



## Regis College Travel Learning Overview and Guidelines

*Tomorrow's "whole person" cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world....  
Students...must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively...."*  
-- Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J.

A travel learning course entails an experience in which all or some amount of time is spent in destinations and engaged in activities that enrich students' education in a culture outside the campus community. While usually associated with international travel, it may also involve travel within the US.

Academic programs that venture beyond the theoretical consideration of ideas into the world of action involve certain risks. In seeking approval for an activity, planners must anticipate both benefits and risks and provide participants with three essentials:

- Accurate information about what to expect
- Explicit and reasonable expectations of participant behavior
- Reasonable precautions to protect all participants and the University

### I. General Criteria for Administrative Approval

The following are broad criteria for approval of travel learning courses. A more detailed explanation of the University's expectations for such courses appears in Part III of this document, entitled "Best Practices in Travel Learning – Incorporating the University's Mission and Goals." Faculty interested in proposing a travel learning course should review all University expectations prior to submitting their Course Proposal Form.

- Academic Enhancement – The ultimate goal of University sponsored programs is to enhance learning. When activities or projects are associated with courses or academic programs, the experiences should provide the opportunity to test and compare content from the classroom to real-life conditions.
- Mission Orientation – All University sponsored activities and projects should strengthen the mission-related aspects of the Regis educational experience. This can be accomplished through inclusion of a service-learning component, a justice education component, or some other explicitly stated mission related activity.
- Economic Feasibility – University sponsored projects and activities should attempt to enhance or at a minimum, maintain the university's economic position. Projects and activities that retain tuition revenue at Regis are therefore encouraged. Supplementary fees or fund-raising activities may be necessary to cover expenses of these programs and an appropriate faculty/student ratio is expected.

- Administrative Oversight – Travel learning must have administrative responsibility housed in an appropriate university area. Administrative responsibility includes ensuring that all travel preparation, scheduling, and liability issues are addressed prior to enrollment.

## II. Expectations for a Travel Learning Course Syllabus<sup>1</sup>

As with traditional syllabi, the syllabus for a travel learning course must include required readings, assignment descriptions, and an explanation of all other activities to be used as the basis for calculating the course grades. A travel learning course syllabus also should include:

- A description of the unique characteristics of the travel learning course, including:
  - General and specific learning objectives;
  - An overview of what the students should expect to encounter and learn (e.g. knowledge, skills, perspectives) in the travel location(s) that they could not acquire on the home campus;
  - An explanation of how the program will take advantage of the travel learning location(s) through academic and cross-cultural site visits, guest professors, special assignments, etc.
  - Specific evaluation and grading criteria with clear explanations of how the experiences associated with the course will be reflected in students' performance assessments.
- A day-to-day itinerary that integrates lectures, site visits, readings, assignment, discussions, reflection periods, and field work. This aids managing student impressions and improves the quality of their work by helping them make connections between the planned activities.
- Student Orientation Plan: In order to prepare students for the academic and cultural experiences associated with the travel learning course, faculty must develop a plan that provides students with opportunities to gather information about:
  - The phases of culture shock and discussion of constructive ways to manage it during and after the trip;
  - The culture, customs, traditions, and other pertinent information about the specific location(s) of the trip;
  - Travel advisories and health-related issues;
  - The prior experiences of students, faculty, or staff who have taken part in a similar experience in the past;
  - Liability issues, support systems, risk management issues, crisis plan, application and selection process, disciplinary records, release forms, health and medical issues, health insurance, acceptance contracts, cancellation policies, payment/refunds/deposit requirements, and expectations of Regis students during Regis-sponsored courses and experiences.
- Student Re-Entry Plan: After students return from the travel component of the course, an opportunity should be provided for students to debrief about their experiences and develop ways to integrate what they learned abroad into their academic and personal lives. Faculty may schedule official seminars that are part of the academic course or more social gatherings such as a welcome back dinner.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Spencer, Sarah E. and Kathy Tuma, ed. *The Guide to Short Term Programs Abroad*. Second Edition. Washington, D.C.: NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

### III. Best Practices in Travel Learning – Incorporating the University’s Mission and Goals<sup>2</sup>

Travel learning courses are, at their best, intentional, carefully constructed expressions of the University’s mission and core values. They offer participants particular opportunities to deepen their reflection on the Jesuit question, “How ought we to live?” They are designed to foster in participants the qualities and competencies to live in and contribute to an increasingly interconnected world. Specifically, they should lead participants to:

- A broader and deeper understanding of the larger world in which they are preparing to exercise leadership through direct experience and reflection;
- An appreciation of the beauty and diversity of the persons and cultures they encounter and an increasing ability to raise questions about the problems, concerns, and issues their experiences bring to light;
- An ability to reflect on their own culture and background, attitudes and habits of thought in the context of their experiences; and
- An increasing ability to integrate and apply their academic and personal learning through reflection on their experiences.

