PARIS BIA PROGRAM REVIEW, SPRING 2011 – REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

I. STUDENT LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Pre-departure Information:
In speaking with the students the committee gained the impression that the pre-departure information and connection they made with the Center was very positive. They were able to establish e-mail connection and were able to ask questions and generally felt comfortable with this initial relationship. No recommendation.

On-Site Cultural and Academic Orientation:
The students spoke very highly of their early time at the center. They generally indicated that everyone was helpful and informative and they received a sense that the staff truly cared about their successful adjustment to the new environment. The Student and Academic Handbook is an excellent reference. It is updated for each semester and is an excellent document. No recommendation.

Instructional Quality:
In the course of the two days one committee member sat in on seven different classes. Obviously each faculty member commanded a different style and approach to the class, but it was easy to observe that each one was able to connect with the students. Students were clearly comfortable in asking questions and engaging in a dialog with the instructor and with the other students. The atmosphere in each class was relaxed, comfortable and a good learning environment. No recommendation.

From examination of the syllabi and the mid-term examinations in all the courses that the committee member attended, the standards of academic expectations from the students give the impression of strength. The syllabi follow a general format and provided appropriate information including course description and objectives, grading requirements and a class schedule. One thing the committee did not see in the syllabi was a statement about expected academic integrity. The Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy is part of the Academic Handbook, but the committee recommends a reference to it be included in each syllabi. (Note: one of the syllabi did have such a statement).

From the classroom observations and the information in the syllabi for the courses observed, it appears that the faculty expectation for student work is rigorous. The committee read over mid-term exams in all the courses, and found the caliber of the questions and the coverage of information to be of high standards. There was good exchange of ideas, questions and discussion in all the classes. No recommendation.

With student/teacher dialogue in the classes there was discussion of e-mail messages between the faculty and the students. It appeared that this was a very natural and routine part of the faculty/student relationship. No recommendation.

Each class has mandatory field studies programs to supplement learning. Programs ranged from local visits to locations like the Office of the European Commission in Paris, the Cite des Sciences, Paris, Memorial Leclerc et de la liberation de Paris, and the offices of LVMH. Also there are field trips available to such locations as Fontainebleau, Reims, Versailles and Strasbourg. Locations vary from time to time. No recommendation.
II. STUDENT LEARNING: ASSESSMENT AND INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

In a short visit it is difficult to assess the student and cultural development. The curriculum and course structure is set up to provide a broad range of French intellectual and cultural exposure for the students in political, economic and business.

In follow up discussions with Nancy Kenyon, we did discuss the notion of a study of the top 15-20 universities that send students to the IES Paris BIA. It would be possible to examine and compare the fall and spring business courses offered at those schools, and to build a comparison matrix to determine the relative match of courses offered by the Center with largest group of schools that send students to the Center. This way the Center could make an assessment of the match of courses and timing for the courses the Center offers, with the target universities. Of course, a one-to-one course match won’t be possible, but the Center would be aware of the target school programs and requirements for future planning. This could be a project for a summer intern.

III. RESOURCES FOR ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Faculty Qualifications:
Based upon the faculty CVs presented in the advanced briefing documents it would appear that all faculty members have strong credentials in their subject matter. The two day brief review did not provide sufficient time to go beyond a review of faculty CVs. No recommendation.

Academic Advising
No observation was made about the quality and standards for student advising. No recommendation.

Academic Center Staff Size:
Currently the ratio of staff to students is approximately 1 to 20, with three staff members for 56 students. We did discuss with the Director the idea of seeking volunteers from among the American expatriate community to help with field trips and other Center events. In this context it may be possible to cultivate relationships with other foreigners who are in responsible positions with local and foreign companies for increase the possibility for field study program.

Center Facilities:
The IES BIA Center has a pleasant and open environment. There are two classrooms, 3 offices, a resource center and a computer room in the basement. The observation of the committee is that the facility does feel cramped when students are present between classes or other times. Obviously, appropriate classroom and office facilities in Paris may be limited and expensive. It is recommended that the Center put together a long-term plan to look for a larger space.

Access to Local Educational and Cultural Institutions and Research Resources:
Students have access to six different libraries, which provide a broad range of resource material in both French and English. In addition they have access to the JSTOR Collection. They can also buy textbooks from the SMD bookstore that comes to the Center at the beginning of the term. Books can be purchased at a reasonable price. No recommendation.
Instructional Technology:
This appears to be an area where Improvement could be made. In the lower floor of the building there are a number of computers and two printers. At several times during the day either between classes or during break periods the room is full of students and very crowded. This is the only “lounge space” they have and it is a multipurpose room.

Students complained about the quality of the internet connections. They indicated, at times, the connection is slow or inconsistent. In reviewing this issue with the staff there was agreement that the internet connection needs improvement and that there is a plan to do this.

Only one of the classrooms has a flat screen to view PowerPoint slides. In the other rooms there are projectors, but they project onto traditional white boards, which is very unsatisfactory. In general the classroom A/V equipment is not up to modern classroom standards.

Students also complained that the internet connections that they have at either the home stays or apartments are inadequate. The connections are intermittent, often slow and not up to a quality broadband standard.

Recommendations:
Improve or upgrade the Internet connection to the highest standard possible in the center. It may be suitable for some connections to be hardwired but a complete high speed wifi connection is also required. The speed should be high enough to bring full internet capability into the classroom for video and web site examination.

In the rooms without a flat screen, the committee suggests buying pull-down white screens for projection. It might be possible to mount the projector from the wall or the ceiling to provide quality A/V capability. Additionally the capability to connect to the Internet and to project videos, web sites and other information on the web would be a very useful and appropriate feature in today’s modern classroom.

The committee recommends that each of the various living accommodations be reviewed to determine what improvements can be made in the internet connection speed and quality. Perhaps the Center can subsidize the host families to make sure the Internet capability is up the highest standard possible.

Student Qualifications:
The committee was not able to make any type of assessment on the qualifications of students. Presumably each institution from which they come would have a set of standards by which students would qualify for the IES program.

Conclusion:
The IES Paris BIA is a very impressive organization. The staff is very dedicated to providing students with the best educational and cultural experience they can. The atmosphere is open, relaxed and conducive to a very positive experience for the students. With the exception of a few recommendations that relate more to the physical plant, the committee is pleased to give full marks to the Center, and to highly recommend that students who are interested in a French study abroad experience consider IES Paris.