

Program Evaluation

The Institute for Study Abroad, Butler University (IFSA-Butler)

Site: Buenos Aires, Argentina

Program: Argentine Universities Program (AUP)

Dates: June 8-13, 2014

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

IFSA-Butler Argentine Universities Program is an advanced level Spanish semester or academic year study abroad program in Buenos Aires in association with *Universidad Católica Argentina (UCA)*, *Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)*, *Universidad del Salvador (USAL)*, *Universidad Torcuato Di Tella (Di Tella)*, and *Fundación Universidad del Cine (FUC)*. All students take an intensive theme-based Spanish language and Argentine culture course taught by program faculty. Depending on academic background, area of interest and sending school requirements, participants complete their schedules by choosing either a specialized program of study selected from among seven optional areas of academic concentration (including a related community practicum or directed research project) or a customized general program of study that includes one additional IFSA AUP program course and/or two to four integrated university courses at one or more of the local partner institutions. All students live in family home-stays and have the opportunity to volunteer at a local NGO or social service organization. Supported by seven full-time staff members, 16 part-time academic advisors, concentration coordinators, and Spanish professors, as well as six visiting professors, the AUP, together with the Buenos Aires intermediate program and the Mendoza program, enrolls an average of 150 students per semester from a wide variety of U.S. colleges and universities. The program features an excursion to Colonia, Uruguay and a series of optional small-group cultural activities that give students an insider's perspective on life in Argentina. Various aspects of the program and its staff members are evaluated internally and changes are routinely made based on the results.

PROTOCOL AND PREPARATION

This is the first external review for this IFSA-Butler program (since the dissolution of the COPA consortium in 2008). The Protocol for Evaluating Programs and Program Evaluation of Systems and Operations (PESO) followed herein was designed by IFSA. The members of the site visit team were:

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Ursinus College
- Barbara Gorka, Ph.D. (bgorka@pobox.upenn.edu)
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In advance of the site visit, the review team considered feedback provided by IFSA including:

- Site visit reports written by study abroad professionals from U.S. institutions (five from 2011 and three from 2012)
- Student evaluations of program including:
 - 2010: semester 2 pre-departure, in-country and post program surveys
 - 2011: semesters 1 and 2 pre-departure, in-country and post program surveys
 - 2012: semester 1 pre-departure, in-country and post program surveys
 - 2013: semesters 1 and 2 post program surveys
 - 2014: semester 1 mid-semester surveys
 - Due to an internal glitch in data collection, complete information was not available for 2012, 2013 and 2014
- Pre-departure emails and newsletters
- Orientation materials
- AUP Spring 2014 Handbook
- Concentrations descriptions
- Program course syllabi
- Program faculty and staff CVs
- Sample list of optional co-curricular activities and resources
- Statistical data on recent program participants
- Health and safety information
- Emergency plans

Additionally, the external review team sent out email calls for feedback and offers of telephone interviews to the 59 sending schools that sent 3 or more students to AUP from 2011-2014, followed by up to three reminders. Professionals from 38 institutions, including most of those who are members of the IFSA-Butler National Advisors Council Executive Committee, responded in writing or orally for a response rate of 64%.

During the site review, which took place from June 8 to 13, 2014, team members met with staff, students, faculty, and partner university faculty and administrators. We also toured sites and facilities in order to gather information and perspectives from various stakeholders. Our schedule included the following:

- Abbreviated guided city tour
- Dinners with IFSA-Butler faculty and staff (including IFSA-Butler president and CEO Mark Scheid) and guests
- Meetings with small groups of IFSA-Butler faculty and/or staff to discuss orientation, housing, health and safety, academic advising, student services, curriculum, and co- and extra-curricular activities and volunteer work/service opportunities
- Campus visits with representatives from various *facultades* from all four host universities
- Lunch/dinner meetings with currently enrolled IFSA-Butler students (approximately 15 students participated)

- Observations of all available IFSA-Butler program classes and of two host university classes (for purposes of comparison)
- Tours of two student homestays and visit with host mothers
- Meetings with volunteer work supervisor at a local organization
- Guided class visit to *Museo de la Memoria*

The external reviewers jointly drafted and agreed on commendations and recommendations, which are made part of this report.

IFSA-Butler response: The Institute for Study Abroad, Butler University would like to thank Barbara Gorka and Nadia Altschul for their hard work and time spent on this evaluation and report. We'd especially like to recognize and thank Melissa Hardin for her leadership on this project. She has spent countless hours evaluating the program and producing this well-written report. To all three, we're glad to have you as part of the IFSA-Butler network of colleagues, so that all together we may advance our mission in support of our students.

We would also like to express gratitude for the excellent work and dedication of our Buenos Aires staff, who went above and beyond expectations to make arrangements for a successful evaluation visit. Mario Cantarini, Daniel Peiró, and Patricio O'Dwyer, in particular, went out of their way to ensure that all the needs of the evaluation were met.

Finally, I want to thank all of our colleagues at our partner universities and throughout Buenos Aires that contributed to making this a thorough review, and especially for their high-quality work that allows us to hold the kind of program we envision, and for their on-going support as we carry out this program each semester.

IFSA-Butler accepts this report and we believe it accurately reflects the work we do in Buenos Aires. We have made some adjustments following this report and will continue to make others as we strive to incorporate the reviewers' suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

In the eyes of many education abroad professionals, the AUP represents the golden standard for advanced language facilitated direct enrollment. The many program options make possible a seemingly infinite number of combinations of learning opportunities supported by individualized academic advising. Participants, who come from a wide range of U.S. colleges and universities, see themselves and this program as a cut above others in Buenos Aires. At the heart of its success is a professional staff with an unusually low turnover that has dedicated many years of service under the leadership of a well-respected resident director who inspires students and staff alike to pursue excellence in all their endeavors. With the addition in 2006 of curricular concentrations, the AUP appeals to students with special interests as well as those who seek a more varied academic roster. One might say that the program's ability to anticipate and meet the shifting needs of contemporary students is its hallmark, but as program options continue to increase and diversify, the AUP must find new ways to clarify the many different tracks and highlight the core values that tie them all together. Sending schools heap praise on almost every aspect of this program, but uneasiness over future growth is emerging. One sending school representative expressed a concern that others appear to share:

“Future growth I hope is not in terms of more affiliated universities or institutions. The number of these already is a bit confusing for the students and perhaps hard to quality control. Also I would not like to see the main program grow in terms of number of students. Our students more than ever need individual guidance about their academic program and the living situation in BA.”

In all of its complexity, the AUP is nothing short of awe-inspiring. The abiding theme that arose during the external review was the sense that this program is actually many different programs under one name and its richness is far too easily lost in translation. As the AUP looks to the future, IFSA must plan carefully in order to avoid having its virtue—chameleon-like customizability—turn in to its vice.

IFSA-Butler response: The addition of the concentrations allowed this program to grow during the years enrollment was at its largest, while at the same time maintaining the individualization and personal attention that has characterized the program from its start. This format allows the program to expand and contract over time. Yet, with IFSA-Butler’s expanded operations throughout Latin America, numbers of students have not been as concentrated in Buenos Aires in recent years, enabling us further to focus on each individual in the program. At the same time, the need for clarification of tracks and the values that bind them is well-noted, and we will continue to refine this.

ORIENTATION

Pre-departure Advising

Because this program is so complex and includes so many different options, thorough, clear and continuous pre-departure advising is critical from the time students choose IFSA-Butler AUP all the way to arrival overseas. One way that IFSA-Butler tries to make the voluminous information more discernible and less overwhelming for students is by breaking it into discrete sections organized around broad topics (health and safety, academics, housing, etc.) that are delivered in a series of periodic email installments. The messages are clear and concise and include web links to more detailed information. The emails also invite students to follow up with the IFSA-Butler program advisor on any lingering questions. Furthermore, several emails are sent directly to students’ families. Yet despite these efforts, students don’t always read carefully and/or they miss important details that could better inform their decisions and actions. This became evident in written and oral feedback the review team considered in preparation of this report.

Upon acceptance to the AUP, students receive a link to the extensive *Preparing to Study Abroad: Argentina* online handbook, yet program evaluations demonstrate that some arrive in Argentina lacking a very basic understanding of the cultural and social reality that awaits them there. Students complain that they were not told the program end date until well into the semester or that the end date they were given for the group return flight was prior to university final exams, resulting in extra expenses and hassles to change their air tickets. There are numerous critiques of the visa application and residency processes. Students repeatedly remark that the budgets and tips on money matters are outdated. Surveys point to the type, timing and format of information students feel they need most pre-departure (including how and when to get a criminal background check, how to get documents notarized, how to understand race, religion, gender, and sexual identity in the Argentine context, how to ensure personal safety, how to

start the residency process, how to deal with inflation and currency exchange, etc.). It should be noted that students say they prefer email as the main mode of communication (far more so than web links and postal mail); however, in practice it appears to be of limited effectiveness. The most striking message is that students seem to want *more* information to be provided *sooner* and *more frequently*. Yet in our review of materials we found that many of the items students mentioned were outlined if not described in detail in one or more of the pre-departure documents. Indeed, despite a few comments to the contrary, the great majority of students characterized the pre-departure emails, newsletters and online materials as very useful. Clearly, written information alone (in whatever form) is not an effectual means of communicating with today's preoccupied students. The pressing question for IFSA-Butler, then, is how best to ensure that students read and retain the information. We believe that the way information is packaged and delivered can be enhanced. As one sending institution representative commented, "The website information is a complex web of information with indexing tabs, and sub tabs that may be confusing. Electronic data should be clear, concise, and easy to index through." We recommend, therefore, that the handbook, orientation manual and other materials be gathered into a single, more cohesive and searchable source that both students and IFSA-Butler advisors can readily reference at any stage of the process. Capturing the undivided attention of young people poses a challenge to all study abroad programs, but IFSA-Butler might also consider implementing new strategies to reinforce the information students receive. For example, IFSA-Butler might invite or require admitted students to participate in pre-departure webinars or tutorials. These might include role plays, podcast testimonials of former participants, and/or some other interactive exchange that actively engages students with IFSA-Butler staff and perhaps with each other. Another idea is for IFSA-Butler regional representatives to partner with sending school study abroad offices to conduct interactive program-specific pre-departure orientations on campuses.

Recommendation #1: Prepare a single searchable document for students, advisors and staff to access before, during and after study abroad. Be sure to address specific student needs as identified in surveys.

Recommendation #2: Consider new interactive ways to deliver pre-departure orientation both virtually and in person.

IFSA-Butler response: We are working with our IT team and consultants to create a way for us to deliver pre-departure advising in a way that is more appropriate for today's student. We encourage our alumni as well as their home schools to continually share feedback about their semester, including financial information, as we strive to incorporate their experiences into revisions of our information.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned issues, most students indicated that they felt very well supported in the pre-departure phase. Several commented (and this was echoed by sending schools) that Indianapolis program advisor Ashley Krutz was especially prompt and helpful. There was similar praise for former AUP advisor Eryn Espín-Kudzinski.

