

Strengthening Teaching, Research, and Faculty Development in Tourism Management in South Africa

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South Africa is the dominant tourism market on the African continent. Tourism is a very important industry for the economy, which has largely focused on the core products such as parks, wildlife, nature and culture. In the last two decades, the product mix has been diversified to incorporate marine and coastal areas, rural communities and townships, events, urban centers, meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions.

The market is largely comprised of visitors from Africa and the Middle East. However, international markets are increasing and there are indications of continued growth in the future. Also, the government expects to increase international arrivals to 10 million by 2010. Given the projected increases in visitors, the potential to expand this sector to generate more income, employment and other benefits is enormous, considering the current level of tourism development.

However, tourism growth is dependent on a number of factors, notably, developing a trained and skilled labor force. Capacity building and institutional development through training is a key component for the vitality and sustainability of the tourism industry in South Africa. In order to address this major need, the University of Florida (UF) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) in Tshwane, South Africa have formulated a partnership to strengthen its teaching, research, service and faculty development initiatives in tourism management.

In Year 1, the teaching and curriculum needs will be accommodated at the Bachelor's degree level with respect to the following objectives: a) review and update existing curriculum; b) develop new curriculum in casino management, event management, airport and aviation management (currently these degree programs are not offered on the African continent); and c) develop vocational and executive training certificate programs in tourism. Also, a more concerted effort will be highlighted to target and enroll disadvantaged populations to the Department of Tourism at TUT.



In Year 2, based on a strategic visioning meeting with faculty and industry stakeholders, a Center for Sustainable Tourism will be established with active industry engagement (Advisory Board) and partnership. The mission of the Center will be largely to serve tourism destinations and industries through research, training and outreach within the community, province and other regions in southern Africa. In Year 3, faculty development will be emphasized with regard to enhancing capacity as well as collaborative initiatives in tourism research with the project team and select UF faculty. The facilitation of collaborative initiatives in research partnerships will be sustained during and post-completion of the project. Also, professional development opportunities will be offered to current TUT faculty through a short exchange program with UF.

The project team has been formulated based on their respective backgrounds, knowledge and expertise within and outside UF which will be instrumental in accomplishing the objectives and strengthening the partnership between UF and TUT.

This project is led by Dr. Brijesh Thapa, an associate professor in the Department of Tourism, Recreation, & Sports Management and director of UF's Center for Tourism Research and Development. He is also affiliate faculty with the center for African Studies. The partnership is managed through the Higher Education for Development agency with a three-year funding award of \$250,000 from the United States Agency for International Development.