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Hills assume leadership role with Richard Furman Society

Furman University

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Study away: An experience not to be missed

SINCE 1969, when Furman students first set foot aboard as part of a university-sponsored travel-study trip, the sun has yet to set on the university’s study away programs.

Whatever you’re talking traditional overseas travel experiences or internship and research programs within the United States, hundreds of students past and present have benefited from opportunities to spend a few weeks or a semester enjoying Furman away from Furman. And nowadays more of them are taking advantage of the options available: the average number of participants has increased over the last decades from approximately 200 students per year to 1,000.

During the recently completed May Experience, for example, students enjoyed three-week travel programs to such destinations as Iceland, Australia and Turkey. For the 2010-11 academic year they have a choice of 13 faculty-led programs to such places as Belize, the United Kingdom, China, Africa, Washington, D.C., and Colombia, S.C., plus a host of exchange programs to such destinations as Japan, Italy and Greece, among others.

Furman’s approach to study away is one in many ways distinct from that of other institutions because the majority of trips are led by Furman faculty. Syra Kuralash Kralicka, assistant dean of faculty for study away and international education, “When Furman faculty are the primary travel-study instructors, we guarantee that the program’s instruction and coursework meet the university’s high standards and ensure that the academic experience meshes cohesively with departmental curricular and our broader educational mission.”

For many students, the study away experience proves to be transforming. Jaday Adamson Moonhead ’99, an attorney in Greenville, still remembers vivid details of her winter 1999 trip to the Baltics and Northern Europe, led by political science professor Cleve Fraser and history professor Jim Hamrick, who died in 2009. “I remember our first night in Tallinn and being so excited to share the spectacle of the trans-Siberian Railway,” Jaday says. “We were stunned!”

One of Furman’s goals is to encourage (and provide the means for) even more students to benefit from a study away program. Because operational and travel costs are increasing, the Furman Matters campaign is seeking to raise $10 million to endow scholarship support that will help accommodate all interested students.

As Jessica Taylor ’07 wrote after spending winter term of her senior year in Turkey, where they explored early Christian and Byzantine sites: “It is possible that I can’t explain here the many wonders that overwhelmed me. It is possible that I can’t express here the many experiences that dissociate us from the lives we lead back home. It is possible that I can’t express here what the winter term means to me, because there is a limit to any writer’s capacity to explain the meaning of the world.”

In assuming this role, the Hills join a short list of RFS chairs who have been among the university’s most active and generous supporters: Jim Hanmick ’50, Gordon Herring ’53, Bob Pearson ’61, Jim W4 and Carol Nicholas’ 62 Nye, and B.K. Bryan. Since 1995, when it began with 10 members, the Richard Furman Society has grown to include 120 members who collectively donate more than $1 million to support annual operational needs, ranging from financial aid to internships and undergraduate research.

In large part because of the scholarship support Jayda received as an undergraduate, she and Brent have chosen to become members of Young Benefactors, a group of 120 alumni who graduated within the last 20 years and who make annual contributions ranging from $2 million to support annual operational needs, ranging from financial aid to internships and undergraduate research.

In turning over the chairmanship to the Hills, Jim Nye said, “Margaret and Robert Hill are marvelous examples of emerging alumni leaders. With their added perspective as Furman parents and Robert’s involvement as a trustee, they are exceptionally well suited to head this effort and will no doubt lead the Richard Furman Society to even greater success.”

Contact john.kemp@furman.edu, (864) 294-3717, to learn more about Young Benefactors.