Commendation #1: Program advisors do an excellent job of anticipating and responding to student needs during the pre-departure phase.

Reflecting back on the period leading up to study abroad as they neared the end of the program, students (both in surveys and in person) overwhelmingly cited the process of selecting and finalizing courses onsite as their single most stressful experience. Some concluded that it was a test that simply had to be overcome or endured; in other words, there was nothing IFSA-Butler could do prior to student arrival to prevent what they perceived as a unique cultural challenge. Other students suggested that IFSA-Butler should manage registration better by explaining the process more clearly during the pre-departure phase. The reviewers recognize the difficulty of registering students for classes in multiple university systems, but we observed another problem that, if addressed, may help to reduce the anxiety experienced by students and onsite advisors during this process. We heard several cases of miscommunication and misinformation about what is expected and/or allowed by sending schools. At times the confusion over course selection originated with students themselves who misunderstood (or misrepresented) their own universities' requirements. It seems to us that the key concern—the transferability of credit—is a matter that must be addressed jointly by IFSA-Butler, sending institutions and participating students. This seems to us to be more a question of information management than it is of cultural difference. In order for the onsite advisors to present students with viable course options (thus avoiding future disputes), they must have direct access to updated and accurate information from sending schools. IFSA-Butler would do wise to identify an individual from each sending institution to serve as their authority regarding credit and course options and/or request that each school provide updated transfer credit policies for its most frequent sending schools or departments. We recognize the far-reaching implication of this recommendation, but insist that until sending schools clarify their own requirements, IFSA-Butler's advising effectiveness onsite will be limited and students will continue to experience unnecessary frustration. Feedback from sending schools seems to corroborate our perception, as credit worthiness and transferability is virtually the *only* concern cited by sending schools about the AUP.

Recommendation #3: Work with sending schools to establish clear guidelines regarding credit-worthy course options.

IFSA-Butler response: We agree with the need to improve communications regarding sending school guidelines, and will work with our field staff, academic affairs staff, and staff onsite to streamline this. Our onsite staff already spends a great deal of time learning about and communicating sending school guideline information, but we understand this can be improved. We encourage participation from our sending schools in this process.

We are also reviewing the information we provide about how the classes and/or universities they elect might impact their return date.

Another major challenge that must be addressed not only by IFSA-Butler but by sending schools and the field at large is student readiness in terms of (foreign) language achievement and academic preparation. Almost all the faculty and staff members on site with whom we spoke stated that despite a higher admissions standard than most Spanish-speaking programs (the AUP requires a minimum of 5 semesters of college-level Spanish, except for the Intensive Spanish concentration), many students arrive ill-prepared for the rigor of integrated classes at local universities in the target language. We note that this observation was made about students *across the spectrum of sending schools* and not just those from certain types of institutions or academic programs. A related problem is the general cultural background that

students bring to Buenos Aires which, according to faculty and staff from both AUP and each of the host universities, tends to lag behind that of their Argentine peers and inhibits their total integration into and potential for success in regular university courses. This phenomenon is not unique to IFSA-Butler program participants, but decades ago it might have been dismissed as a problem for the affected student to overcome. Today's global economy of education has changed all that. Faced with unrelenting financial pressures, universities in Buenos Aires, like those around the world, are increasingly interested in attracting and retaining a paying foreign student body. A few local universities have made strides in the level of academic and student support they provide visiting students, responding to foreign students' "disadvantage" by offering courses designed especially and exclusively for them. These classes are taught by the same faculty who teach regular university courses, but the material, pace, rigor, and expectations are perceptibly adjusted to the audience, resulting (in some cases) in courses that IFSA-Butler and/or sending schools deem inferior—not to mention the semantic problem these "closed" courses cause *vis-à-vis* the goal of university integration. [We hasten to add here that even professors of regular university courses confessed to us that they may grade international students with more lenience than national students.] IFSA-Butler has attempted to counter this trend in Buenos Aires by growing its own offerings of university faculty-taught program courses that cover the topics students want at a level that meets IFSA-Butler standards. Ironically, as we discovered in the feedback we gathered from sending schools, this feature of the AUP is sometimes interpreted as a sign that IFSA-Butler may be retreating from its more rigorous facilitated direct enrollment model. Some sending schools have policies that forbid students from earning credit for more than one such "closed" course (the AUP Spanish language course, of course, is required of all IFSA-Butler students) regardless of how and by whom they are taught. When the review team was onsite, it became apparent to us that, just as students struggle to understand the dizzying array of academic offerings made available through the AUP, some sending institutions likewise cannot distinguish between the program courses IFSA-Butler imparts and those that are offered by universities such as UCA and USAL to a broader international student body. The Program Courses section of this report attempts to highlight and evaluate some of the AUP offerings. The salient point to make here is that if in fact the AUP program courses are of a superior quality, then IFSA-Butler needs to demonstrate this to sending schools.

Another AUP initiative that the review team and many sending institutions judge to be particularly successful— the concentrations and directed research options— is not being promoted accurately to prospective and newly admitted students. During the pre-departure phase students are informed about the concentrations and told that if they are interested in a concentration they are required to submit a personal statement well in advance of their arrival overseas, but when students attend orientation in Buenos Aires, they hear presentations on these options and are allowed to choose one at that time. There may be logistical or pedagogical reasons to encourage students to select a concentration pre-departure, but if that option will again be offered at onsite orientation, then IFSA-Butler should make it clear to undecided students that such a choice can alternatively be made after arrival. In addition, IFSA-Butler should be prepared to manage evolving student expectations as the experience they selected and envisioned pre-departure may change dramatically once they are in Buenos Aires. Here, too, the solution is to communicate information more clearly so that students can make the choices that best align with their ability and goals.

IFSA-Butler response: We are happy to provide syllabi from our program courses (already available on our website) as well as secure syllabi from host universities so that sending schools may evaluate the content and level of courses taught. Please contact us directly to discuss which host syllabi would be most useful for you; as there are thousands of possibilities, we can be most helpful knowing what your specific needs are.

We have created a new honors concentration, in which students will be required to maximize their direct enrollment and minimize “closed” courses. We hope this will address concerns of sending schools expressed above. This will also allow us to recognize the students who are making this effort, and will be a concrete tool for us to encourage this. Students in this concentration will have access to specialized co-curricular activities as well. Our Latin America Advisory Committee helped frame the parameters of the concentration. More information will be shared with NAC member schools shortly.

We have eliminated the request to submit a personal statement in advance for the students interested in the concentration. We are revising the language where students indicate an interest in participating to make the process more clear.

Arrival and Orientation

The theme of complexity that runs through pre-departure continues through orientation and academic advising. The staggered calendars of the various host universities make it possible (and perhaps necessary) for the AUP to run a thorough albeit protracted orientation program that lasts not days but weeks. Students receive a comprehensive electronic Orientation Handbook, mostly in Spanish, that covers all the usual items (money matters, academics/academic advising, home-stays, safety, daily life, health care, travel, and program policies). The practical orientation program—conducted entirely in Spanish—occurs in several stages of varying intensity, beginning with 5 full days of mandatory sessions held mostly at the *Circolo Italiano*, a beautiful offsite location with facilities to accommodate the large number of program participants. A lengthy Spanish language placement exam (outlined in another section of this report) is administered shortly after arrival and the results become available a few days later. AUP advisors then place students in the required program language classes based on their performance. A few days later the orientation is moved to the AUP offices and students begin meeting in smaller assigned groups with program faculty and staff for orientation activities as well as Spanish language classes. As time passes and students’ university schedules fall into place, the intensive language classes shift to maintenance mode and the number of hours allocated for them decreases. In this way, the AUP puts the lengthy “shopping” period of university course registration to good use by frontloading language study and orientation until students are fully immersed in their permanent university courses. Some students say that orientation is too long and that some of the material could better be covered pre-departure, but most students and sending schools deem it robust and thorough. As one study abroad professional remarked, “In my opinion it is one of the strongest programs in Argentina with regards to preparing the students after they arrive before they start their local courses. If more of this could be done before the students went abroad that would be very helpful.”

Commendation #2: The AUP makes good use of the “shopping” period during which class schedules are not yet set to conduct a thorough onsite orientation that reflects IFSA-Butler values.

Orientation takes place in the context of a large and bustling city that presents students with new distractions, experiences and challenges. Some students express a desire for orientation exercises that allow them to familiarize themselves with city resources. Students from suburban areas said they were especially nervous about living in an urban environment and wished there had been a city tour at the beginning of orientation to help them to get their bearings. One student suggested that instead of hard copy maps, students could be provided with an online tool or mobile app that enables the user to plan a trip on the city's subway system. After planning a trip online, students could be shown how to find a subway station, purchase a ticket and board a train, or they could be given a practical assignment that requires them to use the subway to carry out some task. This type of interactive foray into the city before classes officially start might reduce the anxiety that students experience in the first few days. Having not had any practice getting around, some students felt less confident finding the locations to complete the visa/residency application process because they said the addresses provided did not match those they found on Googlemaps.com. The reviewers do not advocate mitigating any and all discomfort from the newly arrived student's experience; however, we do believe that a more interactive approach to orientation would prove more effective for today's students.

Recommendation #4: Incorporate more practical and interactive exercises into the early days of orientation, especially with regard to the use of public transportation.

IFSA-Butler response: We have created an app that addresses many of these and other questions. We are researching the best way to make it available to students. We will continue to maintain paper information for students who do not bring smart phones or have WiFi immediately accessible. We are exploring other ideas to implement during orientation.

The orientation program attempts to prepare students for culture shock and make them aware of the most significant cultural differences in Argentine society. This proves to be rather challenging for some students, in large part because their experiences do not align with their expectations. A few students of color remarked in written evaluations that they were not forewarned that they might be stared at by (mostly white) Argentines. One Jewish student said she was not prepared for the Anti-Semitism she faced in Buenos Aires. A gay African-American student said he felt uncomfortable in the city. To be sure, the pre-departure and orientation materials raise these very issues, but experiencing them first-hand is still a shock to some students. On the other hand, other minority students said they were able to accept and even enjoy what they came to appreciate as the curiosity with which their Argentine hosts looked upon them. In our review of written materials and conversations with AUP staff, we found that the program adequately explains the range of Argentine attitudes and behaviors regarding gender, race, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. Furthermore, individual staff members not only embody these forms of diversity themselves; they actively cultivate a warm and inclusive environment for people from all walks of life. The best example of this was appreciable in the enormous pride with which staff members described their shared sense of accomplishment at having successfully accommodated (with homestays, classes, health care providers and support services) two recent students who underwent gender reassignment procedures during their stay in Buenos Aires. One sending school congratulated AUP staff on their sensitive and humane handling of this matter. Having blazed a trail in this area, AUP is becoming known as an especially friendly program for students who express their gender in non-traditional ways. The reviewers concluded that the AUP provides an ideal atmosphere for

students who welcome the opportunity to experience how diverse communities thrive in a large urban center.

