

Program Evaluation of Systems and Operations (PESO)
The Institute for Study Abroad, Butler University (IFSA-Butler)

Site: Stranmillis University College of Queen's University, Belfast

Program(s): Stranmillis University College Teacher Education

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In accordance with the Forum on Education Abroad's principles for best practices, the Institute for Study Abroad, Butler University (IFSA-Butler) carries out formal program evaluations. This is an important tool in maintaining high quality programs that continually evolve to meet the needs of students and the realities of the environments in which we operate. Guidelines of the evaluations include: 1) reviews are performed by external professionals; 2) reviews include analyses of pre-departure and on-site practices; 3) reviews consider all stakeholders: students, program staff and faculty, partner universities abroad, other partner organizations abroad, Indianapolis staff, and home universities; and 4) reviews rely on clear communication between involved parties and transparent sharing of evaluation results with the education abroad community.

Many themes and questions herein are taken from the Forum on Education Abroad's Standards of Good Practice in Education Abroad, 4th Edition (2011), found here: <http://www.forumea.org/standards-index.cfm>. IFSA-Butler would like to thank the Forum and the many education abroad professionals who have contributed to this body of standards.

To the evaluation team: by participating in this process, you acknowledge that:

- All travel and evaluation-related costs are covered by IFSA-Butler; evaluators are not remunerated;
 - The visit does not imply, require or guarantee endorsement or approval of the program;
 - Comments about specific personnel or other Human Resources issues should be made to the on-site or US-based director of the program, confidentially and separately from the main report, unless otherwise agreed; you may use an "Internal Addendum" for this purpose; and
 - You have the right to unmediated contact with program students, faculty, and staff.
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Please provide feedback about the following, noting particular strengths and weaknesses.

Follow narrative with recommendations where appropriate.

OVERVIEW

IFSA-Butler's program offerings at Stranmillis University College, a College of Queen's University, Belfast, include programs for international students interested in primary and post-primary (secondary) teacher education coupled with an overseas higher education opportunity in a prestigious University in Northern Ireland (<http://www.ifsa-butler.org/teacher-education-at-stranmillis-university-college.html>).

There are two distinct IFSA-Butler programs at Stranmillis University College in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The first is a supported direct enrollment program that features an academic structure common to many IFSA-Butler programs in Ireland, the UK, and beyond. In this program, students take classes at Stranmillis University College, one of which may involve teaching/observation in local classrooms. The second program is a customized ten-week program created in conjunction with the University of Virginia which facilitates student teaching in local primary and secondary schools, accompanied by a seminar, and with oversight by Stranmillis faculty. This evaluation will consider both programs, focusing on common elements where possible and separating out the programs where necessary.

ORIENTATION

1. Pre-departure Advising

Pre-departure information is generally clear and comprehensive. Information about flights, passports, travel plans, cell phones, budgeting, excursions, packing, and orientation is timely and clear, as they relate to students heading to any program in Ireland or Northern Ireland. In emails targeting the Stranmillis program, however, the special teaching components of the two programs at Stranmillis are not discussed in any detail. The distinctive elements regarding school-based teaching/observation should be brought to the fore throughout the materials as part of the pre-departure advising process. This missing element is manifest in a variety of areas in ways that are less than conducive to optimal student preparation and to the management of expectations.

Most of the logistical emails to Stranmillis-bound students regarding travel, housing, and financing are clear and comprehensive. However, no description of the educational mission of Stranmillis is given in the pre-departure materials and key information about the academic experience at Stranmillis, and the teaching placement is left out. For example, the final email to students features a heading that indicates "Stranmillis Course Information." However, this section does not include links to Stranmillis courses. Instead, it links only to general information about primary and secondary education in Northern Ireland. While this information should be of some interest to Stranmillis-bound students, what is more immediately needed is information about Stranmillis courses. No information is provided about the "Northern Ireland Culture and Communication" and "Peace and Conflict in Northern Ireland" courses taught by Stranmillis faculty which are strongly recommended courses for visiting students and which have been designed specifically for international students (ERASMUS and IFSA-Butler students). For the ten-week program students, information should also be provided here about the "Professional Practice in Northern Ireland" encapsulating seminar which contextualizes the local school placement within the Northern Ireland context. More information could be provided about local school placement to help all students understand the general structure of their experience in the classroom.

To facilitate integration between both sets of students, some description of each program should be made so that all students are aware of the entire cohort of IFSA-Butler students on the Stranmillis programs. Students should not discover an entire other group of IFSA-Butler students only once they arrive.

Information about some courses at Queen's University being available should be mentioned.

A breakdown of possible course schedules should be given for both sets of students. For example, it should be outlined that semester students can take two or three courses at Stranmillis University College, side-by-side with local students, and can enroll in a teaching/observation class (with a variable number of hours), as well as a special course designed for international students at Stranmillis. These three courses "Northern Ireland Culture and Education (Primary)," "Aspects of Northern Ireland Culture and Education (Primary and Post-Primary)," and "Landmarks in Irish History: Ulster Peace and Conflict 1600-2000" should be named as recommended course offerings. Point values and minimums and maximums should be explained so that students know the general range of options and their potential work load. This information would also facilitate students' work with academic advisors at their home schools to begin to integrate course work from Stranmillis into their degree and major requirements.

[Apparently, much of the academic content is discussed between the admitted student and IFSA-Butler staff, including Nikki Bruckmann and Opal Leeman Bartzis, but reference to these staff members is not made in pre-departure materials consulted for this report.]

The content and deployment of emails for the ten-week students were not disclosed as part of this evaluation. Based on student feedback from fall 2015, some of the ten-week program students did not receive all of the pre-departure emails. Key information, especially regarding the PBS Tier 4 visa was not included, so students found out about the need and costs for the visa at a late date, causing considerable stress. Since the ten-week program is a customized program, responsibility for the coordination of pre-departure information falls, in part, to the sending institution. However, as this program has begun to include students from schools other than the University of Virginia (the original co-creators of the program), attention should be paid to the deployment of informational emails in the pre-departure phase. All program students, whether semester-long or on the ten-week program, should receive all the pre-departure emails, even if the materials need to be adapted specifically to target each group.

