

Park stresses vital connection between student success, global competency

To succeed in the face of stiff, world-class competition these days, college graduates in business, economics and political science must navigate a complex global terrain where international expertise is absolutely essential.

Should a criminal justice or biology major, or an aspiring graphic designer demonstrate “global proficiency?”

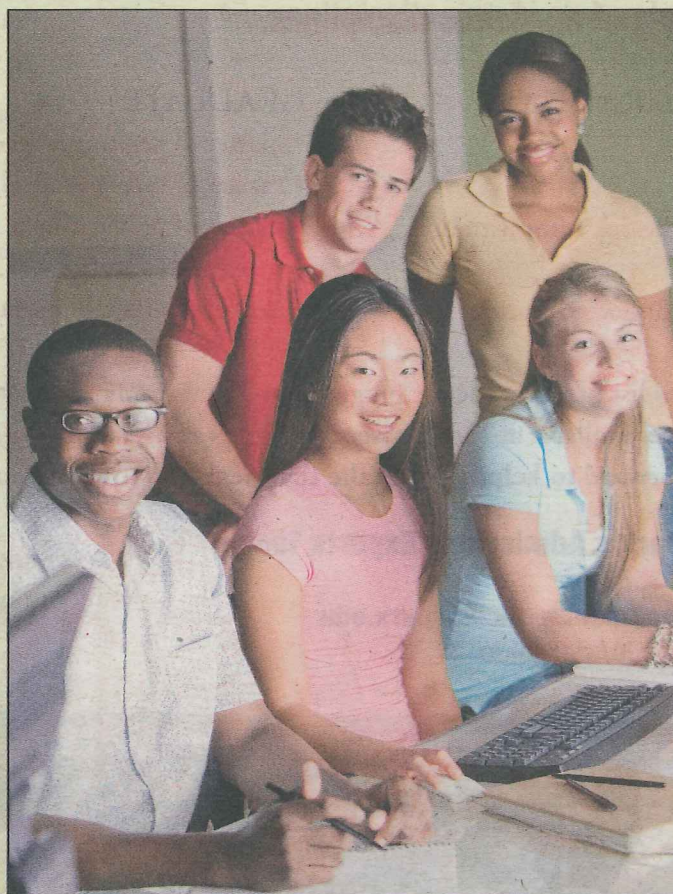
At Park University in Parkville, the answer is a resounding yes. Every student, in every field of study, should have some mastery of global issues. Because, according to Park Provost Jerry Jorgensen, international literacy is now a requisite for success in work and in life.

“I believe no one graduating from any college can realize their full potential without a strong background in global education,” he said.

To that end, Park has launched an ambitious five-year strategic plan that advances the ability of students, faculty and staff to contribute to a globally interdependent society.

Global from the start

International education is nothing new at Park, which has attracted international students since its earliest days. Founded in 1875, Park today enrolls more than 600 international students a year on its Parkville Campus. “Walking across campus, you can feel the multicultural aura of Park University,” Jorgensen said. But Park’s new strategic plan has galvanized the Univer-



sity to do even more. As a first step, Park created a new position, vice president of global and lifelong learning, filling it with a veteran Park administrator and researcher in international communication.

Thimios Zaharopoulos oversees a new Global Institute that will spearhead international learning, scholarship and service activities throughout the University.

“It’s not only about international students at our campus, but also about giving all our students international opportunities, and making our community more culturally sensitive,” Zaharopoulos said.

The Global Institute secured funding from the Council of Independent Colleges to bring an

expert to campus April 8-12 to discuss one of the most politically contentious regions in the world, the Middle East. David J. Dunford, former U.S. Ambassador to Oman and deputy ambassador to Saudi Arabia during the 1990-91 Gulf War, will speak to classes, meet with students and faculty, and deliver formal addresses.

The Institute also launched a second initiative — a Council of Fellows — which provides funding for several faculty/staff members a year to help develop grant proposals or internationalize coursework. “There’s no reason every course at the University can’t have a desired global learning outcome.”

A different take on study abroad

Park is also ratcheting its efforts to ensure more U.S. students at Park have a study abroad experience. According to Angela Peterson, director of global education and study abroad, a semester in Europe isn’t feasible for many Park students, especially non-traditional students.

“How can we reach out to single moms or retired military veterans?” she asked. “We want to give our students an opportunity to go abroad, even if it’s just a week, because for many, this may be their only chance.”

Park has developed one-week stints to Bolivia and Jamaica during spring break where students can immerse themselves quickly. A group of Park nursing students traveled to rural Guatemala during spring break in 2011 to work in a medical clinic, and a larger group will return this March.

“It’s important to provide a meaningful experience abroad at a price students can afford and a time they can get away,” Peterson said. “They return with a knowledge of another culture and an understanding of the diversity in Kansas City.”

It’s that direct application to students’ future success that underscores Park’s new international activities, a more far-reaching goal than travel for travel’s sake. Park now confers a “Global Proficiency” designation on the transcripts of students who complete international courses, activities or

studied abroad. Peterson said, “This is recognition that the University has found you to be globally proficient, that you have experiences with different cultures that make you more attractive to employers and more well-rounded as a person.”

Benefits near and far

Park has also long been a leader in developing progressive international programs for graduate students. This year, Park will bring its first cohort of executives from China to Parkville through a new Global Executive MBA program. The intent is that corporations throughout the world will send their managers to Park to complete a graduate degree and interact with local business leaders, then returning to improve their own corporate culture. Ultimately, it will foster long-term ties between Kansas City and Chinese business interests.

Zaharopoulos, who serves as vice president of the board of directors for the International Relations Council of Kansas City, anticipates additional innovations related to international education, including faculty-student exchanges.

The payoff is clear, Jorgensen said. “Kansas City businesses operate nationally, or want to, and they need a workforce that understands the complexity of dealing with and working around the world. Internationalism isn’t just a tag or an afterthought at Park. It’s baked into our institutional DNA.” ■

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