Shank Wins Fulbright Alumni Grant

By: Donna Self
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Dr. Todd Shank never even tasted Chinese food until he left his small hometown in West Virginia and went off to college. Now he's the man to see about a USF St. Petersburg international student exchange program on the other side of the globe.

Shank, an associate professor of Finance in the College of Business at USF St. Petersburg, was awarded more than $23,000 from a grant from the Fulbright Alumni Initiatives program. Only professors who have won Fulbright Scholarships and wish to set up long-term ties with their host institutions abroad are eligible to apply. The grant allows him to establish a program which will give 15 USFSP Business students the opportunity to go to China, where they will spend three weeks traveling and studying an accelerated course with 20 Chinese students. Shank’s proposal was one of 30 accepted out of 200 nationally selected for funding.

“Most American students know little about Asia, especially in Florida where there is a low Asian population, yet there is a lot of business between Florida and China. Two of our department cornerstones are corporate responsibility and globalization, so this gives our students the opportunity to learn about finance in other cultures.”

Shank’s program, which will begin next summer, is an effort to create academic links between USF St. Petersburg and Sun Yat-Sen University in Guangzhou, China.

Shank said,“Both groups of students are very ethnocentric. There’s nothing better than seeing American and Chinese students having a classroom discussion. They give each other a new perspective.”

USFSP students will tour the Pearl River Delta. First, they spend five days in Hong Kong visiting financial organizations such as banks and the stock exchange. Then they will spend 10 days at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, where they will attend daily lectures for the finance course taught by Shank. They then move on to Macau for lectures at the University of Macau. In addition to the international finance course, students will also visit cultural sites in the Delta, known for its contrast of old and new China.

Shank has been to China twice. He first went to develop an executive program for Chinese managers. Last spring, he taught as a Fulbright Scholar at Sun Yat-Sen, just before his arrival at USF St. Petersburg. He says that traveling to China can be a culture shock. Before departing, students will learn common greetings and Chinese courtesies. They will also be required to read Culture Shock China by Kevin Sinclair, which gives a perspective on a culture that is very different from our own.

After what he calls a “fantastic experience” in Guangzhou, SARS outbreak notwithstanding, he didn’t have to think for long when he heard about the Fulbright Alumni Initiatives Program.

“I wanted to do one at Sun Yat-Sen because of all the learning opportunities. They are an incubator of all the things you learn in Business school.”

Shank said that this program will enable USFSP Business students to rise above other applicants in their future job searches. He plans to begin recruiting for the program in the fall by visiting classes and talking to students about the opportunity. To be considered, a student must be enrolled in the Business School.

“Self-motivation is a must,” Shank says, because of the course’s accelerated pace. Students interested in the program may contact Shank at 727-553-4894 for more information.