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From the issue dated October 31, 2008

Professors Get Their Own Study-Aboard Programs

Trips for faculty members are promoted to raise students' global awareness

By KARIN FISCHER

Winter Park, Fla.

With little prompting, they pull out photographs of their time abroad as they talk about newfound friendships and once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Going overseas has made them think differently about their classes back on their campuses and has opened up new areas of interest and fresh fields of study. It was, they often say, transformative.

Fervent testimonials to the power of overseas study are not uncommon, of course. But at Rollins College, a liberal-arts institution with a mission to educate students to be more globally minded, these peacocks come from professors.

The college's president, Lewis M. Duncan, has pledged to send every faculty and staff member with teaching duties abroad once every three years. Since 2006, 128 Rollins employees, about two-thirds of those eligible, have used the \$3,000 grants to conduct individual research projects or to travel internationally with faculty-led groups to destinations including China, Ecuador, and Tanzania.

"I'm a big believer in the symbolic power of leadership," says Mr. Duncan, who came to Rollins in 2004. "Faculty need to model the lives of global citizenship we want for our students."

Rollins is among a growing number of colleges across the country that are trying to create more-global campuses by cultivating a faculty of internationalists. Indeed, a recent report by the American Council on Education pointed to the expansion of support for faculty members to study or conduct research abroad, or to lead overseas programs, as a bright spot in colleges' otherwise uneven efforts at internationalization.

Madeleine F. Green, the council's vice president for international initiatives and an author of the report, says faculty members can present a major barrier to colleges' international efforts. They may have spent little time out of the country, see their discipline in strictly American terms, or consider study abroad as nothing more than a diversion.

"I tell presidents if they have any money at all for internationalization," Ms. Green says, "faculty development is the place to put it."

Still, these efforts do require a monetary investment, and at a time of belt-tightening, budgets for international travel can be among the first squeezed.

At Rollins and elsewhere, administrators also wrestle with the best way to structure their programs, such as whether to focus on individual travel or on group trips, and how to measure the programs' impact across their campuses and throughout the curriculum.

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'Outside Their Comfort Zone'

For Mr. Duncan and Roger N. Casey, who is provost and vice president for academic affairs, a key goal of Rollins's effort has been to engage more than the usual suspects: professors of area studies or foreign languages or those with a CV laden with international research.

Rollins does allocate some grant funds to individual faculty members, like Kathryn L. Norsworthy, who teaches in the graduate program in counseling. She used her award to further her work in trauma resolution in Turkey and Cyprus. The money has been a godsend, says Ms. Norsworthy, who also has done extensive research in Southeast Asia. "Some years I just buy an airline ticket and hope a grant comes through," she says.

The two administrators become especially animated, however, when talking about reaching out to faculty and staff members for whom an international experience is likely to involve no more than a family trip to Disney World's Epcot, 25 miles to the south. Often these professors would like to go abroad but lack experience in writing international grants or establishing research partnerships overseas, Mr. Duncan says.

On the faculty trips, fellow professors can act as instructors and tour guides, helping colleagues navigate unfamiliar territory. For example, Rachel Newcomb, an Arabic-speaking assistant professor of anthropology, organized a two-week program to Morocco for 14 faculty and staff members in January 2007. Ms. Newcomb — who lived in Morocco for two years while working on her dissertation, and whose Moroccan-born husband, Nour Bennani, works in information technology at Rollins — arranged for meals at private homes; lectures at the Center for Cross Cultural Living, in Rabat; even a camping trip in the Sahara Desert.

The arrangement "helps faculty step outside their comfort zone," Mr. Duncan says.

At first glance, Mr. Duncan himself seems an unlikely advocate. A physicist by training, he was dean of engineering at Dartmouth College before arriving at Rollins.

The sciences and engineering are traditionally viewed as insular disciplines, but Mr. Duncan says his experience as a research scientist at Los Alamos National Laboratory and as a Carnegie Science Fellow at Stanford University's Center for International Security and Arms Control helped him see the connection between science and technology on the one hand and knowledge of other countries and cultures on the other. "To be a leader in the world," he says, "you have to better understand it."

