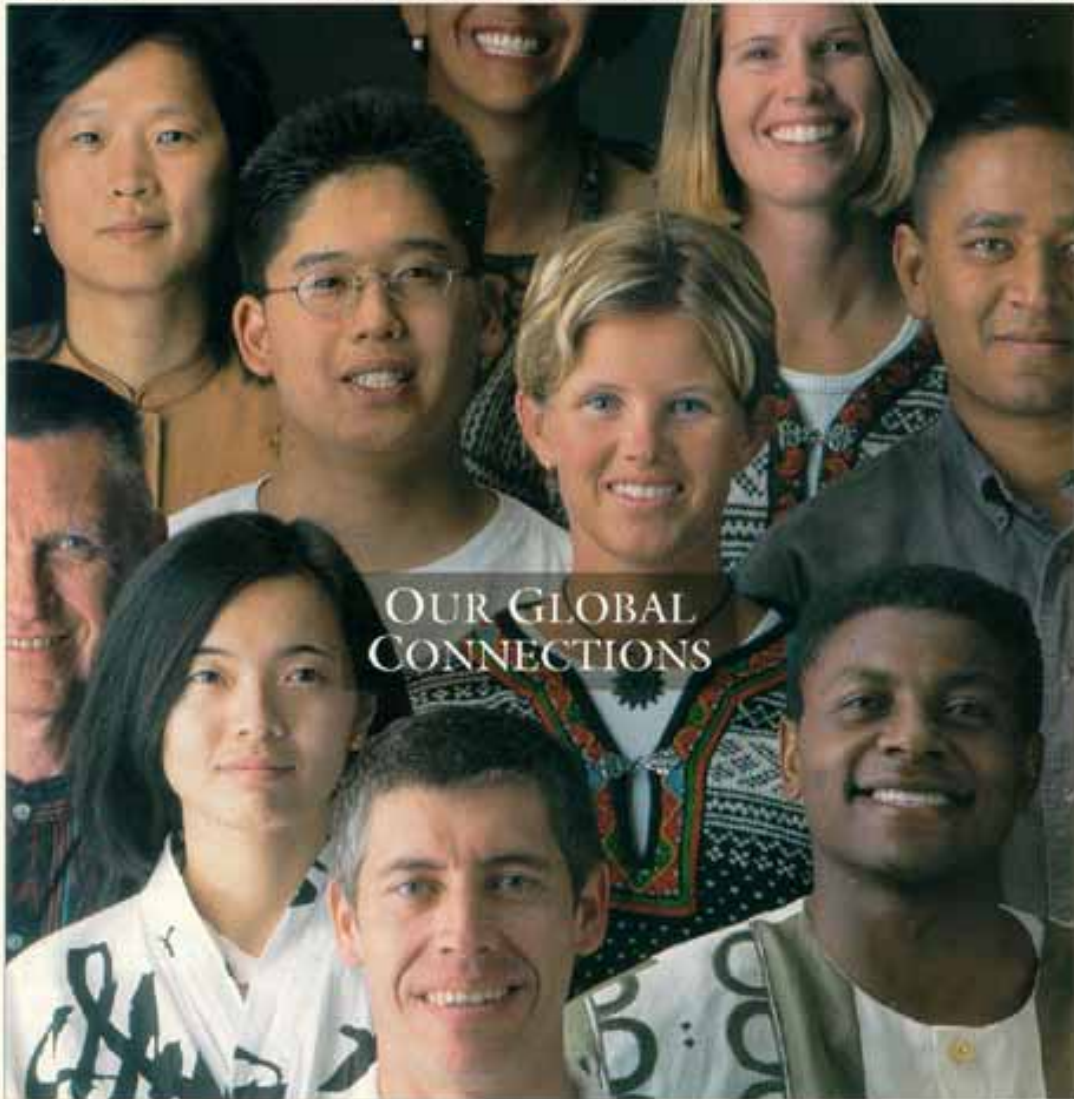


Continuum

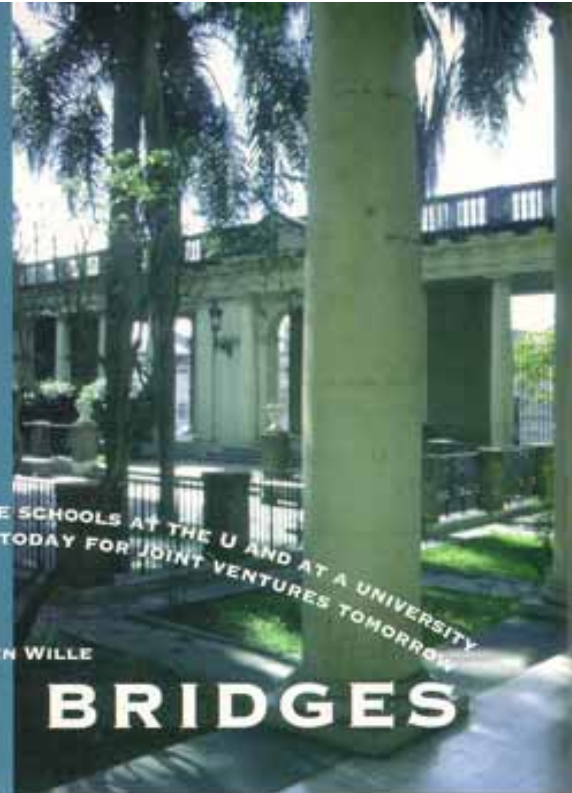
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OUR GLOBAL
CONNECTIONS



FACULTY AND STUDENTS OF ARCHITECTURE SCHOOLS AT THE U AND AT A UNIVERSITY
IN ARGENTINA ARE BUILDING BRIDGES TODAY FOR JOINT VENTURES TOMORROW

BY KIRSTEN WILLE

BUILDING BRIDGES

A deep appreciation for Latin culture and a five-inch binder packed with slides aren't all that U architecture professor Robert Hermanson brought back from his semester teaching in Argentina. He also carries with him a fresh perspective that will affect his future research, his class lectures, and his curriculum. "An experience like this enriches in a covert way," he says as he catalogues the unforgettable moments and observations that have led to his rethinking of architectural and educational norms.

Hermanson is one of several U professors and students of the Graduate School of Architecture who have taken advantage of an International Program for Academic Exchange with one of Argentina's oldest universities, Universidad Nacional del Litoral (UNL). All architecture students at the U are encouraged to spend time studying overseas and exchanges to Japan and Germany are also available. But the Utah-UNL exchange is unique in

that it also involves the exchange of faculty, resources, and knowledge between the two schools, enriching the diversity and breadth of the teaching and curricula at both.

The exchange was envisioned by U assistant professor of architecture Julio Bermudez and a professor of architecture at UNL, Julio Arroyo. Bermudez, who graduated from school, taught, and practiced architecture in Argentina before coming to the U in 1993, had good working relations with many of the faculty members at UNL. He and Arroyo had developed a particularly close association by teaching design studios together on two separate occasions, and both saw a formal exchange program as a natural extension of their work. With the help of director Bill Barnhart MS'71 and advisor Margaret Waterlyn of the U's International Center, the program was launched shortly after an agreement was signed in July 1995.

Bermudez and Arroyo cite different

