought up the questions during the spontaneous conversation so the women could continue talking about the issues the question brought up.
We also asked that the women write down their ideas on post-it notes and stick them on a large piece of paper we hung on the wall. Only five or six out of approximately 15 women put their post-it up. Similarly to what we had heard during the walk two days prior, most of the issues the women brought up related to delinquency, security, trash in the barrancas, and drainage. Senora E was also very vocal about there being a lack of culture, which I also took as meaning education. She is the only person that mentioned this.

During our debriefing in the afternoon we talked about what had happened with the post its. We realized that asking for answers in such a formal manner is not as effective as engaging in conversation and having questions and answers naturally emerge from this space of comfort and free flowing thought. We decided that engaging in conversation with the women tomorrow would be very important.

Setting a time for the women of Llano Grande and El Trafico to meet has been complicated. It has been hard to find a time that is convenient for everyone. We have had to change the time and day we would like to have the workshop in Llano Grande several times and this seemed to upset Senora E. We have finally decided on Saturday at 10:00 AM.

Below Left: Group of women that makes the food for the community sponsored kitchen. Below Right: Poster with only a few post-its on it when we left.
When we returned to Senora E’s this morning we were surprised to see that the large sheet of paper we had hung on her gate was covered in post-its. We were told that many of the people that eat at the comedor had noticed the poster and were glad to share their ideas about what they would like to see improved in the community. I am happy to see this enthusiasm from all of these people; I hope that this enthusiasm may translate into some of them joining us. It seems as though working with those that eat at the comedor could be very beneficial as it is likely that they are a more vulnerable group than the group of people Senora E gathers.

I was slightly disappointed that we had a smaller turn out today than usual. We already knew that several women would not be able to attend because of an event involving the governor but we were surprised to see that only two adult women attended: Mary and Juliana. I was none the less very happy to see their familiar faces; both Mary and Juliana have joined us since our first day in the community. I was also happy to see that Andrea returned and brought with her two of her cousins, Rodrigo and Arturo.

Our original plan for the day was to discuss the issues that had come up on the post-its and to decide on a major issue that we all wanted to better understand and attempt to find solutions for. Because only two adults were present, we felt that it was not the right time to begin the conversation. Instead, we began making jewelry using plastic bags in the hopes that more people would trickle in. The day before, we did not put up a sign to let people know that we would be in the community since we did not know exactly what we would be discussing. This along with the government event may have contributed to less people attending.

No one else showed up and we ended up working on jewelry for the two hours we were at Senora E’s. Slightly saddened because we were not able to move things forward in the direction we had hoped, I focused on the jewelry making, as did my UT peers. I still had a good time with those that attended. Awais led a more informal workshop, rather than giving step by step instructions, he provided help, advice, and materials when needed. I sat between Andrea and her cousins. Andrea seemed very happy to be back and her cousins, both boys around the age of ten, were excited to make jewelry. They all wanted to make a pair of earrings for their mothers. It was great seeing the children interact as they all helped one another out.
I am also happy I had the opportunity to get to know Mary a little better. She works in the comedor and is part of the knitting group that meets on Fridays (most of the ladies that work in the cafeteria are also part of the knitting group). Only in her late twenties, she is much younger than all of the other women in the group. She has been very involved in all of our activities and has expressed lots of interest in recycling and reusing materials. I see in Mary a conscientious citizen and maybe even a future leader.

In the afternoon we decided that we would not be meeting with the community on Monday since there is an expected meeting with the ejido commission at Senora E’s.

We returned to El Trafico at 4:00 to meet with the knitting group. We began talking about the handicrafts they made and how the activity has evolved over the past year. When Dr. Wilson asked the women if they wanted to form an official group or find a space to knit, the women did not seem particularly interested. They seem to be happy with the ways things are going. They meet weekly and are eager to share the craft with whoever wants to learn. While they seem to enjoy the activity and the fact that it is beneficial to both the community and the environment, they do not seem to have an end goal for the group in mind.

We talked about various other topics, including El Tanque and violence at length. Senora E led most of the conversation. We were also able to decide on a time when the women would be able to go to Llano Grande: 10:00 AM. I am afraid we might have pushed the women a little too hard for them to go. Each time that we brought it up, they responded that they very busy and that Saturday was the only day they had to get certain tasks completed. Although they seemed a bit reluctant, they did not say no and agreed to the meeting.

