

Final Rotary Report

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I want to begin my Final Report by thanking everyone who will read it and everyone else at the Rotary Foundation for providing me with this unparalleled opportunity. I realize it is through the hard work and support of many Rotarians, in my sponsor district, in my host district, and in Evanston, who have made this entire program available to me. I continue to feel extremely fortunate and extremely appreciative to have been given such a wonderful opportunity by the Rotary Foundation. After having served as an Ambassador of Goodwill, I am a complete advocate for this scholarship program. I believe it is a productive and valuable investment by Rotary towards world peace and understanding. Early in my ambassadorial year the outgoing governor of my host district here in Buenos Aires (D. 4890) held a welcoming meeting for all new scholars. She reminded us of the many productive projects that Rotary could support with its funds and emphasized the responsibility we therefore carried to use our time productively. Many disadvantaged people could be helped, for example, with the money used to fund ambassadorial scholarships. I have therefore tried hard to live up to that responsibility and serve as a good ambassador. I believe my experience gained, the work I have done, and the connections made have been a good investment, and I hope my current and future work to further world peace will continue to make Rotary's investment worthwhile.

My life in Buenos Aires was very good and the whole year was a challenging, fun, life-changing experience. My Spanish improved, I met very interesting people, I made wonderful friendships, I am completing a masters degree in finance, and most importantly I was able to work on (and continue to work on) a successful service project. I have had significant contact with other Rotary Ambassadorial Scholars studying in Buenos Aires. In fact, I worked with three other scholars on the Patagonia Project, a service project we created to improve the educational infrastructure at poor, rural Argentine schools. The Patagonia Project is what I am most proud of accomplishing as an ambassadorial scholar. I know my talks at local Rotary clubs and the friendships I made in and out of my university have been important opportunities to create links between Argentina and the U.S. I also know that I have educated my friends and family in the United States more about Argentina's history and the role the U.S. has played (both good and bad) in shaping the nation and region's histories. Nonetheless, I know my role with the Patagonia Project is the most important accomplishment I made as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar. Not only have we raised nearly \$8000 USD (and counting!) for poor schools, but we have engaged a local rotary club to become more

involved in community service and we have raised awareness of Argentina's economic and social problems in the United States. Furthermore, I have really enjoyed working with my fellow Ambassadorial Scholars on the project, and we plan on continuing it through at least the end of 2007. Not only has the project allowed us to improve a few schools in Patagonia, but it has also allowed the four of us to establish a very close relationship with the Rotary Club of Puerto Madero that is sponsoring the project, as well as learn more about Argentina, and teach Argentine students about Rotary and the U.S.

During my scholarship year I studied at Universidad Torcuato di Tella, which specializes in social sciences and is modeled off U.S. liberal arts schools. Most of the professors received their degrees in the U.S., so the teaching style and expectations were familiar to me. During the nine months I completed all the coursework for a Master's in Finance and am now working on my thesis project, the final requirement for the degree. I feel very fortunate about finding this program of study. I studied economics as an undergraduate, and although I was not positive about my interest in finance beforehand, I found many of my classes were natural continuations of topics I had covered as an undergraduate. Furthermore, my finance classes sparked a new interest in entrepreneurialism and the power of socially responsible business. Because it was a one-year program, it also allowed me to leave Argentina with a degree which will be helpful for finding work upon return. Furthermore, the program was only part-time, and therefore left me with plenty of time for my ambassadorial responsibilities and the rotary service project in which I have been engaged. I liked the program enough that I recommended it to another ambassadorial scholar who will be studying in Argentina in 2007.

Buenos Aires is a very unique city and Argentina has a unique culture that I have enjoyed getting to know and learn about. I was fortunate enough to travel to provinces in the far northeast, northwest, west, and south of Argentina, as well as in and around the province of Buenos Aires. I also had the opportunity to visit neighboring Uruguay (on a Rotaract exchange trip) and Chile. Besides having the opportunity to travel widely across the country and region, I also made sure that I read the newspaper, read Argentine literature as well as listened to local music to learn more about national politics and Argentine culture. Meanwhile, it is impossible to live abroad without learning more about your own country and culture. For example, something that surprised me was how closely Argentines followed the U.S. congressional elections in 2006. Often coverage of the campaign was at the front of the newspaper, even appearing on the front page. I think this made me realize how important our elections are to much of the rest of the world, and how little Americans generally are aware of that. You will never see an article on the Argentine presidential campaign in U.S. papers (or very rarely) but our politics and policies affect so many people worldwide that I understand why people here were so interested in our domestic politics. While living here I also learned much more about the U.S.'s historic role in Latin America. From supporting Latin American dictators for several decades as well as economic policies which are blamed on increased unemployment and poverty in the region, there are many reasons to expect that Americans would be unwelcome here. Nonetheless, I consistently felt welcomed in the city and country and was surprised by the how open and curious most people were about the United States. I also was impressed how

engaged many Argentines were with their own local politics. For example, it seemed to me that there are many more street protests, picket lines, and marches than in the United States. I cannot even think of the last major street protest I saw in the U.S., especially for issues related to human rights or the environment, although that is not uncommon in Argentina.

The Ambassadorial Scholarship process has been a positive one from the beginning. I thought the application process was fair and well organized. My outbound scholar orientation at Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri was informative and productive, and my reception in Argentina upon arrival was warm. I especially appreciated that there was a scholar at my outbound orientation who had previously studied in Argentina. Although not all clubs in Buenos Aires seemed very accessible, there were a few that went out of their way to include myself and other ambassadorial scholars in their activities and projects. Also, my scholarship counselor in Evanston was friendly and helpful throughout the tedious pre-departure process. For all these reasons and more, I would definitely recommend the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship to my peers; it has been a truly wonderful experience. Furthermore, I think Argentina and Buenos Aires were great places to serve in an ambassadorial capacity. The city has many Rotary clubs, there are lots of opportunities for volunteer work and many ways to serve the community. When I return to the U.S., I would like to stay involved with Rotary. I am very much looking forward to sharing my experiences in my sponsor club and district, but I also want to make sure I speak to non-Rotary audiences as well. I think that is a wonderful opportunity to publicize the great work Rotary is doing around the world and its programs. Not only do I want to work to increase awareness of Rotary International and its mission of world peace, but I also want to work to increase the awareness of the Ambassadorial Scholarship itself. Currently I do not feel the Ambassadorial Scholarship has the same level of name recognition as other fellowships such as the Fulbright. This is unfortunate. The Ambassadorial Scholarship is such a wonderful opportunity to learn more about oneself, learn more about a specific country, improve a foreign language, and make a positive difference towards world peace. Again, I cannot express my gratitude for having had this experience. I only hope I can show my appreciation by staying truly engaged with Rotary International and continuing to work towards its mission of world peace and better international understanding.