

Davis-Austria exchange program in the works

Marshall Plan Foundation brings foreign opportunities for students

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Written by Amir Begovic

Staff Writer

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World War II's destructive history has paved the road for educational programs and the building of foreign relations. One of these programs, The Marshall Plan Foundation in Austria, intends to bring opportunities to students in the international market.

"During World War II, exchanges between youth replaced fighting - thus the importance of connecting youth now. The Marshall Plan is continuing this tradition," said Phil Martin, professor of agriculture and resource economics.

The Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation was formed in 2000 in response to the Marshall Plan - a large-scale financial effort enacted after World War II to aid Europe in the rebuilding process after the war.

"The United States gave Europe money to rebuild; however, it was not a gift, it was a loan. The Austrian Marshall Plan is a foundation which is paying it back," Martin said. "Austria's way of paying it back is through youth exchanges."

One of the ways that The Marshall Plan Foundation in Austria has been promoting youth education is by hosting conferences. One of its most recent endeavors was held on the UC Davis campus on May 6. It was a conference on the issues of migration of Mexico and the United States, as well as Turkey and Europe. The event analyzed the current state of these affairs and provided insight into economic and future development.

"Migration and the environment are issues faced by all countries. Learning how other countries define and try to solve these problems is useful to them and us," Martin said.

The conference was also intended to bring The Marshall Plan Foundation to the attention of UC Davis students and motivate them to take an exchange in Austria, said Eugen Stark, Executive Director of the Foundation.

An exchange program at UC Davis is still in its development stages.

"Stark has prepared a draft agreement, but it hasn't been finalized yet," said Jeffery Gibeling, Dean of Graduate Studies. "It is a possible collaboration to provide support for students to do work in Austria, but currently it does not have a lot of funding."

Gibeling said there is no exact time frame for the project yet, but hopefully the draft will be accepted within the next couple of years. If the draft were to go through, UC Davis would join campuses like UC Berkeley, which have such programs already.

The draft would allow students to apply for a scholarship to study in Austria, Stark said. In order to qualify for the 3,000 to 10,000 euros that would be provided by the Foundation, students must meet certain criteria. There is a minimum of three months stay in the respective Austrian university, and students would compose a research paper on a chosen topic at the end. The amount of money the student would receive depends on the length of stay, as well as the ambition of the paper.

"It's a way to broaden horizons and learn about different approaches at low cost to students," Stark said.

AMIR BEGOVIC can be reached at campus@theaggie.org.