Commendation #3: The AUP staff sets a shining example for diversity and inclusiveness and serves as a bridge and safe haven between students and the host community.

IFSA-Butler response: We are committed to continually learning and enacting best practices for serving a diverse student body.

There is one AUP philosophy that is evident in the program design that some students do not fully appreciate. Students observe that the IFSA-Butler orientation does not include many group social activities and therefore is not conducive to “bonding” among participants. AUP students don’t necessarily notice this until later in the semester when they make acquaintance with U.S. students in other study abroad programs and discover that other program providers include many such common experiences. In speaking with the resident director we learned that recurring group meals, a gathering space and plentiful computer work stations at the program center are deliberately omitted from the AUP in an attempt to discourage students from clinging to one another and instead force them to spend their time among Argentines elsewhere—in classes, at their homestays and in the city. After all, the AUP program focuses on facilitated direct enrollment and engagement with the host community, and all efforts and resources are directed to this goal. For example, from the time that students arrive, all staff members impose the exclusive use of Spanish in all communications even though there is no language contract or pledge. Students take this expectation so seriously that they spoke only in Spanish with the three reviewers. Another example of the program ethos is found in the resident director’s advice to students with regard to resuming their regular extracurricular activities in Buenos Aires: “Don’t look for [what you do at home]; find [what people do here.]” This advice exhorts students to avoid replicating their familiar U.S. lifestyles (which might lead them to connect with U.S. peers) and instead discover and take part in the daily lives and activities of Argentines. We heard interesting examples of students who followed this advice with great success by joining clubs and sports teams organized or supported by their host universities.

Another reason that the AUP lacks large group activities is to make a rather large concentration of U.S. students seem much smaller. The approximately 110 students are divided into small groups for meetings and program classes, but these are limited and not expressly designed to create a sense of shared identity. The initial orientation is an exceptional event that occurs at an offsite location to which students do not return during the semester. A few students did not understand the subtle meaning that lay beneath the structure of orientation and they were perplexed by the use of the *Circolo Italiano* which they pronounced as “irrelevant” to their overall experience. The fact that students misinterpret certain aspects of program design leads the reviewers to believe that the core values are somehow being lost. It might be advisable for IFSA-Butler to make explicit to students that every aspect of the program design is determined based on the goal of integration in the local culture rather than on creating an IFSA-Butler “campus” experience apart from it. For example, in marketing materials and in interactions onsite, IFSA-Butler might more plainly reiterate that the AUP is the right program for students who want to meet Argentine (not U.S.) classmates and friends. This may be more important in light of the frequency with which study abroad returnees in general (though not necessarily from AUP) cite “making friends with other international students” as one of their most rewarding experiences.

Recommendation #5: IFSA-Butler might want to be more deliberate in explaining to students the more subtle philosophy behind program design.

IFSA-Butler response: We appreciate this feedback and are renewing our effort to communicate the ways the program design is related to the program ethos through our marketing and orientation.

ACADEMICS

Academics

The cornerstone of AUP, and the reason that students identified their own interest in choosing this program over other programs in Buenos Aires, is facilitated direct enrollment. Full integration in university classes is the golden standard that staff and advisors try to achieve, and one that the students with whom we spoke value very highly. A recurrent theme that surfaced in the program—and perhaps one that is true of the field of study abroad at large—is that the majority of U.S. students who have finished five semesters of college level Spanish do not have the necessary language level to take full advantage of direct enrollment, especially direct enrollment in the top Argentine academic institutions (such as Di Tella and UBA). The staff nevertheless makes every effort to place students in at least one direct enrollment course, and if possible, up to three or four. Only a handful are ultimately able to take UBA courses, mainly seminars (which are more manageable for an international student due to the format and structure of the course), and some seem to take one course at Di Tella, the second most rigorous institution offered. We hasten to add that we learned from advisors and observed ourselves that even at UBA and Di Tella, academic rigor varies significantly from one course to another. For this reason, advisors are sometimes able to place a weaker student (whether in terms of academic background or foreign language skills) in an UBA course (typically a workshop) in order to give him/her the UBA experience without setting him/her up for failure. Part of this attention to helping students achieve direct enrollment is that advisors register the students in UBA themselves following a “mock” registration between advisor and student. Our impression is that AUP advisors are extremely attuned to students’ backgrounds and they strive to provide the most rigorous academic experience each student can handle. Depending on the student’s level, however, the most rigorous but feasible experience might *not* be direct enrollment, and this contingency is part of advisors’ highly personalized approach. The extreme care evidenced in tailoring the experience to the individual student is also one of the ways in which IFSA-Butler helps students understand and succeed in the host country’s academic culture: in order to achieve this goal IFSA-Butler may provide a less demanding UBA workshop that will nevertheless give the student a new perspective. Likewise, IFSA-Butler fosters integration into the host community by finding courses—sometimes non-integrated or “closed” courses designed for foreign students—that will aid students with language acquisition. For instance, one academic year student we interviewed had taken only closed courses during her first term in Buenos Aires (when her Spanish language level was low), but was then prepared to take mainly integrated courses in her second semester, including Feierstein’s Human Rights/Genocide course taught at UBA. This is precisely the sort of personalized approach that has proved so successful at AUP.

Commendation #4: The AUP does a remarkable job of placing students in integrated courses at host universities even when they may lack preparation.

Recommendation #6: IFSA-Butler should initiate discussions in the education abroad field and among U.S. university leaders about the realities of foreign language and general academic preparation among U.S. students seeking direct enrollment.

IFSA-Butler response: We are committed to maintaining this very personalized approach to maximize student success (academic, cultural, and social). This requires a large, experienced staff.

We will consider ways in which we might engage the field in a related conversation. We consider that this would be quite valuable.

In terms of progress towards the degree, it seems that many students take courses for general or elective credit toward graduation instead of credit toward their majors. Those who take courses in their majors might give mixed reviews of those classes; for instance, one student considered her concentration courses to be noticeably below her home institution's level of academic rigor. Many of the sending schools have Spanish Language and Literature departments (perhaps under different nomenclatures, such as Hispanic Studies, or as one language within a Foreign Language department) in which the language of instruction is Spanish. This means that some of the AUP classes duplicate what home campuses offer, especially literature, film, and culture. As a result, some home university departments prefer that their (Spanish or similar) majors *not* take program or closed courses, whereas they might consider an equivalent integrated course at one of the top host institutions (especially UBA) to be credit-worthy. Even two students who identified courses at certain universities as not rigorous in comparison with their home institutions considered these same courses as opening new vistas and inspiring them to adopt an anthropological perspective regarding Argentine higher education. In any case, IFSA-Butler should investigate further to determine why students perceive that courses in their majors are at a lower level than at their home institutions and how AUP advisors might fine-tune their advising to bridge this gap.

What seems clear is that courses at the most rigorous universities sharpen students' critical thinking skills, but from our limited discussions with students, we gathered that these intellectually challenging courses are typically only found at UBA (the one student taking a Di Tella course mentioned how much she needed to study for it, but she did not comment on its intellectual level. Since she is from an Ivy League university, we are inclined to believe that the large amount of material required in the course did not merely imply rote memorization but involved intellectual challenge.)

One other aspect of the AUP academic experience that the reviewers feel should be studied further is grading practice and policy. When students are overly concerned with how their study abroad grades will impact their GPAs at their home institutions (when home institution policy is to factor grades earned abroad into the home institution GPA), they might not take the most intellectually rigorous academic course of action. Grade inflation is a reality in the U.S. that has not yet been adopted at Argentine universities, although we found that local professors and administrators did express their awareness and understanding of U.S. expectations for (higher) grades. At an Argentine university a student who has fulfilled course requirements 100% will

usually receive a grade of 7 out of 10. When U.S. students or sending schools demand grade equivalences in the 8-10 range as a condition of academic credit worthiness, they unwittingly place unreasonable pressure on local professors to adapt their standards to U.S. ways. For a study abroad program that strives to integrate foreign students into the local culture, this seems like a contradiction. We would recommend therefore reconsidering the way that grades are translated so as to provide a more authentic local experience of grading. This could be accomplished by revisiting and recalibrating the grade conversion chart (in a way that more accurately reflects grade standards in the U.S.) for each host university that Butler University uses when issuing official transcripts. This might in turn lower students' anxiety about their GPA and encourage them to be more adventurous regarding academic rigor and direct enrollment.

Recommendation #7: Review grading policy and practice to ensure that conversion tables are reflective of current conditions in higher education.

IFSA-Butler response: We will review our grade equivalencies for this program. However, we recently examined grades for several hundred AUP students (spanning six semesters), and found that the grades our students earned in Buenos Aires, on average, increased .09 points (on a 4-point scale) from their home school transcript provided in their application. We recognize this is a very important issue and will continue to monitor it.

Program Classes

There are three types of IFSA-Butler program classes that are all non-integrated and thus open only to international students: the required language classes, internal courses, and the main courses for each concentration. We were able to sit in briefly on a few of these program classes.

Castellano Avanzado y Cultura Argentina

The only IFSA-Butler course that is obligatory, Advanced Spanish Language and Argentine Culture is centered on one of several themes shown in the parenthetical subtitle, for example, Argentine Identity or Popular Urban Music. Students who enroll in one of the seven concentrations must take the language and culture section with the corresponding theme, for example, participants in the Directed Research concentration must register for the Advanced Spanish Language and Argentine Culture (Academic Writing) course. Students who are not enrolled in a concentration sometimes choose a language class due to the topic but many times they choose it simply because it fits their schedule. Since final schedules might take over a month to be truly established, language classes are divided in three units in order to permit students to move from one to the other if needed to accommodate changes in their schedules. The three units of language classes are grammar, the reading of four books, and the thematic component. The books they read in these courses include one novel (*Blanco nocturno* by Ricardo Piglia), one work of non-fiction (*Operación masacre* by Rodolfo Walsh), a collection of essays by Beatriz Sarlo, and *La persistencia*, a play by Griselda Gambaro. AUP faculty told us that they had purposely chosen to include two women and two men writers among the authors studied. Language sections are divided into two groups or menus, one white and the other blue, which staff members explain helps them to meet logistical needs. Students can add/drop language sections only within their own color menu, but the program does make rare exceptions to this rule if absolutely necessary. Another reason the AUP manages the language courses internally (as opposed to placing students in language courses offered by host

universities) is that it provides IFSA-Butler staff with regular contact with and therefore a reliable way to ascertain the wellbeing of students whose level of engagement, and potentially anxiety and distress, may be more readily apparent in sustained class interactions than in occasional interactions. Language faculty assume a special responsibility for the welfare of IFSA-Butler students. As one sending school representative remarked, "One of the positive aspects of having the mandatory IFSA course was that it provides structure and forces students to have a stronger relationship with the IFSA staff. The staff then has an opportunity to check up on students and can be more proactive with students that are struggling academically or emotionally."