Travel learning in varied cultures offers powerful opportunities to deepen participants’ understanding and application of the University’s mission and core values. Travel learning courses offered through Regis College must address the educational goals outlined in the *Undergraduate Core Philosophy Statement* and the *Graduate Education Philosophy Statement*:

#### I. Concern for Social Justice

- a. Emphasize and foster in participants a concern for social justice;
- b. Challenge participants to develop the analytical skills necessary to understand and cultivate a deeper understanding of the systemic conditions of poverty, marginalization, and oppression;
- c. Stimulate participants’ recognition of their own racial, social, cultural, and/or economic privilege; and
- d. Reinforce the individual’s commitment to be an active and engaged member of society and to work for structural change for social justice.

#### II. Global Awareness

- a. Foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity;
- b. Develop participants’ cultural competence in diverse settings; and
- c. Create a learning environment that respects diversity, values the uniqueness of the individual, and instills a commitment to justice for all people.

#### III. Leadership

- a. Explore the meaning and personal relevance of “leadership in the service of others”;
- b. Refine participants’ abilities to listen and engage in dialog in diverse settings; and
- c. Strengthen participants’ personal leadership skills by understanding various dimensions of leadership and exploring the ways in which diverse forms of leadership contribute to collaboration and partnership.

#### IV. Ethical Inquiry and Reflection

- a. Strengthen participants’ ability to consciously apply ethical principles to decisions and actions;

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<sup>2</sup> Developed by Regis in the World, an Ad Hoc Task Force on International Learning Experiences

- b. Foster participants' ability to reflect critically on the dominant and/or competing values of the cultures, local and global, in which they live; and
- c. Encourage participants to reflect upon crucial human concerns and to strengthen values that lead to ethical choices, sound decisions, and just actions.

### **Critical Questions for Planning a Travel Learning Course**

Examining experiences from the perspective of social justice assists participants to name and analyze the central justice issues faced both by the people and place they will visit, and analyze the global interplay of justice issues. Throughout the course development process, the following questions should be addressed:

- Does the structure of the course or travel learning experience include an intentional look at the historical, political, social, economic and cultural realities of the people and places to be visited?
- Has consideration been given to:
  - The way in which the historical, political, social, economic, and cultural realities position a given site?
  - The multiple perspectives that different constituents bring to a problem issue?
  - The historical changes that reshape or transform the political, social, cultural, and economic landscape of the site?
- Does this course or experience equip participants with the skills to go into and reflect upon their experiences from the perspective of the impoverished, marginalized, and oppressed?

### **Connections to the Visited Community**

It is of primary importance to critically examine the relevance and impact of our learning activities on the local community, especially in small rural communities where there is high visibility for the visiting group. Travel learning experiences that involve service projects must be planned collaboratively with the host community to clarify mutual understandings and expectations, and there must be a mutually understood and agreed upon continuity or ending between the course planners and that community.

### **Diversity and Inclusivity**

Travel learning courses offer particularly striking opportunities to learn from the diversity of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives of others. Course planners should ensure that their policies ensure inclusivity, acknowledging that age, gender, race/ethnicity, class, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and other human differences contribute to the richness and vitality of our living community. In planning these learning experiences, it is important to keep in mind that persons with disabilities are entitled to appropriate and reasonable accommodation in order to permit their participation.

### **Maximize Learning, Minimize Risk**

To protect students, faculty, staff, and the University and minimize the risk to everyone involved, specific information must be requested from participants and information about expectations, requirements, benefits and risks must be given to them. Waiver and release forms are required, and the required forms vary with the complexity of activities and projects. They are available as templates that can be modified to include information about specific programs or activities so long as the basic conditions and legal language remain intact. Substantive changes to the forms must be reviewed by legal counsel.