Heiskell Award Category: Study Abroad

Name of Institution: Angelo State University

Name of Program: Fostering International Education through Study Abroad: Removing Participation Barriers for Students and Faculty

Nomination Submitted by: Center for International Studies

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Summary of Program (50-100 words): Angelo State University has expanded their study abroad program and support services for students and faculty by broadening the scope of their programs and by removing financial barriers, through the international studies scholarships and programmatic barriers through the passport office and on-line application process. The outcome of the new initiatives has tripled the number of students participating in the study abroad programs within two years with a retention rate of 96.8% of all participating students remaining in the institution after their return. Faculty mentoring programs, merit reward and language training provided to the faculty at no cost has greatly improved faculty involvement and interest in international education and study abroad.
Fostering International Education through Study Abroad Programs:
Removing Participation Barriers for Students and Faculty

Angelo State University (ASU), a small regional campus university, is deeply committed to providing for its students an international education that will prepare them to become responsible citizens in an ever-changing world. Today research suggest that higher education students and faculty encounter financial and programmatic barriers which inhibits participation in study abroad programs. While the barriers among students and faculty may vary, they represent real challenges for university and colleges striving to internationalize their campuses through study abroad.

Prior to President Joseph Rallo’s arrival, ASU had a study abroad office with a one-quarter time faculty director and one graduate student. However, Dr. Joseph Rallo recognized the strategic priority of international education by opening the Center for International Studies (CIS) on April 1, 2008. The Center for International Studies (CIS) provides international and educational opportunities for students and faculty, emphasizing the importance of international connections and partnerships as a catalyst for change. The CIS encompasses four inter-related services: Study Abroad, International Students and Scholars, English Language Learners Institute and K-12 programs. More information regarding the Center, its mission, and activities can be found at http://www.angelo.edu/dept/cis/index.html

Student-Centered International Education

In an effort to create new and innovative programs, Angelo State University expanded the international component of its educational offerings and removed many of the financial and programmatic barriers faced by students and faculty.

Study Abroad Programs – since the inception of the CIS, the number of students participating in summer study abroad programs (4 weeks) has tripled enrollment from 54 students in 2007, 131 students in 2008, to 157 students in 2009.

Short term and Long term Programs – In past years, the university had offered four to five summer study abroad programs to locations such as Germany, Mexico, and the United Kingdom. However, after the 2008 opening of the CIS and an extensive survey of the student body, the number of programs increased to eight in 2009, including new programs to locations such as China, Italy, and Greece and 13 approved programs for 2010, including new programs to Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, the Baltic States, and Canada. Anticipated enrollment for 2010 is estimated to be 250 students. Additionally, the CIS encourages cross-disciplinary programs that appeal to a broader range of academic majors. For example, the program to Costa Rica offers two courses: one in biodiversity and one in eco-business. The CIS also offers semester and academic year programs at partner universities in Mexico, Scotland, Germany, France, Italy, and Holland. The latter two were added in 2008. Currently, ASU is working on partnerships in China and New Zealand to provide more opportunities for students who would like to study in Asia and Oceania.

Scholarships – The growth in student participation is primarily due to the redirection of private scholarship funds to study abroad scholarships. The first year of the new International Studies scholarships awarded $558,000. In the 2009 academic year, 155 students participating in short-term study abroad programs received full scholarships of approximately $4,200.00 each for a total university commitment of about $651,000.00. In the years previous to the International Studies Scholarships, awards totaled about $57,000.00. Additionally, the retention rate of students who participated in the programs showed a stellar rate of 98.6%. Today, retention is a priority of nearly every institution of higher education, and it appears that study abroad programs with scholarships provide the necessary incentive for students to continue and successfully complete their university education. Comments from this year’s incoming freshmen indicated that many students had chosen ASU because of the study abroad opportunities ASU would afford them. In 2008, the CIS aggressively promoted study abroad at K-12 schools, talking to teachers
and counselors. The early awareness of freshmen students can in part be attributed to the promotional activities of the CIS.

Support Activities — In order to support the promotion of study abroad on the ASU campus, the CIS implemented the following support activities which facilitate the process for students and faculty:

• **Passport Acceptance Agency** — the CIS was officially approved as a passport acceptance agency in February, 2009. Since its opening it has processed approximately 225 passport applications. Applicants included students, faculty and staff at ASU, plus a substantial number of applications from the San Angelo community and surrounding areas. ASU is one of only four universities in the state of Texas currently approved to offer this service.