Overall, students seem satisfied with the language courses, although one wished that the thematic aspect took center stage more (i.e., to use the theme to work on grammar or contextualize the readings instead of the more chronological approach that she felt left the theme until the end) while another considered that the thematic aspect had permeated the course too noticeably instead of being left to the end in a more discrete unit (that student wasn't particularly interested in the theme). In other words, each professor appears to integrate the theme into the other units at his or her own discretion.

We were surprised to see that students do not seem aware of their own language learning within the course. Although it was near the end of the semester, two of the students we met noted that they didn't think their vocabulary had grown and they identified language growth only in the non-academic register. Also, at least in students' perceptions, language acquisition, particularly in *lunfardo* (one version of slang fairly prevalent in Buenos Aires), seemed to depend on the teacher who may or may not be very active in introducing local slang (a needed aspect in a city that uses it extensively in daily interactions) in class.

We were able to make short visits to only two of the language and culture courses during which we observed student-centered pedagogy and an atmosphere that encouraged active participation. The two professors we saw, Darío Steimberg and Cruz Tamae, whose sections focus on *Música Popular Urbana* and *Teatro en Argentina*, respectively, demonstrated a strong rapport with students. The instructors ensured the exclusive use of Spanish in the classroom and employed both general discussion and small group activities to encourage students to develop their ideas orally. The most powerful feeling evoked in these two brief classroom encounters was one of mutual respect and admiration. Our later conversations with students confirmed that they genuinely liked and respected their teachers and this inspired them to work hard in class.

Recommendation #8: Explore appropriate ways to incorporate slang into the material taught in the language course.

IFSA Internal Program Courses

This is a group of seven AUP signature courses that are analogous to the closed courses available only to foreign students at local universities (excluding UBA, which provides no such courses). The recent history of closed courses at local universities presents an important context. Some time ago, IFSA-Butler noticed that students were increasingly taking non-integrated courses at local universities such as in UCA's *Programa de Estudios Latinoamericanos*, a nomenclature that would typically describe an academic department in U.S. universities but that in UCA is an

academic program developed exclusively for foreign students. A private university, UCA charges a premium for these courses, and this higher cost began to drive up IFSA-Butler fees. In addition, IFSA-Butler staff observed that the closed courses offered by some of the local universities which were designed to attract a wider audience of international students rather than the particular needs of IFSA-Butler advanced Spanish program participants, did not meet IFSA-Butler AUP standards for academic rigor. Nevertheless, there remains student demand for the topics covered, and closed courses in general are sometimes the “wild card” needed to complete students’ course loads, so the AUP proceeded to expand its own more rigorous version of non-integrated courses on similar topics in order to maintain quality and control cost. Furthermore, the AUP is committed to keeping its own courses open even if enrollment is low. Based on our understanding of these issues, the reviewers agree that although non-integrated courses are not the goal of a facilitated direct enrollment program such as the AUP, those that meet IFSA-Butler standards do serve an important function and therefore should be retained.

Commendation #5: The program tries to minimize reliance on closed courses but is flexible enough to create its own as appropriate when a particular need is not being met.

Recommendation #9: Continue to monitor closed courses taught at host universities for quality control and develop alternative academically rigorous special interest courses while supporting students to take the most challenging integrated courses they can.

Recommendation #10: Create clear policies for local partners, sending schools and students regarding the kind of courses and activities that the program endorses at each host university.

IFSA-Butler response: The program courses also provide a way for us to introduce context surrounding specific themes that provides students a fuller understanding of their host communities. Locals often understand this context already, so such content is rarely offered in integrated classes.

One issue of concern to us is student to teacher ratio. Many courses outside IFSA maintain a high ratio, whereas we limit the ratio in our classes to create the learning environment we feel is most productive.

We will continue to review our policies and the way they are communicated, keeping in mind the diversity of academic needs of our students and sending schools.

One interesting phenomenon we discovered was that students sometimes end up taking closed courses (either AUP program courses or those offered at a local university) in order to satisfy the particular requirements of their home universities or academic departments. For example, we heard several cases of students whose majors included requirements of courses *that contained the term “Latin American”* in the title. Regular university courses in Argentina seldom include such a descriptor because the Latin American context is taken for granted, whereas non-integrated courses that target foreign students do include such terminology. The ironic result is that instead of choosing the more appropriate integrated course based on content and rigor, students and advisors are forced to choose a less desirable alternative in order to satisfy a particular sending school requirement.

Recommendation #11: Begin to unravel the semantic problem surrounding course titles and educate sending schools about the true nature of each type of course offered.

IFSA-Butler response: We would be glad to engage in a conversation about how AUP options match with sending school requirements. Please contact us if your school would like to participate in this conversation. Our staff is often disappointed when a course that would otherwise perfectly match the student's interests and needs doesn't meet semantic requirement.

We paid short visits to four of the seven AUP courses available this term. Our comments appear below.

Arte y Política en la Argentina Contemporánea (Gabriel Palumbo)

This class is an example of IFSA-Butler's commitment to keep open its own program courses despite low enrollment. There were only two students on the day of our visit. Like other courses we observed (described below), it was mostly professor-centered, but the teacher maintained a relaxed atmosphere and used appropriate terminology. The students took notes and made occasional comments.

Literatura Argentina, Ficciones del Presente (Diego Peller)

We visited a part of this course on Argentine fiction from the twenty-first century. The professor discussed several short stories about the Dirty War written by the generation of children of disappeared parents. Based on our observation of the class discussion as well as the syllabus, this course seemed similar to a typical upper-level literature course in a Spanish department in a U.S. college or university. It was mainly professor-centered, a format that is more commonly found in Argentine universities. In our estimation students did not participate actively when given the opportunity and seemed to have read somewhat superficially, which also showed in their level of understanding of the plot. This, too, can be typical of a professor-centered upper level Spanish course.

IFSA-Butler response: We note that this class teaches novels in addition to short stories.

La Argentina Peronista (Sabrina Ajmechet)

On the day of this class meeting the professor had planned a field trip to the *Museo de la Memoria* (ex ESMA), an infamous site where many disappeared were clandestinely processed and imprisoned between 1976 and 1983. The museum required the small class (three of five students attended that day) and the professor to join another more numerous tour group and a museum guide. As a result, little interaction could be observed between teacher and students. Nevertheless, the field trip provided an important opportunity for the class to put the course material into context and to make the material come alive.

Note that we thought it was good that IFSA-Butler kept courses open despite low enrollments, because then students can trust course listings and not fear they will be canceled after they apply and get accepted.

Literatura Argentina y Latinoamericana (Celina Manzoni)

We also visited about half of this program course, taught by a leading full professor from UBA. This course seemed to be the equivalent of an upper-level course from a well-regarded Spanish department in the U.S. The professor examined the first two chapters of a short novel with a rigorous professor-centered teaching approach. Each student had to provide a first impression of the text, which the professor wrote down. This course is conducted in an overall rigorous way and students seem to recognize that their full attention is expected throughout the class. In a separate conversation with the professor, we learned that depending on the size of the group she gives two or three writing assignments of about three pages each which are carefully graded and then returned to the students for re-writing. The professor is extremely knowledgeable in the subject matter and devotes a fair amount of time to the linguistic characteristics that build the text—an exercise that boosts students' understanding of Spanish. In this class, for instance, the students heard explanations about details that created the ambience of mystery, a characteristic of the text that they had noted in their own first impressions. The professor analyzed in detail a paragraph that provided the setting of the story—e.g., the meaning of *calle de los donceles*, the superposition of street numbers, and the historical differences between the street level and the more colonial architecture of the first floor of homes. As in the case of *Literatura Argentina, Ficciones del Presente*, the readings are not very long but in our estimation these courses would be acceptable to a U.S. Spanish department as the equivalent of a course taught by a visiting professor.

Historia Contemporanea: Sociedad y Estado en la Argentina (Cristina Lucchini)

Although we were not able to observe this course, in our conversations with Cristina Lucchini we found her to be very positive about the intellectual satisfaction that her courses provide, especially her directed research course (as part of the Directed Research concentration), in which students choose diverse topics to research with her assistance.

IFSA-Butler Concentration Courses

The optional concentrations were conceived with several purposes in mind: to create a smaller program experience within a larger program, to attract students with special areas of interest, to capitalize on local resources and areas of expertise, and to reduce the anxiety of the shopping period by offering a more cohesive and predetermined alternative. Students are encouraged but not required to select a concentration pre-departure. During orientation students hear presentations on each of the concentrations and most end up selecting one at that time. Students generally need to add one UBA or two USAL/UCA courses to accumulate the minimum number of credits needed. The concentrations combine an academic/theoretical methodology course (which seemed less rigorous than a similar U.S. course) with an internship or practicum experience for credit. This might not be sufficient for top U.S. universities but it appears to be acceptable to most sending schools. The practical experiences result in an appropriate and even impressive visible product such as a short film or article for publication.

IFSA-Butler response: We have been impressed with the outcomes of the student research. Quite a few students present their research upon return to the U.S., and we continually encourage them to present more.

It can be difficult to determine for whom the concentrations are a better fit—whether students who are new to the subject area or students who have already completed advanced level work in it; nevertheless, AUP staff insists that each concentration can be tailored to meet the needs of each type of student. Some students complained in surveys and in conversations with us that the coursework is in fact not sufficiently challenging for majors. We do not feel we had enough exposure to make a judgment.

Recommendation #12: Clarify the appropriateness of each of the seven concentrations for majors by giving specific examples of how they can enhance previous academic work in these areas.

IFSA-Butler response: We will incorporate such information in our revised pre-departure information.

We had the opportunity to visit the program class for three of the seven concentrations. The concentrations not visited are Directed Research, Cinema Studies, Theater, and Intensive Spanish.

Análisis de las Prácticas Sociales Genocidas, Human Rights Concentration (Daniel Feierstein)

This course focuses on legal principles that influenced the tribunals on genocide or crimes against humanity including examples drawn from histories of Nazism, Rwanda, and Argentina in 1985 and since 2000. Before visiting this AUP program course the reviewers were told that the well-known UBA professor was essentially teaching the same course for AUP as he does for the university. The difference we perceived was that in a smaller and less threatening program course format students would feel freer to ask questions including requests for clarification than they would in the same course taught at the university. The lecture style class was professor-centered but he did ask occasional questions of students. The instruction seemed solid and effective.

Diversidad y Género en Argentina, Diversity, Minority, and Gender Studies Concentration (Dora Barrancos and Team)

This was our first short class. Prof. Barrancos is a leader in gender studies in Argentina and one of the most well regarded full time UBA faculty members, and she leads a team of multiple professors teaching the course. Each team member, including Prof. Barrancos, teaches two sessions per semester. During this visit, which was the only negative class experience of our evaluation, the teaching method left us wondering whether the professor had a genuine interest in teaching this type of group of non-native students. We understand that this may not be representative of the whole class, as we only had the opportunity to observe this session.