Rollins had been moving in a similar direction even before Mr. Duncan's arrival. During the 2000-1 academic year, the college offered a course called "Spanish for Professors." Although primarily language training, it also included an optional trip to Madrid and Oviedo, in Spain.

Participants like Gary L. Williams, now a professor emeritus, say the experience led them to build relationships with colleagues in Spain, to conduct research there, and to incorporate new perspectives into their own courses. The connection to Mr. Williams's specialty, American history, might seem tenuous, but the international exposure, he says, helped him think differently about issues like civil rights and immigration. In fact, when he retired this year, he urged his department to hire a comparative historian, rather than an American historian, to replace him.

Others Abroad

While Mr. Duncan's promise of triennial trips is unusual, the idea of furthering globalization through investing in the faculty is not. Rhodes College, for instance, in Memphis, provides annual travel grants of up to \$5,000, which have led to new courses on Bollywood and on the Holocaust, says Michael Drompp, dean of the faculty and vice president for academic affairs.

Grinnell College sends a handful of faculty members each year to one of its study-abroad sites. David Harrison, director of the Iowa college's Center for International Studies, says the arrangement allows professors to vet Grinnell's partner universities and study-abroad providers, to establish new collaborations and exchanges, and to become stronger advocates for overseas study.

Such efforts are not limited to private institutions. The Maricopa County Community College District, in Arizona, and Troy University, in Alabama, each offer faculty-travel grants. The arts-and-sciences college at the State University of New York at Binghamton specifies that new hires for faculty positions must include global perspectives in their areas of expertise.

Not all faculty-internationalization efforts include a travel element. In West Virginia, 20 public and private colleges have formed a statewide Consortium for Faculty and Course Development in

International Studies. It conducts seminars and workshops on international topics and teaching methods for professors, some of whom teach at institutions too small to have full-fledged international-education offices, says Jack L. Hammersmith, the consortium's director and a professor of history at West Virginia University.

For two decades the University of Richmond has offered a faculty-travel program similar in design to the one at Rollins. Its first destination, says Uliana F. Gabara, dean of international education, was the then-crumbling Soviet bloc.

Over the years, about a third of Richmond's faculty members have traveled abroad on the overseas seminars, which are underwritten by the university. Participating professors help develop a reading list and offer presentations on aspects of the destinations related to their disciplines. "It locates the trip," Ms. Gabara says, "in a very strongly defined academic context."

'Explicit Connections'

Rollins likewise insists on a hands-on approach. Thomas Ouellette, a professor of theater who went on a trip to Tanzania last spring, jokes that he had planned to "just pack my bag, get my vaccinations, and land on the veld." Instead he was asked to deliver a two-hour lecture as part of a semesterlong seminar on Tanzanian culture, history, and economics jointly taught by the 15 professors on the trip. He chose to talk about performance and ritual in East Africa — a subject about which he knew nothing.

The pretrip preparation was crucial to his experience, Mr. Ouellette says. When his group arrived at a village inhabited by the semi-nomadic Masai and were welcomed with a ritual greeting, "everyone turned and looked at me," he says. "I don't know if an expert on African performance flown in would have had the same impact. We were sharing knowledge, teaching and learning at the same time."

Rollins faculty members agree that the overseas experience can be intellectually profound. Back from the Morocco trip, Robert Smither, a professor of psychology, is using his work on a psychological interpretation of a sura, or chapter, of the Koran for a book examining the major religions of the world through the prism of personality theory. "It took my thinking to a place it otherwise wouldn't have," he says.

Ms. Green, of the American Council on Education, says creating such "explicit connections" can help make international experiences more meaningful for professors. She has worked with scholarly groups, like the American Historical Association, to find ways to bring an international and intercultural perspective into the curriculum. Faculty members need to see international work as pertinent to their academic and professional goals, she says.