Specific information that should be sent to ten-week students include the following:

- 1) The weekly schedule should be described, indicating that course placements generally occur on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, with Monday and Friday devoted to an encapsulating seminar on "Professional Practice in Northern Ireland" taught by Stranmillis faculty. It should be explained that students receive 12.5 credits for this and that they receive a Stranmillis transcript indicating the completion of the course.
- 2) Notice should also be given to ten-week students that a "School Based Placement" questionnaire will be sent to them to assess their needs and experience in order to align their placement based on students' individual skills and to suit their needs as future teachers. As this questionnaire is a vital document for school based placement—the defining feature of the customized program—it should figure among the pre-departure emails to Stranmillis students as a key "to do" item.

Despite the lack of reference to the "School Based Placement" questionnaire and other logistical information about the academic structure and expectations for the ten-week program, it can be safely assumed that much of this flow of information goes between IFSA-Butler staff and the faculty and staff of sending institutions (University of Virginia and Drake University).

Commendations

- Logistical information for all students going to Ireland and Northern Ireland is clear, comprehensive, and concise.

Recommendations

- Specific information about the two programs should be included in all materials.
- Special notice in the Pre-departure Essentials #1 Email should reference the requirement for Stranmillis students to obtain a Tier 4 visa and a police clearance because of the work placement element of the program.
- Information about Stranmillis, its mission and course offerings, as well as the purpose and nature of participants' placements in local schools should be more clearly articulated.
- The flow of information between IFSA-Butler and sending institutions should be routinized for the ten-week program in the same way it is for sending institutions for the semester program.

2. Arrival and orientation

Arrival and orientation procedures are generally very strong. IFSA-Butler provides a comprehensive overview of important information for making a successful transition to life in Belfast and at the Stranmillis campus over the course of two-day period. It adequately provides students with the information and context necessary for success during the semester. Students also meet key members of staff from both IFSA-Butler and Stranmillis. Students are housed together in a hotel during the orientation period and group meals and tours are organized as part of the orientation. Topics include: Health and Well-being, Social Life, Safety, Academic Success, Events and Excursions, and the services at Stranmillis University College. Particular strengths of the orientations are the safety presentation by a local expert that provides hands-on information in the immediate environment, the comprehensive "Well while away" module presented by a local counselor, and the session on academic success that provides insights into the teaching and learning styles and expectations for Northern Ireland courses.

The academic success workshop presented during orientation might not be as immediately relevant to newly arrived students as the other key topics the pressing issues of transition, or the essential health, safety, and emergency procedures. Therefore, it would be ideal if a follow-up orientation could be organized within the first few weeks of the program specifically to address academic culture. This timing would also coincide with the beginning of students' integration into classes, so that individual syllabi could be reviewed together for clarity and for an improved sense of expectations for each class. At that stage, students would likely have more questions, since they will have gotten a sense of the courses and will have begun to notice some of the key differences and challenges. Drop-in sessions are currently organized at various times a few weeks into the courses; instead, a planned academic follow-up session could be made into a mandatory meeting to address academic issues for all students in order to maximize their chance for success in the local academic system.

Better coordination between the orientation provided by the International Office and the IFSA-Butler orientation could be considered. The services provided to international students at Stranmillis are robust. Orientation materials do not explicitly state that Stranmillis orientation sessions are mandatory. Based on student feedback, local staff with expert knowledge about the campus, academics, and Belfast ably serve as point-persons for student inquiries; however, they are not specifically indicated in IFSA-Butler orientation materials as fulfilling this role. Collaborating with the staff of the International Office on parts of the orientation that are most relevant to life on campus would offer students a better sense

of how to access services and allow for more consistent and coherent communication. As it stands, students expressed some confusion about the roles played by IFSA-Butler staff in Belfast, in Dublin, and those played by Stranmillis staff. It should be noted that the ten-week program students interviewed praised the timeliness and accuracy of the replies to queries to Ashley Ryan, Student Services Advisor. Between Stranmillis staff and Ashley Ryan's helpfulness, these students had very limited interaction with Elbhín Walsh, IFSA-Butler's part-time local coordinator.

Further, more opportunities for coordination of services between IFSA-Butler and Stranmillis support staff can be explored to help the integration of program students into the life of the local institution. The international student (ERASMUS) population is high relative to the overall size of Stranmillis, and activities and excursions are planned for those students. Connections with the international community at Stranmillis can be leveraged to help IFSA-Butler students better connect with international and local students.

Identity issues related to gender, sexuality, race/ethnicity are not explicitly discussed during orientation. Some discussion of possible student needs in these areas should be addressed. A safe space for disclosure and referral to on-the-ground resources should be provided. Where appropriate, group dynamics among the program cohort should be addressed where identity issues are concerned. These issues should also be discussed in the context of Northern Ireland culture.

While the program handbook is comprehensive, it has a few problems that could make it a more user-friendly document that would better support student success abroad. It could be adapted so that it is actively used in the orientation process. Pull-out pages with quick summaries of information could be included; these could serve as references for discussions during orientation, as well as highlights that would make quick retrieval more feasible at a later time.

Related to identity issues above, the section on "Homosexuality (Also Bisexual and Transgender)" should be moved out of the "Health and Support" section (as it stands, it is listed with "Alcohol/Alcohol Abuse," "Drug Abuse," and "Eating Disorders.") Likewise, "Racism" should be moved out of the "Living in Ireland" section and could be combined with LGBTQ and gender issues in a separate section on identity. Specific referrals for support should be made explicit. The offer of a one-on-one discussion with IFSA-Butler staff would be more effective if receptivity to dialogue on these issues was modeled in the orientation sessions. The IFSA-Butler support website [link from handbook?] refers to these topics under the rubric of "Diversity" which is a better grouping of the issues. While that website is a work in progress, once the resources are outlined on that site, they should be excerpted in the handbook and discussed during orientation.

