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TRAVEL SEMINARS IN EUROPE: HOW CAN I DIRECT ONE?

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ABSTRACT

This paper is designed to indicate to any interested faculty member, how to run a travel business seminar. International trade is becoming very important to the United States. The international business environment is a very complex one. It is difficult to teach students how international business is carried by use of in-class lectures, or other traditional teaching methods. A European Business Seminar was developed to carry out his task. During the seminar students have an opportunity to interact directly with top level business executives. These executives have day to day responsibility for their firms' international business operations.

Seminar Development

This paper describes the step by step procedures faculty members would need to follow in order to set up their own seminars. It also highlights some of the major issues a faculty member should consider when structuring a similar seminar. In order to offer an international marketing seminar, one must find a "home" for it. A university institutional base is desirable in order to offer academic credit for the program.

The crucial element of a travel business/seminar is the lecture/discussion sessions with a wide variety of firms which are actively involved in international business or other Institutions that influence the foreign business environment. In order to secure foreign hosts one must first choose the countries to be visited. Experience has indicated that the overseas seminar should visit two to four countries. Participants need to be to contrast the commercial environments and marketing practices found between countries but still stay in each country long enough to absorb its unique features. Countries which are especially supportive of business are: Belgium, France, Netherlands, The Republic of Ireland, United Kingdom, and Yugoslavia. Certain countries should be avoided in running such a seminar. Characteristics of countries that would make less than ideal hosts include a tradition of business secrecy, very high costs of living, strong anti-American feelings, political instability, ect.

Filling Out Your Program

Once the host countries are selected, the next task is to arrange for host organizations. There are a variety of foreign institutions that will help one contact suitable organizations. For example, in the United Kingdom, one can contact the Central Bureau for Education Visits and Exchanges to help find appropriate hosts. Institutions that serve a similar function in other countries include the Irish Development Authority in Ireland, the Bureau of Tourism In Belgium, and Universities in Holland, France, and Yugoslavia. Most countries have such institutions which are willing to help study-travel seminars. These institutions are helpful but often very slow.

In contacting an organization, one needs to send a description of the seminar, a description of the tentative schedule, and a write-up on the type of presentation that would best serve your objectives. One needs to contact 50% more potential foreign hosts than actually needed. This provides a full schedule plus a few back-up hosts. Past experience has shown that it is advisable to have some back-up host organizations because roughly 10-15% of the

organizations that agree to Speak to the seminar will need to cancel their presentation. These cancellations are due to strikes, special holidays, or managerial emergencies.

Students taking this type of experiential seminar should first attend several orientation meetings in the U.S. At the meetings the seminar is explained and reading materials are handed out. The readings should cover general information about traveling abroad, more detailed material about the political, economic, and marketing environments of each country, as well as articles on some of the specific organizations to be visited. At consequent meetings the reading materials should be discussed.

Session Format

Do not expect any visit to a single institution to provide the students with the total picture. The desired outcome is best achieved by visiting a variety of organizations. If each host provides input on its policies, management strategies, methods of dealing with the international market and the environment in which it operates, then the students will develop the necessary understanding from the experiential activity. We leave it to each organization to we visit to decide on the format of presentation that best suits that particular host.

Seminar Development

It is often difficult for any one university to effectively start up and run a travel business seminar. A number of universities have joined together to put on such programs. It often takes a number of years to make the initial contacts. In my case, it took three years. Even once all the contacts are made, one University often can't support a travel seminar on its own. To run such a program efficiently requires two to three faculty members to accompany the students to Europe. This requires recruiting 30 to 45 students, in order to keep the costs within reason. If you are interested in directing a seminar in conjunction with other universities you are welcome to contact myself at the Department of Marketing, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois 62901, (618) 453-4341 and/or Daniel Brenenstuhl, Management Department, Arizona State University, Tempe Arizona 85281, (602)965-3961.