

**Academic Consortium Board**

**Evaluation of CIEE Academic Year (semester), Winter and Summer Programs at  
Universidad de Guanajuato, México**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Guanajuato Study Center began in fall 2002 as a Language and Culture Program. The first Resident Director, Karen Rodríguez, led the Study Center through fall 2012. The initial program combined two CIEE courses with direct enrollment in two courses at University of Guanajuato Escuela de Idiomas. In 2003 the Study Center began to offer its own language courses and an additional History course as well as an Independent Research Project carried out by students during the last weeks of the program. In spring 2004, a study center office was secured in the colonial center of the city. The initial program was designed for students with 0-3 semesters of college-level Spanish and by spring 2005 the Center was offering a new Liberal Arts program for students with 4 plus semesters of college-level Spanish. Beginning in 2003, the Center began to sponsor a summer program that feature two 3-week sessions offering community-based Spanish language and two CIEE content courses.

A full ACB evaluation of the Guanajuato programs was conducted in 2005. It was extremely favorable. Amongst its recommendations, two are salient: to expand direct enrollment opportunities and to develop a recruitment strategy. In 2009, CIEE Guanajuato made several changes to the Liberal Arts program model to give students better access to direct enrollment at the University in three departments: Art, History, and Literature. This same year, however, CIEE Guanajuato was forced to implement contingency plans due to an outbreak of H1N1 flu in Mexico. By 2013 opportunities for direct enrollment at the University had expanded considerably with students being able to select courses in any department of the University that was appropriate for their academic interests.

A two-credit Seminar on Living and Learning was offered in 2013 and 2014 with mixed results. Seminar was replaced in 2015 with the new Intercultural Communication and Leadership course, but there were insufficient enrollment to offer the course in spring 2015.

CIEE Guanajuato offered a Winter Spanish language program in 2014 and 2015. Enrollment has been low but feedback has been positive. The summer program was reconfigured as a Short-Term program with three 4-week sessions as of 2014 and courses were added to make the program more attractive. Feedback for the initial program was very positive.

CIEE Guanajuato has added considerable co-curricular activities in the past two years: volunteer projects with six different local community organizations dedicated to women and children's

education, nutrition, human rights, animal protection, migration and job seeking skill development. In addition, out-of-the classroom activities are linked to CIEE courses on History and Migration.

Many of the changes and new initiatives mentioned above started when the new Resident Director, Beth West, took over in May 2013. Other changes include a significant effort to update host family information and provide better communication, training and support. Host families are now visited a minimum of once per year by resident staff, have pre-and post-semester meetings and training sessions, and receive regular phone call/check-ins. In addition, the center offers regular cultural activities every week; it also has a Facebook group and a student content generated blog. The Resident Director also holds frequent check in sessions with students to monitor and support their personal and academic goals, cultural adaptation, and overall satisfaction with the program. It has been, however, a challenging transition period with unstable enrollment due not only to the flu outbreak mentioned above but also to the ongoing U.S. Department of State travel warning for Mexico. At present, the Resident Director is assisted by three part-time resident staff: Program Assistant, Program Secretary and a Special Projects Coordinator.

While over the years enrollments have remained small and student satisfaction with course and services has gone down, the changes introduced should allow the program to improve and succeed going forward. Partnership with the University has been and remains strong. Short-term programming in the summer for students with little background in Spanish and some courses in English might help increase the center's enrollments. It should also be noted that over the years the Guanajuato Center has attracted consistently heritage seekers (half semester participants) and that a carefully designed recruitment strategy may significantly increase their participation.

### **Focus of Evaluation:**

The evaluation team (ET) focused on all applicable Terms of Reference which included the following: Academic Framework; Teaching and Learning (semester, winter and summer programs); Quality and Appropriateness of Students; Student Preparation for the Learning Environment; Quality and Appropriateness of Services; Health, Safety and Security; Quality of Facilities; Perception of Stakeholders. The team paid special attention to the Learning Environment, the Appropriateness of Services for orientation and for safety and security issues, and the Perception of Key Stakeholders (resident staff, students, CIEE faculty, the University representatives). There was no monitoring report for 2014. The team considered apparent downward trends in student evaluations of CIEE courses. . It also explored adjustments to staff and projected programming at the center as well as the new program facilities.

