THE UNIVERSITY OF TAMPA.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

A guide to faculty-led travel courses at the University of Tampa

Prepared For:

Dr. AnneLiese Busch, Associate Dean of International Programs
University of Tampa

Professor Kristen Foltz, Assistant Professor
University of Tampa

Prepared By:

Kari Tews, MAPC Candidate
University of Tampa
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Abstract

I am proposing a handbook to assist University of Tampa faculty with conceptualizing and creating faculty-led travel courses. The goal will be to assist faculty in developing their programs and to improve the quality of courses offered. I intend to make the handbook accessible in a digital format.

Introduction:

The pause in study abroad programs due to the COVID-19 pandemic has given the International Programs Office time to reassess department goals and improve processes. This proposal will lay out my plan for a faculty handbook for the International Programs Office (IPO) at the University of Tampa (UT). The idea behind creating a handbook is to inform faculty of the requirements to lead a travel course program. My proposal will review the history of faculty-led programs at UT, define how a handbook can help alleviate some of the organization's problems, and explain how I intend to create the handbook.

Background:

The IPO serves the international student population and students seeking to further their education abroad. According to the Institute of International Education (2020), eleven percent of US undergrads study abroad during their degree program. At the University of Tampa, that number drops to 5 percent. UT offers nearly 2,000 locations for a semester abroad and 20 locations for faculty-led programs each year. One of the most popular study abroad options at UT is short-term programs led by UT faculty. UT began offering short-term abroad experiences since the 1990's. Despite the popularity of the courses, a limited number of faculty choose to teach these courses.

Research has shown the influence a faculty leader has on students' decision to study abroad. Christine Anderson highlights the importance of interculturally competent faculty leading a program (2016). Through her research, Anderson proves that faculty-led programs provide a level of support and mentoring that may not be possible throughout a semester program (2016). Charles Lu found that having a professor who had traveled to the country and had shared their experience was essential to the student's decision-making processes (2015). By recruiting more faculty to lead travel courses, UT can recruit a more diverse, more extensive pool of students.

Figure 1: UT students in Italy (Rukholm, 2018)

Challenges:

The process of creating a travel course at UT is confusing for faculty. Faculty are not given directions or guidance as to what makes a good proposal. With no clear standards of what a successful proposal would look like, many faculty do not propose courses.

IPO does not currently offer any materials to guide faculty through the process. Past materials regarding travel courses focused on submitting the proposal and handling expense reports rather than assisting faculty in creating engaging classes.

An external challenge that has been disrupting study abroad is COVID-19. IPO needs to create new policies regarding safety and cancellation of programs to include COVID-19 languages as the pandemic has dramatically affected international travel.

Plan:

I have created a solution for IPO's challenges. I plan to create transparency between IPO and UT faculty by outlining objectives, processes, and resources to develop a travel course in a handbook. I have developed steps to help achieve my goal and purpose.

Step 1: Identify the target audience
To assist IPO in creating a handbook, first, I must identify the audience for the handbook. As the handbook will be posted on UT's intranet (SpartanNet), I must follow UT's brand guidelines when creating the design.

Primary readers will include faculty who want to lead a travel course. Secondary readers would include UT faculty who have taught past programs. Tertiary readers may consist of faculty, staff, and UT students who would like to learn more about the process of creating a travel course. Gatekeepers for this project would include Dr. Busch and the UT department of Public Information.

Step 2: Research
To understand the faculty members' needs, I must learn about their questions about travel courses. To do this, I will meet with faculty groups, including the curriculum committee members, international programs committee members, communication media and culture faculty members, and faculty new to UT this year. Meeting with the faculty is key in determining the most helpful information to include in the handbook.

Step 3: Create a handbook

To meet deadlines for my capstone course, I will have a limited timeline to produce the handbook. I plan to use Canva to include design elements while adhering to UT's brand guidelines.
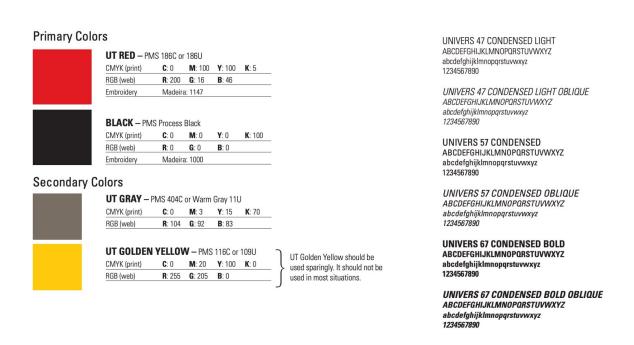
Step 4: Distribution

The handbook will be posted on the SpartanNet website. In early November, a call for proposals will announce the process and timeline to propose a course.

Step 5: Evaluation

The timeline to evaluate the effectiveness of the handbook will be ongoing, as courses for the 2022-2023 academic year will be proposed in early 2022, and student registration will happen in fall 2022.

Figure 2: UT brand guidelines

Qualifications:

I am a student completing my Master of Arts in Professional Communication at the University of Tampa. I also serve as the Coordinator of International Programs: Education and Outreach at the University of Tampa. Combining my education and experience offers the expertise and creativity required to handle the needs of this project.

A schedule for the project is outlined in *Table 1*. This schedule provides deadlines to ensure that the department receives quality work in a reasonable time.

Table 1: **Schedule**

The project's timeline works well with the timeframe for IPO to prepare proposals for the 2022-2023 academic year. I will complete the project in time for IPO to send a call for proposals and utilize the handbook for the new faculty orientation held in November.

Task	Date
Identify target audience	06/15/2021
Research	August 2021
Prepare rough drafts of handbook/solution	09/15/2021
Distribute handbook to faculty	11/01/2021
Evaluate the effectiveness of the handbook	Ongoing

Table 2: Project Costs

Item	Quantity/Hours Needed	Cost	Total Cost
Printing handbooks	100	$0	$0
Design fees	60 Hours	$0/hr.	$0

Creating a handbook that will be shared in a digital format means there is no cost for IPO to produce the handbooks. As I complete the handbook for my capstone project, I will not charge IPO for the handbook's design.

Evaluation:

With the lengthy timeline between proposing a course and students traveling, the evaluation will be ongoing. I plan to survey faculty members who submit a travel course to determine if the handbook was practical. More work is needed to create informational sessions for faculty using the handbook as a guide. My goal is that the handbook is helpful to IPO and can be used for multiple years and adapted to meet their needs. Further research is needed to develop pre-departure materials and training for faculty as they prepare to go abroad.

Summary:

The International Programs Office at UT helps students experience new adventures, sensations, cuisines, and customs through short-term faculty-led travel courses while receiving college credit. The COVID-19 pandemic and pause of all travel abroad gave the IPO time to evaluate and create new processes and procedures.

I have created a plan to distribute information about the process of creating a faculty-led travel course through the creation of a handbook. The handbook will be educational and include deadlines, course requirements, roles and responsibilities, and UT policies and procedures that need to be followed. It will also contain contact information for the IPO. The handbook will be designed free of charge for the organization and made available in a digital format.

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