

Challenges Of The UNCG/ Tec De Monterrey/Disney College Program

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ABSTRACT

This report is based on a study of participants in an international, academic exchange program that includes a Walt Disney World internship. The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) was a principal partner in developing the UNCG/Tec de Monterrey/Disney College Program (UNCG Program). This cooperative arrangement involves students enrolled in degree programs at one of the Tec de Monterrey campuses in Mexico. The report analyzes the challenges faced by the UNCG Program Director and assisting faculty in the early development of the UNCG Program as well as the challenges presented since the Program has matured.

The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) was one of the principal partners in developing the UNCG/Tec de Monterrey/Disney College Program (UNCG Program). The UNCG Program is a cooperative arrangement that involves students enrolled in degree programs at one of the more than thirty Tec de Monterrey (Tec) campuses. This report is based, in part, on a survey of current and past participants in the UNCG Program; it will discuss the challenges faced by the UNCG Program Director and assisting faculty in the early development of the UNCG Program as well as the challenges presented since the UNCG program has matured.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE PARTNERSHIP – THE UNCG/TEC DE MONTERREY/DISNEY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Prior to the 2000 – 2001 academic year, there was an imbalance in the number of student exchanges between UNCG and Tec de Monterrey (formerly known by the initials of ITESM). Previously, UNCG sent twice the number of students to study in Mexico than it received as exchange students from Mexico. To correct this imbalance, the Bryan School of Business and Economics (at UNCG) created a partnership with Tec de Monterrey and Walt Disney World. A program was designed to attract Mexican students who were enrolled on a Tec campus to cause them to enroll in the UNCG Program in Greensboro, North Carolina. The UNCG Program allowed Mexican students to study at UNCG for one semester and then participate in a combination of courses and an internship with Walt Disney World in the following semester. During the entire program, the Mexican students would be participating in an international academic exchange program with UNCG and maintaining full-time student status.

The following are descriptions of the three entities that make up the partnership arrangement for the UNCG Program:

1. UNCG – This is a comprehensive university located in Greensboro, North Carolina with a student population of more than 14,000. Undergraduates choose from more than 100 areas of study. There is a wide variety of master's degrees and nineteen doctoral areas of study. It is one of the sixteen universities of the University of North Carolina system.
2. Tec de Monterrey (Tec) – Tec is a private university system in Mexico formerly known as the Instituto Tecnológico y Estudios Superiores de Monterrey (ITESM). It is comprised of thirty-six campuses. Nine of

the campuses host exchange students from all over the world. The Tec is considered one of the top universities in Latin America.

3. Walt Disney World (WDW) – WDW is located in Orlando, Florida and part of the larger Walt Disney organization, a Fortune-100 company, and a leader in the entertainment and hospitality industries. WDW is the largest single-site employer in the world. The WDW properties consist of four theme parks, two water parks, twelve resort hotels, and a large dining, shopping, and entertainment complex. The WDW College Program recruits thousands of interns each semester. The participants for the College Program are recruited from more than fifty U.S. colleges and universities. The Tec de Monterrey students are the only authorized, international participants in the College Program.

INTRODUCTION – SCOPE OF THE PAPER

The UNCG Program has been in existence for five years. A key to the success of the program's longevity is, no doubt, the positive relationship that has been established with the faculty and administrators at the Tec de Monterrey and at the College Program of Walt Disney World, Orlando, Florida. This report will present the challenges in three categories: "At Disney" (Walt Disney World); "At the Tec" (Tec de Monterrey); and "At UNCG" (the University of North Carolina at Greensboro).

TEC CAMPUSES – SELLING THE PROGRAM CHALLENGE

The challenge at the Tec is organizing a recruiting visit by the UNCG faculty in such a way that there is interest developed on the part of many students. UNCG/Tec/Disney College Program is competing with other universities and other organizations (entities, for instance, that offer internship placements) throughout the world. In the past, before the Disney tie-in was established, the participation at UNCG by Tec exchange students was miniscule.

Not only had many Tec students not heard of UNCG, they knew very little about North Carolina. Since the association with Disney, UNCG has become one of the largest exchange programs with the Tec de Monterrey system.