Literature Argentina y Latinoamericana, Literature Concentration (Celina Manzoni)

In stark contrast to the professor of *Diversidad y Género en Argentina* and to her credit, Celina Manzoni, who is also a UBA full professor, was very positive about teaching this type of student and course. The professor demonstrated a genuine interest in the classroom and it was evident that she found the students and the teaching intellectually refreshing.

Recommendation #13: Train professors new to the dynamics of teaching non-native students classroom techniques that can help bridge expectations and compensate for students' poor linguistic abilities.

Recommendation #14: Consider ways of bridging the gap between the pedagogies employed by local faculty members and those to which U.S. students are accustomed. This could include setting more accurate expectations about teaching practices during the advising, pre-departure and arrival orientation phase and perhaps by creating opportunities for local faculty to share effective classroom strategies with one another whatever their origin. Some of these techniques (including the use of audiovisual material and a more student-centered classroom environment with small group discussions and other hands-on exercises) are already being used very successfully in the language and culture classes.

IFSA-Butler response: We are considering how we might refine the training provided to new IFSA-Butler professors with these recommendations in mind, and how current professors may share best practices amongst themselves.

Host Universities

The wealth of academic offerings available in the AUP is the fruit of the relationships that IFSA-Butler has cultivated with its four partner universities. Each institution contributes unique strengths to create a virtually limitless array of opportunities for students. The fact that there are multiple partners of varying levels of rigor helps IFSA-Butler to realize the goal of direct enrollment while minimizing reliance on non-integrated courses. When a student is found to be underprepared for the demands of one course, *facultad* or university, advisers suggest another until a full slate is reached. To be sure, there are costs associated with combining so many different options. For example, students onsite corroborated a concern raised in feedback from one sending institution: "since [IFSA-Butler students] are in several places, and commuting a lot, they do not get as much interaction with students from Buenos Aires." After meeting with representatives from all four universities and talking with faculty, staff and students, the reviewers were able to appreciate the contributions of each one but still wondered if the complications that resulted from having so many options (i.e. a staggered calendar, an extended shopping period with a comparatively short course duration, a feeling of having spent time and energy on courses that students ultimately abandoned in favor of others, a sometimes overwhelming decision-making process, a delay in finalizing course schedules, a sense of being scattered, etc.), were worth the painstaking efforts to manage all of them. Since it was not clear to us from our short visit that every university is indispensable, we recommend that IFSA-Butler weigh carefully the benefits of each relationship and discontinue any partnership that it deems non-essential—especially if there are plans to add any new partners in the future. Alternatively, if indeed all four partners are crucial, then IFSA-Butler should make plain the reasons why.

During our meetings with representatives we came face to face with another issue that is frequently found in unilateral arrangements with host universities: the desire on the part of the hosts to move beyond the facilitated direct enrollment agreement. For example, one university articulated a hunger for higher foreign student enrollments in general and a strong wish to take on the responsibility of advising IFSA students in particular. Another university expressed

interest in pursuing study abroad opportunities for its Argentine students at IFSA-Butler partner universities in the U.S. The natural appeal for reciprocity and equal opportunity in an increasingly global economy of education is something not only IFSA-Butler but the U.S. study abroad field at large ignores at its own peril.

Our impressions of each host university are summarized below.

UBA

The relationship IFSA-Butler enjoys with UBA is its greatest accomplishment in terms of providing U.S. students with the most challenging academic opportunities available in Buenos Aires. The unique culture of this large public university also provides students with a fundamental perspective on Argentine education. As the top ranking and largest institution of higher learning, UBA promises to continue to represent the highest academic achievement for those students who are qualified to pursue it. IFSA-Butler should make every effort to nurture this mutually beneficial relationship while seeking opportunities elsewhere to meet the diverse linguistic and academic needs of program participants.

Sample UBA Courses

One of the reviewers also briefly attended two UBA *Filosofía y Letras* courses in order to have a more grounded sense of the type of direct enrollment courses that students generally are *not* in a position to attend. These were Diego Peller's *práctico* of literary criticism (a first year course for Argentine students), and a *teórico* (master lecture) on twentieth-century Latin American literature. Both courses would be appropriate for a native or heritage speaker from a U.S. university with a strong interest or background in Spanish American literature. These courses are based almost solely on oral delivery. The master lecture is strictly a lecture in which not even the blackboard was used as a teaching aid; it was also heavy in the use of quotations read aloud which would be hard to follow for most foreign students and for those without a strong literature or humanities background. The *práctico* was a bit more interactive in that the professor was open to questions and made occasional use of the blackboard. A U.S. student with a literature major who is used to taking courses in Spanish or who is close to native language level should be able to succeed in this course, provided that he or she is up for the challenge of a theory course.

IFSA-Butler response: We would like to express appreciation to UBA and Dr. Peller for allowing a reviewer to observe classes. Argentine universities typically don't allow external observers to attend classes.

UCA

Of the four university partners, UCA purports to provide the highest level of student support and services, including extensive extracurricular activities. Although not a residential campus, the university does seem similar to the U.S. campus life in large part due to the efforts of the *Programa de Estudios Latinoamericanos* to integrate foreign students into university life. The advisability of reliance on closed courses for foreign students is a matter that IFSA should continue to study.

USAL

Although not a top-ranked university, USAL provides interesting course options for IFSA-Butler students and seems to occupy an important place among host institutions. Like other private universities, USAL is actively expanding its offerings in order to attract more foreign students, but there is less emphasis on non-integrated courses. AUP advisors readily recommend USAL courses to students and most seem to take at least one course there. The relationship between USAL and IFSA-Butler appears to be friendly and productive.

Di Tella

Di Tella provides a unique private university experience with attractive and modern facilities. It also embraces a teaching philosophy to which U.S. students are drawn: highly qualified full-time faculty scholars teach courses in their area of expertise to relatively small groups of students. The pedagogy, which encourages class discussion, is more student-centered than that found at other universities. As a large and relatively expensive private university, Di Tella enrolls mainly students from an elite minority.

FUC

Although FUC is part of this program, only students participating in the cinema concentration take courses here. Due to time and scope limitations, the evaluation team did not have the opportunity to look closely at FUC or the cinema concentration, so no remarks are included in this report about either.

Teaching

A number of different faculty members were observed delivering instruction. On the whole, the reviewers observed effective teaching practices. A few issues of concern were identified and pointed out to IFSA during the drafting of this report. Those issues that were deemed to be isolated to a particular faculty member or class presentation were treated as internal matters and omitted from this document.

Commendation #6: IFSA-Butler has developed working relationships with a variety of host institutions that provide students with diverse opportunities.

Recommendation #15: Review current partnerships to see if any changes should be made. Articulate the essential function of each host institution so that prospective and enrolled students and sending schools can more readily determine the best academic fit.

Recommendation #16: Prepare for the challenges of maintaining a direct enrollment option open for what may be increasing numbers of U.S. students with inadequate linguistic and academic preparation.

IFSA-Butler response: We appreciate the feedback treated as internal matters and are following up appropriately.
We will address recommendations 15 and 16 as well.

Academic Advising

The strength of academic advising on the IFSA-Butler Buenos Aires program is what allows direct enrollment at four different universities to be possible. Advisors strive to meet individual student needs in regards to their language background, academic background, and home-school requirements. Many of the advisors also teach at IFSA-Butler and/or at local universities. They know a remarkable amount about the U.S. university system and key sending schools (like Penn, Tulane, and Northwestern) and have a high level of awareness about not only the different academic cultures at the four host universities, but also departments and courses. They seem open and flexible, and seek creative solutions when needed. In short, the reviewers were very impressed by the academic advising, despite the diversity of host universities and sending universities.

Even though advisors do an outstanding job of explaining academic options, many students say that course selection is overwhelming. The difficulty is not only because of the number of courses available but also the restrictions that sending schools place on students. In order to address the latter problem, advisors expressed to the review team a desire to gain access to more concrete academic background information on students, whether in the form of an official transcript or a descriptive list of courses completed. As for students' perceptions of the advising they received, few of them indicate that they felt they were placed in inappropriate courses. This is an indirect positive indication that the advising must be working.

Commendation #7: The review team commends the advisors on their excellent work placing students in courses and for their desire to go one step further in their efforts to advise students.

Recommendation #17: Consider providing advisors with copies of students' IFSA applications, or at least a copy of the transcript.

IFSA-Butler response: We collect the transcripts and a description of student courses with the application. We will ensure the academic advisors have access to those.

Internships, Field Research, and Community-based Learning

The reviewer met with María Inés Selwood, Coordinator of the Human Rights concentration. Together we visited Amnesty International, a regular host not only of AUP interns but interns from all over the world at the graduate and undergraduate level. The undergraduates are not able to do independent research projects and the organization tends to give them a very specific project during their semester in Buenos Aires which has worked well. The executive director (who was an intern herself as a student) supervises the IFSA-Butler interns herself which creates extra work for her, but she prefers to take on this responsibility rather than burdening her other staff members. IFSA-Butler interns interact with other staff members in other ways that teach students about the office culture—they eat lunch together, have coffee, and collaborate on various tasks. The executive director said that of all the organizations they've worked with, IFSA-

Butler has been the best because IFSA-Butler stays in touch with the organization and places students there regularly.

IFSA-Butler follows common policies and procedures for all internship placements, not just those at Amnesty International. IFSA-Butler maintains a contract with each partner organization that outlines responsibilities and expectations of the host organization, IFSA-Butler and the student intern. The host organization keeps a record of the contract and for each student in case there is an immigration check. IFSA-Butler follows local law. The internship supervisor is not involved in the grading of the intern in any way. Students use the internship as a learning experience and as a resource for the papers they write for the class that accompanies the internship. Interns spend a minimum of 8 hours per week on the job. They are able to work more if they discuss it with their supervisor and agree on the terms. IFSA-Butler offers a donation of \$300 to all host organizations that are supporting an IFSA-Butler intern. This is a symbolic amount intended to acknowledge the extra work required of the organization to host the student and to demonstrate a commitment to the organization's mission. The only donation that Amnesty International Buenos Aires receives from an intern provider, this token means a lot to Amnesty International.

The reviewers had the opportunity to meet one student who was pursuing an internship. The intern was enrolled in the Human Rights concentration and was working at an organization that focused on the effects of sexually transmitted diseases on marginalized communities. The student was proud to have written an article that is ready for publication based on her internship. In addition to internships, every concentration has practical experience with some sort of "output." We saw the literary newsletter published by the literature concentration students and found that it was of high quality and showcased all of the students in the concentration. The directed research concentration often sends students out into the community. IFSA staff work with students to help them identify topics that might lend themselves more to interactive research and engagement.

