The program is 50 years old and its name still causes confusion. "I get calls all the time for the Hutton Honors College," said Stephanie Goetz, director of the Indiana University Honors Program in Foreign Languages. But despite the challenges in its name, the program has completed its first half-century with the same spirit and success, and with largely the same objectives, as when it began.

The program was established with Ford Foundation funding in 1962 as a summer language immersion experience for advanced high school students. Numbers were small and there were just three sites—in France, Germany, and Mexico. It has since expanded to Spain and now has a total of nine sites.

Each year, a large field of applicants from Indiana high schools is winnowed to a select group that will spend seven weeks abroad. During that time, participants receive tailored instruction in grammar, culture, conversation, literature, and phonetics, all taught in the language of the country. They undertake field trips and afternoon activities in choir, theatre, and sports. And they live with host families. They sign on to a strict honor code that includes a pledge...
to speak no English during the program, to refrain from dating, drinking, and smoking, and as much as possible to observe the customs of their host families. This promise to undertake complete language and cultural immersion requires commitment and fortitude of participants and leaves them with an experience they will remember all their lives.

The Golden Anniversary celebration of the program brought more than 100 people to Indianapolis. Every decade was represented, including a participant from the very first Mexico Program in Oaxaca in 1962. Attendees performed folk music, reminisced about their time abroad, and discussed ways to reach prospective participants and to establish an alumni association.

The impact of the program and its continuing importance to the lives of its alumni were very much on the minds of conference speakers:

Think of how society has changed since the early 1960s—with today’s easy communication devices: email, the Web, cell phones, Twitter, and Skype—yet the program design, including the language commitment, has remained the same. Students live the language and the culture each and every day, morning, noon, and night. They have relationships abroad based on face-to-face relationships—not virtual ones! The result is that almost all program graduates have reached college with advanced knowledge of the language, and they return home never quite the same as when they left just two brief months before!

—Kathleen Sidell, Associate Vice President for Overseas Study

Do you remember your flight or train ride or bus ride to your Honors Program host city? Do you remember how so very tired you were from the many weary hours of travel, how you were plunged into your foreign language without mercy, how the adrenaline alone kept you going until you reached your host city? Do you remember getting that huge lump in your throat thinking, so this is what the “No English Rule” is like—and then thinking a few seconds later, can I really do this? And do you remember the moment when you realized you could? What a feeling!

—Stephanie Goetz, Director, IU Honors Program in Foreign Languages

The time abroad opened up a wider world, one of differences but also of that common unity that makes us all part of the human family. Every journey that we undertake is a journey in time and in space. But it is also a journey into ourselves. The journeys made by thousands of young people taught them self-reliance and stretched their confidence beyond what they might have imagined possible.

—Patrick O’Meara, Vice President Emeritus for International Affairs and Special Advisor to the President~

Alumni from every decade since the 1960s attended the celebration. Here, a panel talked about how to carry the IUHPFL experience forward in one’s life. Panelists from the left: Pat O’Connor (instructor San Luis Potosi ’88, ’89, ’90), Charlene Tsoutsouris (from the first year in Oaxaca ’62), David Rosenbaum (Krefeld ’64), Don Bredle (St. Brieuc ’66), and Cole Dietrich (Ciudad Real ’06).

Mark Satterly and Shaily Cripe, alumni of Oviedo ’10, at the 50th anniversary celebration.