reasons for the exchange, but the two schools have found it mutually enriching and intend to renew the five-year contract in the year 2000. The UNL was attracted to the partnership because of the U's extensive library collections and the competence of its architecture school in the area of electronic design, says Bermudez. Also, at the time of the program's founding, UNL had no formal relationship with academic institutions in North America. "They had strong European biases in their curricula and little to no North American influences or expertise," which they desired because of the United States' prominence in the field, he says.

In 1995, the U offered almost nothing in the way of student exchanges to the southernmost region of South America. "I perceived a great deal of ignorance and misunderstanding about countries south of the border on the part of my students, which is shocking since they are our neighbors," says Bermudez. The exchange program has also been helpful in increasing the diversity of the architecture school. "Despite our recruiting efforts, the Graduate School of Architecture lags behind in the number of minority, foreign, and female students," says Bermudez.

Aside from the cultural enrichment, Bermudez says his students also benefit from the program academically. "South America has a largely untapped potential. It has given our architecture program a special focus that not only sets our school apart from others in the United States but also energizes our curriculum, intellectually and culturally. Many other architecture schools in the nation have international exchange programs, but no school in the United States has the kind of bond we have with South America.

"There are a lot of issues not dealt with in great depth by American architecture schools with which South American countries have more experience, such as the issue of public or low-income housing," he explains. Argentina has a predominantly urban population. Nearly one-third of its inhabitants live in and around its capital, Buenos Aires. In addition, Argentina has a strong European influence—unlike most Latin American nations, its residents are principally of European descent—has spawned a natural interest in urban planning and design

issues. Because of this, a strong consciousness of urban space has been built into UNL's program, whereas in the American West it's almost politically incorrect to talk of urban space and planning. "You can talk about these differences in the classroom forever, but until the students experience it firsthand, it doesn't mean much," says Bermudez.

