

Patrick Cochrane
Foreign Commercial Service
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I spent two months this summer working in the Commercial Section of the US Embassy in Buenos Aires, Argentina, for the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS). My experiences in Argentina were incredibly rewarding, both in and out of the office. Buenos Aires is amazing, and the Embassy has a great location in the city's biggest neighborhood, Palermo. The people from FCS made me feel like I had worked there for years, and I will keep in touch with them for a long time.

I lived in a studio apartment in Palermo Viejo (a subdivision of Palermo) about a twenty-minute walk or ten-minute bus ride from work. Although I really enjoyed the apartment and would highly recommend it, I had friends who lived in old houses converted to apartments. Their places had a lot more character and were great for meeting people. I became friends with people from Argentina to New York to Germany. I also spent time with other interns at the Embassy, but it was with the Argentineans and others I met that my time outside work was most well spent; why go to Argentina only to hang out with other Americans?

My first week and a half at work were actually spent at the American Chamber of Commerce in Argentina (AMCHAM), a non-profit trade organization for the two countries. I was there while waiting for the somewhat frustrating Department of Commerce security clearance to finish. Since I was only at AMCHAM for a short time, and the staff knew I was only going to be there a short time, I wasn't really given much of value to do. Although they were very welcoming and learning what the AMCHAM does was very

interesting, I couldn't wait to start at the Embassy, where I knew I would have time to develop more of a feel for the work and office.

Once with the FCS, I learned a lot about how an Embassy functions, and how the commercial section fits into the puzzle. The main function of the FCS is to promote trade relations between the U.S. and Argentina, mostly through assisting small and medium sized U.S. firms in their business here. To that end, the FCS generates both detailed and snapshot market research reports on sectors and industries, facilitates meetings between businesses in the countries, generates contact lists for firms, provides customs information to them, and has lately begun to establish relationships between U.S. states and Argentine provinces with similar demographics.

The functions I mentioned may be more extensive than the general commercial service website details, as I gathered that the office in Argentina is highly regarded and has a lot of responsibility spread amongst its small staff of American commercial officers and Argentine market specialists.

My responsibilities at the office varied from day to day, and I was able to have a taste of many different aspects of the service. I translated documents from Spanish to English and English to Spanish and generated contact lists for US firms exploring business in the country. Other tasks involved editing market research reports on everything from tourism to fishing, and using daily news articles and other information to generate quick blurbs on a specific topic for the FCS to release to companies.

I also had chances to tackle much bigger projects. I did the research for and wrote the first draft of an extensive report on the IT hardware industry in Argentina, and also helped put together an IT roundtable between the Ambassador, the Mayor of Buenos Aires,

and CEOs of American IT companies to discuss the construction of a new research park in the city. I was able to sit in on the roundtable and hear the opinions of some very important people. From this I had the opportunity to help draft an official cable on the meeting. Roundtables such as this, along with other major meetings and events that involved the Ambassador, always took priority in the office.

Throughout my time at the FCS, I truly felt that what I did was valuable to and appreciated by the staff. Sometimes there was what seemed like too much downtime, but there were six interns and not enough work to go around all the time. This was a result of the fact that the staff seemed to feel bad about giving us busy work or mindless “intern” tasks at times. Although initially I felt there was hesitancy on their part to ask an intern to do something, once I began actively seeking out work on a consistent basis the market specialists were happy to see me interested in their sector, and this led to opportunities for us as interns to do both important and less important jobs.

Even the Commercial Attaché Charles Ranado, who spent a good chunk of our time there also acting as Chief Commercial Officer, found a lot of time in his busy schedule to show us that the interns were important to the FCS, and helped us all come up with one “big” project that we could work on throughout our whole internship. I decided to look at various investment issues in the country, and I was able to use the office and specialists to collect great resources to begin putting together a paper I will be able to work on throughout my senior year.

Interns also had the opportunity to attend briefings from the other sections in the Embassy. All of the interns at the Embassy had meetings with the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank, too. These briefings and meetings were sought out and

organized by the interns at the Embassy, though – not something we were expected to do. One of my favorite outside “jobs” was working at the Embassy Fourth of July party at the Ambassador’s mansion.

I was both challenged by the internship and tasks given to me on a daily basis, as well as interested in them. The relaxed and welcoming atmosphere of the office helped a lot, and although speaking Spanish in an office setting on a daily basis was brand new to me, the patience of everyone around me helped immensely. Looking back, I feel truly privileged to have had the opportunity to work in a trade office in a country as interesting as Argentina, and will remember the experience for the rest of my life.