

A Point of Departure for International Partnerships

When Nancy McGehee, assistant professor in the Department of Hospitality and Tourism, agreed to

participate in Virginia Tech's first International Faculty Development Program (IFDP) in 2005, she had no idea that a little over a year later, she would be working on agritourism with colleagues in Italy — plus developing a collaborative project in Mexico.

Professors advance the university's international agenda while developing far-reaching collaborations

BY SUSAN B. FELKER



Heike Mayer



"The program gave me the confidence to work with faculty at universities in other countries, something I had never done before," she says.

McGehee is just one of the growing number of faculty who have benefited from Virginia Tech's innovative IFDP. Launched last year to advance the internationalization of the university community through the development of faculty expertise and leadership in the global arena, it is the first such program in the world. It supports faculty in their efforts to develop new international collaborations that will enrich their discovery and teaching while adding depth and breadth to Virginia Tech's ability to educate students for the global economy.

The first program received such high evaluations that it remains virtually unchanged this year. The deans of each

Faculty members Carlyle Brewster and Nancy McGehee enjoy the view from the balcony at Tech's European center (*middle*). Faculty members visit the Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano, Switzerland (*left*).

college select two faculty members who receive invitations to participate. During the spring semester, these educators attend introductory meetings, presentations by panelists with considerable international experience, discussions about Tech's international programs, and briefings on the university's Center for European Studies and Architecture (CESA) in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland.

Virginia Tech's Center for European Studies and Architecture in Riva San Vitale, Switzerland.



Carlyle Brewster

European Partners

Group members identify one or more potential European partners and possible collaborative programs, then arrange to meet with their contacts in Europe during the month of May. The provost's office and Outreach and International Affairs underwrite expenses for IFDP, which means that faculty need not deplete their budgets to expand their horizons.

For the second phase of the program, the group travels to CESA. Located in the Canton of Ticino near the Italian border, CESA is the logical headquarters for the IFDP.

Last year, the entire group visited the Lugano and Mendrisio campuses of the Università della Svizzera Italiana and met with faculty and administrators at the Politecnico di Milano, the oldest engineering school in Italy. It has an enrollment of 42,000 students.

After their tour of universities near CESA, members of the group dispersed across Europe to meet their European partners and develop their collaborative projects. Upon returning to Riva San Vitale, group members reported to their colleagues on the results of their meetings.

All Colleges, Many Backgrounds

Last year, 13 faculty members representing the colleges of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, Engineering, Pamplin Business, Architecture and Urban Studies, Science, and Veterinary Medicine participated in the IFDP. This year all eight colleges are fully represented.

Some faculty participants have had no previous international experience and benefit from the expertise of other group members who have already been involved in transnational collaborations. "We had lots of opportunity for formal and informal discussions to learn about what faculty who have worked abroad are doing," says McGehee about her experience last year.

For a new program of its size and scope, the IFDP met with success quickly. First-year participant John Rossi, professor and head of the Department of Mathematics, is sold. "Many university initiatives never get off the ground because the reward system fails to recognize the faculty member for his or her efforts," he says.

"As a result," Rossi continues, "before I attended the International Faculty Development Program in Riva, I was



Professors from seven colleges at all stages of their careers share ideas for international collaborations. Meetings and meals often wind up in the garden at CESA (far left).



Carlyle Brewster

The church in Bellinzona (left) is part of the learning experience.

somewhat worried about the untenured folks in our group. However, all the participants were able to structure activities that could further their own scholarship and simultaneously advance the university's desire for further globalization in one fell swoop. I am so confident in this program that this year I encouraged an untenured member of my department to participate."

Strategic Objectives

The International Strategic Plan developed by the university community in 2004 inspired the program. The concept further evolved under the leadership of a planning committee composed of Vice Provost for Outreach and International Affairs John E. Dooley, College of Architecture and Urban Studies Dean

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Mendrisio staircase.

Heike Mayer

Being There

Milan Centrale train station, Milan, Italy.

Faculty tour l'Accademia di architettura di Mendrisio, Switzerland.

Below, a view from Lake Como, Italy.



Paul Knox, Associate Provost for International Affairs S.K. De Datta, College of Architecture and Urban Studies Associate Dean for Academic Affairs Jack Davis, Center for European Studies and Architecture Academic Director and Associate Provost for Undergraduate Affairs Ron Daniel, and Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures Chair Andrew S. Becker.

“One change in this year’s program is that Graduate School Dean Karen DePauw’s first Future Professoriate: Global Perspectives Graduate Seminar and International Experience course members will arrive at CESA for the last week of the IFDP program and will hear faculty presentations about their meetings with international colleagues,” says Dooley. The goal of DePauw’s seminar is to explore faculty roles and responsibilities in higher education from a global perspective.

Faculty participants also like the flexibility of the program to accommodate varied interests. “Different people, of course, have different goals,” says Christopher W. Zobel, associate professor in the Department of Business Information Technology, Pamplin College, who is working on his first international project as a faculty member. He studied abroad as an undergraduate.

“Before I was involved in the IFDP, my mind immediately jumped to study abroad as the way to internationalize,” Zobel notes. “Personally, I’d like to establish research connections with colleagues outside the university. This program provides me with the support system to work toward establishing such collaborations. I like the adaptability of this program in providing support for varied faculty interests that are all a part of the international experience. I feel very fortunate to be a part of it.”

McGehee found her experience last year valuable for several reasons. “It gave us a cross-college experience. We had people at all stages of their careers, from young faculty striving for tenure, to those on the cusp of being tenured, to those who are highly experienced. We otherwise might not have met and learned from each other. Also, it allowed me to see the university’s priorities in the context of my own work and the ways in which I might be able to collaborate internationally to advance both my own scholarship and the university’s goals.”

Just how useful was the IFDP? McGehee says, “It really was a wonderful experience and one that will help me throughout the remainder of my research career.”

www.outreach.vt.edu/ifdp