When we left, several of the women told Dr. Wilson that they had really enjoyed the conversation. It seemed as though talking about these important issues not only made them feel better but was also necessary.

Left: Mari and I. I am wearing a bag Mari knitted using plastic bags. Right: A post-it put up on the poster. This community member would like to see an area built where children and teenagers can play sports and work out.
Saturday August 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 2014

Today the women of El Trafico went to Llano Grande to teach members of the community how to knit using plastic bags. We decided to hold the workshop in the primary school in Llano Grande. Aves and Katie left with Sarah in her car in order to arrive early and set up the jewelry workshop. The rest of us rode to El Trafico in the bus in order to pick up the women from the knitting group that wanted to join. When we arrived at the set time, 10 AM, no one was at Senora Enedina’s house. I was worried that the women could not participate in the activity but did not have the heart to tell us they couldn’t come. Around 10:30 we got word from Uriel that we could head to Llano Grande and Enrique would pick up the women from El Trafico because they were running late. I was greatly relieved to hear that they would be attending. When we arrived at Llano Grande, the jewelry workshop had started. There was a room full of women and children from Llano Grande already participating!

Awais lead another great workshop. Students from UAE, UT, and Perla moved around the room helping out people when needed. Timing also worked out perfectly. By the time that the jewelry workshop was wrapping up, a group of about four women from El Trafico had arrived. They seemed very happy to be there and ready to begin teaching. The women and children from Llano Grande seemed equally eager to learn. As soon as they heard the knitting workshop was beginning they hurried to finish up making their bracelets in order to not miss the beginning of the second workshop.

I was really happy to see the way the workshop played out. Senora Enedina showed the women how to cut the plastic bags in long strips but she did not dominate or overpower the other women from El Trafico. They all had something of their own to bring to the table: tips on how to cut the bags more easily, examples of different things they had made, advice on washing the bags before using them. Since most of the women already knew how to knit, once they knew how to cut the bags, they began making a variety of items. Small working groups formed and everyone helped each other out.

The women from El Trafico did a wonderful job of facilitating, rather than leading the workshop in a formal way. They were also able to connect the activity of knitting to ideas of bettering the community. They talked about their own group that has formed. Sarah asked meaningful questions about the effects of the knitting group. They had so many positive things to share in response. It strengthened the community, it could be an additional source of income, it gave them the opportunity to be creative and share with others . . . While the women of Llano Grande did not give a definitive response when asked if they would like to form their own group, they were all ears to what the women of El Trafico had to share.

We then went around the table and took turns introducing ourselves. After having spent several hours with one another but mainly having spoken about the workshop, we were happy to get to know a little more about one another. We all took turns sharing and listening. In this moment I felt a true connection with everyone there.

After the workshop ended we walked over to the park with the women of El Trafico. It was wonderful that they got the opportunity to what the community members of Llano Grande had accomplished using recycled materials. I hope the park might inspire the women of El Trafico if they are able to build a communal space in El Tanque, the land currently being discussed located behind the church.
Above Left: Awais leading the jewelry workshop in Llano Grande. Above Right: The ladies of Llano Grande learning to knit with plastic bags. At the back left, Senora Enedina is teaching a community member of Llano Grande how to cut the plastic bags.

Monday, August 4th

As planned, we did not meet with the community as we usually do today because a meeting with ejido commissioners was supposed to be held at Senora Enedina’s at ten in the morning. Both the El Trafico and the Llano Grande groups attended the meeting. The majority of the professionals participating in the workshop did too. It appears that there was some confusion over which government agency was actually supposed to arrive, as the ejido commission did not show up. Instead, a government agency called EnGrande which acts as an intermediary between the ejido commission and the community was present.
The meeting was somewhat confusing for me and most of the other UT students attending. The meeting was held around a table where Senora E, Dr. Wilson, Raphael, and the EnGrande group sat. The rest of the professionals and UT students sat on the outskirts of the meeting. There were so many of us, that we could not get close enough to hear what was actually being discussed at the table.

