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Capacity Building and Institutional Development Partnership: University of Florida and Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Capacity building and institutional development through training is a key component for the vitality and sustainability of the tourism industry in South Africa. The overall advancement of qualified, trained and skilled labor force is crucial, given the rate of growth and future trends. In order to address this major need, the University of Florida and Tshwane University of Technology have formulated a three-year partnership (2009-2012) to strengthen curriculum, research, and faculty enhancement initiatives in tourism management in South Africa. This presentation will outline and expand the partnership objectives and accomplishments. This example can be a model for international academic partnerships.

Keywords: *human resources, tourism, curriculum development, international partnership.*

South Africa is the dominant tourism market in the African continent. Tourism in South Africa is an important industry with demonstrated growth in visitor arrivals in the last decade. The tourism product mix has experienced diversification beyond the traditional core products based on wildlife and natural protected areas to incorporate marine and coastal areas, rural communities and townships, events, urban centers, and meetings, incentives, conventions and exhibitions. The market is largely comprised of visitors from Africa and the Middle East. However, international markets are increasing and there are indications of continued growth in the future. More recently, the country has increased its' visibility on an international stage as the successful host of the 2010 FIFA Football World Cup. Leveraged on such sporting events as well as international meetings and conventions, the government expects to increase visitor arrivals to 10 million plus in the future to generate income, employment, tax revenues, and entrepreneurial activity. Overall, the potential to expand this sector are enormous, considering the current level of tourism development.

While growth has been evident, it is vital to maintain and enhance tourism with a sustained strategy for further growth and destination competitiveness given the potential to strengthen other economic sectors in rural and urban regions. In addition to hard infrastructure

projects such as facilities, utilities, transportation networks, etc., it is paramount to also simultaneously focus on the soft-infrastructure, i.e., human resources development in the tourism sector to achieve sustained growth. The overall advancement of qualified, trained and skilled labor force is crucial, given the rate of growth and future trends. Capacity building and institutional development through training is a key component for the vitality and sustainability of the tourism industry in South Africa. In order to address this major need, the University of Florida (UF) and Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) have formulated a three-year partnership (2009-2012) to strengthen curriculum, research, and faculty enhancement initiatives in tourism management in South Africa.

First, curriculum needs were accommodated at the Bachelor degree level with respect to the following objectives: a) Reviewed and updated existing curriculum in Event Management; b) Developed new curriculum in Casino Resort Management, and Aviation Operation (currently these degree programs are not offered on the African continent, and pending final approval by the government); and c) Vocational and executive training certificate programs based on the new degree programs - to be developed at a later phase.

Second, based on a strategic visioning meeting with faculty and industry stakeholders, a Center for Tourism Research was established with active local and national industry engagement and partnership. The mission of the Center will be largely to serve tourism destinations and industries through research, training and outreach within the community, province and other regions in southern Africa. Currently, final TUT approval along with financial and human resources is in process to operationalize the Center.

Third, faculty enhancement has been emphasized with regards to enhancing capacity as well as collaborative initiatives in tourism research with the project team and select UF faculty. Recently, a nationwide study among residents and visitors during the 2010 FIFA World Cup was completed. Currently, a study to examine community conservation, development, and tourism at Vredefort Dome World Heritage Site is being conducted – site is considered to be the oldest, largest, and most deeply eroded complex meteorite impact structure in the world. The facilitation of collaborative initiatives in research partnerships will be sustained during and post-completion of the project. Fourth, professional development opportunities has been offered to current TUT faculty. Finally, faculty exchanges have also occurred to further facilitate the partnership.

Currently, majority of the objectives have been accomplished. In addition, various spin-off projects and stakeholder engagement have been conducted in South Africa. This partnership has been successful in capacity building and institutional development with respect to tourism education, research, and training. Such form of cooperation and collaboration based on international academic partnerships is encouraged and should be fostered to facilitate tourism training and education. The example of this project can be a model for international academic partnerships. The project is managed through Higher Education for Development with a three-year funding [\$250,000] from the U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C.