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IE3 Final Report

**Institute of International Education/EducationUSA Internship
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During fall of 2006 I was accepted to an internship with the Institute of International Education (IIE) Office for Latin America in Mexico City. Specifically I worked in the Educational Advising Center under EducationUSA provided by a grant from the Department of State through the Educational and Cultural Affairs section. My experience as an intern was highly successful, resulting in an invitation from IIE to extend my internship for a second term. As this internship comes to a close, I am very pleased to have been a part of IIE for the past six months and currently remain interested and enthusiastic about the work taking place in the office. Needless to say, I will be disappointed to leave this position and this city.

This international internship experience surpassed my expectations in terms of benefits gained both professionally and personally. Due to the limited size of the office, I was allowed the opportunity and expected to significantly contribute to large projects taking place. Through these projects I quickly learned many valuable skills including how to communicate formally in a bilingual setting. A considerable benefit which resulted from the constant collaboration, which is the nature of IIE, were the valuable contacts I gained and was fortunate enough to work with. Through events and projects with the partner organizations within the EducationUSA – Mexico umbrella group, I was able to communicate with many other offices, offering a small window into their organizations as well. As a result, I not only learned about IIE, but I was able to understand a bit of the role each institution we worked with played in both the Mexican and U.S. higher educational

systems. Personally, this internship taught me to be independent and adventurous, taking appropriate risks for a well rounded experience of Mexico City and other regions I visited. During the initial three months of this internship I lived alone for the first time. While this was often challenging, I learned how to navigate the many demands of rental housing issues specific to Mexico. In addition, I gained a greater understanding of Mexican culture through working with the general public, attending various types of working and leisure events and everyday activities.

The largest challenge I encountered was working under the supervisor provided for the first half of my internship, whose priorities were not in her current profession or working performance. As a result, I was often presented with projects and responsibilities of her position's level, without the proper guidance to complete them. Consequently, I gained from this experience by completing the required tasks while learning how to do so successfully in the moment. During such projects, the expectations for completion of my Coordinator were not compromised. Surely, through participation in such projects, I became an asset to the organization as the Supervisor would not have completed the work without my assistance. In response, I took additional steps to make these accomplishments on my part known to my superiors, in order that they would understand the situation clearly. In addition, to benefit the organization, I often asked the appropriate staff if they needed assistance in various projects and collaborated with other departments effectively.

Considering my professionalism before the internship and to date, I have grown significantly. My first day at the internship was somewhat hectic and overwhelming, although in retrospect, I realize it was actually a very easy day compared to the daily office work I would look forward to in the future. My first day consisted of meeting other employees, receiving explanations of the programs administered and a welcome reception

for a group of newly selected grantees in the evening. Originally my Spanish language skills were fluent yet very informal. I quickly learned the appropriate terms in Spanish to use in the office. Subsequently I became more comfortable communicating via phone and email in Spanish, although this was a somewhat slow process. I suspect I began to feel comfortable communicating formally in the workplace in this language after about three weeks in the internship. It was especially challenging for me to improve my written Spanish to a level advanced enough for the formality expected in Mexico. This is something I continue to work on improving.

As mentioned previously, my initial supervisor had minimal input in the way of guidance during my internship. The Coordinator, however, had a positive impact on my experience in the office and ultimately became my supervisor during the second half of the internship. The Coordinator was very challenging to work for, due to her high expectations of performance and demanding schedule. However, I greatly appreciated the potential she assumed I could accomplish, causing me to push myself to a higher level of success. My professors' supervision on campus was minimal at best. While they were enthusiastic to hear that I was having a positive experience, they did not assign supplemental projects, as had been discussed, and rarely provided prompt responses to my inquiries regarding academics and planning. However, I suspect that they will have sufficient work and presentations for me to complete upon my upcoming return.

Previous to my internship, I had a significant amount of experience with Mexico City, as most of my family lives here. However, I still had a perception of the city as a dangerous place, especially for woman living independently at my age. However, the more time I spend in Mexico City, the more I am convinced that it is not as I previously understood it. I feel very comfortable navigating the city and have learned the safe way to

enjoy myself without restricting the areas I travel to. I continue to appreciate the cultural differences of Mexico from my home town of Seattle, Washington, and am sure that I have been influenced by some of the current local customs unique to Mexico City.

My daily routine consists of a 15-30 minute commute to work, depending on transportation choice; eight hours of work at the high security, windowless offices of the U.S. Trade Center, broken up by a one hour lunch break; and a 30 minute commute home followed by occasional trips of jogging at the park or visits to local cafes with friends. This routine keeps me very busy and entertained, therefore, I often find myself pleasantly exhausted. In addition, the final few months of the internship have resulted in taking many assignments home to continue work in the evenings and on weekends. As I find the work interesting, this is an aspect of the position I am willing to complete. This busy schedule has been very enjoyable and will be disappointing to leave behind.

The most important tip I can pass on is to contact someone who has recently lived in Mexico City. They will be able to give you specific tips regarding the current political situation, housing suggestions and other pointers. However, I highly recommend that students take the time to understand the layout of the city by reviewing a map before they arrive. Also, students should try not to bring valuable items or anything that will attract attention. Finally, it is important to not be dissuaded from Mexico City by the reputation it often has among foreigners. This city, while dauntingly expansive, is an interesting and exciting place to live. Within Mexico City I was surprised to find a large Mexico savvy expatriate community that will help any American feel right at home while appreciating and experiencing the vibrant culture of Mexico.