



Printer-friendly story
Read more at tcpalm.com

Grant will help Indian River State College disaster program expand

By D.B. Toth

Friday, April 30, 2010

FORT PIERCE — An United States Institute of Peace grant will allow Indian River State College to expand its disaster relief program so it can be a national and international model for educational and aid institutions.

The College's Center for Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Operations will use the \$79,680 to connect students with domestic agencies and international organizations that play a part in humanitarian work.

"What the grant allows us to do is to upgrade the program," said Paul Forage, the program's director. "We will conduct three to five international workshops over the next few years to bring students from Florida together with world class international organizations, as well as government agencies" such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency and United States Agency for International Development.

While most disaster relief and humanitarian operations focus on academic research and teaching, IRSC's program also emphasizes field training.

"This is the only program that does a training exercise over a two-week period where there's no let up," Forage said.

At IRSC's Treasure Coast Public Safety Training Complex in Fort Pierce, students face challenges such as organizing food convoys, transporting aid from one point of an affected area to another and negotiating accidents and checkpoints.

A fourth-year student in the program, Karen Elmore, described the training as a life-changing experience.

"The training is intense and very difficult, both emotionally and physically," she said. "All aspects are what it would be like in international situations with people who speak little or no English."

Forage said the training paid off for students who were dispatched in January to Haiti after the earthquake. Working with U.S. Army units and the United Nations were similar to challenges they faced during their training.

Students from the program have put their skills to use in countries such as Kenya, Iraq and Afghanistan. IRSC has partnered with several universities to develop the next generation of humanitarian and relief workers.

“We’ve had students from Oklahoma, Missouri, New York and Rhode Island who came here to train,” Forage said.

What surprised him, though, was students’ willingness to repeat their experience.

“The conditions we simulate are austere, and I was surprised that students want to come back for second or third helpings,” he said.



© 2010 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online