### **Key Discussions/Findings:**

**Orientation and CIEE courses:** At present, academic advising during the week-long orientation is handled by the Resident Director, who presents CIEE courses and eventually approves final course selections. The ET believes that CIEE faculty should engage more with students during the orientation period so that each faculty member presents their own course and meets with students individually to discuss course content and requirements. CIEE courses need to be presented by the faculty. Courses are their domain and having them present their courses presents a very good opportunity for students to be introduced to their prospective instructors. Furthermore, the program faculty is the indispensable and most logical source of information about CIEE courses—they should all be present at the orientation and join the RD who will, of course, present her own class. These two modifications will enhance existing initiatives for on-site advising with both a team-oriented and individualized approach to advising and course selection at the very beginning of the semester programs, that is, when it matters most to both students and faculty.

**Co-curricular activities:** While Guanajuato and Mexico offer rich opportunities for cultural activities, volunteer work and excursions and the recent hiring of a Program Assistant to handle and explore these can significantly strengthen the support the Guanajuato Center offers students to structure their experiences and contextualize their learning, the current part-time status of the Program Assistant makes achieving these goals in a sustainable matter in the long term quite challenging.

**Language and communication at the Center:** For a number of semesters student evaluations include consistent expressions of disappointment due to the use of English during the orientation, excursions and at the Center. **Assessment:** The ET appreciates CIEE's interest in getting a sense of how students grow academically and culturally at the Guanajuato Study Center, but feels strongly that for assessment to be really valuable it must avoid taking the form of standardized tests that generate numbers and percentages but little else.

**Marketing:** The Center attracts students who not only are motivated, academically curious, focused and, almost in spite of the common stereotypes that exist in the United States and not necessarily displaying naiveté, very eager to explore Mexico, but also aware of the cultural richness that exists in Mexico and the complexity that accompanies it. It is also apparent that Guanajuato is an important destination for heritage students and those interested in migration. The online presentation of Guanajuato by CIEE does not, however, adequately touch on this. Instead, it offers descriptions that evoke those found in tourists' brochures or airline magazines.

**Housing:** The arrival program protocol for homestay families that has been in place and delivered with considerable success for years will change so that, instead of staying in a hotel and meeting as a group over a special dinner with their Guanajuato families, upon arrival students will be sent to their Guanajuato homes immediately. The ET questions the change, mindful that the arrival protocol for homestays has supported students and their families (their actual families in the US and the Guanajuato families) extremely well and might in fact be one of

the reasons that, in spite of how difficult recruitment for Mexico programs is, the Center has maintained and, at times, increased slightly its enrollment.

**Re-entry Programming:** The ET recognizes the value of re-entry programming and believes that, in this study center in particular, it should take into consideration that the program attracts very good students who, while taking courses at the University of Guanajuato and living with local families, find themselves among peers who interact with professors and adults at a certain mature and professional level. Careful design of re-entry activities will help the Center staff avoid programming that engages participants as individuals in need of care and treatment that may in fact condescend to their abilities and learning needs and goals.

**Center Growth and Staffing:** While considerable progress appears to have been made and the Center operation has been regularized, the ET is concerned that the RD is currently the only full-time staff at a Center that is seeking to offer program all year long and needs an assistant who must be able to deal with Portland, students on-site as well as the UG and local organizations and partners. Furthermore, overlapping in August is imminent, and this raises questions about the staff's ability to handle vital arrival and departure protocols as well as when in the year will there be time for the staff and the RD for re-evaluation, examination and forward-thinking.

**Center Management:** The ET had a very positive impression of the staff and the way they work together to carry out the goals of the center. The center staff recognizes that the RD is professional and has made a tremendous effort to organize and ensure the smooth running of the center. Still, as the team met individually with the part-time staff members a number of concerns came to light. As such, while the overall impression was of a highly functional team, some mentoring is necessary.

**Facilities:** The new facilities are excellent but reconsidering the current organization of the Center's space allocation is desirable.

