

## THE WORLD IS OUR CLASSROOM

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**Global engagement initiatives provide students with unique opportunities to expand their worldview**



After officially becoming a University on July 1, 2012, Rivier embarked on the implementation of a global engagement initiative to expand its global presence. This commitment, consistent with the University's core mission of 'transforming hearts and minds to serve the world,' was included in the University's strategic plan. The global focus quickly began to take root, with the creation of diverse global opportunities including a study abroad program for students, faculty exchange agreements with other institutions, and a global speakers program. Dr. Mark Meehan joined Rivier as its first associate vice president for Global Engagement, and a robust Office of Global Engagement was established to pursue global opportunities for the University and guide students as they explore their place in the global community.

### Partnerships and study abroad

Over the past year, Rivier has pursued global initiatives and partnerships that will benefit students and extend the University's global reach. Rivier's transition to University status has been instrumental to the institution's ability to "engage in a global environment" and "broaden the institution's profile beyond its Nashua campus, offering students an opportunity to learn on a global level," said Sister Paula Marie Buley, IHM, Rivier's president.

“We have developed programs to locally engage refugees, teach classes in partnership with Atilim University in Turkey, and send nursing students to Senegal for hands-on experience in rural clinics,” Meehan added.

Rivier entered into an agreement with On-Campus Boston (OCB), a new organization housed at Wheelock College in Boston, Mass. The agreement facilitates the recruitment and admission of international students who will complete a college preparatory program at Wheelock in the first year of the program and have the opportunity to advance to the second year of degree courses at the partner institutions, including Rivier. This initiative will provide international students with a direct path to Rivier’s undergraduate and graduate academic programs.

The University also entered into an agreement with Fairfield University, through which students are able to take part in study abroad opportunities in Ireland, Nicaragua, Tanzania, Italy, France, Australia, and Brazil.

“I’m convinced Rivier’s long history of involvement with other cultures has created the perfect platform for a range of dynamic global initiatives,” said Meehan.

In January of this year, Rivier signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Hellenic American University of Athens, Greece—a mutually beneficial strategic alliance enabling students from both institutions to experience a rich, vibrant culture and live and learn alongside their peers in the United States and Greece.

This MOA is the foundation for initiatives that will enable Rivier students to travel and learn in Athens, Greece, and for Hellenic American students to experience living and learning in the United States. The student exchange program will allow for students in each institution to attend from one term to one full academic year at the other institution.

The study abroad experience may include Greek language courses, cultural immersion activities, service learning activities and experiential learning projects. The program will start in the fall of 2013.

Included in this agreement is a faculty exchange where faculty from both institutions can conduct research and or teaching residencies in the other institution.



*Assistant Professor of Nursing and Director of Undergraduate Nursing Education Kathleen Patenaude, and Assistant Professor and Director of M.S. Nursing Program Susan Feeney, with Sister Emma Montage, a Sister of the Presentation of Mary in Senegal.*

A similar agreement was recently signed with Atilim University of Ankara, Turkey, enabling Rivier students to travel, take classes and immerse themselves in the country’s culture. Like the Hellenic-American agreement, this agreement includes a faculty exchange program.

These agreements are just the beginning of what is becoming a vigorous global engagement program at Rivier, offering students life-changing experiences both on campus and in other parts of the world.

“Currently, global engagement at Rivier means a robust study abroad program with nine international sites and Rivier faculty leading experiential teaching trips around the world,” said Meehan.

A Polycom video conferencing system was installed in the Office of Global Engagement that allows communication with other Polycom users, from anywhere around the world. It works via the internet and provides a video and audio connection, allowing our students, faculty and staff to communicate with other countries.

### **Shaping globally aware future leaders**

Rivier offers a new bachelor’s program in Global Studies, which focuses on liberal arts but also includes broader subjects about the global environment to help students get a glimpse of worldwide culture and problems.

In addition, a new bachelors program in transnational security studies takes a deeper look at globalization and its effects on business, security and culture.

“Today’s college graduates need to be globally aware and be able to function in a globally competitive environment,” said Martin Menke, Global Studies program director and professor. “Our worldwide economy has impacted nearly every profession and profoundly influences our society in so many other ways. Travel is an outstanding form of experiential learning and we want to allow our students to personally witness life outside the United States.”

Through the Office of Student Affairs, Rivier will also initiate a new Global Leadership Program in the fall, a one-year program with a dual focus on leadership and mentoring connecting exceptional Rivier students to global issues, global leaders, and professional opportunities around the world. The program includes meetings with Rivier leaders, reading and discussion of globally focused literature, and dialogues with a variety of visiting scholars, guest speakers, and people from around the world.

### **On-campus global events**

The Office of Global Engagement, along with the Regina Library and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, hosted several Refugee Engagement Month events intended to create opportunities for the University and Nashua community to be enlightened about the experience of refugees, engaged by the New Hampshire refugee community, and to exchange ideas that facilitate relationships between both communities. Refugees from the Congo and Bhutan shared their experiences of their journey.

“Global engagement has been an incredible new force on campus, exciting students and faculty while at the same time informing them of some important local people who have a global experience,” said Ginelle Testa, a junior Sociology major at Rivier from Hudson, N.H., who serves as a student ambassador in the Office of Global Engagement as well as a refugee liaison. “Refugee Engagement Month was packed with events for all sorts of people, which was what was special about it—it reached out to a variety of students in different majors. I have considered myself fairly globally aware for a few years now and I had no idea refugees even existed in New Hampshire, let alone in our own city of Nashua. What this event was able to do was break down barriers that look at these people as ‘others’ and allow students to interact with and hear stories on a personal level. I couldn’t have thought of a better way to inform people in a personal and unique way about their neighbors and their unique struggles.”

