



Students to set sail on a multicultural, educational college cruise

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Thousands of students from all over the world are applying for an ambitious new academic program that seeks to impart education in a completely multicultural setting - onboard a sailing ship.

Over 8,000 students from 175 countries have applied for the program, known as The Scholar Ship. The program will take students on a 16-week learning tour onboard a ship that will set off from near Athens, Greece, sail through the Panama Canal and across the South Pacific to Australia and Asia.

During the semester-long program, around 600 graduate and undergraduate students from around the world will attend regular classes onboard the ship.

The vessel will also halt at such ports as Lisbon, Panama City, Suva, Sydney and Shanghai, where students will attend academic workshops. The voyage will cover a total of nine nations.

Macquarie University in Sydney, one of the ports of call, will award academic credits to students of The Scholar Ship.

Joseph Olander, president of The Scholar Ship, which is based out of Baltimore, said Macquarie University was one of a group of "academic steward" universities that helped develop the program curriculum and supplied some of the faculty.

One U.S. school, the University of California, Berkeley has joined the ranks of the academic stewards. The other schools are Tecnologico de Monterrey in Mexico, Al Akhawayn University in Morocco, Fudan University in China and the University of Ghana.

Olander said a number of other universities from around the world would provide students and faculty, though they would also recruit students directly.

The Scholar Ship is not the first sea-based academic program. A study abroad program called Semester at Sea has been around since the 1970s, with the University of Virginia

currently acting as the academic sponsor. Another program SEA Semester focuses on teaching marine sciences.

However, Olander said The Scholar Ship is different because of its international focus and the "distinctive form of intercultural learning" it would provide students.

"We developed a curriculum that is, by its nature intended to develop not only their intercultural competence, but also their leadership skills," said Ronald J. Zighelboim, the chief marketing officer of The Scholar Ship.

Zighelboim said the program is not different "for the sake of being different" or because it is ship based. Rather he said it addresses an "underserved" need.

"[C]ommunication in a multicultural context is one of the skill sets that is increasingly needed in the workplace," he said. Zighelboim added that employers are looking for people who can operate comfortably in several different cultures. Most recruits currently lacked this skill, he said.

Olander said multinationals like Microsoft, HSBC Bank and IBM played an "advisory role" in helping them develop a curriculum that would increase the employability of their students.

He said the development of intercultural skills was integrated into the curriculum and that there would be an "intercultural counselor" assigned to every 24 students.

Most of the courses offered by The Scholar Ship also appear to emphasize global relevance. Undergraduates for instance, can take courses such as sustainable development and conflict studies, while graduate students can learn international business or international relations.

While they want to maintain a diverse student body and faculty, Olander and Zighelboim said proficiency in English, the language of instruction, was a prerequisite.

The Scholar Ship is being funded by Miami-based Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd., which is also helping to run it.

"Royal Caribbean has a successful history of supporting noble social causes ... and it clearly wants to give back to those communities it serves," Zighelboim said.

Michael Bonner, the chief operating officer for The Scholar Ship, who previously worked for Royal Caribbean Cruises, said the program would also benefit the image of the cruise ship company.

Fees for the program are relatively high at \$20,000. However, Olander said a scholarship fund of over \$2 million had been set up and that scholarships would be awarded based on academic merit and economic need.

While students will have to acquire travel documents such as visas themselves, Olander said his program had contacted several embassies to help ease the process.

The Scholar Ship is to set sail September 2007.

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