

I participated in the Global Exchange Program in Buenos Aires, Argentina in the Fall, 2015. I was attending Austral University, which is small private school in Buenos Aires. Austral has two campuses, one in downtown Buenos Aires and the other in Pilar, which is about one to two hours away from Buenos Aires. The university has other undergraduate and graduate programs and you can take classes in any of those programs. But, since I could only receive academic credit for law school classes, I was limited to those options. Most law school classes were offered in Pilar, which was very inconvenient. I thought that most classes offered when I was there were very business oriented so I had a difficult time choosing something of my interest. I was only attending part-time (because I was doing a full-time legal externship for credit elsewhere), but if I had been a full-time student at Austral, I would have had to take a class or two in Pilar. Generally I would say that there were not many class options so anyone interested in going should take this into account.

Their law school program is supposed to be completed in five years, so they have first, second, third, fourth, and fifth year classes. Most first to third year classes are taught in the Pilar campus. Each class consists of about twenty students and they tend to take all classes together, unless they are retaking a class or did not take it the previous year. In my situation, the class and the seminar that I took were with fourth year students. There were also about six other international students, most of them from Germany. Having a small group of law students who had been studying together for several years meant that they had a certain way of doing things that was not always clear for foreign students. For example, for midterm exams the students get

to pick the dates they want to take the exams within a two-week period. For our class, there was an initial discussion on a possible date but apparently the local students continued this discussion in a WhatsApp group they were all part of. I found out about the exam date but did not know that this group existed. A few days before the two-week exam period began, the students decided to change the exam date. International students never received a message regarding this change; it was by chance that we found out it would be a day earlier than previously scheduled. This type of local knowledge is something that you will not find out about in orientation. Therefore, for anyone going, I highly recommend always checking in with local students because they generally know more of how things work. The administration will not send you reminders so you have to figure things out on your own.

In terms of the quality of the classes, I thought that the academic level was really good. It was definitely different than at Hastings, but it was still challenging. For the one class that I took, there was a lot of reading assigned and you did have to be prepared to participate in class. Since it was a very small class, everyone usually participated. The professor was very knowledgeable and regularly asked foreign students if they understood what was being said. The Spanish level among the foreign students varied, but I would highly recommend only participating in this program if you have a good level of the language. I am a native Spanish speaker but sometimes I still had trouble understanding a few concepts because 1. the porteño (that's what people from Buenos Aires are called) Spanish is very different, with a very distinctive accent and with many words used differently, 2. some professors tend to speak very fast, 3. there are many new legal concepts that you need to learn, and 4. the legal terminology in Spanish, and in Argentina in particular, is something that you cannot always literally translate from English. The final exams are tough. My oral exam consisted of studying and memorizing

sixteen units (everything that is listed on the syllabus), and presenting in front of two professors two of those units that were chosen randomly chosen there. Overall, it was a challenging class.

One last thing that anyone from Hastings interested in doing this program should know is that Austral University is a conservative school. The atmosphere, the comments, ideologies, etc. that you will experience are very different from Hastings and the Bay Area in general. There are religious images almost everywhere in the school so you should be comfortable seeing those (that didn't bother me at all, but it is something that you would definitely not see at Hastings). Lastly, people will talk about politics all the time, even during class. Maybe that was just the specific time in which I was there (during some very controversial presidential elections), but it was an ongoing topic of discussion.

Living in Buenos Aires was an incredible experience. It is a very large city with endless activities so you can never get bored. There are a lot of free cultural events, great and affordable theater performances, concerts, and many restaurants to try. Even though public transportation was great and very affordable, it would always take me about an hour to get almost anywhere. I had to be aware of my surroundings, especially in the downtown area or when I was taking crowded public transit, but it was generally very safe. The food and the wine were terrific. Housing expenses were comparable to the Bay Area, but that depends on what neighborhood you choose to live in. I do not recommend shopping for clothes and electronics there because it is substantively more expensive than in the U.S. Everything else was very affordable. Lastly, the people were generally friendly. I did have to get used to greeting everyone with a kiss on the cheek.

Overall, it was a great experience.

