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UF Receives US Department of State Grant for \$569,235 to Strengthen Relations between Turkey and Armenia through Tourism

GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Tourism as an influential ambassador to champion cultural understanding, goodwill and peace among different cultures and nations has been espoused by several tourism academia, the United Nations and the UN World Tourism Organization. In fact, the ultimate endorsement was offered earlier by Mahatma Gandhi who attributed travel to be ‘the language of peace’.

The prospect to promote cultural understanding, mutual respect and peace via travel and tourism is a monumental opportunity given to the University of Florida’s department of Tourism, Recreation and Sport Management by the US Department of State through the Embassy in Turkey. Mitigating crises via promotion of cultural understanding is one of the goals of international travel. Thus, the impetus for the grant is to strengthen relations between Turkey and Armenia, which have traditionally been strained due to a number of historical and political issues.

A team of researchers have received a \$569,235 grant which will focus on travel and tourism education and research partnerships between Turkey and Armenia. Research has shown that movement of citizens between the two countries as well as mutual financial investment in tourism infrastructure (e.g., hotels, attractions, etc.) can accelerate the process of peace and reduce conflict and crisis by increasing socio-cultural communications and exchange,” said Lori Pennington-Gray, Associate Professor of Tourism, Recreation, and Sport Management and Director of the Tourism Crisis Management Institute.

This project proposes collaboration between academic institutions and the private sector that will train, educate and bring together resources which relate to sustainable regional tourism development. The partnership will be led by the University of Florida U.S. along with Dokuz Eylul University, Turkey, and Armenian State University of Economics, Armenia. Members of the U.S. team include: Dr. Lori Pennington-Gray, Dr. Asli Tasci, Dr. Brijesh Thapa, and Dr. Mike Sagas, from the University of Florida; in addition to Dr. Muzaffer Uysal from Virginia Polytechnic University and Ms. Deanne McKinney, Strategic Planning & Research Director, Missouri Division of Tourism.

The project will start in September 2010 and is expected to be completed by December 2012.

For more information, please visit www.tourismcrisis.com or contact Lori Pennington-Gray at (352) 392-4042 x1318, pennggray@hhp.ufl.edu.