Of all the Tec campuses, only nine campuses are administratively-organized to receive incoming international exchange students. Initially, these nine campuses were selected as sites from which the UNCG program would recruit Tec students. Since that time, Tec students from other campuses attend the UNCG information sessions on the nine campuses.

TEC CAMPUSES – MAKING THE INITIAL EXCHANGE ARRANGEMENT CHALLENGE

The recruiting process followed for each campus has similar components. The first step in this long and detailed process is to contact the person in charge of international programs by e-mail, phone, or mail. When the contacts are made, a tentative recruiting schedule is developed.

Each site is mailed "collateral" (promotional) material that describes the program and contains the days and location of the UNCG/Disney information sessions. The administrator for the international office is encouraged to e-mail the Tec students to announce the specific date and time for each session.

Alumni of the UNCG Program, who are completing their degrees at one of the Tec campuses, are contacted at least a month prior to the session to announce when and where the sessions will take place and encourage them to attend and assist in the information sessions. The alumni that attend the sessions are invited to join the UNCG faculty at a social held the evening of the session.

Several days before arrival at each campus, contact is made with the international office to ensure the office personnel that the UNCG representatives are coming and also to serve as a reminder to the office of the recruiting presentations. This is an important part of the process since the Tec has relationships with numerous universities

throughout the world and this more recent contact reinforces that the UNCG reps are following through on the commitment.

Upon arriving at the Tec campus, the representatives go to the international office hours before the sessions. At that time, the schedule may involve a variety of activities such as talking with faculty about the quality of the UNCG Program, working out administrative challenges, and setting up an exhibit to recruit students.

The session begins with a presentation highlighting each component of the UNCG Program as well as describing the qualifications that each Tec student needs in order to be accepted into the Program. Program requirements include successful completion of an interview with UNCG representative, attainment of a minimum score of 550 on the TOEFL assessment (TOEFL is a trademark for a standardized examination for proficiency in English as a foreign language) that is less than a year old, and a “B” grade average. Of course, each student must be recommended by the Tec and be in a position to complete the UNCG Program with at least one semester remaining to be completed at the Tec.

The presentation is approximately one hour and fifteen minutes in length. It is desirable to have alumni participate in the presentation by giving their testimonials of their experiences at both UNCG and at Disney. The students’ remarks personalize the information and result in greater interaction with the audience. They are a very effective recruiting tool. Parents of Tec students, Tec faculty, and Tec administrators are often represented in the audience during the presentation. Occasionally, a member from the Disney organization will also participate in the presentation.

After the presentation and all questions are answered, interviews are scheduled for interested students during the remainder of the afternoon. At the end of the presentation, each student provides the following information on the interview sign-up sheet: name, major, semester in school, most recent TOEFL score, and, most importantly, his/her e-mail address. During the interviews, it is the responsibility of the interviewer (a UNCG representative) to determine if the student has the potential to be successful at both UNCG and Disney. Contrariwise, Tec students have questions about the program that will aid them in making a “buy-in” to the UNCG Program.

The UNCG Program Director schedules a minimum of one recruiting trip to Mexico each semester. The number of campuses visited each semester ranges from five to nine. Additional trips are scheduled as needed. The fall semester trip follows, in detail, the above description of the recruiting process. The spring semester trip is modified in order to take advantage of the Tec Fair where institutions and organizations, from all over the world, come to Mexico to participate as one group in the Tec Fair. The Tec Fair is a highly-organized, successful, promotional activity to benefit the Tec students. The objective of the Tec Fair is give Tec students an opportunity, in a central location on each campus and in one afternoon, to learn about international experiences available to them such as exchange programs and internships.

AT UNCG – THE PAPERWORK CHALLENGE

Getting all Tec students interviewed early in the semester by a Disney recruiter, following through with each Disney acceptance offer to ensure that the offer is mailed early in the semester, and scheduling the students’ arrival dates as well as departure dates to coincide with the Disney plan are major activities fraught with peril and involving sensitive paperwork matters. A separate matter, but equally important, is arranging for each student to receive a social security card which is needed for employment as a Disney intern. This is a simple task at first blush; however, it is very time-consuming and labor intensive for both the Tec student as well as the UNCG representative. Students must have their J-1 Visa materials, letters from UNCG, and an offer letter from Disney before they can obtain a social security card. Students are transported to the local U.S. Social Security office many times before the task of each student receiving a social security number is accomplished.

