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Exchange partner school: INCAE Business School (Costa Rica)

Period: 15th August – 2nd October

Re: Report from exchange program

1. Academic part

INCAE Business school is a university located in Central America. It has its campuses in Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It was set up on request of USA President JF Kennedy by Harvard Business School. It claims to be the best business school in Latin America.

INCAE is the business school with the highest ratio of doctoral-level, full-time professors in Latin America.

INCAE actively uses the case method as a participative methodology that leads to the development of an exceptional analytical ability which cannot be acquired through conferences and presentations. A case is a document developed in cooperation with company executives. It shows all the necessary dimensions of the business for students to analyze a particular situation thoroughly and suggest alternative courses of action to solve the problem.

INCAE's teaching methodology focuses on the participant, encouraging a comprehensive learning experience through methods, case discussion, group work, management simulations and self-training activities.

The INCAE MBA is a full-time two-year program. Each academic year is divided into two semesters and each semester is currently divided into two modules of 8 weeks each. The structure will change for students coming in the fall semester of 2011. All core courses are taken during the first year. During the second year students take all their electives and concentrations. It is possible to focus on the following areas: General Management, Industry and Technology Management, Sustainable Development, Business Economics and Finance, and Marketing (Nicaragua campus only). In addition to all the elective work, INCAE students must carry out their Management Consulting Practice (MCP) or fieldwork, traditionally

known as Trabajo de Campo. This assignment is planned months in advance and takes place during the second module of the first semester of second year (October to December 2010; January to March 2012).

School policies are very strict and students need to commit to the program full-time moving to the campus housing. Every first year course is to special grading called S curve. It means that certain amount of people has to fail the class and the grades are also distributed accordingly. That is why there is very strong competition among students and it makes the program very famous and valuable among future employers.

Exchange students can take only second year courses which are “easier” and professors are not that great as in the first year. The courses are both in Spanish and English. The surprise came when I enrolled to 5 courses and when I reached Costa Rica the coordinator informed us that last minute changes applied and some of the courses will not be provided in English, but we will get simultaneous translation. It was very inconvenient and some students, including me, decided to drop the courses.

Students must take 3-5 second-year courses per module (or 9 credit hours minimum). Language requirement: TOEFL (90 minimum or equivalent). Students must be able to actively participate in class discussions regardless of the language of instruction of the course. Depending on the requirements of their home institution, exchange students may take courses only in English or only in Spanish. Keep in mind that a working knowledge of Spanish is necessary to get around campus and town.

Methodology: 70% case study analysis and discussion, and 30% lecture. The specific method depends on the nature of the course. However, all courses are very demanding and students have to be prepared. Class participation can be 60% of the final grade in some cases. Students are expected to read and prepare all the material assigned individually and to check their e-mail regularly for last-minute instructions from professors, even during the weekend or holidays (Easter Week).

Below you can find courses available for Fall semester. From courses I took and audited I can truly recommend Supply Chain Management and Global Macroeconomic Trends. The second one is conducted by Alberto Trejos, ex-Ministry of Foreign Affairs who negotiated CAFTA with USA. I do not recommend Corporate Strategy nor Family Enterprises.

SECOND-YEAR COURSES

COURSES	LANGUAGE	CREDITS	CONTACT HOURS	TYPE OF COURSE	DATES
MODULE 7					
Corporate Strategy	English	3	26.66	ELECTIVE	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Estrategia de Operaciones	Spanish	3	26.66	MANDATORY	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Supply Chain Management	English	1.5	13.33	I & T	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Money and Banking	English	3	26.66	E & F	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Family Enterprises	English	1.5	13.33	ELECTIVE	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Microeconomics of Competitiveness	English	3	26.66	ELECTIVE	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Global Macroeconomic Trends	English	1.5	13.33	E & F	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Gerencia de la Sostenibilidad	Spanish	3	26.66	MANDATORY	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
Social Networks	English	1.5	13.33	ELECTIVE	15 Aug - 14 Oct 2011
MODULE 8					
Gerencia de Servicios	Spanish	3	26.66	I & T	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Gerencia de Tecnología y Sistemas de Información	Spanish	3	26.66	MANDATORY	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Gerencia de Microfinanzas	Spanish	1.5	13.33	E & F	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
International Trade	English	3	26.66	E & F	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
E-Business	English	3	26.66	ELECTIVE	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Introducción a la Consultoría		1.5	13.33	MANDATORY	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Fusiones y Adquisiciones	Spanish	1.5	13.33	E & F	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Creating Value from Values	English	1.5	13.33	SD	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Gerencia de RRHH	Spanish	3	26.66	MANDATORY	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
Investigación de Mercados	Spanish	3	26.66	ELECTIVE	17 Oct -16 Dec 2011
MODULE 10					
Dinámica de Sistemas	Spanish	3	26.66	I & T	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Gestión de la Innovación y la Tecnología	Spanish	1.5	26.66	I & T	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Financial Institutions and Capital Markets	English	3	26.66	E & F	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Entrepreneurial Finance	English	1.5	13.33	E & F	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Finanzas Internacionales	Spanish	3	26.66	E & F	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Cultura & Valores	Spanish	1.5	26.66	ELECTIVE	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Gestión de la Calidad	Spanish	3	26.66	I & T	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Procesos Gerenciales	Spanish	3	26.66	MANDATORY	23 Mar - 25 May 2012
Advanced Marketing	English	3	26.66	MANDATORY	23 Mar - 25 May 2012

There is possibility to learn Spanish. INCAE organized for exchange students 15 classes free of charge, which was very helpful as not many people in Costa Rica speak English.