In general, the concentrations offer the academic framework and thematic connections, while the internship and field research offer students the opportunity for practical application, community engagement, and different perspectives on the topic.

Commendation #8: The internships and practical experiences seem to be well integrated into the concentrations.

Recommendation #18: Given the direction of the education abroad field, IFSA is wise to continue to maintain and develop this component of the Buenos Aires program. We can envision a future when internships and field research will assume an even more prominent place in the program, perhaps opening up to non-concentration students. We are not (yet) advocating that as a recommendation, but rather are noting it as a topic for further discussion.

IFSA-Butler response: We are exploring other types of internships with our customized program model. We welcome new ideas from NAC schools for customized programs. As we learn from those models, we may incorporate some into our regular offering.

Language Commitment, Testing, and Placement

IFSA-Butler AUP enjoys a reputation among study abroad professionals and students alike as a demanding program in terms of foreign language entrance requirement and commitment. Participants know this when they apply and they willingly follow the guideline as they would an honor code, treating it as an obligation to self and to other. That IFSA-Butler has achieved this important goal without imposing a formal language pledge is a feat to be admired.

Commendation #9: The success of the Spanish language “expectation” rather than a formal pledge is to be celebrated.

As mentioned in the Arrival and Orientation section of this report, students take a lengthy language test known as STAMP upon arrival to Buenos Aires. The results take several days to come back and then they are used to place students in the appropriate language class. According to data provided by IFSA-Butler for semester 2 of 2012, the average student score for advanced-level AUP participants (6.24) was higher than the “regular” level Mendoza participants (5.5) and Costa Rica participants (6.14), but it was lower than the Santiago, Chile average score (6.33) for the same term. There is not enough data to make any meaningful judgments regarding these scores, not only because they are taken from a single term but also because relatively few students take the post-test. In fact, only 38% of the AUP students took the post-test during that term. Those that did showed an average increase of .34. The problem is in part that the test is long and the post-test is voluntary, so most students lack an incentive to take it and to make their best effort on it. In order to prove that AUP students make significant gains in Spanish language acquisition, IFSA-Butler must immediately get to work to implement a system of pre- and post- language testing that serves the purpose of placement as well as outcomes assessment. Since more international education providers are now including such information in reports sent to home schools and in achievement records prepared for students, this will likely become an expectation.

Recommendation #19: Implement a system of pre- and post-testing of Spanish language to serve internal purposes and provide external audiences with outcomes assessment data.

IFSA-Butler response: We have been offering the STAMP test for several semesters, each semester refining the way we use it. We are working with professionals on site to determine the best way to motivate students who take the post-test.

PROGRAM OFFICE

Program Staff

Without question, the program staff of AUP, including the extraordinary leadership of resident director Mario Cantarini, is at the heart of its success. On our first day on site the reviewers attended a group meeting with most of the program staff. Each person described his/her role and cited the number of years s/he had worked at AUP. The number of employees with ten or more years of service was astonishing. As the week progressed the commitment and longevity of the staff emerged as one of the cornerstones of the AUP program workplace. Time and time again, the reviewers saw among the staff members an unsurpassed esprit de corps. Staff members demonstrate respect for one another not only as professionals but also as individuals.

They genuinely like each another—socializing together after work and even vacationing together. The workplace atmosphere is upbeat, energetic and friendly, and staff members readily anticipate and attend to the needs of students and colleagues. The resident director explained how staff members are encouraged to propose new ideas and projects which he reviews and approves or, when appropriate, he passes on to IFSA-Butler for consideration. This has led to upgrades in staff members' responsibilities, titles and salaries, creating the sense that staff members are valued and professional advancement within the organization is possible. In fact, the workplace ethos of flexibility combined with camaraderie is so pronounced that it can sometimes seem to eclipse the chain of command.

With his unconventional leadership style, resident director Mario Cantarini quite literally subverts the traditional academic hierarchy, having placed his desk (a small writing table, actually) not in one of the few large offices with a window, but rather in a small corner in the main corridor of the program center. Students and staff walk past him all day long, frequently stopping to chat. For an unwitting outsider this image might suggest a low position or status. On the contrary, this is Mario's characteristic way of upending the predictable educational environment in favor of a new decentralized model that places all players in a shared physical and metaphorical space and thus ignites in them a desire to work to their greatest strengths for the common good. At the same time, Mario uses this strategy to show that the middle of the action is the ideal vantage point from which to keep a watchful eye over the program and all its participants. He does this with acumen and discretion, gained no doubt from years of experience and a remarkable perspicacity. Schooled in this approach, staff members speak about their resident director with tenderness and respect. The word with which they describe him repeatedly is charismatic. Students, too, share anecdotes about Mario's kindness, the dinners to which he invites them, and the way he gently cajoles them out of their reticence to embrace the challenges of integrating in Argentine life.

When the success of an organization is so strongly associated with the decades-long tenure of such a captivating figure, it is only natural that observers anticipate the inevitable changing of the guard. While there are no plans for the resident director to retire, the future of program leadership raises apprehension among some sending institution professionals and program staff members. At the end of a week of observations and many long conversations, the review team reached the conclusion that Mario has already answered the question about his enduring legacy—in his own subtle way. By moving his desk into the busy hallway, the current resident director has literally made room for others to take over. One look at the organizational chart reinforces the shared approach to program direction. The two offices with windows are currently occupied by the two assistant directors with whom Mario already shares virtually all responsibilities. Daniel Peiró and Patricio O'Dwyer complete the triumvirate of the AUP administrative team, and Diego Peller coordinates academic affairs. Each of these three staff members is an able leader in his own right and they all fulfill multiple roles while bringing unique skills sets to their jobs. Daniel directs the summer program and manages academic and student affairs whereas Patricio handles administration and human resources including finances. Both have taught Spanish language and served as academic advisors. In addition to his responsibility as an active faculty member at UBA, Diego serves IFSA-Butler as academic coordinator/tutors leader and literature concentration coordinator and professor. In other words, the AUP benefits from a talented group of leaders that is poised to tackle new challenges as a new era draws near. Notwithstanding the tried and true model of shared leadership that will likely carry on at AUP, staff members and sending institutions need reassurance about the direction the program

will take and the future that IFSA-Butler envisions for it. For this reason the reviewers recommend that IFSA-Butler commence internal talks that include AUP staff members about the future of the program.

Student and sending school feedback point to a unanimous appreciation of the entire teaching and administrative staff of the AUP. Countless favorable comments from students and study abroad office personnel attest to their hard work and dedication. In our conversations with staff members we learned of several ways in which IFSA-Butler can continue to support and encourage them. Several staff members of different ranks commented on a general desire for new professional development and training opportunities including workshops and perhaps even occasional visits abroad to learn more about how the U.S. system of higher education works. The reviewers were impressed by the fact that so many staff members are lifelong learners constantly engaged in self-improvement, and we encourage IFSA-Butler to take advantage of this cultural norm for the betterment of the program overall, for example, the current housing coordinator has completed studies in nutrition that she could use to create useful programming for students and homestay hosts; the program assistant is pursuing graduate study in psychology and has counseling experience that might be useful in identifying improvements for the onsite orientation. Other ideas include staff retreats, inclusion of staff in the off-site orientation and symbolic rewards such as books or other tokens of appreciation. Non-academic staff expressed an interest in better understanding the work of their faculty and advising peers, something that could easily be folded into a center-wide staff retreat.

Commendation #10: Under the visionary leadership of the current resident director, the IFSA-Butler AUP has developed into a highly successful program ready to carry on that legacy.

Recommendation #20: IFSA-Butler should include AUP staff in talks about the future direction of the program and should continue to support staff in practical and symbolic ways to maintain high morale and professional advancement.

IFSA-Butler response: We held our annual staff meeting in and around Buenos Aires this past year, and therefore were able to include a number of Buenos Aires (and Mendoza) staff in the meeting. This included a training on intercultural communication. We will continue to seek ways to contribute to professional development of our local staff and appreciate the reviewers' suggestions.

Office Facilities

Located in a secure building in the middle of town, the IFSA-Butler AUP is in an adequately appointed space with offices and classrooms. Some cosmetic improvements (a new coat of paint, new carpeting, and some new furniture) are needed to bring the center's appearance up to the level of its reputation. The design of the center is in keeping with its philosophy in that the space (which lacks a student lounge) is functional but not conducive to social gatherings among visiting students who are constantly encouraged to return to their homestays, classes and the city itself to form relationships and pursue pastimes. Free Wi-Fi and minimal computer stations are available for students who need them, but there is not room for more than a few students to be in the small common area at one time. IFSA-Butler has cleverly selected a center

that includes classrooms and offices that draw students in for instruction and advising and not just trouble-shooting when problems arise.

Commendation #11: The program center is intelligently designed to conform to the program philosophy.

Recommendation #21: Make needed cosmetic improvements to the center.

IFSA-Butler response: We have secured authorization to make cosmetic improvements and will address them annually.

CO-CURRICULAR

Housing

A homestay can influence a student's perception of the entire study abroad experience. Fortunately, the IFSA-Butler AUP homestays are yet another program component that students and sending schools give rave reviews. Even students who initially balk at the requirement that every student must be individually placed in a homestay ultimately agree that this opportunity is one of the most rewarding forms of engagement. The housing coordinator maintains a long list of all kinds of families generated exclusively by word of mouth (ensuring strong references), though about half live in households with widows (but even those typically introduce students to extended family dynamics because grown children and grandchildren often visit). Before arrival students complete a questionnaire that invites them to express any concerns or special needs, and the housing coordinator works hard to accommodate them or to make explicit what cannot be accommodated. Clear and concise written rules are provided that outline the rights and responsibilities of students and hosts. Homestays are spread out across several different areas of the city in more affluent as well as middle class neighborhoods where students seem to learn to integrate rather than clinging to one another. It is important to note that in keeping with the program philosophy of respecting diversity, homestay families are screened and trained to accept students from all identities and backgrounds. Likewise, hosts from diverse walks of life and schools of thought are welcomed into the IFSA-Butler family. Pre-departure advising and the onsite orientation prepare students for life in an Argentine home. Meals and homestay etiquette are discussed in detail. Students have breakfast and dinner in the homestay and are expected to prepare their own lunch, but they have full access to the kitchen to do so. Students are encouraged to go to the supermarket to show the family the foods they like. In this and other ways students and homestay families work together to achieve a positive shared living arrangement.

At certain points during the term students are asked to give feedback on the housing placement and AUP staff intervene if any flags are raised. The students with whom we spoke (and most of those who submitted written feedback) said that relatively few students changed homestays; most said they were very happy. Study abroad professionals commented that students from their schools often request specific homestay placements based on the experiences that their peers share with them. To be sure, not all placements are perfect, but as long as students keep the housing coordinator informed of any issues, their needs can be met. Procedures are in place to support students and families to deal with the inevitable issues that arise. For issues that are minor, students have one opportunity each month to request a new placement. If something

major happens or there is an emergency, a student is moved immediately. Even then students are given more than one option as well as the opportunity to interview the prospective new hosts. A family who violates a rule is permanently removed from the list.