“Global engagement can be seen as increasing numbers of international students come to campus and the Student Affairs team creates programming to connect them deeply to their American

classmates,” Meehan said. “Global engagement includes cultural celebrations of Indian and Chinese students, which draw students from across the campus and people from around the Nashua community.”

*“One semester of study abroad, as part of a four year degree program, is an academic experience that is rapidly becoming a requirement for a world-class education.”* –Associate Vice President for Global Engagement Mark Meehan



### **Serving—and learning from—the world: Rivier students abroad**

During spring break, undergraduate students took part in an eight-day biology field experience teaching trip for academic credit in St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands with Dr. Joel Stake, associate professor of biology and coordinator of biology, in partnership with the University of the Virgin Islands. Students had the opportunity to experience first-hand the cultural and natural beauty of the U.S. Virgin Islands by exploring coral reefs and conducting research on live coral through hands-on experiences. Biological field techniques were taught throughout the trip and used to conduct diversity surveys for selected habitats on the islands. In addition to gaining an appreciation for the natural beauty of the U.S. Virgin Islands, students visited historic sites, providing a cultural framework for the modern identity of the islands.

“This trip has changed my mind and the way that I think about restoration and resilience, and it’s changed my heart to give more compassion towards all those here working to better protect our environment,” said student April Krawczyk '13 from Tyngsboro, Mass.

This fall and again in January 2014, nursing students and faculty will visit Senegal as part of the ‘Rivier University Institute for Global Health’ project as a study abroad opportunity to complement coursework and academics with real-world experience and service in another country. Several Sisters of the Presentation of Mary—Rivier’s founding order—who reside in Senegal will participate. A site selection and discussion, followed by a faculty exploratory trip, recently took place.

The Rivier University Institute for Global Health: A collaborative project between Rivier University, the Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, and the communities of Nashua, N.H. and Dakar, Senegal will aim to connect and support communities by creating and sustaining two related care centers, providing comprehensive health care, educational training, English as a Second Language programming, spiritual guidance, and support for micro-ending/business development programs. The project aims to connect students and Rivier faculty with refugees. For students, the opportunity will

provide capstone hours, experiential learning, cross-discipline academics, and global engagement; for refugees, it will provide health care, a sense of community, education, business skills and consultation, and ESL experience; and for faculty and staff, nurse practitioner hours, health care, community public relations, and hosting a travel clinic and administering inoculations.

In the future, it is anticipated that the project will expand to include business and education students.

“Our Senegal trip was truly life changing and life affirming,” said Susan Feeney, assistant professor of nursing and director, M.S. nursing program. “The Sisters were gracious and warm. They live their faith and give selflessly. The sense of community and true joy in life was visible wherever we went in Senegal.”

“Visiting Senegal can be described as a transformational journey not only personally, but professionally as a nurse,” added Kathy Patenaude, assistant professor of nursing and director of undergraduate nursing education at Rivier. “The Sisters of the Presentation of Mary in Senegal are amazing. Their love for the mission is evident in all aspects of their lives and in the care and service they provide to the people of Senegal. I can’t wait for our students to experience the same, and live out our mission to ‘transform hearts and minds to serve the world.’”

## Life-changing experiences

Global engagement and study abroad opportunities afford students a life-changing experience—allowing them to gain first-hand, in-depth knowledge of other cultures, develop new ways of looking at the world and understanding their surroundings, and cultivate intercultural skills that will help them succeed on today’s global stage.

According to Rivier’s Office of Global Engagement, study abroad can lead to both personal and professional growth. The acquisition of valuable skills—including adaptability, self-confidence, patience, cultural awareness, learning a new language, problem-solving, observation, making new friends around the world, expanding one’s worldview and awareness of global issues—enhances students’ perspective in life and increases employment opportunities. Many employers believe that a student who studied abroad is self-motivated, independent, willing to embrace challenges, and able to handle diverse problems and situations.

*Inside Higher Ed*, an online higher education resource, provides further confirmation of the positive impact of study abroad, saying that students who study abroad have improved academic performance upon returning to their home campus, higher graduation rates, and improved knowledge of cultural practices and context. Studying abroad also helps academic performance of at-risk students.

Meehan has seen first-hand the importance of global engagement and study abroad in the lives of students.

“One semester of study abroad, as part of a four year degree program, is an academic experience that is rapidly becoming a requirement for a world-class education,” he said, adding that recent research has shown that students who complete a study abroad semester are more likely to stay at their institution and graduate on time.

Global engagement opportunities at Rivier—especially study abroad programs—are challenging students beyond what they had thought they were capable of, building self-confidence and creating a sense of worldliness and understanding of other cultures, truly bringing to life Rivier’s mission.

“Traveling abroad has been an amazing experience and a once in a lifetime opportunity for me,” says Rivier student Hillary Tarr, a sociology major with a minor in social work. “I traveled to Uganda in 2011, where I worked in an orphanage. It has given me insight into the way other people live and has made me realize how blessed I am to be given the opportunity to attend Rivier University while many other youth struggle to get a primary education. I encourage anyone who is given the chance to travel abroad to take the opportunity. They will not regret it and will come back with a new view on their lives and the lives of others.” ■