

This summer, the Kellogg Institute granted me the opportunity to spend ten weeks interning with the Foreign Commercial Service in Buenos Aires. The nature of my workload in the office was varied, to say the least. On a day-to-day basis, I answered phones and edited market research reports on every conceivable sector in the Argentine market, from advanced security equipment to pet food (both steadily growing markets, incidentally). These market research reports are now part of the U.S. Commercial Service Country Commercial Guide for Argentina, which can be found on the Embassy's web site. I also worked on more specialized reports, such as an International Partner Search (IPS) for a U.S. client in the safety equipment industry. A finished IPS consists of five or more companies that the FCS consultant has investigated and personally contacted, and these companies represent the client's best options for Argentine partners. I also compiled two briefings for the Ambassador Vilma Martinez, one on trade statistics between Argentina and the state of Georgia in honor of Governor Sonny Perdue's visit to Buenos Aires, and another on the agenda for an upcoming meeting of the Argentine-American Chamber of Commerce in Buenos Aires, which included short biographies on all of the attending members.

Other projects that I worked on extensively were detailed market reports on Argentina's growing IT and Telecom markets, which I found extremely interesting and applicable to my IT Management/Spanish major. I also witnessed firsthand the formation of several international business relationships by U.S. and Argentine companies. I thoroughly enjoyed the laid-back Latin American lifestyle, which definitely transferred to the workplace. There were, as expected, several occasions in which I had very little to do and had to actively search for work. Heeding the advice of previous years' interns, when such a day occurred I would go around and ask the commercial specialists individually if they needed help with any of their projects, and they always gave me something to do.

The specialists in the office were extremely welcoming and complimentary of my efforts, and I greatly enjoyed working with all of them.

One of the more challenging projects I undertook involved researching and contacting thirty-two different mining companies in Argentina. Calling all of the companies' purchasing managers personally and trying to gauge their interest in purchasing our client's product was definitely one of the stronger tests of my Spanish-speaking abilities. I also had the opportunity to attend several lectures outside of the office, including one given by Bill Clinton on behalf of the Clinton Foundation at the Hilton in Puerto Madero. Additionally, I had the opportunity to greet guests and attend two separate receptions at the Ambassador's mansion. The first reception honored the Governor of Georgia's visit to Buenos Aires, and the second was the annual 4th of July Gala. Each experience was utterly outside my normal realm of activities, and completely unforgettable.

Although I was only working for the Commercial Service for ten weeks, I do feel that the office benefited from the work I accomplished. My confidence in this statement stems not only from the projects I undertook but also the liberal amounts of encouragement and praise I received from the Argentines in my office. Argentines are, from my personal experience, truly welcoming and outgoing people. I truly enjoyed working with the specialists in my office, as well as meeting and interacting with others outside of work. One of my favorite experiences involved an invitation from the host family of Stephanie Makar, the FSD intern in La Plata, to a homemade multi-course asado dinner, followed by several hours of entertainment provided by playing with their five-year-old grandson and watching a fútbol game. They welcomed me into their home with literally wide-open arms, and it was a truly wonderful experience.

The knowledge I gained about the Argentine culture as it relates to business, politics, the Spanish language, and just life in general is irreplaceable. There are so many aspects of a country and its people that can't be learned from a classroom – the gestures and facial expressions common in enthusiastic conversations and aggressive outdoor market negotiations, the people's outwardly evident

devotion to fútbol and Michael Jackson, the feeling of sharing mate with nine strangers, and so forth. What made this internship a truly unique experience was that it complemented both of my majors so perfectly, while offering me the opportunity to gain a greater knowledge of the structure and inner workings of U.S. embassies. That being said, I believe that the internship is distinctive in that it could appeal to students in almost every area of study. Future interns should definitely possess a moderate to high level of proficiency in Spanish, in addition to a willingness to adapt the distinctive Argentine accent and slang. Answering the phone and transferring calls to the appropriate department was often something of a struggle, but it became easier with time as I gained confidence.

Self-confidence is one aspect that future interns can expect to grow in tremendously. Everything you do requires a sense of confidence, because it is by nature so different - from interacting in Spanish with other employees in the office, to navigating the potentially overwhelming bus and subway routes, to walking home from work at night. You will be living alone in a foreign country, probably living more independently than you ever have before. There will undoubtedly be some rough times, but this opportunity is irreplaceable. Be smart, be safe, but most importantly – enjoy it. Ten weeks will fly by faster than you realize, and those ten weeks have the potential to encompass one of the most interesting, memorable, and fun experiences of your life.