My Buenos Aires Semester Abroad
U.C. Hastings College of the Law/ La Universidad Austral

As a student at U.C. Hastings College of the Law, deciding to apply to study abroad was not an easy decision. The incredible atmosphere of the Bay Area coupled with the diversity of classes of interest at Hastings made taking a semester in Buenos Aires, Argentina a gamble of sorts. Sharing a different legal tradition than the US, Argentina offered a different perspective on law, with cultural flare, natural beauty, and cosmopolitan city life to boot. During the fall 2011 semester of my last year of law school, I studied in La Universidad Austral in Buenos Aires. The decision turned out to have the most rewarding payoffs when it comes to life experience, expanding my understanding of our society, global interconnectedness between cultures, and myself. Getting to know Argentina through taking classes, travelling, volunteering, and simply living the porteno life has forever changed me personally and professionally.

La Universidad Austral hosted over 50 international students in all areas of study, and from all over the world. The private "facultad" in the center of capital federal, Puerto Madero, boasts one of the best law programs in South America, where civil law systems are prevalent, as in most countries throughout South America and Europe. I was only one of two American exchange students, which was fortunate, allowing me to get to know people from Colombia, Portugal, Iceland, Holland, Peru and Spain, among others. The international program coordinators are warm, helpful and encouraging, giving students an open door policy for advice on any questions, whether academic, cultural or personal in nature. They make studying on a different continent feel like a being in a second home university for students. The classes all included local Argentine students, offering an important cultural element of studying along side Buenos Aires natives, thus being able to see their perspective on the law and life.

I took courses in Spanish and English, with an international focus on cooperation, integration, immigration, development and trade. Taking classes in a different legal system shed a different light on American lawyers and expanded my knowledge of the function of law in society. The classes presented more technical information than I was used to in the U.S., where fact patterns and issue spotting are more essential. This difference was a reflection of the different legal traditions between common and civil law: while common law invokes the principle of stare decisis, in which past cases become law, civil law is completely reliant on codified law, making a more technical understanding crucial to the function of the system. The classes were academically rigorous, terminating in papers and public oral exams in which students and faculty can listen to student present the information, while being relentlessly questioned by multiple professors on specific dates and details of the composition of legal institutions. Argentine students study hard and also enjoy themselves outside of academics wholeheartedly, representing a greater differentiation between work and life than in the U.S.

The culture of Buenos Aires feels more relaxed than in the States, with people taking time to sit in cafés and read or catch up for hours on a daily basis, and meandering to dinner no earlier than 9pm. The terraces and gardens that pervade the restaurants and houses invite enjoyment, with the airs and sounds of the city omnipresent in porteno life. The heavy reliance on public transportation and walking allows constant interaction and communicate, reflecting a much more close and open relationship among people than in the U.S., where strangers do not usually talk to one another on the street, or make direct eye contact constantly. This candid closeness to one another was one of the best things about living in Buenos Aires, as well as the fusion of diverse backgrounds reflected in the architecture, cuisine and music. Yet the people can come off as pessimistic, awaiting national crisis due to their tumultuous history, with a military regime that ended only 200 years ago, with other economic crises to follow. As one local student explained, this has made Argentines more capable of dealing with stress or unexpected challenges of work and life. The cultural differences allowed me to see that there is no one way to live, and illuminated the power of choice that we all have to shape our values, attitudes and daily routines.

During my time in Buenos Aires I also volunteered with Volunteers Without Borders. In a weekly after-school project with local children, volunteers were able to work on art and vocabulary projects, help with basic English vocabulary and get to know a different side of the city. The children are energetic and open, interacting with volunteers from all over the world, while demonstrating their distinct qualities as urban youth in South America. The most beneficial element for both volunteer and child is the bond that can form, allowing understanding to flourish freely. With cultural and idiomatic challenges, the hours spent helped me learn the cornerstones of communication when faced with differences, whether in age or nationality. Covering fundamentals of hygiene, Argentine geography, and introspective art throughout the lessons created a healthy environment for learning. Simultaneously, games, snacks, and laughs pervaded the "comedor," where the friendly community members also regularly feed needy families in the neighborhood. The volunteers got to know one another, sharing perspectives as native Argentines and international students, of various ages and professional pursuits. The experience has inspired me to continue an involvement with projects that help others, even in the simplest way, to foster mutual acceptance and understanding

Cumulatively, the experience of studying abroad in Buenos Aires was challenging, rewarding, eye-opening, and the best time of my life. I will always carry this semester with me, and will be more prepared to take on life personally and professionally with a broader, better perspective. The gamble of studying abroad for a semester was well worth any risk, with an experience of personal growth to gain that has permanently changed me and will always be a highlight of my life.