

# **The 2011 Innovative Initiative Award Recipient Heartland Community College**

**for program entitled**

## **Online Travel and Tourism Program Partnership**

### **Program Description**

This project was formulated in Spring, 2008 in response to an industry-wide and local concern about the increasing shortage of professional travel counselors available to fill vacant positions. Our Travel and Tourism Professional Certificate Program is designed to prepare students for a variety of careers in the travel and tourism industry, and for those interested in starting a home-based travel business. This is one of the fastest growing segments of this global industry and is very attractive to those seeking to re-career or looking for a second career. Our curriculum can also benefit individuals currently working in the business with professional development and continuing education courses to maintain their existing certifications. We currently offer seven industry-based online courses, 12-16 weeks in length, and we are continually expanding our offerings based on industry needs and requirements. These courses prepare the students across the state to take nationally recognized examinations to earn professional credentials and designations set forth by The American Society of Travel Agents (ASTA), The Travel Institute, and Cruise Line International Assoc (CLIA). Heartland is a nationally approved test site to administer the national Travel Agent Proficiency (TAP) exam. As an added bonus for both Heartland and the students, these courses are also approved for vocational credit. Because the program is entirely online, it lends itself to easy partnerships with other institutions and we can eventually market it nationally or even globally.

### **Current course offerings-**

Professional Certificate Sequence:

The Business of Travel and Tourism

Geography for Travel and Tourism

Travel Agent Proficiency Review Course

### **Professional Development & Continuing Education Courses:**

Caribbean Destination Specialist

European Culture and Heritage Destination Specialist

CLIA's Guide to the Cruise Industry

Meeting and Event Planning

This program is innovative and unique in that it offers these key features:

- A turnkey educational program available for partnership at no cost
- Certified Travel Consultant instructor with 32 years of industry experience
- Online courses available 24/7 for maximum flexibility and convenience
- No minimum enrollment quotas
- Classes never cancel

- Industry-recognized curriculum culminating in national testing to earn professional credentials and designations
- Program includes marketing pieces for partnering institutions to implement for their own use
- Tuition income for partner institutions

This program is flexible for the students because they can enroll in just one course or as many as their time allows. Students have daily communication with the instructor via course messaging. Students can leave the program and return at a later time without any completion requirements or time restrictions, and they can enroll in these courses for their own personal enrichment. Additionally, the instructor incorporates her vast personal travel experiences in each class and provides the students with industry-breaking news daily, videos to visualize the destinations being studied, internet research assignments which go beyond the scope of textbook, and practice exams to prepare them for their industry exams. Because our program is online and offered through our Community Education department (noncredit), it can be marketed and used in a variety of ways. It can easily be offered at any other institution through a partnership program. We have successfully tested the partnership program with Lewis and Clark Community College. The partner just includes the courses in their catalog and registers the students, and then they retain a percentage of the enrollment income. Additionally, we retain a portion of this income with very little overhead on our part, plus our partners do the marketing for us. Also, there are not any location limitations for our potential students.

Our students have been highly successful in passing both the TAP and Destination Specialists national exams. They have gone on to find employment in local travel agencies, hotel and conference centers, tour operators, corporate travel departments and as home-based travel agents. One of our students relocated to Pune, India and is employed in the product development department for a large international tour operator. Institutions enjoy a percentage of the tuition income without the outlay for development costs. Their only expense is the cost of including the courses in their course catalog and any other additional marketing pieces they may wish create. Communities are anxious to employ students who have been professionally trained for employment in a variety of jobs requiring this knowledge and specific skill set. There is also a segment of our student population who are entrepreneurs and train to start own home-based travel business.

Effectiveness can be measured by the number of students who have successfully passed the online courses, as well as the national industry exams, and how well our program met the staffing needs of our local travel and tourism community. We also receive evaluations from each student at the end of the classes that are compiled and shared with the program manager and instructor. This program concept can be adaptable to other areas of study outside of travel and tourism. Anyone with a particular area of expertise can develop online classes and use a college as a home-base and share with other institutions. Online classes could be even developed collaboratively amongst experts from multiple institutions and then marketed globally. While our program prepares our students for careers in the travel and tourism industry, there are endless possibilities to apply this concept to other industries.

For our program, we had one dedicated, highly qualified industry professional develop the curriculum on her own time using Blackboard courseware technology. Her compensation is based entirely on a percentage of the tuition from students who enroll each semester. This arrangement offers an incentive for

the developer/instructor to promote the program and be actively involved in assisting the college to form and maintain partnerships with other institutions. The extent of financial resources to the college is the cost of publishing the travel and tourism courses in the catalog, and any additional marketing pieces involved in the promotion of the program.

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