After the meeting ended we were able to show Senora E and some of the other professionals the map of El Tanque that Vivek and Tom worked on over the weekend. They had made a rendering of the area with a new soccer field and benches to sit on. Although I was standing right next to them when we showed them the plan, I could not tell how they felt about it. Senora E none the less said that the plans could be useful in the future. We were also informed that El Tanque had been discussed in the meeting. EnGrande could not make any decisions on their own regarding the land, but they said they would make the community’s wishes known to the ejido commission. They were confident that within a year the land would be El Trafico’s to use for a communal area. We were also told that Senora E believed it was too early to begin working on park plans since she was not yet certain El Trafico would acquire the rights to do anything with the land. It was nice to see that so many locally based professionals are interested in the future of El Tanque so they may assist Senora Enedina in this process if needed.

After the meeting ended, something wonderful happened. One of the ladies that had come to the first two jewelry workshops came up to Awais to show him various items that she had made by herself over the weekend. She proudly showed us the jewelry, and vases she had made over the weekend. She used recycled plastic bottles, plastic bags, foil, and even shells of snails she had caught and eaten for décor (see image to the left). She was clearly thinking about reusing and recycling even outside of the workshops.

In the afternoon, we had a very productive debrief. Realizing that we only have three days left to work in the community, we wanted to organize our time in a way that would be fruitful for the community. We agreed that the post-its was the best place to start since we had gotten an overwhelming of responses from community members. The three main problems we saw on the post-its were delinquency, trash, and drainage. I believe that the most pressing issue to work on is security. It can be hard to focus on issues relating to the environment if one does not feel secure in their own community. Several others believed security was the most pressing issue also but as a group we decided trash was an equally important issue and would be easier to tackle in three days remaining.

The three day plan we laid out today consisted of a first day of conversation and mapping trash. We will map on a large scale and also on a street scale and then have a discussion about the maps tomorrow. On the second day we will collect the data and make sense of it so that we can deliver an action plan on the third day. If things go as planned, I believe we will be able to create some sort of concrete action plan with the community, there is of course a chance that things do not go as planned.
After our debrief yesterday our group was feeling ready to get things accomplished coming in this morning. When we arrived at Senora Enedina’s house, we were saddened to see that no one was there. We waited about a half hour in case if people were to show up but no one came. While I am disappointed we were not able to start mapping trash today, I am not very surprised that no one showed up. I believe we have not been clear enough about when we will be present in El Trafico. We did not get the chance to let people know we would not be working with the community on Monday since it was decided on Friday afternoon, so if people showed up on Monday and saw nothing was going on, they may have not wanted to come back on Tuesday. I also believe we are not being clear enough as to what is going to happen over the two weeks. People don’t seem to understand exactly why we are here. Most of them think we are holding jewelry workshops using recycled materials. Although we do not know exactly what we are going to be doing either, we do have a general idea. We know that we are working on issues related to sustainable development in El Trafico with community members. I think we should at least communicate this to those attending, so that they have an idea of why we are present that is closer to the truth. I think we should also post a more definitive schedule of when we will be present.

Since no one came to us, we decided to go out into the community. Before leaving Gibran and I made a sign announcing that we would be back tomorrow at ten “To solve issues relating to trash together”, and posted it on Senora Enedina’s gate (see image below, left).

We then walked around El Trafico. We wanted to get a feel for what people believed was problematic in the community, among a more random group of people. We were met with a bit more distrust in the streets than in Senora Enedina’s house, which is to be expected. None the less after slightly awkward introductions, most people seemed happy to share their ideas with us.
We talked to about six sets of people consisting of one to three people. Most people seemed to say trash was a huge issue, that most, especially those living further off of the main road, do not bring their trash to the garbage truck when it comes, but burn it instead. One of the reasons for this is that one cannot simply put their trash can on the street and leave, one has to physically be there when the truck comes in order to toss it into the truck themselves. After learning this, it made much more sense to me why trash burning was so popular: one is not necessarily available or does not always have the time to wait around for the truck to come. Everyone we talked to also seemed to be excited about the idea of a park being built in El Tanque. In the end, it seemed that the fact that no one showed up this morning was not so much of an issue as it seemed when we first arrived. I believe reaching out to the community rather than relying on a select group of people that Senora Enedina knows, is important for building ties with the community as a whole.