AT UNCG – THE ARRIVAL CHALLENGE

The UNCG International Program Center (IPC) handles the arrival process for the Tec students when they arrive at UNCG. IPC is notified of the candidates nominated by the Tec and that office will issue acceptance packages to the students about two to three months prior to their arrival at UNCG. Once the student receives this acceptance package, he/she has much work to do to get all of the paperwork in order to be permitted to study in the U.S. Some of the procedures are based on U.S. security measures implemented as a result of the 9/11 experience (previously, the procedures were much more simple). For example, each student must visit the Mexican consulate office (in Mexico) for an interview about his/her study plans in the U.S. in order to obtain clearance for the J-1 Visa; the student must pay a \$100 fee for the Visa. The student must also obtain a passport, clear a background check, and show financial responsibility (e.g., how the student is planning to pay for the costs of the UNCG Program) before being issued the DS 20-19 which authorizes the student to participate in the UNCG Program.

IPC also directs these students to the various UNCG websites for information on housing and meal plan options, costs of books and supplies, social activities, etc. This information changes frequently and there is a need for updates to be made. For example, the website informed international students to be prepared to spend \$200 for their books for one semester of classes. This out-of-date information does not reflect the rising prices of textbooks – it is not unusual for one textbook to cost more than \$100; thus, the cost of four to five textbooks would normally be well beyond the estimated total of \$200 for one semester. Textbooks in other countries do not cost anywhere near the amount that they do in the U.S. and this can be a major surprise to students when they arrive at UNCG.

Students who want to live off-campus instead of in university housing need additional help to find out about nearby apartments, host families, etc. In addition they need to be informed of the realities of public transportation in Greensboro.

Occasionally, Tec students are placed at one of the other campuses of the UNC system for their semester in North Carolina. Generally, this is because the student is an engineering major (UNCG does not offer that academic program). Sometimes the student numbers are needed on other campuses in order to balance the international exchange ratio (a given campus may have more students going to Mexico than the number of students coming from Mexico).

AT DISNEY – THE COMMUNICATION CHALLENGE

It may be common to any distance-learning course that one does not see the student on a regular basis, if at all. This feature may be a black hole in that the instructor e-mails the student but does not know if the student has opened the e-mail as some students do not regularly open the university's e-mail service address for that student and, instead, he/she uses a preferred e-mail service such as AOL, yahoo, and hotmail.

Unless a student has his/her own computer, computer access is not readily available. Even when there is a computer available in the apartment, but owned by another roommate, access to it often is, at best, difficult and, perhaps, not offered to the student by the owner. Also, there is one communication line per apartment available for computers; so, even with multiple computers in the apartment, computer accessibility is limited. (A second phone line is in each apartment; however, it is dedicated for phone use and must not be used for any other purpose – this second line is to permit Disney managers to contact the apartment to talk with an intern).

Other elements present obstacles to good communications such as computers crashing, computers needing repairs, and the word-processing program being incompatible with the one used at the university.

AT DISNEY – THE SITE VISIT CHALLENGE

Site visits are a major component of the UNCG Program while the student is an intern at Disney. During the internship, Tec students are also enrolled in courses offered on the Disney property. The purposes of site visits are to do the following: 1. build relationships with the sponsor, 2. to determine that the student is making progress and there

are no “glitches” in the internship, 3. ensure that the students have enrolled in the correct classes, and 4. ensure that, if the student is unsure of continuing in the internship part of the UNCG Program, assistance is offered to help the student make the best decision for him or her.

For many students, the Disney experience is the first time they have been away from home, in a less-structured environment than a typical university experience. At Disney they are responsible for their own well-being. This total responsibility is in contrast with the support services that are available to a student on the campus of the university (e.g., dorm counselors, faculty advisers, career service counselors, advising centers.) Unlike a university, these students are in a “one strike and you are out” environment – rules are issued and penalties are enforced. In many cases, there are no second chances and no hand-holding. For most students, this is the first time that they have had to survive in such an environment.

