UO overseas research featured

With hundreds of young athletes from dozens of countries arriving in Eugene for the World Junior Championships track meet this week, how might the University of Oregon best promote its international reach in academia?

Well, how about a portable exhibit that features a 70-inch touchscreen, encased in a cedar housing, where users can watch videos that feature professors and their international research?

Such is the inspiration of the university’s Office of International Affairs, which commissioned the exhibit.

It will be showcased at the Tracktown USA tent next to Hayward Field for the duration of the world championships, which begin Tuesday.

“This (track) event allows us to use our university’s international influence as a way to bridge the gap between academics and athletics,” said Dennis Galvan, vice provost for international affairs. “This is a really nice synergy.”

Galvan and his team have named the exhibit the Global Scholars Expo, with the hopes of allowing international visitors the opportunity to take in not only the culture of track and field, but the university’s growing international presence.

Chakris Kusslanant, director of marketing and communications for the Office of International Affairs, said the exhibit idea came about as several folks gathered to brainstorm possibilities. "We collectively came up with the idea that we should promote the research that our professors do overseas," he said.

Some of the exhibit’s featured professors include Brendan Bohannon, whose research focuses on microbial diversity in the rainforests of Brazil; Peter Walker, whose research addresses liberation issues in Ghana; and John Postlethwait; who has made frequent expeditions to Antarctica to study the embryotic effects of bone loss in ice fish.

In total, the exhibit will feature 174 videos, each about a different professor and his or her work overseas.

“What a lot of people don’t realize is that we have professors who do research in all parts of the world,” said Galvan. “I think it’s important for people to know that.”

The portable exhibit is actually one of three displays.

There are flat-screen TVs mounted in the Global Scholars Hall and the Living and Learning Center on campus, which Kusslanant said have been turned into touchscreens featuring this exhibit.

Maya Lazaro, a 2013 UO graduate, serves as production coordinator for OR Media, a video production company based out of the School of Journalism and Communication. She oversaw a team of 12 undergraduates who produced the videos for the exhibit.

“Throughout the course of production, we were really able to see how far this university had come,” Lazaro said. “As we interviewed, it was as if they took us to every corner of the world.”

Project production began in November, when the first round of interviews were conducted with the professors. According to Kusslanant, production ramped up around mid-April when producers were interviewing and editing videos daily.

Kusslanant partnered with The Venture Department, a creative branch of the Emerald Media Group on campus, to
conceptualize the look and feel of the display. Ivar Vong and Andy Rossback, the two leading members of The Venture Department for the 2013-14 academic year, worked with their staff to write the code for the touchscreen.

The project cost about $150,000. Galvan said most of the money went to video production and exhibit display costs. Funding for the project came from the UO Foundation, he said.

Galvan has plans on extending the project after this week’s International Athletics Association Federation-sponsored championships. Ultimately, all the videos will be made available on a single website, and Galvan has plans to add more videos to the collection.

“If you put things into perspective, we have about 350 different faculty members who should have their research featured in this project,” Galvan said. “I would like to see them all be a part of this project down the road.”

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