On the horizon

Current trends inspire new study abroad options for UA students

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Have you ever wanted to throw a dart at a world map and let it determine your next adventure?

The UA office of Study Abroad and Student Exchange (SASE) has recently implemented eight new programs for students who wish to study abroad in the summer and fall, said Associate Director Laura Thornes. She said there has been a growing trend of students wanting to study abroad in more unique areas of the world.

Some of the new student exchange programs for summer and fall include locations such as Japan, China, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Singapore, Taiwan and Korea.

"To meet (students') growing interest and confidence with going to less-traveled areas, we are also trying to develop programs that provide support structure beyond just sending students there," Thornes said.

SASE will be expanding its programs into Eastern Europe, Asia and South America. They are working closely with international programs and local faculty members in hopes of making more diverse study abroad opportunities available for students, Thornes said.

"The UA is unique in efforts to provide students with a variety of programs," said SASE director David Wright. "I am proud of the fact that we are able to offer to students, in a very significant way, over 150 programs that stand in 50 different countries around the world."

Each year, the UA sends around 1,000 students abroad on summer, semester and full-year academic programs.

"Some of the newer initiatives we're trying to take in terms of going to less-traveled areas like Africa, China, East Asia and Eastern Europe are really growing," Thornes said.

She said in the past, a majority of students choose to travel in places like Spain, Italy, France and other...
European countries.

"That's part of the reason students haven't gone to some of the more unique destinations in the past," Thornes said. "There were no programs there to receive them or faculty to take them there and make students more comfortable."

SASE has sustained a successful semester-long Yangtze International Study business program in China, with 55 undergraduate students from the Eller College of Management attending this summer.

Hector Oviedo, a political science senior, spent two semesters abroad in Nanjing, China and Pécs, Hungary on the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship.

Oviedo said he entered the program hoping that one day he'd be able to change the world.

"Seven months later, the world ended up changing me," he said.

Oviedo said he encourages other students to take the opportunity to see the world for what it really is, instead of from the narrow viewpoint some Americans may have.

"I think these newer programs we've just added are exciting in that they are places we've been needing to go," Thornes said. "For example, San Juan, Puerto Rico, is like a gem. I think students underestimate all that is available in Mexico and all that is worth exploring."

Tough economic conditions in the United States do not seem to be stopping students interested in studying abroad.

"Across the board, our numbers are holding about the same," Thornes said. "We are not seeing as much growth as we have in the past. I think students are a little more cautious."

Thornes is hopeful that the trend of students exploring new study abroad opportunities will continue.

"I love when students think outside of their comfort zone and wish to explore other regions and I admire students that aren't afraid to try new things," she said. "We always try to think what and where the new challenges are, and we love students that embrace that challenge."

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