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Assignment looks at tourism through eyes of university students

HVAB will showcase select '36 hours in Happy Valley' itineraries to potential visitors

STATE COLLEGE, PA, Feb. 13, 2020 – If you had 36 hours to spend in Happy Valley, what would you do? That is the question being posed to students in Penn State University's introductory tourism class.

Developed by Dr. Ashley Schroeder, assistant professor, Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Management, in coordination with The Happy Valley Adventure Bureau (HVAB), the assignment is inspired by the popular "36 Hours" series in the *New York Times* travel section.

At a special presentation at the Centre County Visitors Center, Dr. Schroeder's students learned about the HVAB's tourism promotion mission and the economic importance of leisure and business visitation before being given their own tourism undertaking.

Students were divided into groups, with each group assigned a specific valley – Penn's, Moshannon, Bald Eagle, Nittany. They were charged with developing the itinerary for a trip that extends from mid-afternoon Friday to late morning on Sunday – a typical time frame for visitors seeking a weekend getaway in Happy Valley.

"The goal of the assignment is to help students familiarize themselves with travel and tourism in Happy Valley and to better understand course concepts through real-world application," Schroeder said.

"Students are asked to research their destination and its attractions, as well as visit and talk with locals."

Students are required to complete all aspects of a trip itinerary, everything a visitor would want to know and need to know before visiting.

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Part of the grading rubric includes an evaluation by the HVAB.

“We are excited to see what the students develop,” said HVAB Communications Director Edward Stoddard. “We always encourage students to explore Happy Valley beyond campus. This assignment is a great way for them to learn about all that Happy Valley has to offer visitors.”

More importantly, Stoddard said the assignment provides an opportunity to develop tourism ambassadors from within the university student population.

“The greater awareness students have about things to do and see and places to visit in Centre County, the more they can share with parents, other family members and friends,” he explained.

HVAB President and CEO Fritz Smith added that positive “word of mouth” encourages first-time and repeat visitation.

“We want students to know there are plenty of reasons to come back after graduation, and someday bring their own families here to create new memories in a familiar place,” Smith said.

Stoddard said select student itineraries will be featured on the HVAB website and social media platforms.

The “36 hours in Happy Valley” assignment is just one of the ways in which the HVAB works with Penn State tourism students. HVAB staff frequently serve as guest lecturers, and have featured student-created Happy Valley tourism videos on social media. In addition, the HVAB currently has several interns from Penn State’s Hospitality program who are actively contributing to the organization’s communications/marketing efforts.

“Students are receiving valuable resume-building experience, while we have the ability to share their perspective on what makes Happy Valley a wonderful place to visit. It’s a win-win for both,” Stoddard said.

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