• **Study Abroad On-line Application Process** — during the 2009 summer, the CIS worked with the university information technology department to create a new study abroad online application process. The new process was activated on September 1, 2009 and during the first week of availability, received more than 100 student applications. The new process interfaces with the campus Banner platform so students only need to indicate for which program they wish to apply. Thereafter, all of the traditional application information is propagated from the Banner system to the application form. It also allows the students to complete most of the required forms (application essay, health clearance, release of liability statements, etc.) online. Faculty can also monitor the applications for their respective programs and schedule interviews, appointments, etc. directly through the application software. This will not only greatly expedite the application process, but eliminates multiple student visits and paper work required in the traditional application process. ASU’s strong commitment to international education is furthermore demonstrated in the fact that the university IT Department committed a substantial amount of time and manpower to develop this study abroad online application program. Even though there are software packages available for purchase, by implementing the ASU developed online application, the CIS is able to provide the same student service with no additional costs to the student that commercially available software would have necessitated.

• **Health insurance** — ASU now requires all study abroad students and program directors to buy health insurance. This insurance coverage includes Emergency Medical Evacuation (EME) and Repatriation of Remains (RR). When health issues arise while studying abroad, our students have the coverage they need. Prior to being accepted into a study abroad program, participants have to receive clearance from a physician stating that they are able to participate in a study abroad program.

• **Risk Management**— In the fall semester the CIS organized a mandatory orientation for the program directors, which provided pertinent information on health issues and risk assessment for faculty directing study abroad programs. Guest speakers such as a counselor and health insurance representative participated. In early spring the CIS held a mandatory orientation session for all students registered for a study abroad program. In this session the study abroad coordinator addressed safety issues, culture shock, group dynamics and health concerns.

**Student Scholars Program** — The Center for International Studies has also initiated a scholars program for students wishing to pursue research or internships in an international location. Since 2008, ASU has awarded four $4,000.00 scholarships to students who have completed the following activities:

• Research intern in the medical imaging and surgical pathology services of the Jules Bordet Institute in Brussels, Belgium.
• Study of AIDs in Africa.
• Study of Gender Issues among Indigenous Populations in Australia.
• Broadcast intern with the International Broadcasting Center at the World Games in Austria.

**Communication and Promotion of Study Abroad**

The CIS began promoting study abroad programs vigorously on campus and in the community. Promotional activities included emails to students, posters, video displays in university centers and hall ways, study abroad columns in student newspapers, brown bag luncheons for students, informational
sessions for students in dorms, informational sessions for special target groups (honor students, ROTC students), reports on local TV stations, sessions during International Education Week, program directors visits to classes, and a photo contest. The CIS also invites students who have participated in study abroad programs to present their experiences to other students and parents during the annual Family Day.

**Faculty-Centered International Education**

In order to support the campus internationalization efforts, the following additional faculty resources were implemented:

**Faculty Mentoring Program** — In an effort to better prepare prospective faculty members for developing and guiding a study abroad group, the CIS has initiated a Faculty Mentoring Program. Faculty applications are solicited from each of the five university colleges. One award per college is awarded. In the summer of 2008, 2 faculty were awarded a $3,000.00 stipend to accompany a summer study abroad program directed by seasoned faculty directors in an effort to provide on-site training in the management of a study abroad program and resulted in the development of two new programs the following summer. In the 2009, four faculty participated in the program and will be leading four new programs in the summer of 2010. In cases, where faculty wished to propose a program without prior experience or participation in the mentoring programs, they are paired with experienced faculty directors on an ongoing program.

**Rosetta Stone Language Training** — in order to encourage foreign language acquisition for the faculty, the CIS purchased a site license for eight language training online courses. The original 25 openings were filled by faculty within a few days of the initial announcement. Once the faculty member has completed the course, their opening is filled by a new faculty person on the waiting list. An additional 5 licenses were purchased to meet the demand. This service is available to the faculty at no cost and is managed by the CIS.

**Professional Achievement Awards** — the university has implemented a new merit system for the faculty which awards merit points to faculty who have initiated new study abroad programs, directed an existing or ongoing program or have served on the campus-wide International Education Committee. Once again this serves to further stress the importance of this study abroad on the ASU campus.

**Faculty Support Services** — in order to support faculty in the development and implementation of study abroad programs, the CIS provides the following activities to the ASU faculty:

- Informational training for prospective new faculty directors
- On-line program development manual, sample proposal formats, evaluation and assessment
- International Education Opportunities seminar for new faculty
- Staff support in the application process, program logistics, collection of required materials, and program deposits
- Risk Management Training Seminar for faculty directors
- Pre-departure Training Seminar, including the information on record-keeping, communication requirements (the CIS provides full cell phone service to each program director), program management, and assessment.

**Outcome Assessment of Study Abroad**

The CIS developed two assessment tools to evaluate study abroad programs and the learning experience they provide to ASU's student population. Prior to departure each student is asked to compose a comprehensive portfolio in which s/he has to state academic and non-academic goals the students seeks to achieve through the study abroad experience. Upon return the student has to write an evaluation on how the goals were achieved. At the end of the study abroad program students also evaluate the various program components and learning experiences in a separate survey. Student feedback is used to improve or develop future programs.