Southern Miss Sees Multiple Opportunities with New Ties to Panama Universities

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Representatives of a third seminars Technical University of Panama are planning to sign a similar memorandum in the future.

One of the world's poorest democracies, Panama is also rich for its biodiversity and commitment to preservation of its natural environment. It is experiencing strong economic growth, and new opportunities for trade are expected once expansion of the Panama Canal is completed.

"Panama is of strategic importance to the Gulf of Mexico and offers a wealth of opportunities for our Logistics, Trade and Transportation programs," Dr. Saunders said. "They are also very "green," which is a great fit with Southern Miss' commitment to sustainability."

Dr. Saunders, along with Southern Miss International Education Director Dr. Susan Shaw and Dr. Tulio Subarain, director of the Southern Miss Center for Logistics, Trade and Transportation met with leaders of the universities for wide-ranging discussions. They were accompanied by Bruce Fallier, executive director of the Southport/Bohn International Airport and airport commissioner. They also met with President George M. Karetsos.

The group also received a briefing from the Panama Canal Authority about the canal's planned expansion, expected to begin in 2010.

Founded in 1969, the University of Panama is the country's largest university with approximately 70,000 students enrolled at multiple campuses. Technical University of Panama is noted for its strong engineering and science programs, including marine and environmental science, while International Maritime University trains cadets to become officers for merchant marine vessels engaged in product transportation.

"We hope that these new relationships will spur collaborative research opportunities between our faculty and provide enriching academic experiences through exchange and other programs between our universities," Shaw said.

Increased trade opportunities.

Panama's imports and exports have doubled every 15 years, with containerized cargo estimated to increase by more than 50 percent by 2020. The expansion of the Panama Canal also figures into this growth, in addition to Panama having the largest logistics and cargo center in the region.

Southern Miss' Center for Logistics, Trade and Transportation can be an important resource for port and land transportation authorities involved with new trade and transportation developments, such as those benefiting from the canal expansion, Subarain said.

The center will also support the research and academic needs of students and professionals with collaborative, interdisciplinary research and outreach that can spur economic growth in the region.

"The establishment of these relationships in Panama is another example of the integrated focus of industry, government and Southern Miss that inspired the Center," Talley said. "They open a wealth of opportunities for the students and faculty to expand their academic horizons."

The group also met with leaders of the City of Knowledge and its hotel and research program, located at the site of a former military base. The City of Knowledge brings cutting edge research in technology and business to better engage Panama in the global marketplace through international partnerships in business, science, education, government and non-profit entities, among others.

Supporters of the development of the City of Knowledge include the European Union and the Inter-American Development Bank. Its acclaimed Panamanian International Technology Park promotes the synergy of research, technological development, innovation and business in an effort to spur development of high technology enterprises.

Southern Miss officials hope to collaborate with the City of Knowledge to offer short-term courses and other programs. "We see the City of Knowledge as a powerful platform to deliver and showcase our academic and cultural programs, and as a unique resource network for research," Shaw said.

Southern Miss President Martha Saunders and International Maritime University of Panama president Victor Luna sign a memorandum of understanding between the universities in July. The event took place during a visit to the Central American nation by Saunders to establish mutually beneficial ties between Southern Miss and Panamanian universities that could lead to academic, research and cultural exchanges, as well as economic development opportunities. Joining Saunders were Southern Miss International Education Director Dr. Susan Shaw, third from left, and Dr. Tulio Subarain, fourth from left, and Ms. director of the Southern Miss Center for Logistics, Trade and Transportation. (Southern Miss photo by J. Asberry)

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