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UH tackles global strategies, studies

Provost Paula Short gave Jaime Ortiz a lofty task when he entered the newly created position of vice provost for Global Strategies and Studies: Make UH the most global university.

While UH consistently tops “most diverse campuses” lists, most notably on U.S. News & World Report, a global university excels in foreign-language and study-abroad programs and has a global curriculum, a large population of international students and many cultural activities. A special goal for UH, as it is in the energy capital of the world, is to increase international energy partners.

All of these things together, Ortiz said, will add value to students’ degrees once they enter the workforce and are able to better interact with people internationally.

“You have to be up to par with what’s going on in the developments that the rest of the world is having,” Ortiz said. “Otherwise, you will become culturally and intellectually illiterate.”



This fall, Ortiz’s office will launch an initiative that provides passports to all or some of the incoming students. While the official details aren’t finalized, the intention is there: UH wants its students to study abroad.

“They will ask themselves, ‘What do I do with this booklet?’ and the immediate answer is going to be, ‘I can use it to travel outside the United States,’” Ortiz said, “and that’s exactly what we want.”

This month, Short allotted \$200,000 for study-abroad scholarships, for which students can apply to fund their adventures abroad.

The scholarship money is necessary, as most students can’t afford to travel abroad.

Richard Armstrong , who leads the study-abroad program for The Honors College, said the money is crucial if students wish to gain a global perspective.

“Traveling when you’re a young adult is probably the most significant thing you can do, I guarantee it ... You live in a place like Houston, and you think Houston is big, and there is so much here, but the world is so much bigger than Houston,” Armstrong said.

“The nice thing about studying abroad is you’ll get back (and) you’ll notice a lot of things you never really noticed from around the world in Houston.”

UH also hopes to expand its volunteer- and intern-oriented programs, hoping to positively affect the visited foreign countries. Through the Graduate College of Social Work’s Latin-American Initiative, professor Luis Torres and his graduate students take a social issue and work with the locals to improve the country’s conditions.

Torres has worked extensively with El Salvador during the last few years, and this summer he will launch a six-week course on family and youth violence prevention. The program is in collaboration with social work programs from El Salvador. The course will take place for two weeks in El Salvador, two weeks in Houston and two weeks via the Internet. Another group from GCSW will visit Bolivia to study and help the mining communities there.

This close collaboration with Latin American countries creates lasting relationships that expand UH’s network of global opportunities.

“Study abroad is really only one piece of it,” Torres said. “Working with other universities abroad is part of the goal to lead to faculty exchanges.”

These connections also develop opportunities to do research or grant writing collaborations, as well as recruit foreign students.

“The impact extends beyond the individual (study-abroad) student,” Torres said, “and really does have a global impact on the UH campus, the city of Houston and the countries that we visit.”

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