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New tourism research institute to open at UF, study crisis recovery

GAINESVILLE, FL — The University of Florida Center for Tourism Research and Development has received UF funding to open a new on-campus institute that will research local, national and global crises and their impact on tourism, including travel behavior.

The Tourism Crisis Recovery Institute also will work with clients from the travel industry to produce crisis response plans in the event that normal business is interrupted by extraordinary circumstances. The clients can be public, such as government agencies, or private-sector tourism companies, such as Disney or cruise lines. Possible crisis situations range from hurricanes and tsunamis to terrorism and plane crashes, said Lori Pennington-Gray, director of the Center for Tourism Research and Development and a UF associate professor of tourism, recreation and sports management.

“Tourism is the largest and fastest-growing industry in the world, and its importance to the United States, and Florida in particular, is astounding,” Pennington-Gray said. “We look forward to being able to provide answers to the industry that will help them make decisions immediately following a crisis, which is something they rarely have access to.”

The new institute will receive $750,000 in university funds between 2007 and 2011, and it will be housed in the department of tourism, recreation and sport management. The goal is that after 2011, the institute will be self-sustaining, Pennington-Gray said. Though the institute will start preliminary operations July 1, data collection and the first research project are not expected to begin until January.

The Center for Tourism Research and Development has created one new research position associated with the institute. Interviews for the position began last Friday.

The center was established in 1992 and has a twofold mission: 1) to foster and advance the discipline of tourism through basic science-based research; 2) to collect and disseminate knowledge of an applied nature that has direct application for local and global partners.

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