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ENCOURAGING STUDENT PARTICIPATION DURING INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

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Active student participation is essential for Students to derive maximum benefits for an international study program. As we will indicate in Part II of this presentation, a fair grading system that includes a recognition for participation is an important element that encourages academic involvement. This statement, therefore, will not dwell on grading, but will consider other means for encouraging participation, academic and otherwise.

First, students may not know each other very well prior to the beginning of the program. We have found that two formal organizational meetings are advisable before departure on the program. While most of our critical information about the program is disseminated both personally and via a brochure, a first collective meeting is held to allow students to see all of their fellow travelers and to reinforce information concerning grades, clothing, extra money, insurance, demeanor (discouraging any illegal drug usage, for example), etc. This meeting is held about three weeks in advance of departure. A second formal meeting of shorter duration is held about 10 days later to review the above information and answer the inevitable student questions that will arise. At this meeting emphasis is placed upon 1) academics, to be sure that the students appropriately recognize that the program is a serious academic one, and upon 2) demeanor, that is, that we are guests in another country and are highly visible.

Then, within the last week before departure, the faculty holds a social with a theme focused on the country to be visited, with cheeses and other food and drink from the locale. Native magazines, posters, and brochures are in abundance, along with (usually homemade) directing signs in native jargon identifying the essentials (W.C. for toilet, for example). Probably most of the students are now beginning to be comfortable with each other and the faculty, and are willing to become more active members of the group.

Once on the trip, participation is encouraged in a variety of ways. Students are briefed just before each formal visit about what is to be seen, and the faculty may suggest some useful questions that may be asked of the local speakers. One or two faculty suggestions of questions just prior to hearing a lecture leads to many additional student questions during or after a lecture, we have found. In essence, a theme or framework allows students a focus and whets their interest. No matter that the theme has been suggested before the trip or the day before: students need encouragement just prior to hearing a speaker. Their enthusiasm is much greater with a little help just before the Site visit or lecture, and their retention is greater if there is a short, informal debriefing just after a visit "about what we just heard." Brief reinforcement of this nature can cause some students to carry forward an informal discussion on their own for hours.

For students who may still be reluctant to actively participate on the formal part of the program, the faculty may ask questions about a recent visit. This type of program is a rare opportunity for faculty to be able to gently encourage participation, as faculty and student are together often in "off hours" and at meals and in other informal settings. Even the shyest Students may open up on a study program of this type.

Finally, faculty should make every effort to cause the students to feel comfortable in the new environment during the early part of the program. A comfortable student is much more likely to be a good participant. Environment orientation from simple maps to menus, coupled with assurances that

the students can handle themselves in a strange environment much better than most of them believe, will go a long way in causing students to become good participants, and more than likely, good learners.