



Helping Latinos study abroad

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Advocates of programs that allow college students to study abroad are working to put the programs within reach of more Latinos.

Officials at Global Learning Semesters Inc., an organization that promotes study abroad programs, say Latino students enroll in international study programs at about half the rate of all college students.

The organization has partnered with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities to secure \$8 million in scholarships to help Latino students take part in international study programs.

Officials with Global Learning Semesters hope their multimillion-dollar scholarship fund - to be distributed over 10 years - will increase Latinos' numbers in study abroad programs nationwide.

"Part of our mission is helping to educate America's leaders of tomorrow, and we're certain that having some international experience and understanding of other cultures is integral to that," said Antonis Polemitis, president of Global Learning Semesters.

"Latino students aren't getting that exposure," he added.

Officials point the finger at several factors - affordability, limited awareness of programs and cultural issues.

According to the Institute of International

Education, just 5.4 percent of the nearly 175,000 U.S. college students who study abroad are Latino.

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"I'm not surprised that that's the case, but it's not true here," said Mike McBride, former director of foreign studies at Whittier College.

He said about 75 students at Whittier College enroll in study abroad programs each year. Roughly 10 percent are Latino. Financial aid at the private college helps students afford to study abroad, McBride added.

Beginning next spring, Global Learning Semesters' tuition scholarships will be available to students attending HACU member institutions, which includes Whittier College.

Studying abroad can cost up to \$8,000 per semester, plus additional travel and personal expenses, said Alvaro Romo, associate vice president for programs, services and international affairs for HACU.

"Even when Latino students already have student aid, they often do not have the additional resources to pay for their travel and their stay at another country," Romo said. "This makes it more feasible for them to be able to participate in study abroad programs."

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