Mr. Casey, the provost at Rollins, acknowledges there continue to be skeptics among faculty members who see the trips as unrelated to their work and question spending college money on international travel.

"No, international isn't free," says Mr. Casey, who led a trip to the Galápagos Islands. "But then again, the chemistry department isn't free."

Still, supporters say such programs require a relatively small financial commitment. Ms. Gabara, of the University of Richmond, says the budget for the annual seminar trips has never exceeded \$55,000. At Rollins, Mr. Casey used money left from a faculty search to finance an early trip. After three years, the total price tag thus far for the program is \$525,000.

While many of the faculty-travel programs at private colleges are underwritten by donors, public institutions, like Troy University, routinely must use money from their general budgets for the purpose. Jack Hawkins Jr., the chancellor, has managed to set aside \$250,000 for international travel over the past three years, which has allowed 20 to 25 professors to go overseas annually.

"I wish we could make more of a financial commitment," Mr. Hawkins says. Recent economic contractions, he adds, are likely to put an even greater strain on his budget.

Rollins, in fact, may be looking for a new source of revenue for its faculty-travel program. It had been made possible by a \$12-million pledge by the parent of a Rollins student for this and other international efforts. But the FBI last month made public an investigation into the financial practices of the donor, Thomas J. Petters, a businessman and trustee. Mr. Duncan says no matter the outcome of the case against Mr. Petters, who has since stepped down from the Rollins board, the travel program will continue. Finding a new donor, if necessary, would be his "highest priority," he says.

Spreading Through Osmosis

A committee at Rollins is working on a strategic plan for all campus-internationalization and off-campus efforts overseas, including faculty travel, says Ms. Newcomb, the anthropology professor, who is director of the travel program. As the committee tries to be purposeful, she says, one question is whether, and how, to quantify the trips' outcomes, such as asking professors to demonstrate that they have incorporated the experience into their teaching.

At Richmond, the seminars abroad have led to the signing of agreements for faculty and student exchanges; the university now has 60 such arrangements with foreign institutions. More recently it has begun to develop joint courses with partner universities.

Richmond also uses the trips overseas to help build up its curriculum in areas in which it perceives weaknesses, Ms. Gabara says. For example, in recent years, two seminars have focused on India, in an effort to improve faculty expertise.

Rollins, too, has formed several institutional partnerships with foreign universities — in China and Morocco. And while it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what changes on the campus to attribute to the travel program, Ms. Newcomb argues that an international ethos seems to be spreading through the campus "almost by osmosis."

Job candidates now routinely inquire about the international-travel program, Mr. Casey says. Rollins is host to an international film festival about peace. And study-abroad participation on the campus has increased by more than 50 percent, from 308 students in 2005-6, the first academic year of the faculty-travel program, to 472 in 2007-8.

Some professors, like Mr. Ouellette of the theater department, say their experience has made them evangelists for overseas study: "I tell them, 'I don't care where you go — just go.'"

Randi Irwin, who graduated from Rollins this summer, says she "didn't give much thought" to studying abroad until her professors began urging her to do so. One professor suggested she sign up for a short-term trip to Morocco being organized by Ms. Newcomb. She did and later returned to do fieldwork in migrant communities. Ms. Irwin now hopes to continue her research in a graduate program in anthropology.

"There's really a viral aspect" to the travel program, Ms. Newcomb says.

Nowhere on the Rollins campus is the result of international travel more vividly on display than in Rachel Simmons's office, reflected in her striking, vibrantly hued representations of marine landscapes. Ms. Simmons, an associate professor of art, says her trip to the Galápagos shifted the focus of her personal and classroom work to issues like environmental sustainability and global climate change.

"It has energized my teaching," says Ms. Simmons, a Rollins graduate who collaborates with professors in environmental studies to offer courses on science and art. One course takes first-year students into a local elementary school to make "green art."

This fall Ms. Simmons will travel to Antarctica, where she hopes to lead a faculty trip of her own.

"Now," she says, "I'm seeing the college as a broader place."

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