INAUGURAL UF DISNEY ACADEMIC EXPERIENCE OFF TO A GREAT START
After five years of coordination, our first group of students started the program May 2014

Gainesville, FL -- The International Disney Academic Exchange Experience is an opportunity for international students to receive up to 12 University of Florida credits as well as invaluable experience with a paid internship at Walt Disney World®. Currently the partner universities for this program are the University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and Brock University, which are all located in Canada, but we hope to partner with other countries in the near future. The program starts at the beginning of Summer A semester and runs through mid-December.

For the 2014 class we accepted 13 students to participate. These students range from third to fourth year students in various concentrations of studies including Business, Communications, Tourism, and Sport Management. They all have a passion for learning and an admiration for the University of Florida and the Walt Disney World Corporation. The program allows them to take 3 UF courses online: Resort and Destination Management, Destination and Event Management Capstone, and Internship in Leisure Services and one Disney course taught by the Disney education team. The course taught by the Disney Education team teaches them how to apply hospitality, leadership and creativity into their work life but through the bullet-proof Disney model. They options they had were: Advanced Studies in Hospitality Management, Corporate Analysis, Organizational Leadership and Corporate Communications.

Another element of this program was showing the students what it is like to be a Florida Gator. They spent 8 days in Gainesville, FL really getting to experience what it is like to be a UF student. They stayed
in the dorms, ate at the dining halls, and even visited the Swamp. They also were able to meet with leaders in the tourism industry to learn more about marketing, resort/hotel management, as well as destination management with a weekend trip to St. Augustine.

After experiencing the orange and blue, the students went straight to the Happiest Place on Earth. They checked into their Disney housing and started the training process to earn their “ears” and then they were assigned their work positions and locations. They have the opportunity to work at various parks, resorts and departments throughout the course of the program so they will experience a wide variety of tasks and management styles.

With the combination of their courses and the practical experiences with the internship and excursions, they will present a comprehensive event/destination analysis at the end of the program for their Destination and Event Management Capstone Course.

We are excited to see the growth of these students over the next six months. Arielle Gousse, the Program Manager for the Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute, has been with these students every step of the way and will be keeping in contact with them while they are in Orlando. When asked about the program, Arielle said “with this year starting off on such a great note with such a fantastic group of bright, enthusiastic students, I am sure the program will be bigger and better next year.”

The Eric Friedheim Tourism Institute is committed to building a bridge between the tourism industry, organizations, destinations, and higher education through excellence in interdisciplinary research that provides strategic information focused on a wide array of travel, tourism and hospitality opportunities.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Arielle Gousse (Program Manager and Marketing/Public Relations) at agousse@ufl.edu (352.392.3992).