Some final notes about the general thrust of much of the pre-departure and orientation materials:

Given that the ten-week program boasts robust numbers each year, and that the semester-long program sees only a few students annually, some materials might be adapted for older students. As mentioned earlier, explicit acknowledgement of the existence of both programs could better set students' expectations for the cohort when they arrive. Since both programs cater to the needs of future educators, the vast majority being nearly professional-level at the stage that they come on the program, one could envision language throughout the pre-departure and orientation materials referring to program participants as "future educators." Framing each opportunity for intercultural dialogue and cultural immersion as key skills for "future educators" could help spur students to strive more actively to form ties with local students, to seek out distinctive learning opportunities, and to otherwise see

themselves gaining important professional skills in every interaction that they will have. This acknowledgement of a pre-professional *raison d'être* of the program would also help the students form an identity as a group. Plans are in place for a more robust re-entry preparation session that has not yet been developed for students on the Stranmillis program. The pre-professional learning outcomes of this program are so well-defined that a re-entry preparation session would be particularly fruitful as returning students are on the cusp of their careers as educators. Semester-long students who are in a less advanced position vis-à-vis their career paths can usefully model themselves on the older students and reflect on their own learning in both cross-cultural and professional contexts.

Commendations

- Orientation activities prepare students for a successful transition to life in Belfast and provide a strong foundation for their integration into the life of the local university.
- Program staff and affiliated participants provide engaging and meaningful activities and discussions to facilitate preparation for cross-cultural challenges.

Recommendations

- Further communication and coordination of services with the International Office of Stranmillis can be leveraged for better integration into the University.
- Communication to students about roles and responsibilities between IFSA-Butler and Stranmillis staff can be marginally improved.
- Some elements of orientation—particularly discussions about academic adjustment—might be deferred and amplified for more effective impact.
- The program handbook can be made more user-friendly. It should include a discussion about identity to ensure that students from all backgrounds are supported and can achieve success abroad.
- There is an opportunity to frame the unique opportunities in Belfast as valuable teacher-education programs and to create a sense of a pre-professional cohort among participants.

ACADEMICS

3. Academics

The full semester and ten-week programs at Stranmillis are designed specifically for international students interested in gaining practical teaching experience in primary and post-primary classrooms in Belfast area schools.

In both programs, international students are provided opportunities to interact and study with students attending Stranmillis pursuing courses of study other than education, share campus facilities and research resources, and generally interact on a daily basis in academic and campus life with the Stranmillis student population. Unique to the IFSA-Butler study abroad programs is the focus on teacher education customized for American students interested in pursuing education majors or minors in their home states in the US. Two programs are offered for international students interested in PK12 education, a full semester Classroom Assistant opportunity, and the ten-week school-based Teaching Placement. The Teaching Placement is a new program for the IFSA-Butler/Stranmillis collaboration and requires full commitment from the Stranmillis faculty and staff, primary and post-primary teachers in the Belfast area, as well as the IFSA-Butler personnel to organize, implement, and evaluate the efficacy of programs on campus as well as interactions in the local schools. This program meets an emerging need for engaging American future teachers in international classrooms working under the auspices of highly skilled professional educators overseas.

4. Program Classes

Semester Program

All students in the semester-long and ten-week program are engaged in courses (modules) offered through Stranmillis and/or Queen's University. Faculty work with students to identify courses that best align with their programs and areas of interest, whether on the Stranmillis College or Queen's University campus. As the concept of "modules" and course hours are quite different from the traditional US higher education model, Stranmillis College provides advising information pre-arrival and face-to-face advising assistance post-arrival. Faculty and staff help all international students enroll in the proper course sequence that aligns with their program area and personal interests.

Additionally, all students are expected to take the Northern Ireland Culture and Education module (SEO2001).

Expectations for Academic Performance are made very clear to program students. Section IV of the Student Handbook clearly outlines policies and procedures for academics in Stranmillis programs throughout Ireland and Northern Ireland. Attention is drawn to the differences between US and Irish instructional systems, including coverage of classroom performance expectations, transcripts, writing expectations, acquisition of required course texts, grade conversions, course loads, and basic academic survival. Section IV provides detailed information regarding commonalities in the Irish higher education system as well as specific pertinent information relevant to each IFSA-Butler partner institution in Ireland to ensure students are capable of navigating academic work (including honesty, course completion, examinations, grades and credit), library facilities, academic regulations, tuition, and participation in clubs and societies.

The Student Handbook thoroughly outlines grading policies with grading tables for IFSA-Butler partner institutions as well as information about academic record inquiries and transcript acquisitions. The Student Handbook coupled with on-campus orientation, advising and support provide students with all pertinent information to be independent and aware of academic policies and their differences from US university academic policies, procedures, and expectations.

A student academic contract that confirms all students have attended the academic briefing session is included on page 78 of the Student Handbook, and all students are required to sign and submit this document upon the conclusion of their orientation.

Information about programs of study and required coursework are clearly outlined on the Stranmillis web site:

Primary: <http://www.stran.ac.uk/ifsabutler/undergraduatecourses/bedprimary/>

Modules: <http://www.stran.ac.uk/ifsabutler/undergraduatecourses/bedprimary/bedprimarymodules/>

Post Primary: <http://www.stran.ac.uk/ifsabutler/undergraduatecourses/bedpost-primary/>

Modules: <http://www.stran.ac.uk/ifsabutler/undergraduatecourses/bedpost-primary/bedpostprimarymodules/>

These web sites clearly articulate: course aims, course structure/content, and General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTNCI) Teacher Competences. Syllabi are also posted in .pdf format and thoroughly outline objectives, content, intended learning outcomes, skills acquired, teaching methods, assessment strategies and information about plagiarism, and a timetable for course sessions and topics.

Ten-Week Teaching Assistant Program:

The ten-week Teacher Assistant program provides an opportunity for international pre-service teachers to gain experience honing their skills in an international setting under the auspices of professional educators in Northern Ireland. The program design allows for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of each of the ten weeks for full-time interaction in a local Belfast school placement. Mondays and Fridays are spent on the Stranmillis campus participating in coursework, lectures, and cultural events/excursions. Teacher Assistants spend four days of their first week on the Stranmillis campus and one day visiting and observing in their assigned school placement. From that point forward, all Teaching Assistants spend three days per week in the schools working under the auspices of a professional teacher. A timetable provided by Stranmillis faculty outlines the expectations for movement from observation to co-teaching, to full-class teaching over the ten weeks, but is subject to modification relative to the Teaching Assistant's capacities. This program offers students the opportunity to expand their cultural awareness and understanding of Irish culture and history while honing their teaching skills in a Belfast area post primary school.