The review team was able to visit two homestays and speak with the host mothers and student. Both had hosted students for several years and shared anecdotes of how they invited students to join their extended families for celebrations and activities. We learned from one of the homestay mothers as well as feedback from sending schools that many students have found placements with local Jewish families to be an entrée into this vibrant Buenos Aires community. Staff members also recalled with fondness the efforts made by host families to support two recent transgender students. The housing coordinator and one of the homestay mothers also explained that host families bear special responsibilities if a student falls ill or needs to be accompanied to the doctor or to the hospital.

In a large city where there may be added cause for concern for student safety (addressed in a separate section of this report) the homestay is often considered a form of security; however, this should not be taken for granted. Some sending schools indicated that they are carefully watching crime statistics in Buenos Aires. Based on our conversations with students about their social activities, the reviewers noted that students may be less likely to follow advice about accompanying one another home at the end of a night out if their homestays are far apart. We suggest therefore that IFSA-Butler take into consideration student behavior when conveying safety information to students.

Commendation #12: The well-managed, required homestay is a key to the success of the program.

Excursions

The IFSA-Butler standard is that every IFSA-Butler program must include a long and short excursion. On the AUP program, due to budgets and planning, they offer only one excursion to Uruguay (*Colonia* and *Punto del Este*). The rationale for this destination is so that students can see another aspect of the Río de la Plata region. Students seem to enjoy this excursion across the board, although some wished that there was less time at the beach (and would have liked to go to Montevideo instead). This seemed to be the only destination used in recent years. Students and some staff indicated to the reviewers that standard long excursion may not be the best use of program resources and they would like to explore other options. The reviewers were inclined to agree that local staff members should have more of a say in the use of program funds for excursions and that student feedback should be a part of the decision-making process.

When planning cultural activities, the staff attempts to offer options that go beyond the stereotype. Sample activities include outdoor activities (such as biking, kayaking, or other water activities), the performing arts (concerts, ballet, opera, theatre), as well as visits to museums and monuments (*Museo de Arte Latinoamericano de Buenos Aires*, *Museo Evita*, *Cementerio de la Recoleta*, *Museo de la Memoria*, *Museo de Arte Decorativo*). These activities are optional. The IFSA-Butler staff emails students about the upcoming program activities along with the number of seats/tickets available. Students must sign up in advance. The staff also sends students regular emails about cultural activities offered in Buenos Aires. The approach to cultural

activities throughout Buenos Aires fits well with the IFSA-Butler direct enrollment philosophy. Students are provided with an array of options that will help them to delve below the surface of the culture, but it's largely up to them to participate. The students seem to appreciate the presentation of activities as options as opposed to requirements that are imposed on them. As one sending school representative said, "IFSA tries to strike a balance between facilitating and supporting the experience with setting the students free to proactively construct their own experience. With a group of self-selecting students who are motivated to engage in that kind of experience, this works."

Recommendation #22: Consider whether Uruguay is the only feasible destination for the long excursion. Discuss with local staff what ideas they have for alternative destinations or approaches to the excursions.

IFSA-Butler response: We have changed the long excursion every few years, over the duration of this program. It changes in response to student needs, personalities, local economies, weather, and other factors. We are reviewing student and staff feedback to make decisions about up-coming excursions.

Community Engagement

Besides internships, field research, integrated classes with local students, activities within Buenos Aires, and living with host families, IFSA-Butler has developed an active volunteer program to offer students an opportunity to engage with local non-profits. The reviewer met with the coordinator of volunteer opportunities, Lorena Bouret. The goal for the volunteer program is for there to be a benefit to the students and to the host organizations. A few years after initiating the program, Lorena distributed questionnaires to the students to establish top opportunities based on integration of the students into the host organization, active student participation, and host organizations that are working well with student volunteers. Once she had a reduced list, it was much easier to match students and develop close relationships with the host organizations. Types of opportunities include organizations that focus on public health, social inclusion, education, the homeless, native cultures/communities and the environment. Projects are usually long-term, in which case IFSA-Butler tries to place successive students from one semester to another so there is continuous participation. There are also short-term options that can accommodate larger numbers of students for a one-day project (note that many of IFSA-Butler's summer students participate in the short-term projects).

During orientation, Lorena gives a presentation on the volunteer opportunities. Students are then able to interview several sites before selecting their preferred option. Students typically volunteer once a week. About half of the semester students inquire about volunteer opportunities, and about one-third actually participate. The reviewers met only two students who participated in the volunteer program. Of these, both did not complete the semester with the host organization. In one case it seems there was an internal change in the organization that made the experience less than ideal; in another case the student did not realize the organization was religious, and was uncomfortable with people associating her with that religion. Lorena said that there is a very low attrition rate—most students stay with their host organization the entire semester. However, when students do drop out, it tends to be due to unforeseen changes in the organization's administration or needs.

Another form of community engagement is available through host universities. Options at USAL and UCA include intentionally developed sport clubs, choirs, and other student organizations that encourage student participation. There is an active buddy system at UCA (“pals”), Di Tella (“padrinos”), and USAL (“buddies”). The students we met with definitely took advantage of these opportunities, and this seemed to be one reason why students might choose these universities over UBA. IFSA makes students aware of these university club opportunities and encourages them to participate. Students acknowledge that they have to take the initiative to join clubs and meet people. One student we met joined a choir and didn’t like it at first, but stuck with it and now loves it. Several students joined athletic teams or clubs, even some who had no experience with that sport.

Students also get involved in the local community outside of university or program related activities. They join gyms, go to rock concerts, and enjoy exploring area restaurants. It was clear from our conversations with students that many are becoming very engaged with some aspect of their local community. One student mentioned how coming to Argentina had helped him to practice healthy risk-taking. “I want to live without fear,” he told us, “and Argentina has taught me to do that.” We heard several students repeat different variations of this theme.

Commendation #13: The multipronged approach to community engagement reflects the IFSA-Butler commitment to the immersion experience. Students must be independent and take some initiative, but IFSA-Butler offers a wide range of opportunities from which to choose.

Recommendation #23: There currently is no opportunity for volunteer students to share or reflect on their experiences. We are not sure whether this would be welcomed by students or seen as another obligation. IFSA-Butler should explore ways to encourage this. If done appropriately, students may be able to deepen their experience by sharing, learning from others, and reflecting.

IFSA-Butler response: IFSA’s Exploring Community and Culture (C&C) initiative is designed in part to address the need to deepen the experience in the way described above. We have provided training for all of our resident directors in Latin America, as well as at least one additional staff member in most sites (and more in several sites). We will be implementing the C&C in each Latin American site, with 2-3 sites coming live each semester.

Cross-cultural Learning and Student Transformation

All evidence made available to the review team suggests that cross-cultural learning and student transformation is significant. What appears to be missing is a guided opportunity for students to reflect on their experiences and a mechanism to prepare them for their return home. The few students with whom we spoke were glad to share the opportunity to look back on their semester in Buenos Aires, but they seemed unaware of the re-entry challenges that lie ahead and even said that no discussion on this topic had taken place previously. One sending school professional praised the IFSA-Butler AUP program in every area and added the following: “If IFSA adds more of an element of in-depth intercultural learning plus more of an element for re-entry, that would be the icing on the cake.”

Recommendation #24: Develop guided reflection and re-entry programming.

IFSA-Butler response: The C&C is also designed to address these needs.

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND POLICIES

Health and Safety

IFSA-Butler sets the standard for health and safety policies and practices in the field of study abroad. In this respect and without taking anything for granted, we felt that our job was largely to see how IFSA-Butler's general protocols are managed "in action." Below we outline practices of different aspects of the program.

Pre-departure: Prior to arrival, IFSA-Butler staff members register all students in the U.S. State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP). This is a measure that goes beyond the norm in that IFSA-Butler actually registers the students, rather than just encouraging the students to register on their own. This ensures that every student is signed up for this important service.

On Arrival: Students receive a packet with the IFSA-Butler "emergency card" that on one side includes nine IFSA-Butler Buenos Aires staff phone numbers, and on the other side, local emergency numbers (police, fire, ambulance, hospitals, as well as the IFSA-Butler office in the U.S.). The student chooses to whom they wish to direct the call and the staff member responds and relays information to others as needed.

Orientation: A large part of orientation is dedicated to safety, security, and health. Topics covered include:

- Use of the "emergency card"
- Use of ATMs
- Avoiding demonstrations and rallies
- Areas of caution (soccer stadiums, music concerts, train stations, higher-risk neighborhoods, parks and squares, city outskirts, areas adjacent to bars and clubs). These topics are supplemented by maps of the higher-risk neighborhoods.
- Use of taxis
- Use of backpacks
- Entering/exiting buildings
- Crossing the street
- Common robbery techniques
- Use of alcohol and drugs

This part of the orientation is carried out in English and Spanish to strive for maximum comprehension. This is reinforced by handouts summarizing the same topics (again, in English and Spanish).

IFSA-Butler invites a staff member from the U.S. embassy to this portion of the orientation to highlight current local threats to visitors. IFSA-Butler asks the representative to be sure to cover the use of taxis (which may pose a special risk in Buenos Aires) as well as issues related to the

use of alcohol and drugs. The success of the embassy section seems to depend on who they send. Unfortunately, the most recent speaker has not been as strong as previous ones.

Health and medical topics covered during this session include:

- Health insurance and how to use it (all IFSA-Butler students are covered by CISI insurance, which in most cases includes wide coverage on a reimbursement basis).
- Suggested hospitals, clinics, and doctors

Similar to the section on safety and security, this one is also conducted in English and Spanish, with bilingual handouts as well. IFSA-Butler staff follow up with the same information by email a few days later.

On approximately the fifth day of the orientation, IFSA-Butler staff members offer separate sections for men and women to discuss issues related to gender in Buenos Aires. We were told that this session was a result of student feedback several years ago. In the women's session, IFSA-Butler invites a gynecologist and an attorney to answer questions, including important information on women's health and laws affecting women in Argentina. Staff members role play scenarios for students and offer advice on how certain behaviors may be interpreted in Argentine society. The reviewers were not able to find out what information is presented in the session for men.

