

## **CONCERNS REGARDING IT TRAVEL**

To: Dr. Alan Baharlou, chair of the International Programs Advisory Committee  
From: Dr. John P. Stimac, co-leader of the 2003 Ireland Study Abroad Program  
Re: IT Travel as the sole-source vendor for travel  
Date: 13 November 2002

On 11 November I was informed by Pam Collins that she has been told that unless the Business Office makes change, short-term study abroad programs must run through IT Travel unless their agency won't place a bid on the program.

I understand the Business Office's desires in wanting a single-source vendor. A single-source vendor will make the Business Office's job easier since the single vendor becomes familiar with the way the office works, forms that it uses, etc. Dealing with a single vendor should also save the University, and hopefully, faculty, staff, and students who use their services, money since the single vendor should be giving some type of discount to users.

I feel that it is my obligation to the students to be fiscally responsible for their monies since student fees, and not appropriated fees, fund this study abroad program. However, I have a concern with the fact that the Business Office, a section of the University that should support the primary mission of the University has taken it upon them selves to mandate to the faculty what vendor they may use. When asked, students will state that a primary concern is cost when considering any part of their education – after all, Eastern does offer superior, yet accessible undergraduate education.

Last year while preparing the budget for the Ireland Study Abroad program I went through CIE Tours. I was informed that we should go through IT Travel but had major problems with their lack of organization. We initially contacted IT Travel on 11/19/01 concerning a planned trip to Ireland for a school group giving them tentative numbers and a detailed list of stops; they replied on 12/3/01 that they were still waiting for a quote and I replied that I was leaving town on 12/11/01 - would they get something to me by then. On 12/10/01 they emailed asking if fax or email would be better when sending the schedule; I replied fax, but either would work; on 12/10/01 they said they faxed the schedule to the departmental fax number. 12/10/01 - they emailed me that they then had to make up one page before faxing the schedule; when I returned from teaching on 1/3/02 I immediately emailed them to email me the schedule since I did not get any fax. I asked all the departments that use the fax machine as well. My email bounced back since the person I was in contact with (Karin) had left IT Travel. I called and asked about the status of our schedule and trip. The new person needed two days before they found any information at all. Frustrated with IT Travel, after browsing the web for lower fares, I made contact with CIE Tours on 1/9/01. The quote that I did receive from IT Travel was

initially \$200 more per student than the quote from CIE. CIE then was able to further reduce the amount by \$400 after some of the hotels chosen were downgraded.

In summary - I did not like the disorganized and confused service IT Travel gave and certainly did not like the inflated price that was given. IT Travel did say that they could reduce their initial price per student, but my question is why they gave us an inflated one in the first place?

This year, after submitting our trip itinerary, the Business Office was able to get IT Travel to deliver two bids for the study abroad program. One was through CIE Tours (our agent last year) and the other was through Brendan Travel.

Last year our guide and driver, Mr. Michael Keene, was wonderful and very accommodating. He customized many of our stops, taking into consideration the nature of our group. His knowledge of the local history everywhere we went was superior. He has been an accredited Board Fáilte (Irish Tourist Board) guide for over 20 years and instructs many of their new members. Based on a student survey, accompanying the original proposal to the IPAC selection board, we decided that if we could get Mr. Keene as the guide again, we would attempt to do so. Mr. Keene is currently working with Ireland Leisure Tours - a travel group based in Chicago, Illinois, as opposed to IT Travel, which is based in Indiana.

Without having been told that we needed to go through IT Travel, we started working with Ireland Leisure Tours, based in Illinois, as opposed to Indiana for IT Travel. Their original quotation for the trip cost was \$300 less expensive than the lowest IT Travel quotation. After pointing out that we would like all dinners included, they are still \$150 less expensive than IT Travel.

My question to the International Programs Advisory Committee is this: How can the Business Office mandate use of IT Travel for educational programs? Even if the university does decide that the use of IT Travel is in its best interests, should a program be required to use them only after being notified after the start of the program?

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