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Teaching Tourism Geography

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At the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers held in Boston, geographers shared their experiences on team-based and critical teaching approaches, study abroad, service learning and programme development as participants in a panel on 'Tourism Geography Education'. Lorri Krebs (Department of Geography, Salem State College) discussed team-based approaches, which were developed to deal with issues raised during assessments of the department and its tourism programme, as well as in student assessments. For this course, which covered introductory travel and tourism topics, the economic fundamentals of various travel sectors, and basic tools necessary for effective decision making, Krebs emphasized team-based discussion, problem solving and decision making through the use of destination marketing, sustainable tourism, revenue management and technology case studies and a final project. While challenging, the team-based approach resulted in near-perfect attendance, improved group dynamics and student accountability to one another, enhanced student work and performance, and greater understanding of tourism geography concepts. According to Krebs, key elements in the success of the course included a good textbook; correlated course goals, assignments and assessment; and the instructors creating the groups and requiring that their members remain constant over the term. Assessment, via immediate individual and team assessment tests, case studies and group project scores based on individual contributions and participation and peer evaluation, was also crucial to the outcome.

Zoe Meletis (Department of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Management, University of Northern British Columbia) discussed another teaching challenge – that of incorporating critical, political economy/ecology perspectives on tourism through topics, such as imbalances in consumption, impacts on host communities and environmental justice. To pro-tourism students, much of the largely critical, geography-based scholarship in tourism was viewed as depressing and negative. Meletis recommended weaving in critical perspectives via a more palatable 'spoonful' approach. For instance, by using case studies, such as Jeff Sasha Davis' work on Bikini Atoll, with

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