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*EDUCATION*

## A chance to cruise through college on The Scholar Ship

**Royal Caribbean Cruises joins six universities to launch an onboard international studies program next fall that will take graduates and undergraduates around the world.**

BY MARTHA BRANNIGAN  
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College study abroad is taking a distinct turn for the (more) exotic.

Miami-based Royal Caribbean Cruises is helping launch The Scholar Ship, an ocean vessel that will ferry some 600 college students on a 16-week academic voyage to ports like Lisbon, Portugal; Papeete, Tahiti; Sydney, Australia; and Shanghai, China.



■ [Graphic | Global Classroom](#)

Royal Caribbean, the world's second-largest cruise concern, has joined with six universities and will provide operational support and funding for the international studies program. The most recent -- and only U.S. college -- to join the venture is the University of California at Berkeley.

Macquarie University in Australia will be the institution of record and will provide credits for the program. Other schools include Fudan University in China, Tecnológico de Monterrey in Mexico, Al Akhawayn University in Morocco and the University of Ghana in Africa.

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Ronald Zigelboim, who formerly ran a family-owned sporting goods business in Miami, developed the idea and pitched it to Royal Caribbean, which embraced it over time, he says.

The Scholar Ship isn't the first such educational venture on the high seas. Semester at Sea, affiliated with the University of Virginia, has been offering onboard studies for years.

Still, Zigelboim, who is chief marketing officer for The Scholar Ship, says the international studies market is underserved, especially considering the demand for an educated workforce that is comfortable with and sensitive to various cultures.

Tuition is steep: about \$20,000 per semester. But the venture has established a \$2 million scholarship fund for the 2007-2008 academic year.

The partnership tapped Joseph Olander as president of the program. Olander is an expert in international education who was a founding faculty member of Florida International University and served as president of two universities in China.

**MULTICULTURAL**

"We will be satisfying an important need for intercultural education," says Olander. "It was OK to go to one country. But now multinationals are talking about the need for students who are comfortable with multicultural situations."

The closed community created by a semester on a cruise ship with fellow students from a variety of countries "provides a unique venue for such an education," he says. Separate graduate and undergraduate programs will be offered.

In a statement, Richard Fain, Royal Caribbean's chairman and CEO, said the ship's goals "of building a globally competent and culturally sensitive workforce could not be more timely and essential." The program is also tapping expertise from Microsoft, IBM and HSBC Bank to make the studies useful and relevant for students.

The venture is negotiating to lease a 1,100-passenger ship for the program, says Zigelboim. Though the ship will carry about 600 students in its first semester in the fall of 2007, it may carry as many as 900, he says, plus about 200 faculty.

**NOT A BOOZE CRUISE**

The Scholar Ship principals say they plan to offer serious educational programs -- not a booze cruise. While the value of international travel in broadening a student's world view is self-evident, it's unclear whether the venture will be able to attract top academics.

But Zigelboim claims the project is drawing a lot of inquiries from professors.

"One of the easier parts of our project is attracting faculty," he said. "It's an incredible professional development opportunity for faculty. On the other hand, it's a wonderful sabbatical excuse."

U.S. students will likely get 12 credits from Macquarie University for the semester. Students will spend about a week in each port, typically with educational programs available.



"It's not just arrive and they're on their merry way," says Zigelboim. The ambience of the cruise will be quite different than a typical cruise. Cuisine will be more casual and buffet style, Zigelboim says. But the emphasis on international education means travelers will be exposed to all sorts of food.

"It won't be hotdogs and pizza and hamburgers, unless it's American week," he says.

Alcohol will be available, he says, but ``in a controlled environment."

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