Students in the ten-week Teaching Assistant program spend the majority of their time (TWR each week) in local schools working in classrooms. A week-by-week timetable is prepared for this group of students that outlines their sessions in the Northern Ireland Culture and Education module, any cultural excursions, and their special events/seminar sessions that meet on Mondays and Fridays when they are not expected in their school placements. Teaching Assistants collaborate with their classroom teacher to outline a plan for incrementally taking on teaching responsibilities.

Commendations:

- Diversity of opportunities and a customized approach for placing students in the appropriate grade levels and classrooms in Belfast area schools is a challenge Stranmillis is meeting extraordinarily well.
- Details and expectations for all primary and post-primary course requirements are thorough, clear, and posted neatly on the Stranmillis web site (see links above).

Recommendations: None.

5. Host University

Established in 1922 to provide teacher training for Northern Ireland, Stranmillis University College is situated in a secluded and secure setting in Belfast within walking distance of Queen's University, shopping, dining, and entertainment. Stranmillis' focus on the development of highly prepared teachers has grown to encompass an international component that extends to Europe, USA, Africa, China, and Malaysia, bringing in close to one hundred international students each academic year. A range of programs are offered to support the professional development of teachers through its postgraduate programs. An institutional focus on teacher education and longstanding positive relationships with the local schools, administrators, and cooperating teachers creates an environment where flexibility and professionalism co-exist in a way that is supportive of international teachers' diverse needs as well as the needs of the schools and their specific student populations.

During our visit the evaluation team had opportunities to observe in teacher education classes, participate in the evaluation of program participants' final presentations with teams of cooperating teachers from the field, and interview students. The evaluation team was quite impressed by the professionalism of the Stranmillis teacher education faculty in terms of positive student/faculty interactions, high expectations for students with clear guidelines for performance expectations,

relevance of course materials, and partnerships with highly professional local primary and post-primary teachers and administrators. Interviews with principals and cooperating teachers revealed a deep level of caring and support for the international students. They were welcomed into the school, supported in the classrooms, and integrated into school activities. As our visit was around the Christmas holiday, many of the international program participants were traveling from the Stranmillis campus back to schools in the evening, or staying later in the day to participate in holiday programs or events with their students and cooperating teachers. At one school visit, the international students needed to be excused early from our meeting in order to prepare for her role in the Christmas performance.

The program evaluators were also invited to sit on panels to observe and provide feedback to Teaching Assistants as they presented their summary projects/reflections on their work and learning in their school placements. Each panel was provided a room with a projector and screen for displaying their PowerPoint and more than adequate space to accommodate a panel of three cooperating teachers and an external evaluator (in this case, members of the program evaluation team – all teacher education faculty/administrators). Although there were variations on protocols for each evaluation team, a consistent rubric that had previously been shared with the students was used to evaluate the presentation and provide immediate feedback about his/her performance.

School Placements: Stranmillis uses the international students' CV coupled with their responses to a placement questionnaire in order to identify appropriate schools and teachers to support them during their internships. Efforts were made to ensure students were in appropriate school placements that were responsive to student needs and interests. In one case, an international student noted she was an ESL (English as a Second Language) on her form and discovered her placement was in a Spanish classroom upon arrival in Belfast. Her situation was immediately handled, the student was placed in a suitable classroom, and she had a wonderful experience with the faculty, administration, and students in her school.

The contract with a local cab company to provide transportation for all teacher candidates to and from the schools ensured safe and timely travel for the international students while also removing any stress associated with navigating an unfamiliar city while trying to get to school on time for their field placements. This is a brilliant idea and was noted by the students to be a strategy they greatly appreciated, as it allowed them far greater flexibility in terms of time they were able to spend after school for special programs, meetings, and collaborating with their cooperating teachers.

Alignment with diverse partner schools is another hallmark of the Stranmillis teacher candidate placement model. In addition to providing content and grade specific placements that align with the teacher candidates' interests, Stranmillis offers placements in a range of school environments that represents the diversity of the Belfast area. All teacher candidates expressed great pleasure regarding their teaching placements and also enjoyed learning about the experiences and challenges their colleagues in other school placements encountered during their internships. This is a valuable experience that international students may not always have the opportunity to enjoy in their home school districts. Further, the strong collaboration and open communication between the international institution's faculty advisor and Stranmillis program administrators ensure that any confusion about experience levels of international teacher candidates participating in Stranmillis teacher education programs are clarified.

Commendations: The care, thoughtfulness, professionalism, diversity of opportunities, and rapid response to teacher candidates' needs are hallmarks of the Stranmillis programs for students in both the

semester-long and ten-week teacher education programs. The collaboration between Stranmillis faculty and local school administrators and teaching personnel is quite strong and supportive, providing an outstanding opportunity for international students to hone their teaching skills in a diverse, international setting. Collaboration and open communication between Stranmillis faculty and international students' home institutions is also evident. The alignment between the educational mission of Stranmillis and the US institutions involved in teacher education makes for an exceptional learning opportunity.

Recommendations: Our observations reveal that while the Stranmillis faculty all collaborate in regard to the support of international students, the key component of their program experience is related to their interactions with the schools. These relationships have been curated over time under the leadership of one key person, Audrey Curry. In order to continue this model with the effectiveness and efficiency into the future, it is recommended that identification of the faculty member who follows in this position occur in a timely way so that the strong relationships currently established between Stranmillis and the local school administrators/teachers be continued seamlessly.

6. Academic Advising

Academic advising for international students begins prior to their departure from their home country. As international teacher candidates from the US must complete individual state requirements for earning a teaching license prior to participating in an international teacher education program, advising for prospective Stranmillis international students from the US must be advised on their home campuses, either by a faculty member who possesses familiarity with the programs or by a member of the global programs staff in study abroad offices. Understanding how the Stranmillis teacher education programs interface with overseas teacher preparation is a critical first step in academic advising for international program participants. International program coordinators at the teacher candidate's home institutions communicate information about academic and field-based expectations they will engage in while at Stranmillis and provide materials and links to the Stranmillis website where information about the expectations for the full semester and ten-week program are accessible. See section 4b above. IFSA-Butler program personnel cannot be held accountable for this critical piece of the advising process. The home campus advising is the critical first step as candidates must be able to complete home campus expectations in order to graduate.

