

***Go Global* with West Texas A&M University**

College of Education and Social Sciences

Introduction. The College of Education and Social Sciences at West Texas A&M University has developed an initiative that promotes the acquisition of cultural knowledge and the development of cultural understanding through an innovative and multifaceted academic delivery system. The University's *Go Global* initiative connects graduate and undergraduate course content with the development of cultural knowledge and cross-cultural understanding; service leadership; academic research and writing; and the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills through experiential learning in international settings. The *Go Global* experience provides students the opportunity to apply new knowledge, skills, and cultural understanding to their professional roles in order to positively impact the local and global community. Additionally, participating faculty members and students engage in meaningful scholarly activity associated with the *Go Global* initiative.

History. In June 2006, the College of Education and Social Sciences delivered its first faculty-led student travel opportunity to central Mexico. Graduate students in education and two faculty members participated in the initiative which emphasized accomplishing the learning objectives of the course associated with the travel opportunity; acquiring knowledge of Mexican culture, history, art and religion; and designing, delivering, and assessing a meaningful service leadership project. Specifically, the faculty and student participants formed a partnership with a residential facility for abandoned and neglected children. During the course of the experience, WTAMU students assessed the general intelligence and academic achievement in reading, math, writing, and spelling of 35 children ages 4 through 15 years – information previously unavailable to the caretakers of the children.



Since its inception in 2006, the *Go Global* initiative at WTAMU has extended the university classroom into the world to include the following faculty-led, short term study abroad opportunities:

- June 2007 – Graduate students in education studied the history, culture, religion, art, and architecture of northern India and participated in faculty-led experiences

- including service to Mother Teresa's Kalighat Home for the Pure Heart, a free hospice for the poor, and the Children's Home of the Immaculate Heart.
- June 2007 – Graduate and undergraduate students in political science traveled in England to study the historical foundations of modern political thought and engage in dialogue with English university faculty members in the discipline.
 - January 2008 – Undergraduate honors students representing a variety of disciplines studied the history, culture, religion, art, and architecture of northern India including service designed to promote literacy and cross-cultural understanding to elementary school children in the city of Agra, India.
 - June 2008 – Graduate students in education studied the history, culture, religion, art, and architecture of Southeast Asia and participated in faculty-led experiences in Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia including service to public schools serving tribal children in northern Thailand.
 - June 2008 – Graduate students in education built 130 ventilated mud and brick wood burning stoves in rural homes in the Andes Mountains. The project was designed to improve domestic air quality and reduce respiratory illness resulting from open cooking fires and lack of adequate ventilation. Additionally, WTAMU students participated in experiential leadership and group dynamics training in the Amazon Jungle.



- June 2008, June 2009 and June 2010 – Graduate and undergraduate students in education continued service leadership opportunities in central Mexico including the expansion of the educational initiative to a rural public school and a community center serving at-risk children.
- June 2009 and 2010 – Graduate and undergraduate students majoring in criminal justice participated in faculty-led experiences in central Mexico designed to develop their understanding of comparative criminal justice systems. WTAMU students toured Mexican federal and state correctional facilities, engaged in dialogue with Mexican law enforcement and judicial officials (including border and drug enforcement agencies), studied the Mexican criminal justice system with law professors in Mexico, and investigated social services available to individuals and families in the Mexican criminal justice system.
- July 2009 – Graduate students in education participated in faculty-led opportunities in Turkey, Greece, and Egypt including studying the history, culture, religion, art, and architecture of the region and comparing the delivery of public school education.

- May 2010 – Undergraduate and graduate students in social work participated in field experiences in New Zealand which emphasized the comparison of social service theories and practices in New Zealand (a leader in the field) and the U.S.
- July 2010 – Graduate Students in education participate in service leadership opportunities in South Africa including service to the homeless refugee population. Participating students conducted comparisons of public school curriculum and educational methodology.



- May 2011 - Undergraduate and graduate students in social work participated in field experiences in Turkey which emphasized the comparison of social service theories and practices in a progressive Muslim society compared with those in the U.S. The experience emphasized the acquisition of knowledge of faith-based and cultural practices and expectations that will likely manifest in an increasingly Muslim client population in the Amarillo area.
- July 2011 – Graduate students in education and in the sciences participated in field experience in the Ecuadorian Amazon Rain Forest and on the Galapagos Islands. Students conducted a comparison of curriculum, infrastructure including technology, preservice and inservice teacher training, and educational methodology in schools serving the indigenous children living in the Amazon and children living on the Galapagos island of Santa Cruz.

The Future. As a result of the success of the *Go Global* initiative, faculty-led opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to acquire cultural knowledge and develop cross-cultural understanding while accomplishing course and discipline-specific learning objectives will be expanded within the college and the university. Future *Go Global* field experience opportunities will include programs in education, criminal justice, sociology, social work, and political science.

Faculty and Community Outreach. The success of the *Go Global* initiative has resulted in the creation of a number of related ventures. Faculty members from the disciplines of education, criminal justice, sociology, political science, and business have formed a unique learning community with specifically designed professional development goals. The learning community is actively engaged in Spanish language instruction with a focus on conversational skills, book study related to Mexican culture, and an intensive experience in Mexico designed to enhance course content and cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, the college hosts a variety of

events designed to increase cultural knowledge and foster cross-cultural understanding including its annual *Dia de Los Muertos* festival. These events involve the active participation of diverse leaders in the community.

Each year, the Office of Continuing Education at West Texas A&M University offers the community an exciting opportunity to study and travel through a noncredit course entitled: *Incredible India - A Learning Adventure*. During the fall, participants meet on four occasions at our *WTAMU Amarillo Center* to study important aspects of Indian religion, culture, history, art, and architecture. The adventure continues with a two week journey in India under the direction of WTAMU faculty members. During 2012, community participants will have the opportunity to tutor in a village school and provide service to Mother Teresa's Hospice for the Destitute in Varanasi, India.

Financial Support. All participating students pay a significant portion of the direct expenses associated with their international field experience. However, scholarship assistance is essential to student participation. The direct expense for one student to participate in the program ranges from \$2,000 to \$5,000 depending on the international destination. An endowment supporting the *Go Global* initiative has been established at WTAMU. For additional information concerning *Go Global* or ways that you can participate, please contact: Dr. Eddie Henderson, Dean of the College of Education and Social Sciences, at 806-651-2603 or ehenderson@wtamu.edu or Dr. Angela Spaulding, Dean of the Graduate School and Research, at 806-651-2730 or aspaulding@wtamu.edu.



