Office of International Education (OIE)

Narrative for SACS
June 1, 2006

Introduction

The Office of International Education (OIE) was established in 2003 and is supported through the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost, supervised by the Associate Provost, Dr. Robert Nelsen, and directed by Dr. Rodolfo Hernandez. The OIE mission is to support the teaching, research, and outreach missions of The University of Texas at Dallas by offering comprehensive and flexible coordination of international education opportunities to faculty and students. The Office seeks to be a resource on campus to foster international learning opportunities that educate and prepare individuals with the skills necessary to function in a global environment.

In September 2005, a new director was appointed to lead this office. A discomfort was found among students and faculty regarding OIE services and a lack of communication between this office and other UTD administrative and academic units. Since September 2005, several meetings have been conducted with UTD leaders, administrators, faculty, and especially students to discuss their experiences and identify the most optimal and efficient way to meet the OIE mission. These meetings haven been, and will continue to be, instrumental in incorporating perceptions, suggestions, and criticism in a continuous improvement process for OIE. To date, the result has been a redesign of OIE operations, enhancing a higher level of inclusiveness, visibility, and quality services.

Diagnosing and Facing the Challenges

Upon the inception of the new OIE administration, there were immediate concerns and misunderstandings about the office's functions across campus and among students. A lack of concise and homogeneous information for international opportunities, a lack of coordinating information among UTD administrative units involved in international mobility such as records, financial aid, bursars, and a lack of continuous management for international collaborations such as the renewal of agreements were identified. In short, students followed arduous, complicated, and confusing procedures.

One of the immediate initiatives to overcome these circumstances and to enhance OIE leadership and user-friendliness was to provide visible, efficient, and clear information across campus. In order to accomplish this, we eliminated any unnecessary or duplicative aspect of the application procedure such as the submission of essays. Also, programs, study abroad fairs, insurance coverage, and scholarships have been announced electronically to students and staff on a frequent basis. The OIE web page has been updated to

reflect accurate information such as deadlines of programs and international scholarship funds. In addition, visits by international colleagues promoting opportunities to study abroad through their agencies or at their institutions have been essential to adding new opportunities to our portfolio of international education.

Also since September 2005, the OIE has met with administrators to discuss procedures and to identify coordinated and homogeneous procedures to avoid duplication and/or students' frustration. Our goal is to define the simplest and most efficient protocol for our students to have the safest and most educational and enjoyable experience abroad. The effort has been complemented by offering pre-departure information sessions to educate students about handling externalities such as emergencies during their journeys, transfer of records, insurance, and other issues.

Another component of the OIE agenda has been the organization of Study Abroad Fairs at the beginning of fall and spring semesters to introduce students to representatives of international programs. From fall 2005 to spring 2006 we have had a significant increase in the number of attending students from48 to 97. The effort has not been sufficient based on the total UTD population (15,000 students). Therefore, we are pursuing some changes in the organization of the Study Abroad Fair for the fall of 2006 by sending invitations to the institutional representatives earlier, dedicating the fair to a specific country or region (in this case Hong Kong), hosting a delegation from one of our counterparts in such region (in this case City University of Hong Kong), complementing the fair with a Passport Fair (U.S. postal services personnel to receive passport applications on campus), and adding a series of workshops about international programs during the fair, including customized programs for faculty.

In order to expand the scope of OIE, we complemented study abroad programs with the design and implementation of international exchange programs. This new venue of international mobility has become a more accessible mechanism of mobility for our students since tuition is waived on a reciprocal basis. Also, students may have a deeper cultural and linguistic immersion by being guests of one of our international counterparts rather than traveling and pursuing study programs with other U.S. nationals. Since September 2005, UTD has signed exchange programs with Kyungpook National University, Korea, University of Kaiserslautern, Germany, City University of Hong Kong, Fudan University, China, Polytechnic University of Cataluna, Spain; and Sungkyunkwan University, Korea. In addition the exchange program agreement with the School of Physics and Astronomy at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland was renewed.

Measuring Our Progress

The OIE is committed to evaluating results every semester and to quantifying the quality of our services and continuously improving our operation. Currently the OIE is requesting students to fill out evaluations during their visits to the OIE and their experiences abroad. In addition, the OIE team has been instructed to maintain close and friendly contact with the students to identify needs and challenges.

Future

Despite the short existence of the OIE, its strategy is constantly evolving to meet the expectations of our growing student population and to educate our UTD community about international education. Several projects will be designed and implemented within the next two academic years (2006-2008). The OIE will:

1) Create online applications for international mobility, study abroad and exchange programs to increase the efficiency of our services
2) Create electronic surveys to measure student satisfaction with OIE services
3) Design discussion sessions and workshops, including the participation of former participants, alumni, and potential participants to share and learn from their experiences
4) Continue identifying and formalizing new international collaborations, especially those which expand the portfolio of student mobility. Currently the OIE is designing exchange mobility with the Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education (ITESM), and the Mexican Research Center for Mathematics (CIMAT).
5) Continue identifying mechanisms to better facilitate awareness of international programs across campus
6) Continue training OIE staff to effectively advise our students about international education