Once on the Stranmillis campus, students in the semester and ten-week programs meet and go over the specific requirements for their programs with IFSA-Butler personnel. While there is flexibility in the modules they take on the Stranmillis campus for the semester program, field experiences and coursework for the ten-week program is clearly outlined in the handbook as the primary focus of this experience is to gain experience in schools and increase understanding and awareness of Northern Ireland education and culture.

Advising may also take place on a more informal basis as faculty in the Stranmillis teacher education programs and IFSA-Butler personnel who engage with students in these programs are all aware of the program requirements. If they cannot provide answers to the program participants, the relationship between IFSA-Butler and Stranmillis faculty and administrative staff is so strong that they can easily make a recommendation regarding who on campus might best be able to help the student.

7. Internships, Field Research, and Community-based Learning

For students participating in the semester-long and ten-week teacher education programs at Stranmillis, their experiences can be considered teaching “internships” as well as “community-based learning” experiences. Student teachers, teacher candidates, and teaching interns are all commonly used appellations for individuals practicing their chosen avocation under the auspices of professionals who support and guide them in their development. Therefore, participants in these programs are given an opportunity to engage deeply in an international teaching internship within the community of Belfast and, more specifically, a local school community that represents a smaller subset of the diverse Belfast population. The IFSA-Butler/Stranmillis University College collaboration oversees an excellent program that provides international students with an excellent opportunity to grow in their chosen avocation while learning a great deal about Belfast and Northern Ireland communities.

8. Language Commitment, Testing, and Placement

While there are colloquialisms and expressions specific to Northern Ireland addressed in the orientation materials and shared with international students at the beginning of their time in-country, the language spoken in Northern Ireland is English and presents no further commitment of time or effort for the program participants from the US.

Commendations: The academic and co-curricular advising for ten-week program students is individualized and highly relevant to students’ academic and pre-professional experience. The program is particularly well-developed for cultural integration through structured fieldwork placement.

Note: Some differences might be encountered since professional placement for semester students involves less active participation in teaching in local classrooms. However, feedback about full-semester students was limited due to the semester program’s low numbers.

PROGRAM OFFICE

9. Program Staff

In the Ireland office there are 4 full-time staff: Maria Keane, Ashley Ryan, Donna Noonan, and Suzi Breslin. This semester there are 82 students in Ireland. Each of the staff members seem to be very well trained for their positions. It is clear that they work closely together, as they provide coherent communication on all aspects of the program. Ashley is charged with providing pastoral and academic support for IFSA-Butler students. She benefits from the local support in Stranmillis through Eibhlin Walsh who is employed part-time with a ratio of approximately 20:1. Stranmillis also provides support for the international students through both Laura McKeown and Margaret Mulhern. The students communicated that the support that Laura provides is especially appreciated. The students see Laura as a huge resource and a person who is there to help them. They communicated that they would go to her regularly with concerns. Students also reported that Ashley communicated regularly with them about community opportunities. Ashley and Eibhlin were very helpful in terms of greeting the students and providing orientation for them in Belfast. They helped the students figure out necessary components for a student’s life including shopping for necessities and food.

Maria has worked with IFSA-Butler since Sept 2009. She started as a Student Advisor and took on her current role in November 2013. Eibhlin started with IFSA-Butler in Oct 2013. Both Ashley and Donna have been with IFSA-Butler 1.5 years, and Suzi has been with ISFA-Butler for 2.5 years.

All full-time staff receive first aid training. They take a course with the Rape Crisis Centre that covers how to deal with students in the aftermath of sexual assault. They also take a two-day course on suicide awareness. They have completed training in intercultural communications with the Irish Council for Overseas Students. This was a one-day workshop that the organization designed for IFSA-Butler staff. IFSA-Butler is a member of the Confederation of Student Services in Ireland, and staff attend their professional development training days and conference. Suzi and Donna recently completed Excel training, and Ashley is completing a certificate course in integrative counselling and psychotherapy. Maria completed this course a few years ago, and Donna will most likely do it next academic year. Suzi has also done additional training for her role teaching Community & Culture, including attending the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication at Reed College in Portland, OR.

Maria has an annual evaluation meeting with her staff where they discuss strengths, opportunities, areas where they feel they need training, changes to roles, program changes and the distribution of tasks. She has a weekly team meeting with the staff either via Skype or in the office where they can raise concerns. She is also constantly reassuring them that she is available on a one-to-one basis should anything arise that they wish to speak about. She debriefs with the team after orientations and student weekends discussing what went well and how they might improve things next time.

Recently, to ensure the team communicates well with each other, they did a morning session with an occupational psychologist. It was an opportunity for everyone to become aware of how different people react to differing forms of communication and how this can impact communication on a day-to-day basis. If anything ever comes up with Maria's staff that she feels she needs support with, she contacts the Director of Human Resources in Indianapolis, Mary Georgantes. Currently Maria reports to Shannon Cates.

The IFSA-Butler Orientation and Information booklet provides brief information on each of the IFSA-Butler staff including contact information for each of the staff. Eibhlin is perceived as the "go to" person for the day to day questions; however, when the students were asked about her role, the majority responded that they did not go to her. One student said that she had only seen her on three different group occasions. The student noted that Ashley was excellent in terms of communicating in a timely fashion. Other students stated that Ashley was open in her responses and gave a specific example of how Ashley responded to a travel inquiry regarding Paris after the terrorist attack.

Commendations: The staff communicate through booklets that students receive throughout their semester in Ireland. The majority of these booklets contain contact information. The staff seem to excel in communicating all aspects of the program with enthusiasm and knowledge.

Recommendation: Consider adding staff contact information to all booklets including: "Your Guide to Belfast" and "Well While You're Away."

10. Office Facilities

There is no office on campus for the IFSA-Butler programs in Belfast. At Stranmillis, there is a student center and a student organization that caters to foreign students (mainly ERASMUS). The international students have a special orientation and are provided numerous activities throughout the semester to get together for outings and other activities. ERASMUS hosts an I Café on Wednesday evenings that provides Irish music and an opportunity for the foreign students to mingle.