We recognize that a challenge faced by the onsite staff is that students may feel safer in Buenos Aires than it really is. This was gleaned from our conversations with students, who overall felt safe in the city (several reported they felt safer here than in their home university's city). On the other hand, female students from one sending school reported safety concerns when taking night classes. It's clear that there are urban threats to the students about which they need to be aware. The question is how best to get the message across. The students we spoke to seemed to understand that this was all important information, but felt that it was being presented as a list of things not to do and that the goal was to scare them. While the reviewers are confident this is not IFSA-Butler's goal, we need to think about how students perceive the orientation and what approaches might work better. A case in point: several female students reacted very negatively to the women-only session. They felt it was a "blame the victim" mentality and thought it was condescending. In the end, they agreed that perhaps it was not the content but the approach that bothered them. One student mentioned that her home university offers a session on "Women Abroad" facilitated by administrators, but with student panelists. We recognize that IFSA-Butler won't have past participants to help in this session, but perhaps there is a way to pull quotes from student evaluations that could be used during the session (so that it feels more "student focused").

Role of host families. Another advantage of housing students with host families is the extra set of eyes to help identify students in distress (health issues, students who do not return home after a night out, etc.). Many host mothers have themselves taken students to the hospital or clinic. Host families know that they need to inform IFSA-Butler if an issue arises. On a relatively large program in a large city, the host families are a definite asset to help manage the health and safety of our students.

Commendation #14: IFSA-Butler offers thorough health, safety, and security information that is supported by written documents. All students receive an emergency

card upon arrival. Homestay families add an extra set of eyes to help care for and support students.

Recommendation #25: Consider ways to include past student advice about health, safety, and security into the orientations and the male/female-only sessions.

Recommendation #26: Consider how students receive safety information and develop ways to make the orientation more interactive, without compromising the integrity of the IFSA-Butler philosophy of instilling independence.

IFSA-Butler response: We are evaluating ways of improving the safety orientation, including incorporating the experience of previous students into our orientation, such as the use of videos.

Emergency Plans

Several years ago, the IFSA-Butler Buenos Aires staff developed an emergency plan in the event of a national emergency. The most real large-scale threat they envision is political unrest. In most regards, their plan follows accepted protocols in the field. The one exception presented below is a unique example of how flexibility in or different interpretation of established protocols can be acceptable due to the inherent culture of a program. It is clear from our visit that the IFSA-Butler AUP staff work very well as a team. Furthermore, they have one of the strongest “mission continuity” plans the reviewers have ever seen. We are not sure if this was part of a long-term plan, or if it evolved organically over the years, but significant efforts have been made to ensure that every staff member knows how to do someone else’s job. IFSA-Butler AUP could manage to continue to run the program despite significant staff turnover or absences due to a large-scale event. Moreover, their somewhat unique approach to emergency response seems to be representative of their team approach to all their work.

From an external perspective, it may seem contrary to streamlined response management that the emergency card includes nine phone numbers students can choose to call. The philosophy behind this is that students might feel more comfortable with one person than another. Yes, it means that nine people (several of whom are part-time employees) are on call 24/7. And yes, there are challenges related to training nine people in how to respond to students and ensuring smooth communication. However, the approach seems to work. The part-time staff members know that if a student calls them in an emergency situation, they must immediately notify the resident director or one of the assistant directors. In other words, six of the nine emergency contacts serve more as an initial point person rather than as the emergency responder. The part-time staff we spoke to also felt that this approach makes most sense given the nature of the program, and that it was not a burden to them.

Commendation #15: Due to the culture of working together as a team, along with their emergency response plans, IFSA-Butler seems well equipped to manage crises large and small.

CONCLUSION

After a week-long visit and numerous opportunities to observe the program, the reviewers were left dumbfounded by the tremendous complexity of the AUP. The AUP offers such a dizzying array of opportunities and choices accompanied by so many forms of support and guidance that the hundreds of students who undertake it can quite literally customize their own unique experience. The abundance of choices places an onus on study abroad advisors to unpack, a heavy burden on program staff to manage and an important obligation on students to be intentional. It almost seems too much to handle, yet despite these challenges the program not only survives; it thrives. Our hope is that the recommendations contained herein will serve to strengthen an already praiseworthy program even more.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The review team wishes to thank IFSA-Butler and IFSA-Butler AUP for the opportunity to visit Buenos Aires and spend time getting to know the team members that make the Argentine Universities Program such a shining star. We especially thank resident director Mario Cantarini and assistant directors Daniel Peiró and Patricio O'Dwyer who painstakingly arranged meetings, meals and other review activities while continuing to manage program operations. We are grateful to faculty and staff (many of whom fulfill multiple roles and met with us several times in different capacities) for their candor and commitment and their willingness to continue conversations with us long after the business day ended. Our warmest regards go out to the representatives from each of the host universities with whom we met; we thank them for providing our students with unmatched cultural and educational opportunities. The organizations that open their doors to interns and volunteers deserve special thanks for carrying out their missions while mentoring our students. Our deepest appreciation goes to host families who welcome students into their homes and care for their needs. We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude to Erika Ryser García in Indianapolis for her patience and attention in providing us with necessary documentation and support before, during and after our visit. We sincerely appreciate the behind the scenes work of the advising and health and safety teams in the U.S. and in Argentina. Finally, we thank Dr. Mark Scheid for his leadership and vision of IFSA-Butler.

IFSA-Butler response: We echo the reviewers' acknowledgements and also appreciate the hard work of our colleagues in Buenos Aires. We would also like to acknowledge the tremendous effort made by Melissa Hardin, Barbara Gorka, and Nadia Altschul, our review team, to provide us such a thorough, professional, and helpful evaluation.

RECAPITULATION

Commendations

Commendation #1: Program advisors do an excellent job of anticipating and responding to student needs during the pre-departure phase.

Commendation #2: The AUP makes good use of the "shopping" period during which class schedules are not yet set to conduct a thorough onsite orientation that reflects IFSA-Butler values.

Commendation #3: The AUP staff sets a shining example for diversity and inclusiveness and serves as a bridge and safe haven between students and the host community.

Commendation #4: The AUP does a remarkable job of placing students in integrated courses at host universities even when they may lack preparation.

Commendation #5: The program tries to minimize reliance on closed courses but is flexible enough to create its own as appropriate when a particular need is not being met.

Commendation #6: IFSA-Butler has developed working relationships with a variety of host institutions that provide students with diverse opportunities.

Commendation #7: The review team commends the advisors on their excellent work placing students in courses and for their desire to go one step further in their efforts to advise students.

Commendation #8: The internships and practical experiences seem to be well integrated into the concentrations.

Commendation #9: The success of the Spanish language “expectation” rather than a formal pledge is to be celebrated.

Commendation #10: Under the visionary leadership of the current resident director, the IFSA-Butler AUP has developed into a highly successful program ready to carry on that legacy.

Commendation #11: The program center is intelligently designed to conform to the program philosophy.

Commendation #12: The well-managed, required homestay is a key to the success of the program.

Commendation #13: The multipronged approach to community engagement reflects the IFSA-Butler commitment to the immersion experience. Students must be independent and take some initiative, but IFSA-Butler offers a wide range of opportunities from which to choose.

Commendation #14: IFSA-Butler offers thorough health, safety, and security information that is supported by written documents. All students receive an emergency card upon arrival. Homestay families add an extra set of eyes to help care for and support students.

Commendation #15: Due to the culture of working together as a team, along with their emergency response plans, IFSA-Butler seems well equipped to manage crises large and small.

Recommendations

Recommendation #1: Prepare a single searchable document for students, advisors and staff to access before, during and after study abroad. Be sure to address specific student needs as identified in surveys.

Recommendation #2: Consider new interactive ways to deliver pre-departure orientation both virtually and in person.

Recommendation #3: Work with sending schools to establish clear guidelines regarding credit-worthy course options.

Recommendation #4: Incorporate more practical and interactive exercises into the early days of orientation, especially with regard to the use of public transportation.

Recommendation #5: IFSA-Butler might want to be more deliberate in explaining to students the more subtle philosophy behind program design.

Recommendation #6: IFSA-Butler should initiate discussions in the education abroad field and among U.S. university leaders about the realities of foreign language and general academic preparation among U.S. students seeking direct enrollment.

Recommendation #7: Review grading policy and practice to ensure that conversion tables are reflective of current conditions in higher education.

Recommendation #8: Explore appropriate ways to incorporate slang into the material taught in the language course.

Recommendation #9: Continue to monitor closed courses taught at host universities for quality control and develop alternative academically rigorous special interest courses while supporting students to take the most challenging integrated courses they can.

Recommendation #10: Create clear policies for local partners, sending schools and students regarding the kind of courses and activities that the program endorses at each host university.

Recommendation #11: Begin to unravel the semantic problem surrounding course titles and educate sending schools about the true nature of each type of course offered.

Recommendation #12: Clarify the appropriateness of each of the seven concentrations for majors by giving specific examples of how they can enhance previous academic work in these areas.

Recommendation #13: Train professors new to the dynamics of teaching non-native students classroom techniques that can help bridge expectations and compensate for students' poor linguistic abilities.

Recommendation #14: Consider introducing local professors to U.S. pedagogies, including the use of audiovisual material and a more student-centered classroom

environment with small group discussions and other hands-on exercises. Since some of these techniques are already being used very successfully in the language and culture classes (such as Cruz Tamae's dynamic student-centered teaching approach), IFSA-Butler can ask faculty who are attuned to these pedagogies to share them with their colleagues.

Recommendation #15: Review current partnerships to see if any changes should be made. Articulate the essential function of each host institution so that prospective and enrolled students and sending schools can more readily determine the best academic fit.

Recommendation #16: Prepare for the challenges of maintaining a direct enrollment option open for what may be increasing numbers of U.S. students with inadequate linguistic and academic preparation.

Recommendation #17: Consider providing advisors with copies of students' IFSA applications, or at least a copy of the transcript.

Recommendation #18: Given the direction of the education abroad field, IFSA is wise to continue to maintain and develop this component of the Buenos Aires program. We can envision a future when internships and field research will assume an even more prominent place in the program, perhaps opening up to non-concentration students. We are not (yet) advocating that as a recommendation, but rather are noting it as a topic for further discussion.

Recommendation #19: Implement a system of pre- and post-testing of Spanish language to serve internal purposes and provide external audiences with outcomes assessment data.

Recommendation #20: IFSA-Butler should include AUP staff in talks about the future direction of the program and should continue to support staff in practical and symbolic ways to maintain high morale and professional advancement.

Recommendation #21: Make needed cosmetic improvements to the center.

Recommendation #22: Consider whether Uruguay is the only feasible destination for the long excursion. Discuss with local staff what ideas they have for alternative destinations or approaches to the excursions.

Recommendation #23: There currently is no opportunity for volunteer students to share or reflect on their experiences. We are not sure whether this would be welcomed by students or seen as another obligation. IFSA-Butler should explore ways to encourage this. If done appropriately, students may be able to deepen their experience by sharing, learning from others, and reflecting.

Recommendation #24: Develop guided reflection and re-entry programming.

Recommendation #25: Consider ways to include past student advice about health, safety, and security into the orientations and the male/female-only sessions.

Recommendation #26: Consider how students receive safety information and develop ways to make the orientation more interactive, without compromising the integrity of the IFSA-Butler philosophy of instilling independence.