

A Month-Long Exchange in Buenos Aires by Anne Burnett, Reference/ Foreign & Int'l Law Librarian, University of Georgia School of Law

Visit Date: October /November 1998.

In October and November of 1998, I spent several weeks in Buenos Aires, Argentina as part of a faculty exchange between the University of Georgia School of Law and the Universidad del Salvador (USAL). My activities were funded by a United States Information Agency grant, which supports a 3-year project focusing on dispute resolution in the Americas. The grant's administrators charged me with the broad task of setting up "efficient means of sharing information between the two schools." The bulk of my time was spent at the Biblioteca Central (Main Library) of the Universidad del Salvador (USAL) in Buenos Aires. My main contact while there was the library's director, Laura Martino. The staff in USAL's International Development Office, along with Laura Martino, coordinated most of my activities.

Below is a description of my major activities during the visit:

- worked with USAL library staff to create a Web site on dispute resolution in MERCOSUR; the framework of the site is bilingual (English and Spanish), although most of the contents will only be in Spanish;
- met with member of Argentina's joint parliamentary commission on MERCOSUR to discuss obtaining electronic copies of relevant documents for publication on the Web site;
- provided several training sessions on the U.S. legal system and Web resources for library staff, law students, and members of RedAmicus (consortium of private university librarians in Buenos Aires);
- received training from Biblioteca Central staff in researching Argentine legal materials via the internet and other electronic means;
- met with USAL's Legal Informatics Department for a demonstration of Sistema Argentino de Informática Jurídica (subscription database containing Argentine legal materials);
- along with Dr. Eugene Younts (UGA Vice President for Public Service and Outreach and Associate Provost), visited USAL's Pilar campus outside of Buenos Aires; met with the branch librarian at the Pilar campus;
- arranged to assist USAL students who will represent the United States in the 1999 Model OAS;
- assisted USAL library in preparing their first "auto-evaluation" by providing relevant library science publications and arranging for transmission by Professor Ann Puckett of draft copies of the self-study recently completed by UGA's Law Library and Computing Services Department;
- met with the deputy secretary for cultural affairs (a USIA employee) at the U.S. embassy in Buenos Aires and reported on my activities in relation to the USIA grant;

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- visited several libraries in Buenos Aires, including the Economics and Social Sciences library at the Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), the UBA Law Library, the Information Resource Center at the United States embassy in Buenos Aires, the Legislative Reference Library for Argentina's Congress, and the Argentina Library of Congress;
- arranged to exchange materials with USAL's library; we will lend books to each other subject to copyright laws and each library's circulation policies; photocopied articles may be faxed if not too lengthy; electronic materials can be e-mailed; reference assistance at both libraries will be available to users of either library;
- asked for recommendations for arbitration experts who should participate in a planned arbitration conference in Buenos Aires next fall;
- discussed possibility of a "Call for Papers" by students in both institutions on the subject of alternative dispute resolution in the Americas, with winning paper to be published on the project's Web site; as a follow-up to these discussions, I have sent the USAL library a copy of the Uniform System of Citation, which will be necessary for any USAL student or faculty who desire to publish in U.S. legal periodicals.

Comments:

My hosts at USAL were generous, warm, and made my visit pleasant and productive. Although my inadequate Spanish skills provided numerous obstacles, the USAL main library staff went to great lengths to help me to overcome those difficulties. In particular, the library's director, Laura Martino, spent many hours each week translating for me during training sessions and meetings. In addition, Laura Martino arranged for my visits to other libraries and accompanied me on these trips. She was instrumental in identifying and contacting Professor Moya Dominguez for the purpose of obtaining the parliamentary documents on MERCOSUR. She also arranged for several social activities in the evenings and on the weekends.

My visit came at a very busy time for the USAL main library, as they are in the midst of preparing their first-ever auto-evaluation along with the usual year-end reports, yet they still devoted much in the way of time and other resources to working with me on grant-related projects. Specifically, my work on the MERCOSUR Web site monopolized the library's one internet workstation, which serves the entire library staff and any USAL faculty or students who come to the library for Web access. These difficulties highlighted the disparity in resources between our libraries. In general, libraries in the United States enjoy far greater access to both print and electronic materials. I was impressed by the resourcefulness of Laura Martino and her small staff in maximizing the access they provide despite their limited resources.

Similarly, Mirta Barreiro and the staff of USAL's international development office worked hard to make my visit as productive and enjoyable as possible. My accommodations at the Edificio Arenales were clean, pleasant and in a wonderful location. The apart/hotel is a brisk 40-minute walk, or an inexpensive cab ride or Subte (underground train) ride to the USAL library. The hotel is one block from the Foreign Ministry, the Plaza San Martín, and numerous cafes and restaurants. The front desk staff speak English.

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The visit provided a unique opportunity to share resources and information with my colleagues in Buenos Aires. We made good progress on grant-related projects and formed relationships that should prove beneficial to both institutions. As we continue to work together, I anticipate that we will discover additional ways to share resources, and I hope that a representative from the USAL library will be included in the list of future visitors to UGA. In addition to the professional advantages offered by such an exchange, I enjoyed the personal enrichment afforded by immersing myself in such a colourful and cosmopolitan culture. I am pleased and fortunate to have had this experience.