CO-CURRICULAR

11. Housing

All students are provided housing which includes a private bedroom with a private bath. All rooms have built-in closets and desks. Linens are provided along with weekly communal area cleaning services. Student responses to availability of cleaning varied from regular trash removal to some bathroom cleaning. The bathroom is modern and well equipped. The residence halls are located centrally on the campus. Students are provided both breakfast and dinner at the cafeteria and have access to kitchen facilities for food preparation. Each student has a separate bin in both a cupboard as well as the fridge for food storage. The semester students live in residence halls with other students, both foreign and Irish. Student needs are accommodated as necessary for room requests. The ten-week students tend to live together in the same building. Students commented that if there are any problems with the actual building that they are dealt with promptly. Students can request a move from one room to another and if the reason is substantial, the request is honored in a timely fashion. The school does not specifically address cross-cultural training.

The campus is surrounded by a fence. There are security cameras in place around campus and a security checkpoint at the entrance. All buildings have standard safety equipment and doors are clearly labeled as fire doors to remain closed. Surrounding the campus is a quiet residential area.

Students are provided rules of residence that address specifics under categories of general information, communal learning, fire and personal safety, finance and disciplinary action. This is a comprehensive guide to all aspects of residential living specifically addressing health and safety issues, emergency response, and change of room.

12. Excursions

Excursions for full semester IFSA-Butler students include Tour of Belfast, Killary Adventure Weekend, Northern Ireland Weekend, and Dublin. The trips to Killary and the Northern Ireland Weekend have five guides while there are two guides for the Dublin trip and Belfast outing. Each outing uses a coach for transport. In the brochures for each of the activities are contact details, emergency numbers, and travel itineraries. It would be helpful to have a list of suggested items to take on each of the outings and cash suggestions. The actual Travel Newsletter for Northern Ireland is a comprehensive listing of information that the student traveler will need for travel to Ireland from the US.

The ten-week students go on one official outing to Ulster American Folk Park. This park focuses on Irish migration. Ashley and George [LAST NAME? AND ROLE?] accompany the students on this trip. The objective of the trip, as understood by the students, is to build an understanding of the connection of Ireland to the United States, and they agreed that the trip was a positive experience. The students interviewed mentioned that they would like to have the Black Taxi tour at the beginning of the semester to set the stage for a better understanding of Belfast prior to their teaching placements.

While there is not an explicit goal for the outings, the objective of the excursions seems to be to help the students to get connected as well as to discover more about Ireland. It appears that the outings were important to the students since there were many pictures of the outings in a student generated slideshow that ran through the graduation ceremony.

13. Community Engagement

Due to the nature of the program, the students are fully engaged in the community through their school placements. For the ten-week students this is the main focus of their time at Stranmillis. They are in the schools three full days per week interacting with both students and teachers. The students who come for the semester also interact with the students and teachers but for less time. Both of these school placements provide excellent examples of meaningful cross-cultural exchange and community engagement. Students have many opportunities to engage in the Stranmillis community by getting involved in a number of clubs. Clubs include: Christian Union, Kings Scholars RFC, Gaelic Football, Drama Society, Men's Football, Ladies' Football, StranCats Volleyball, Music Society, Badminton, Netball, Basketball, The Knitting Club, and the Stranmillis Running Club. Membership in these clubs is seen as a beneficial avenue for significant community engagement. Not all ISFA-Butler students take advantage of these clubs, but some do. For example, two of the fall students participated in the Christmas Celebration of Carols and Lessons.

14. Cross-Cultural Learning and Student Transformation

When asked about the impact of the experience, program students responded overwhelmingly that this had made them more adaptable, more confident, and more open-minded. The nature of the program fosters this transformation. The students are placed in schools and have the opportunity to teach students. This in itself is transformative for both parties. Students are then asked to reflect on every aspect of what is happening in the classroom. Each day that the students teach they are expected to reflect on one of their lessons addressing strengths, areas for further development, and implications for future teaching and pupil learning. The post lesson review includes full assessment of student learning and evaluation of teaching by the student modeling the role of reflective practitioner.

In the fall semester, the students are involved in sharing about Thanksgiving in their school placements. At the students' schools, the learners get exposed to all aspects of the Thanksgiving celebration including a wide variety of Thanksgiving related art projects. In the school settings, the IFSA-Butler students are learning both from their Irish students and their cooperating teacher, while the Irish students and teachers are learning from them. This is a mutually beneficial relationship that is sustainable as long as there are schools and teachers willing to work with the IFSA-Butler students.

Close relationships between the IFSA-Butler students and their cooperative teachers are fostered in the school placements. One of the students who participated in the program last year actually had her Irish cooperating teacher attend her wedding "virtually", and there are plans for a student from the current semester to continue working with her cooperating teacher to supply lessons on politics in the US.

Finally, the IFSA-Butler students at Stranmillis are provided the opportunity to attend Lifelong Learning classes at no charge. These seven-week courses are offered to the public for a nominal charge and include such topics as Irish History, Irish Art, Languages and Wine Appreciation. A number of students took advantage of this offer and expressed their appreciation for the courses they attended. They enjoyed the course immensely and had the opportunity to interact with local folks of all ages in these classes.

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND POLICIES

15. Health and Safety

The IFSA-Butler programs at Stranmillis boast excellent health and safety provisions on all levels. As a campus-based program, students are housed on campus in a secure environment with access to several levels of medical care and psychological and counseling services. Emergency numbers are provided to

program students by both IFSA-Butler and Stranmillis. At Stranmillis, the levels of medical services include: Stranmillis Student Support Centre, Queen's University Belfast Student Support Centre, off-hour phone numbers, Halls Office of Reception staff at all hours, including an emergency services one-touch hotline available in every residence hall common room. IFSA-Butler provides students with emergency numbers to local medical services, staff phone numbers in Belfast and Dublin, and an emergency pager number with explicit instructions to carry this information at all times and enter it into mobile phones. In close proximity to Stranmillis is the Queen's University Health Centre and the Royal Victoria Hospital that has a 24/7 emergency department. Other resources include counselling services through the Stranmillis Student Support Centre, and a range of specialized services throughout Belfast for students with needs in responding to alcohol/drug abuse, eating disorders, sexual assault, STI's, as well as chaplaincies, and general counseling services, including helplines. Medical insurance provided by IFSA-Butler ensures the facilitation of medical treatment in emergency and non-emergency situations. Students are provided with safe means of transport to and from work sites. Special care is made to have students travel in pairs to their school-based placements and, as mentioned previously, taxi service is provided and coordinated by Stranmillis staff.