2. Life & Cultural Life

Every exchange students has a buddy, which is very helpful at the beginning as the campus is located 1 hour from San Jose, in a fairly isolated area, and the public transportation system is not very good.

If you're single, you'll be assigned a room in a house for single students. If you're married and your family is coming with you, there is possibility to reserve a house for married couples with or without children. All rooms have double occupancy, mainly because there are some housing limitations. In one house live 8 students in 4 rooms. There's a refrigerator to keep cold beverages, yogurt, ham, cheese, fruit or other things for breakfast. and sink in the common area together with dining table. There is also small conference room for studying and group meetings. There is a ceiling fan in every bedroom. Bed linen and towels will be

provided, but if I suggest to take your own. You have to pay the laundry service for towels and bed linens as well.

Cooking at home is banned in houses for single students and they have to rely on the students mess, where lunch and dinner are provided. The food is not very tasty and healthy. In addition it is very expensive with comparison to regular local restaurant outside campus. Nevertheless students do not have many alternatives choice and are forced to purchase the prepaid card in advance in order to use canteen.

There is many facilities in the campus to do sports. Outdoor swimming pool, but there is no lifeguard on duty at any time. If you choose to use the swimming pool, you do so at your own risk. The soccer field is available during daylight hours. Soccer balls can be borrowed at the Oficina de Vida Estudiantil. Place called hard bar: It's the students' recreational center with a pool table, ping-pong table, mini-soccer tables, cable TV, and music. There is also tennis Court. You MUST sign up to play. On the first floor of the classrooms building, near the court, you will find a small bulletin board with a listing of available hours. You must sign your name on this list on the same day you want to play. No one can play for more than 60 minutes on any given day unless there is no reservation made for the following hour. Gym and Sauna are opened from 6:00a.m. to 8:00p.m.

Students in the fall semester are changing their attitude towards classmates as second year is not that competitive. It means there will be many BBQs and parties in the houses. This is time to socialize. Local students are not very open to mingle with exchange students as they have usually bad experience from previous year second year students. That is because INCAE requires 2 years of working experience and most of exchange students are master students without it. The distance changes with every party and socializing event.

First phrase you will catch in Spanish is "Pura Vida". It means pure life and is used instead of cheers, thanks and bye. Costa Rica is country famous for its tourism. Many Americans choose Costa Rica as the place for retirement because of its safety, standard of living and medical infrastructure. That is why the prices in Costa Rica are very high in comparison to other Central American countries, like Nicaragua or El Salvador.

Costa Rica is a land of volcanoes, rain forests, waterfalls, and rivers. Adventure travelers can choose from a variety of activities such as rafting, snorkeling, kayaking, sport fishing, surfing, and lots more.

Life in Costa Rica is pretty expensive. Students pay tuition at their home institution. Expenses for a single student at INCAE include:

- Materials \$69 per course
- Photocopies \$35 per month
- Housing \$511.50 per module (8 weeks)
- Electricity \$20 per month
- Transportation \$30 per month (approx.)
- Recreation \$150 per month (approx.)
- Linens Deposit \$50 (if you don't want to bring your own)
- Food Lunch and Dinner, Meal plan available for 70% of all meals (\$541.50)

The only cheap thing is telecommunication. The rates for messaging and calls are very low. The only thing you need to present is your passport and pay 5\$ for the first recharge.

In order to make shopping exchange students need to rely on the help of local students. Without a car it is very difficult to commute. Usually local students go once a week to make big shopping in the nearest supermarket and they are glad to take you with them.

3. Notice for future students

INCAE is very good business school with top tier students among Latin America – it is perfect place for networking and learning Spanish.

If you are interested in exchange in Costa Rica below are some of my recommendations for you:

1. Choose Spring semester. You will join MCP project which is Management Consulting Practice students do to use their MBA knowledge. It might be even in other country and is amazing experience to be involved in real case problem of company or government. In addition you can get great cultural insights and it doesn't rain all the time like in Fall semester.
2. Check the courses of the first year. Some of the professors are spectacular and you can always ask for auditing the class,

3. Prepare yourself for a lot of reading materials and spending time really on reading it.
4. Be prepared for the classes as professors do cold calling. It is always better to be proactive during discussions in the classes
5. Clarify the VISA need. Students during my exchange period applied for it in Costa Rica. They entered on touristic visa.
6. There is many hidden costs behind your exchange: electricity bill, internet at house, laundry of your rented towel and linens, cleaning and copyrights for all materials used.
7. Do not forget to use Career Services at INCAE. They provide you with in-house consulting about career development including building CV, employee branding, professional photo session, personality tests.
8. Bring your formal dress because you can participate in all companies' presentations and placements. Also it is required if you will join MCP.
9. After your exchange finish apply for status of Alumni, it will give you access to great network of people around Latin America.

PURA VIDA