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Towson University Wins 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund Grant  
Santander Bank-Sponsored Competition to Fund “It Isn’t Easy Being Green: Peruvian and U.S. Students Tackle Local Environmental Sustainability in a Transnational Context”

Towson, Maryland: October 4, 2016.

Towson University is among the winners of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund Competition #10 focusing on the commitment of Towson University and Universidad de Piura in Peru to environmental sustainability, service learning, and cross-cultural communication. The fund is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, Partners of the Americas, NAFSA: Association of International Educators and the Santander Bank, N.A.

The goal of 100,000 Strong in the Americas, President Obama’s signature education initiative in the Western Hemisphere, is to increase the number of U.S. students studying annually in the Western Hemisphere to 100,000, and the number of Western Hemisphere students studying in the United States to 100,000 annually by the year 2020. The initiative is aimed at enhancing hemispheric competitiveness, increasing prosperity, and preparing a more globally competent workforce.

Funding for Competition #10 is supported by Santander Bank and was an open competition for higher education institutions in all countries throughout the Western Hemisphere and all fields of study. The winning institutions are expected to create new innovative partnerships that will increase student mobility to and from Latin America, the Caribbean, Canada, and the United States. The Innovation Fund grant promotes transnational institutional partnerships rather than direct scholarships. The announced awards are up to $25,000 each and will leverage commitments from the selected universities to increase student mobility and address institutional barriers that prevent students from studying abroad.

The 100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund granted to Towson University and its partner Universidad de Piura, Peru is titled “It Isn’t Easy Being Green: Peruvian and U.S. Students Tackle Local Environmental Sustainability in a Transnational Context” and is a seven-week reciprocal study abroad program that will be tailored to underrepresented students from both universities. During the program, participants will improve their language skills as they study the pressing environmental issues that affect both campuses and their respective communities. The participants thus will put their knowledge into practice in a bilingual setting that not only raises their level of environmental awareness, but also heightens their sense of social responsibility. A total of 20 participants will be involved in the program in 2017 and it is anticipated that a total of 80 students from the Universidad de Piura, Peru and Towson University will be mobilized to participate in exchange programs by 2020.
The grant proposal was developed collaboratively between Towson University’s Department of Foreign Languages, Office of Civic Engagement and Leadership, Study Abroad Office, International Initiatives, International Partnerships, and our counterparts at the Universidad de Piura, Peru. Dr. Saleha Suleman, Assistant Vice President for International Initiatives, stated: “The goal of the **100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund** is highly aligned with the goals of Towson University’s comprehensive internationalization plan which envisions to increase the university’s interaction with partners in Latin America and diversify our partnerships in the region. Towson University’s International Initiatives Office has been actively seeking and building partnerships with universities in the region such as Universidad de Piura, Peru for student and faculty exchanges, academic articulations, and to offer customized short term training programs.” Dr. Suleman expects that “the **100,000 Strong in the Americas** grant award to Towson University will have a positive impact on our efforts to expand our exchanges and outreach in Peru as well as our partnerships in the region.” She notes that Towson University is a member of the IIE Generation Study Abroad national initiative and that this award will be instrumental in achieving the initiative’s goal of increasing student participation in study abroad by 40% by 2020.

Dr. Colleen Ebacher, Professor of Spanish and Co-PI on the project, underscores the collaborative nature of the project: “The **100,000 Strong in Americas Innovation Fund Grant** provides an exciting opportunity for Towson University and Universidad de Piura students to study, research and work together on environmental issues of global importance in a cross-cultural and multilingual context. The project will prove valuable to student participants professionally and personally and to Towson University and the Universidad de Piura as the beginning of a partnership designed to have multiplying positive impacts in the future.” Dr. Lea Ramsdell, chair of the Foreign Languages Department and Co-PI, echoes this enthusiasm: “This project opens a possibility to underrepresented students in both countries that they may not have otherwise.”

Doctors Ebacher and Ramsdell will be joined by Dr. Christopher Jensen, Director of the Office of Civic Engagement and Leadership, in directing the Towson University portion of the project while Doctors Rodolfo Ramírez and Gastón Cruz Alcedo, Professors of Industrial Engineering, as well as Shirley Cortez González and Karent Urizar González, Spanish Instructors, will oversee the program at the Universidad de Piura.

Additional information about **100,000 Strong in the Americas Innovation Fund** can be found on: http://www.100kstrongamericas.org

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