Based on their skills and experience, the program staff of IFSA-Butler in Dublin are well placed to recognize and respond to political unrest, terrorist activity, and natural disasters. Although not a local incident, the response to the Paris attacks was swift, comprehensive, and sensitive and gave students the information and context they needed to make informed choices. Staff backgrounds and experience indicate their ability to recognize physical and mental health concerns; however, it should be noted that there is only one part-time member of staff with limited contact with students. Therefore, the ability of local staff to detect physical or mental health issues is limited in that regard. However, strong communication lines between students and program staff allows for efficient response when students disclose issues. Stranmillis staff and faculty are in more constant contact with students, given that students live in residence halls and, for the most part, participate in teacher-training seminars with Stranmillis faculty. Good lines of communication exist between Stranmillis faculty and staff, and explicit protocols developed by Stranmillis include communications for a range of responses to emergency medical situations. On the whole, the physical and mental health of students is well monitored on the program, and the capacity for intervention and assistance is assured.

16. Emergency Plans

IFSA-Butler's well-regarded plans for responses to emergencies, including its Critical Incident Response Plan, protocols for natural disasters and terrorist attacks, as well as for crisis response for individual students are comprehensive and provide a layer of strategic support for IFSA-Butler staff in Ireland. The mandates under these plans regarding student preparation are satisfactorily executed on the local level for the Stranmillis programs. Multiple means of communications are reinforced including a designated email address for students to check in as safe in times of emergency. This email address is separate from the emergency pager number and staff emails and mobile numbers, so that redundancy of communication is ensured. Based on local experience, Facebook and other social media platforms are in active use by program staff and participants which adds another layer of communication. Students are issued emergency cards to contact local police, fire, and medical emergency personnel. Likewise, they are given staff emails, mobile numbers in Belfast, Dublin, and Indianapolis. Information about how to register with the US Consulate and contact information for this is provided. The inability to communicate in emergency situations is not addressed.

If evacuation plans, assembly points, and "stay-put" plans exist, these have not been disclosed to the reviewers. It should be noted, however, that the on-campus staff at Stranmillis could provide assistance

in many—though not all—areas. An incapacitated student who cannot communicate, for example, could be located and assisted by resident hall and/or security staff. Stranmillis has not disclosed any safety protocols regarding campus evacuation or responses to critical incidents.

17. Policies

The program complies with IFSA-Butler’s policies in most areas. Formal evaluations of the customized program should be put in place to bring it into IFSA-Butler’s standards of practice. As discussed throughout the report, the customized ten-week program should be seen as a full-fledged option, and therefore it should be evaluated as such.

Areas of improvement for closer alignment between policy and practice are highlighted in relevant sections of the report.

Additional Notes

As outlined in the various sections of the report, this program—or set of programs—features top-notch teacher training in a unique cross-cultural context. Partnerships with the local institution in Stranmillis University College and key partners in local primary and post-primary schools are extremely strong and define the program entirely. Key partners at Stranmillis, most notably Audrey Curry, Director of External Affairs and Community Engagement, ensure the success of the integration of students into the local education system. The ongoing work of Sandi Cohen from the University of Virginia, who was instrumental in the design of the customized ten-week program, is essential to the well-being of this program. The level of buy-in and ongoing support by Stranmillis leadership and faculty for the customized program is unmatched on any supported direct enrolment program. There is a true matching of interests in delivering high-quality education to primary and secondary students in sometimes challenging circumstances between Stranmillis and many teacher education programs. The Stranmillis leadership team sees this teaching aspect of study abroad as part of the legacy of the school. They also see the relationship as reciprocal in that the benefits go both ways. They are very willing and able to customize programs to meet the needs of the colleges that are sending students. This alignment of goals should be leveraged to further strengthen IFSA-Butler’s programs at Stranmillis.

It seems to the reviewers that the future of the Stranmillis program lies in the professional development of future teachers. In the case of this program, the customized program offers a tremendous value far above and beyond the semester-long option. The opportunity for teaching placement and the careful observation and contextualized instruction provided to the customized program students is, as described throughout the report, of a very high quality. The reviewers believe that this program should be encouraged and developed further, not only in the ways described in the report to improve the educational experience of students, but in terms of IFSA-Butler’s support of this program, and the recruitment and marketing efforts that should accompany it. As it stands, the customized program is not advertised on the IFSA-Butler website; only the semester-long program is described. In the main, program materials are geared toward semester-long students. As a customized and perhaps experimental program, it is understandable that it not be made widely available. However, given the strong numbers of participants, and especially in light of the small numbers of semester-long students, the reviewers are of the opinion that every effort should be expended to create a full and proper teacher-training program or set of programs that center on the student teaching experience and the encapsulating seminar.

The professional gains in intercultural communication, especially against the distinctive backdrop of Northern Ireland, are unique to this program. In the context of the necessity for future educators to

develop global competencies, the reviewers are confident that the customized program, facilitated by IFSA-Butler and developed with the strong support of Stranmillis faculty, can be developed more broadly and can position IFSA-Butler as a leader in innovative teacher-training programs.

IFSA-Butler wishes to sincerely thank Scott Carpenter of Columbia University (chair), Dr. Julia Shahid of Austin College, and Dr. Ann Cunningham of Wake Forest University for completing a Program Evaluation of Systems and Operations (PESO) for the IFSA-Butler Stranmillis University College teacher education programs in December 2015. This document offers a status update on IFSA-Butler responses and actions as regards the specific recommendations of the evaluation team.

An acknowledged challenge for the evaluators was the project's focus on essentially two distinct programming options:

- 1) A traditional semester program consisting of coursework with an optional, limited practical teaching practicum;
- 2) A short-term customized program consisting of a dedicated student teaching internship with supporting workshops and activities; this is typically referred to in the evaluation as "the student teaching placement program."