In the afternoon, we did not have a debriefing session at Albert Einstein University. We instead visited a secondary school where PRA methods have been used to start an organic farming program (see image above, right). It was amazing to see the results the school has achieved. One of the students participating in the program explained to us how the process works (image below). Sandy, one of the instructors facilitating the program told us about the changes she has seen in some of the students. It seems that farming has made students closer as a group and also to the earth as they are able to see how they fit into this giant life cycle. We then visited Senor Raphael’s home and garden. He is an expert on agriculture and plant properties and getting the chance to see the breadth of his knowledge and the power hidden in the plants he cultivates was really wonderful.

Secondary school student explaining the farming process. He is standing in the field he has helped cultivate. Nopales along with various other plant species are beginning to grow.

Alberto talks to a couple during our walk around El Tafico. They tell us about the way trash is disposed of and inform us that there is no safe area for children and teens to play or exercise.
This morning we had an early meeting to begin planning Friday’s event. Many actors that are involved with or work for the Guadalupe watershed will be attending an event at Albert Einstein University. The goal of this event is to connect people so they may form working groups and create concrete projects related to the watershed. The meeting went well. We were able to plan the event and allot times for each portion of the event. In the evening we hammered out the names of the different working groups.

No one was present when we arrived at Senora E’s this morning. We had hoped that the sign we put up the previous day would draw some people in, but this was not the case. The professionals as well as the UAE students told us that most women are busy getting their children ready for school this week, because school starts next week. Physical exams, paperwork, meetings, and shopping trips must all get taken care of in the next two days. We would not be debriefing in the afternoon because we were all attending a meeting with municipal officials so we decided to debrief and plan for our final day then and there as to really make the best of it. Since no one has arrived for the past two days and tomorrow is our last day, we decided that our final day in the community should take place in the street and not in Senora E’s courtyard. This will give us an opportunity to connect with the community whether or not people show up. We decided we will have a demonstration of various “ecotecnicas” or eco technologies since this is what we did in the community during the first week. It also works because the ecotecnicas we will be demonstrating use recycled trash. This will allow us to touch upon the issue of trash, which we have been wanting to discuss all week. Once we finished planning for tomorrow, we put up a sign announcing the exhibition outside of Senora E’s house.

We then walked around El Trafico to discuss issues relating to trash and tell people about the eco technology exhibition tomorrow. I was happy that we ran into Andrea and Juliana, who had both been present during most of last week, and that they said they would come.

In the afternoon, we went to Nicolas Romero to attend the meeting with government officials. While walking to the government building, I saw a line, primarily of women and children, wrapped around the block. Uriel told me they were waiting in line to see the doctor in order to enroll in school. This line was particularly long because it was at the Red Cross, which only costs a fraction of the price of a normal doctor. Most of these people would be spending a good portion of their day in line.

Carlos a student at UAE and Ariadna sat at the table with the officials as representatives of the UT and UAE student bodies. Dr. Wilson and Sarah, who works for the Cuenca de Guadalupe, also participated in the meeting. Ariadna did a wonderful job of asking the officials the questions we had given her. While the officials did not seem to have a very in depth understanding of the Guadalupe watershed and its issues, they were aware of its high levels of pollution. They told us about their various efforts to help clean the watershed and help people of the municipality. When we left, they said they would be happy to help us out in the future. Although the meeting was not productive in an immediate way, I still think it was beneficial.
This could possibly be the beginning of a relationship between the municipality and UAE or the Prensa Guadalupe which could be great.

Top Left: Line wrapping around the block outside of the Red Cross. Top Right: Meeting with Municipal Officials.

Bottom Left: UT and UAE students listening to meeting. Bottom Right: Carlos and Ariadna, our student representatives.
When we arrived in El Trafico this morning, we immediately began setting up for the Eco technology Exhibition. We set a large table and chairs outside of Senora E’s house. We brought various examples of different ecotecnias, but it was amazing to see all the examples community members of El Trafico had to contribute. Many brought the jewelry they had made during the workshops as well as items they had made on their own (see picture below, left). Senora Perla was a huge help, she brought dozens of examples of ecotecnias, ranging from flower pots made of tires to shawls made of plastic bags (which you can see in the image below on the right). She also brought music and speakers, so the event had somewhat of a festive vibe. I was really happy to see that both Juliana, who arrived with her young son, and Andrea, who arrived with her cousin and mother, came early.

