IDEAS Grant – WKU Global Learning and International Affairs

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Studying Abroad has a profound impact on a student’s academic experience.

WKU was just awarded a competitive grant from the State Department to increase study abroad participation among rural students.

Amy Bingham has more in this week’s View from the Hill.

2019 WKU graduate Hilarie Spangler is so thankful for her time studying abroad in both Italy and Northern Ireland.

“It was so interwoven into my experience. I don’t think that I would have come out of WKU with the outcomes that I did without the study abroad experience.”

A native of Middlesboro Kentucky, population twelve thousand, Spangler is exactly the type of rural student the 35-thousand dollar IDEAS grant will target.

“One of the things that we’re going to be doing is hiring a graduate assistant to work in our office to do research on students from different rural parts of Kentucky and other areas that WKU serves so that we better understand who they are and what their concerns are, what their needs are.”

WKU’s Office of Global Learning and International Affairs deals with everything that involves a passport.

Associate Provost John Sunnygard says studying abroad can have a significant impact on the graduation rates of rural students.

“The chances of that one who doesn’t study abroad of them actually completing their degree within four to five years is about 35 to 40 percent. The chances of the student who studied abroad completing their degree is about 85, 86 percent.”

He adds that rural students who study abroad also perform better academically.

“They get more focused, they have more self- confidence, they have a much broader way of looking at their academic studies.”

Junior Meghan Pierce of Smiths Grove went to Costa Rica as a Gatton Academy student.

“The Gatton Academy has a very high percentage of students who go and study abroad during their time and I think it is because of the scholarships at Gatton and WKU.”

She and Spangler are excited that the IDEAS grant will afford this opportunity to even more rural students.

“Absolutely 100 percent for more opportunities to make it more accessible. Most of my experience was able to be paid for by WKU and not everybody can say that.”

With this week’s View from the Hill, I’m Amy Bingham.

With travel opening up since the pandemic, Sunnygard says WKU has seven students planning to study abroad this summer. Two to the United Kingdom, three to Jordan, one to Panama and one to South Korea.

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