To date, we have treated the latter as a customized program and, as such, have limited our student communications, leaving the bulk of the advising to the home school to whom the program "belongs." For the same reason, we have publicized the traditional semester program but not the customized program (no web page, for example). The vast majority of the evaluation team's recommendations center on their belief in the strong value of the customized model, their recognition of its popularity in comparison with the traditional semester program, and their strong view that we are missing out on participants because we have not properly marketed it. In sum, "standardizing" the "customized" program would address most of the evaluators' concerns.

Specific recommendations for pre-arrival advising for the customized program: (see pp. 2-3)

1. Create a pre-arrival student advising series which specifically addresses the customized student teaching program;
2. Provide academic information about the "Northern Ireland Professional Practice" package of workshops and activities which supports and contextualizes the student teaching experience of the customized program, including a weekly schedule, credit value and transcript expectations;
3. Expand advising information about the structure of the student teaching placement to help students understand what to expect;
4. Warn students that a "school based placement questionnaire" will be sent and that its completion is vital to their proper school and teaching assignment;

IFSA-Butler agrees with each of the recommendations above and has committed to addressing them in the manner requested for the spring 2017 application cycle. Program advising materials and practices are currently being updated and revised accordingly.

Specific recommendations for pre-arrival advising for the traditional semester program: (see pp. 2-3)

1. Expand information about the structure of the optional student teaching practicum to help students understand what to expect;
2. Highlight links to available semester courses and syllabi;
3. Recommend students' consideration of and include specific links to the following two unique courses: "Northern Ireland Culture and Education" and "Landmarks in Irish History (Peace & Conflict)";

4. Provide breakdowns/models of possible course schedules with point values, minimums and maximums to aid students in achieving adequate course loads and ensure adequate integration into home school major and degree requirements.
5. Include information about the possibility of enrolling in courses at Queen's University Belfast.

IFSA-Butler agrees with each of the recommendations above and has committed to addressing them in the manner requested for the spring 2017 application cycle, with the exception of the final recommendation (#5). Program advising materials and practices are currently being updated and revised accordingly. We cannot comply with the final request (#5) as there is no assurance of course availability from Queen's and students and their home schools have been sorely disappointed with these false expectations in the past. We remain willing to make requests to Queen's on a case by case basis. This position was explained to the evaluation team chair following the evaluation.

Pre-arrival advising recommendations for both programs: (see pp. 2-3)

1. Expand advising information on obtaining UK Tier 4 visas, and stress the importance of the visa within the first advising email/communication;
2. Make students aware of the existence of both programs so that one group does not discover the other upon arrival at Stranmillis.

IFSA-Butler agrees with the two recommendations above and has implemented each of them.

Further recommendations for "standardizing" the "customized" program:

1. Create a web page and marketing materials for the customized program;
2. Standardize the flow of information between IFSA-Butler and the home school for the customized program in the same way that it occurs for the traditional semester program;
3. Conduct student evaluations of the customized program in the same manner we do for the semester program.

IFSA-Butler agrees with each of the recommendations above and has committed to addressing them in the manner requested for the spring 2017 application cycle. Program advising materials and practices are currently being updated and revised accordingly. Additionally, a page dedicated to the newly "standardized" "customized" program has been developed in draft form for the 2016-17 IFSA-Butler catalogs.

Specific recommendations for on-site support of students:

1. In addition to the academic success discussion during orientation and drop-in session(s) later in the semester, require students to attend a "follow-up orientation" to address academic issues (see p. 4);
2. Coordinate IFSA-Butler orientation with Stranmillis orientation more intentionally, demonstrating coherent communication and enabling students to understand how to access services and understand differentiation of staff roles;
3. Advise students that their attendance at Stranmillis' orientation is mandatory;
4. Increase coordination between IFSA-Butler and Stranmillis regarding activities for international students (the sizeable ERASMUS population was noted), enabling IFSA-Butler students to feel more connected to the life of the institution;

5. Explicitly discuss Identity issues related to gender, sexuality, and race/ethnicity during orientation, offering students a safe space to discuss concerns (see p. 5);
6. Revise the student handbook to make it more useful to students and appropriate for ongoing reference during orientation; for example, create pull-out pages with summary information by section;
7. Also in the student handbook, move “Homosexuality (also Bisexuality and Transgender)” from its current placement within a section including “Alcohol Abuse,” “Drug Abuse,” and “Eating Disorders” to a newly created section on Student Identity. Similarly, move “Racism” out of the “Living in Ireland” section in the new Student Identity section. Make specific referrals for support explicit;
8. Add IFSA-Butler Ireland staff contact information to all student materials, including “Your Guide to Belfast” and “Well While You’re Away”;
9. Add lists of suggested items to take and cash recommendations to IFSA-Butler materials regarding cultural excursions and program activities;
10. Reposition the Black Taxi tour at the beginning of the program to give students a better understanding of Belfast prior to embarking on their student teaching placements;
11. Identify and make available any safety protocols Stranmillis may have in place regarding campus evacuation or critical incidents.

IFSA-Butler agrees with each of the recommendations above. While we are still considering how to implement #6, the remainder have already been implemented as requested for the fall 2016 intake. Furthermore, we are discussion implementation of the following recommendations in our program sites worldwide: #1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 11.

Other recommendations for both programs (pre-arrival and on-site):

1. Recognize that many participants, particularly on the customized program, are mature students and develop resources aimed at their needs;
2. Refer to students as “future educators,” framing the experience as a valuable teaching experience and creating a sense of a pre-professional cohort among participants (see pp. 5-6).

IFSA-Butler agrees with each of the recommendations above and has committed to addressing them in the manner requested for the spring 2017 application cycle. Program advising materials and practices are currently being updated and revised accordingly. Marketing materials are also being reviewed in consideration of #2.

Additionally, IFSA-Butler is reviewing the role of the student services coordinator in Belfast and seeking ways to strengthen students’ familiarity and reliance on this position for daily questions (see pp. 5, 12 and 15).

The evaluation also revealed a structural consideration for future evaluations. The PESO document indicates that this exercise “reviews analyses of pre-departure and on-site practices.” In future, we intend to evaluate re-entry and post-program services as well. The PESO document will be updated to reflect this change, beginning with the fall 2017 external evaluation.