The event was a lot of fun. It felt informal since people could come and go as they pleased. It was also nice to be able to meet and talk to so many people in the community. I would estimate that we talked to about thirty people we had not met previously. If I was I able to go back two weeks to the beginning of the field work, I would have liked to have a similar event on one of our first days here. I believe this would have shown out desire to reach out to the community. Because we have been behind Senora Enedina’s walls most of the time many people never even knew we were here. I wonder if it may have also made our workshops appear to be somewhat exclusive to those that were aware of our presence.
Senora Perla was able to attract the majority of the passersby. While talking to one small group of people, others would be walking by and begin listening to what she was saying. In this very informal way, she was able to get people involved (see image below, left). People seemed to respond very positively to the ecotecnias. Several people even asked when we would be back to teach them. Although we will not be able to hold anymore workshops, we told them that they could come back to Senora E’s on Fridays at four to learn how to knit with plastic bags. It was great to see such a strong desire to lean in those that stopped by the table, and while we were not able to teach them the actual techniques, I hope the exposition inspired them to try some things out and experiment.

While talking about ecotecnias, we were also able to touch on the issue of trash. We began mapping El Trafico on a large scale (image below, right). It was great to have this conversation about issues relating to trash with people but also somewhat disappointing. While the ecotecnias using recycled material do alleviate the issue to a degree, there is much more that can be done, and we did not have the time to delve into any other solutions or ideas.

After the workshop ended, it was time for goodbyes. Telling Juliana and Andrea goodbye was particularly hard. Just as quickly as we had come, we were leaving. It really did feel like our time was cut short. We also said goodbye to Senora Enedina and all the ladies preparing food in the kitchen. Senora Enedina seemed saddened that we did not get to spend more time together since she had been so busy with the community kitchen and various other commitments. She invited us to stay and eat, but we could not since we had planned to go back to Pueblo Bonito for the goodbye party. I am truly grateful for the trust that Senora E placed in us. Every day for the past two weeks she has let us come into her home to do what we want in her space without ever questioning our actions. I found this very generous of her.
Friday was the last day of the course and the day of the large event intended to gather many social actors to create projects related to sustainable development of the Guadalupe watershed. Two days prior, Ariadna, Katie, Gibran, Awais and I had emailed a detailed description of the event that included a timeframe and the different working tables. When the event started, we were surprised to see that it was not going at all as planned. A lengthy introduction of the watershed broken up by regional Mexican dance performances had us wondering if UAE would use our plan for the event. We were relieved to see that after the introduction ended, the working groups we had chosen were presented.

Alvan and I facilitated the working table on Urbanization and Land Use. The only professional in our group was Sarah, who works for the watershed commission. Karina, a UAE student also participated for the first twenty minutes or so. Because there was only one non-facilitator in the group for the majority of the time, it was hard not to contribute to the formation of the project a bit more than I had planned. Sarah would have otherwise been doing individual work rather than being involved in a group process that involves bouncing ideas off of one another and various points of views. Alvan and I did not make any of the major decisions concerning the project, but I do think we were able to help Sarah move forward in her ideas through discussion.

Our table chose to deal with the issue of urbanization not by using a legal framework as might be expected, but instead with a grassroots approach. Sarah told us that many people in this peri-urban region have land, but that it is not always put to use in a productive way. If peri-urban and rural regions were more productive, migration to urban areas might be curbed. We came up with the idea of forming co-ops in the region that would organize and educate local producers. The goal is to create a more complete local economy that would enrich this peri-urban and rural region, rather than create dense cities and empty country sides.
Sarah seemed very enthusiastic about the project. I think she was a bit overwhelmed by the immensity of the issue at first, as we all were. It was wonderful to see her get more and more excited about the project as plans became more concrete. When we presented our projects at the end of the workshop, we realized that our table’s project was related to that of the working group dealing with economic issues (see image below). Maria Luisa and Rafael, who are both experts on agriculture and also make various types of goods and handicrafts were both in this group. Realizing that their knowledge would be of great help to the project, Sarah asked them if the groups could work together, to which they gladly responded yes.