AT DISNEY – THE HOLIDAY CHALLENGE

For most students, the internship position that includes a major holiday will cause some change of habits. Interns are expected to work during the holiday periods that occur during the semester of the internship; this includes Thanksgiving, winter holidays, and spring holidays (or any religious or special event). Peak times include Easter, the Fourth of July, and Christmas. It is the Christmas holiday that creates the most difficulty for students; they are used to being in their home environment at this time of year and it is understandable that this is a personal challenge to them. Nevertheless, facing such a challenge, the majority of the students successfully complete the internship. Some families join the intern at Disney during the holidays which ameliorates the problem.

AT DISNEY – THE COURSES CHALLENGE

The internship is independent from the courses. A typical student would take twelve hours of courses during the Disney semester. UNCG offers BUS 230 (six semester hours); there are two parts to this course: 1. the assignments of the faculty at the university and 2. completion of a graded course at Disney that has been deemed by the American Council on Education to be worthy of three semester hours of credit. In addition, UNCG offers credit for successful completion of two other courses taught by Disney faculty.

The students receive credit if they successfully complete the courses irrespective of whether or not they successfully complete the Disney internship. In actuality, students who take Disney courses for credit have a much higher success rate in the Disney College Program than those students who do not take Disney courses..

AT DISNEY – THE ARRIVAL AT DISNEY CHALLENGE

Getting arrival dates set up is always a challenge. There is a gap in time between the last day the Tec students can be in the dorms at UNCG and the date they are to arrive at Disney. It is important that the students know of this gap so that they can plan on how to fill this time. It may require additional cost for them whether it is a plane ticket to fly home or the cost of housing at a hotel for the interim period. For students without financial resources to cover the additional cost, arrangements are made for them to stay with faculty members or other citizens of the Greensboro community. Also, some Mexican students are not as familiar as U.S. students with transportation options in the U.S. for getting to Orlando and, thus, require help in making these arrangements. On the other hand, some of the Mexican students are very knowledgeable as to transportation options. Here is an example of the resourcefulness of one student: this student bought a special Amtrak youth ticket that could be used for travel in the United States. With this ticket, the student traveled to Williamsburg, Virginia; Washington, D.C.; Boston, Massachusetts; and Chicago, Illinois, to name a few of the cities visited. The student ended the trip in Kissimmee, Florida (site of the Disney College Program) one day before for her scheduled arrival date for the beginning of the internship. She solved the dilemma of arriving one day early by spending the night with a relative of a UNCG faculty member who lived in the area.

AT DISNEY – THE CALENDAR CHALLENGE

Instead of just coordinating two calendars (UNCG and the Tec), this program requires the coordination of three calendars (the addition of Disney). Disney sets arrival/departure dates based on its business needs which may or may not conflict with the academic calendar that a university follows. It is critical that the Director of this Program be informed of the calendar items and issues for all three entities.

AT DISNEY – THE LEAVING EARLY CHALLENGE

When a student requests permission to leave Disney earlier than what the contract stated, it is pointed out to the student that he/she has made a personal contract to be available at Disney for a certain time. Leaving early will reflect poorly on the student and the university; the Disney organization will not view the student's record at Disney in a positive manner. Because of the portent of a negative view, very few of the Mexican students leave the program early. Returning home to Mexico and being unsuccessful in completing the UNCG Program would be viewed as a major crisis by the student's family and the Tec de Monterrey whereas a lesser view of the problem is taken by the typical U.S. family or the U.S. student's university. The typical U.S. student is much more acclimated in "spinning" a negative situation into neutral to positive explanation such as "it was not my fault." The result is that the U.S. student will return home, explain the situation from his/her viewpoint, find a part-time job, and reenter the university the next semester – no negative label is placed on his/her conduct. The Tec student, on the other hand, will return home in Mexico and will be viewed as having disgraced his/her family and Tec de Monterrey. Because of the U.S. privacy law, there is very little information that can be provided to parents. In such crisis situations, the Director works with the Tec and the family involved to help resolve the effects of this stigma and attempts to salvage as much academic credit depending on each student's academic accomplishments. In other situations, the student may be reinstated, depending on the seriousness of the original infraction of the Disney rules.

