the running of the project because I saw myself attempting to do too much and once again neglecting the importance of the group in completing a large task. Finally, I have found another person to storyboard the movie, and have told him he can do it however he sees fit, subject to my approval of the final board. Although these may seem like small steps, and perhaps they are, these three actions are large leaps forward for me. With luck, through them I can and will move closer toward my vision of an ideal leader and finally overcome my lack of faith to be the best leader I can be.

CULTURE SHOCK
Leonardo Velazquez

Computer Science
Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades, Mexico City, Mexico

“Culture is the complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a person as a member of a society. It is the total way of life of any society.” Shock can be defined as a “violent impact or collision.” Culture shock can be defined as “an impact, a state of distress or disorientation brought on by a sudden subjection to an unfamiliar culture.” It is a feeling or a kind of panic that develops in people who are living in a different place or society where they are not familiar with what is happening around them.

Culture shock is the feeling of insecurity and fear that develops when someone is living outside his or her own environment. Sometimes it is very hard to adapt to being in a different society, with different customs, beliefs and ways of life. However, culture shock is not just a feeling of loneliness and panic that occurs in people living in an unfamiliar society; it can happen to people living within their own society. There are many different types of culture shock. For example, a rural person moving into an urban setting faces or experiences culture shock in much the same way as a person from the United States may experience it moving to Mexico. Almost everyone has experienced the feeling of being in a strange environment with different people. I have experienced culture shock many times in my life.

I remember the first time that I came to the United States by myself. At the beginning I thought that my life would be the same and
that language would be the only difference. I got my first taste of culture shock while I was on the plane. I have flown before in Mexico, but this time after I got comfortable, the meals that the airline offered me were different. I was used to eating a big meal at noon and then having some coffee or milk at night. It was noon and the stewardess came with a sandwich and a soda. I was hungry and I expected more food, but I soon learned the eating schedules outside Mexico were very different.

Later on, at the airport in Chicago, I had to call a friend who was going to pick me up and I had a hard time trying to use the public phones. In Mexico, we have an unique collect call service, because there is only one phone company. We just have to dial 02, and the phone operator nicely answers any question that you have and connects you with the person you need. Here I had to deal with different and strange procedures and companies in order to make the call, and I got frustrated because a machine could not understood that my English background was not the best one at that moment.

My first week adapting to the new culture was awful. I stayed with an American family who didn’t speak any Spanish. I understood most of the words, but I had a hard time trying to communicate with them. I learned early about my fear and insecurity in communicating with people in a new culture. For me, my greatest fear when I got here was not being able to communicate and make people understand me.

The first week that I stayed with my host family, I learned many new cultural habits and more about the American way of living. I remember the first day I wanted my typical breakfast from Mexico: eggs, beans and salsa. Instead I ate cereal and milk, and at that moment I felt like something was missing. I missed my culture but I knew that I had to get used to the new culture. Now I have learned to love cereal and milk, but I cannot forget the shock I felt that first morning I was here. My host family was an older couple, and like almost everybody in this country they went to work. It was hard for me to understand that older people still worked. In my country, most of the older people do not work and they live in the same house as their children.

The technology here is a continuing culture shock for me. I am an educated person and I think that I was up to date with most of the new technology in Mexico, but here I can hardly keep up. I am not saying that my society is behind, but our point of view of life is more relaxed. Here I learned the American phrase, “Time is Money.” In the United States, most people eat precooked food to save time, but in Mexico, we still prefer homemade food. My mom likes to buy precooked food so she does not have to work for long periods of time, but my dad does not like the
taste as much. I love the easy, American way but sometimes I miss my mom’s homemade cooking. Technology and the modern life of Americans has been one of the greatest culture shocks for me.

Also, the system of measuring is different. I still have a hard time at the store trying to figure out how much of something I need to buy. I am used to buying things in kilograms and not pounds, running in meters and not feet, and driving in kilometers not miles. Now that I have been here over a year I am starting to learn the American system of measuring.

It is hard for me to predict the weather changes here. In Mexico we always have nice weather, but here the temperature changes constantly. Everyday I need to watch the weather channel, which we do not have in Mexico, to see if I should wear a sweater or a jacket.

It has also been hard to adapt to the driving laws; I got a speeding ticket my first semester here! I was driving almost 85 miles per hour because I am not used to paying attention to the speedometer. In Mexico, hardly anyone obeys the speed limit and at night you can drive even faster and never get a ticket.

The definition of culture shock cannot be learned from a dictionary. The dictionary can give us a definition and examples, but everyone’s experience is different. Age, gender, and background shape the way people react to different cultures and environments. It is likely that two people from two different backgrounds who travel into the same new society will each react differently to the new society. Culture shock cannot be understood until one actually experiences it. Culture shock is a part of learning about a new society or environment. At first it may be hard to understand the people and customs, but after awhile the shock wears off and the new way of life actually starts becoming a part of one’s own personal behavior. But the question is still, what is not culture shock? Probably having a normal life, a normal relationship, a normal environment without experiencing changes can make our life free of culture shock. Although living in one environment or society can be comforting, one can only expand one’s horizons by a change in environment. Culture shock may be a stressful experience, but it is one that has changed my life for the better.