### **Primary Recommendations:**

1. **Recommendation V:** That the language pledge be observed at all times during orientation, excursions and at the Center. .
2. **Recommendation VIII:** That CIEE promptly undertake a re-conceptualization of the marketing materials for the Guanajuato Study Center and develop a sound recruitment strategy for the center.
3. **Recommendation IX:** That the effective arrival program protocol for homestays used very successfully for years be restored immediately.
4. **Recommendation XIV:** That a full-time Assistant Director be hired before the beginning of the summer sessions and that the calendar for the Center and staff be revised so that indispensable time to regroup, reflect, recharge batteries and gain perspective be part of the center's year calendar.

5. **Recommendation XVII:** That the RD office be moved to the main floor of the Center and that the top floor office be shared by all center staff for special projects or activities.

### **CIEE Action Plan**

*In response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) Evaluation of the CIEE Study Center at Guanajuato, Mexico Academic Year (semester), Winter and Summer Programs*

### **Overview**

CIEE staff are pleased to provide this Action Plan in response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) report on the CIEE Study Center in Guanajuato, Mexico. The report of the site visit was received by members of the ACB at the Spring 2015 meeting. After review, the ACB accepted the report, and presented it to the Academic Consortium.

The Action Plan outlines the key recommendations from the Evaluation and the specific steps CIEE plans to follow to address the recommendation. The Action Plan should be read in light of the ACB Evaluation and with reference to the detailed description of the program available from CIEE.

The “ACB Plan for Program Evaluation”, the Evaluation report, the Action Plan, and program details are available at [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org).

### **Actions**

*ACB Recommendation*

**RECOMMENDATION #1** *That the language pledge be observed at all time during orientation, excursions and at the Center.*

*Action*

CIEE does not have language pledges, per se, but observes community language commitments. The RDO will work with the RD to reinforce the need to observe the community language commitment during the orientation, excursions, and at the Study Center. The RDO will work with Guanajuato staff to review the various program components and implement language commitment strategies used successfully by other CIEE Study Centers with language programs.

*ACB Recommendation*

**RECOMMENDATION #2** *That CIEE promptly undertake a re-conceptualization of the marketing materials for the Guanajuato Study Center and develop a sound recruitment strategy for the center.*

*Action*

During the months of May and June the RDO, with input from the RD, worked with the Marketing team to review and change the language used to market the CIEE Study Center in Guanajuato in both the 2016 catalogs and on CIEE's Study Abroad website. The new wording specifically targets Heritage Seekers, given that they make up a significant portion of students who end up choosing the location for their study abroad experience. Further work will continue to be carried out by the RDO and RD with the Marketing team to develop a long-term recruitment strategy for the Study Center.

*ACB Recommendation*

**RECOMMENDATION #3**

That the effective arrival program protocol for homestays used very successfully for years be restored immediately.

*Action*

While we understand evaluation team's concerns, CIEE has revised and strengthened its housing policies worldwide with a focus on consistency, quality and health, safety and security. One aspect of the new housing policy is that students move directly into their housing assignment on the first day of the program, flight arrival times and other logistics permitting. There are multiple reasons behind the change: to assist with student adaptation to the locale and bonding with local people, whether in the homestay or in student housing; to improve orientation logistics; and to use orientation monies more effectively. Orientation sessions covering essential topics including health, safety and security will be held on arrival day. CIEE has run this arrival protocol at numerous locations worldwide for several years very successfully, and we believe it will be successful in Guanajuato as well. We will, of course, monitor and evaluate the implementation of these changes and make adjustments as needed.

*ACB Recommendation*

**RECOMMENDATION #4 That a full-time Assistant Director be hired before the beginning of the summer sessions and that the calendar for the Center and staff be revised so that indispensable time to regroup, reflect, recharge batteries and gain perspective be part of the center's year calendar.**

*Action*

The Executive Director of Program Management and the RDO will continue to work with the RD to determine optimum levels of staffing throughout the year given the addition of new programming during the summer, January and May periods.

*ACB Recommendation*

**RECOMMENDATION #5 That the RD office be moved to the main floor of the Center and that the top floor office be shared by all center staff for special projects or activities.**

*Action*

The new RDO will be visiting the Study Center this fall and will determine together with the resident staff and the Executive Director of Program Management the optimal configuration of the new Study Center and staff offices.

Written by: Catharine Scruggs, Executive Director of Program Management and Craig  
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Date: August 25, 2015