

## **Study Abroad Opportunities for UNA Staff**

**John Thornell, Provost**

The UNA Strategic Plan calls for significant attention to increasing study abroad opportunities for our students. Toward that end UNA has consistently been able to increase the number of study abroad classes and the level of participation by our students. Estimates for 2012 are that almost 120 UNA students will enroll in study abroad classes. Four years ago, it was approximately 70. Among the reasons for this increase in interest among students and by UNA is the widespread recognition that study abroad can be a life-changing experience for the participants. Students gain knowledge in their discipline and also learn about other cultures and environments. But they also gain self-confidence and elevate their risk taking skills all of which serve to better prepare them for a global society. Students often return from study abroad as changed individuals. They have a greater curiosity for learning, tend to take their studies more seriously, and demonstrate increased tolerance for diversity of other cultures and races.

These same benefits tend to accrue to any study abroad participant, not just students. As such there would be a direct benefit to UNA staff who might wish to participate in study abroad courses. Two significant obstacles are funding and time away from work. This proposal is intended to address those two issues. First, a scholarship pool of \$7500 would be created to award partial scholarships to staff who wish to participate in UNA study abroad sponsored courses. The funds would be used to allocate five scholarships of \$1500 each. The proposal also requests a waiver of the tuition charges associated with the course IF the staff member needs to earn college credit. And finally, the travel would be considered as professional development by the university so the absence from work would not count against vacation leave.

By January 15 of each year, applications from staff would be submitted to the International Program Committee of the university. Applicants must be fulltime staff employees. Administrators at the dean level or higher are not eligible. The applicants would indicate the trip they wish to take and provide a rationale in terms of educational growth and job enhancement, including benefits to the university. The application must be endorsed in writing to the Committee by the immediate supervisor of the staff member. The instructor of the course must also agree in advance to allow the staff person to participate if selected. Based on the application, especially the strength of the relationship of the study abroad to work responsibilities, and the letter of recommendation from the supervisor, the Committee would select recipients, each of whom would receive the \$1500 scholarship. The Committee would also select a priority waiting list. Should an awardee not use his/her award, the Committee will use the priority list to select additional applicants.

This program will provide multiple benefits. It will assist employees in gaining self-confidence and people skills that serve the university well in the workplace. It also sends a message from the university that staff members are highly valued. And finally it adds support to the overall mission of increasing university participation in study abroad. Many of the study abroad courses have small enrollments and an additional enrollee can make a difference in the size and quality of the course.

For a relatively small investment (\$7500) we can make a huge difference in the morale, attitude, and work performance of one of our most important resources, the staff employees who serve UNA.

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