The number of students who are enrolled in courses for credit but who do not successfully complete the Disney program is drastically lower than the number of students who are not enrolled in courses and do not complete the program. (Disney does not require that interns enroll for courses offered by Disney.) Students who enroll for courses for credit are more likely to honor the contract and remain working at Disney through the contract period. The numbers for all Disney program participants are not recorded and, thus, are not available for presentation or explanation. Tec students are not given the option of not enrolling for courses at Disney. Because of their J-1 Visa status; they are required to remain full-time students for the duration of their participation in the Program. If one only looked at the Tec de Monterrey students, for instance, one would note that there have been less than four percent of those students who had to leave early. Reasons for terminating early run a wide gamut from breaking the conduct rules of Disney to self-termination for personal reasons.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS CONTINUING CHALLENGES

In order to expand this Program, it will become mandatory to place more Tec students at the other campuses in the UNC system (there are 16 campuses in the UNC system). As the Program expands and more students are placed on other campuses, the close ties that the UNCG representatives have been able to develop with the Tec students will be more difficult, or, perhaps, impossible to accomplish. It remains to be seen how this will impact the effectiveness of the Program. On the other hand, this challenge presents an opportunity to the UNCG representatives to build stronger relationships with the international program personnel on the other campuses. For instance, by building closer relationships with international program centers, information regarding Tec's many programs offered in English can be presented to students who, heretofore, may not have had that information made available to them. It is not commonly known that the Tec system offers a variety of international certificate programs as well as numerous courses in English. On Tec's nine exchange campuses, a U.S. student does not need to have any knowledge of the Spanish language. However, the more knowledge of the Spanish language the student possesses the wider the variety of Tec courses he/she has from which to select.

Students in the UNCG/Tec/Disney College Program who are enrolled at campuses other than UNCG need to have a close relationship with the faculty responsible for the UNCG/Tec/Disney College Program. A closer

relationship with Tec students at the other campuses of the UNC system will better ensure that the students will have an understanding of what they will experience at Disney. At UNCG, meetings, both individual and group, are held with Tec students throughout the semester. The distances involved with the Tec students on other UNC-system campuses make it impossible to involve those students in the UNCG meetings. Although in following the recommendation, it will never be to the same degree; nevertheless, the UNCG faculty and the Disney recruiter could meet with these students and make a special effort to establish a relationship with these students. Tec students who are at UNCG will be encouraged to communicate, via e-mail, instant messaging, and phone, on a regular basis with those Tec students at other North Carolina campuses.

The UNCG/Tec students can serve as valuable resources to students in Mexico who are getting ready to come to UNCG. They can, for example, explain school policies, recommend dorms, and discuss meal plans, as well as sell their books to these incoming students. From the e-mail addresses collected during recruiting visits, the Tec students at UNCG can contact the students in Mexico to help them in the transition to the UNCG Program.

UNCG/Tec students can review sample UNCG course materials and appropriate websites in order to provide explanations of unfamiliar terminology. An example of the need for these explanations was underscored when a Tec student read a syllabus that announced the last day of class; based on that information, she made her flight arrangements to return home. She later was shocked to find out that it is a common practice in the U.S. to schedule a final exam after the last class (a proctored exam was arranged for her at one of the Tec campuses). In essence, there is a need to ensure the materials reflect cultural sensitivity.

There is a need to develop a UNCG Program website for Tec students to use who are considering the UNCG Program. The website would contain, among other things, a checklist of activities to accomplish prior to leaving Mexico; a FAQ sheet with links to appropriate UNCG sites or other sites that contain information about Greensboro, in particular, and North Carolina, in general; IPC housing; meal plan options; campus jobs; breakdowns of various expenses; information about the Disney College Program; and pictures of all facets of the UNCG Program. The website will be available in English and Spanish. The Spanish version will be a direct benefit to the parents of the Tec students who are considering the Program as well as Tec students in the early stages of investigating the Program but who have not yet developed English proficiency.

Notes