

OPPORTUNITY FOR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN THE COMMONWEALTH CARIBBEAN

Visit March 16-22, 2000

Report by Gangaram Singh

Objective

When I embarked on a career as a university professor, I had established for myself several goals. One of those goals was to allow my students an opportunity to experience the international community. I am happy that the Office of International Programs has given me an opportunity to begin the achievement of this important goal. I expressed my idea of an exchange of students between the Commonwealth Caribbean and San Diego State University, which was endorsed by the Office of International Programs. To show its commitment, the Office offered me a grant of \$2000 to pursue the possibility of an exchange. I am pleased to report that I have completed the research trip. Moreover, I consider it a resounding success.

Adjustment to the Proposal

But before I outline the specific accomplishments, let me highlight two important changes to the initial proposal. First, as a result of another grant that I received (\$160,000), I had to reschedule the trip to March instead on May-June. It is important to note that rescheduling the trip did not affect the success of the trip.

Second, as a result of budgetary constraints, I eliminated the Jamaican portion of the trip. I decided on this course of action for two reasons. Jamaica is a more established country, and transactions can be accomplished on the telephone. I also travel to Jamaica for other reasons and can work on the project during one (or more) of those trips. Guyana is a more challenging venue, and the majority of my budget was used to explore that venue.

Accomplishments

Jamaica

I have established a firm relationship with the University of the West Indies. SDSU students (and professors) who see the Commonwealth Caribbean as a likely study venue should come to me so that we can discuss the details of their plan. At the request of Professor Noel Cowell, such requests must be handled on an individual basis. For example, if a student wants to take classes, then he or she must be admitted to the University (as an exchange student). It is not difficult to do so, but the process could take time depending on the area of concentration. On the other hand, if a student wants to do research in the area, then he or she can become affiliated with the Center for Employment Research. In short, the objective of the student (or professor) will drive the action. I will

serve as the contact between the student and the University of the West Indies (through Professor Noel Cowell).

Students (and professors) are responsible for all financial expenses of the exchange in Jamaica.

Guyana

Similar activities can be accomplished at the University of Guyana. At the University of Guyana, my contact is Professor Sasenarine Kowlessar. On my trip to Guyana, I met on two occasions with Professor Kowlessar. He is excited about the prospects of an exchange. Professor Kowlessar, in the capacity of Minister of Finance, was also excited about our students with a strong economics background. Here I have spoken to Professor Serge Rey (of our Geography Department) about possible collaboration. So in Guyana, our students (and professors) have access to opportunities both on and off campus. Off campus activities can be (not necessarily) compensated. Very little immigration barriers exist for such an opportunity. I spoke to the Guyanese Ambassador to the United States in Washington (Dr. Odeen Ishmeal) to verify the immigration requirements.

In addition, two other forms of exchange are possible in Guyana. First, internships with public (e.g., schools) and private (e.g., labor unions) institutions are highly likely as a result of the demand for skilled workers. In a meeting with the Vice Principal of Gibson Primary School (Geeta Chanderpaul), she indicated an interest for "teachers." In Guyana, unlike the US, it is possible to become a teacher without a teaching background. Students of sociology, therefore, are eligible for this opportunity. Students (and professors) who accept such an opportunity will be compensated at established rates.

Second, opportunities exist in firms in the private sector. Guyana has just increased trade with the United States. But knowledge of the US market and regulations is a real barrier. In several meetings with the CEO (Maurice Rajkumar) and the Operations Manager (Seedat Doobay) of ROMAR Company, they indicated their interest in American interns. ROMAR is a fishing company. It catches a large amount of fish that is highly desirable in the US (such as red snapper). ROMAR is very interested in the US market. It is, however, clueless about the FDA standards. An American can easily research such information and advise ROMAR.

Jamaicans and Guyanese Coming to SDSU

Jamaica is much more developed than Guyana. Hence, Professor Cowell and I discussed the possibility of Jamaicans coming to SDSU. He fully understands that all financial responsibility rests with the student; SDSU has no such responsibility. But while in San Diego, students from the University of West Indies will seek advice from "experts" in their area of concentration. I volunteered to be the broker at SDSU.

On the other hand, in several conversations with Dr. Rajendra Singh (Advisor to the President of Guyana), I have come to the conclusion that Guyanese students cannot afford to attend SDSU. Having said so, though, should someone from Guyana express an interest, I will pursue it.

Summary

With a modest budget of \$2000, I am happy to report that students (and professors) of SDSU now have two additional countries to explore their interests. To show my commitment to this exchange, I have incurred over \$500 expenses (my own money). Moreover, I am volunteering my time so that individual students (professors) can discuss their interests.

I have invested a great deal of resources to make an exchange between SDSU and the Commonwealth Caribbean a reality. Let us take full advantage!

Report submitted on May 31, 2000.

Expenses

Air ticket (San Diego to Los Angeles)	185.00
Air ticket (Los Angeles to Guyana)	1364.80
Accommodations in Guyana	425.00
Airport tax (in Guyana)	13.50
Total	\$1988.30