For Professor Arroyo, the differences between the two countries' cultures and institutions are exactly what make the program so fruitful. "The program's benefits are many and diverse if we understand that the best we can do is to learn from our differences rather than from our similarities."

Jim Agutter BA'96, a second-year graduate student at the U who accompanied Hermanson on the exchange last spring, says that even if he were never to confront urban planning and design issues professionally, his exposure to them has increased his architectural sensitivity. "It has been a good exercise for me to design in another country with totally different design issues. It has expanded my ability to think about problems and come up with solutions."

Hans Cerny, a second-year U student who also took part in the exchange, agrees. "Every time I travel, I learn to be more open to the way other people live, the way other people think, the way they deal with situations differently. I think as an architect this will be extremely helpful in designing places that work for the needs of the client. It is very difficult to separate

FACULTY AND STUDENTS OF THE U'S GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE ASSEMBLE IN FRONT OF A LARGE PROJECTION SCREEN AND COMPUTER TERMINAL FOR A VIDEO-CONFERENCE WITH THREE U STUDENTS STUDYING IN ARGENTINA AS PART OF THE SCHOOL'S INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC EXCHANGE.





**PROFESSORS
ROBERT
HERMANSON AND
JULIO BERMUDEZ,
WITH ARCHITECTURE
STUDENT CECILIA
PARERA AND
GRADUATE SCHOOL
DEAN WILLIAM
MILLER (L TO R) ON
EXCHANGE IN SANTA
FE, ARGENTINA.**

what we would like to build from what would work for others," he says.

Recalling some of the cultural idiosyncrasies he observed, Hermanson says he was particularly struck by the broad educational background of the Argentinian students. "I found students much more grounded in classical education," he says. Some of them spoke Latin, and most of them were familiar with the history of philosophical thought. "They were deep thinkers," he says, who challenged his beliefs in new and profound ways.

Another difference Hermanson notes is UNE's integration with the community. UNE doesn't suffer from the same "town and gown" syndrome so common to academia in the United States, he says. The university's close ties with the community can be seen in the location of its buildings, which are dispersed throughout Santa Fe. The finance and economics departments are in the business district, whereas the art and humanities classrooms are located in the city's cultural centers. Hermanson found this notion of education inspiring and says it will filter into his efforts to enlarge the outreach component of the U's architecture school in collaboration with other departments and with Salt Lake City.

Arroyo, who says the mission of his university is to create good citizens and not just educated professionals, sees the exchange program as another way of linking UNE with the community—the global community. For him, much of the value of the program lies in its capacity to create opportunities for future alliances on research, design projects, and business ventures.

Bermudez agrees with Arroyo, adding that most of the larger architecture firms in the United States—those with 100 employees or more—have a significant international presence. He estimates that about 60 percent of those firms' buildings are in foreign accounts. "The international market is exploding, especially in Latin America. And programs like ours definitely give students a market advantage," he believes.

"But in addition to the obvious academic and cultural learning, the strength of the exchange program lies at the human level," Bermudez adds. "This aspect cannot be underestimated."

For students Agutter and Cerny, the personal relationships that grew between students and faculty in Argentina will be what they remember. "I think the friendships you make in an experience like this are different from those in the States. It takes no time at all to become very close friends in a different country," says Cerny.

Agutter said that most of what he learned about Argentina was gleaned through conversations at local restaurants, cafes, and bars. "I believe that my interaction with the students has been very enlightening. We have had many discussions with other students that mostly revolve around the political world. I now have an insight into how Argentinians view their culture and the problems that they face, as well as their perception of the United States."

According to Arroyo, the design of the program encourages social interaction, which he says is fundamental to any future alliance or collaboration. "Any personal relationship between students or faculty that arises tends to remain fixed in time. This is especially so if human relationships are associated with intensive study and cultural immersions as our program allows," he says.

"This exchange is like a metaphoric bridge built collaboratively and ready for use at the appropriate moment," he explains. And those appropriate moments will surely become more frequent as people depend increasingly on connections and contacts in and out of their immediate vicinities. ■

—Kirsten Wille BA '92 MA '97 is a writer in the University News Service.