

Traveling Owls Faculty & Host Selection

The Traveling Owls strives to include a faculty member or staff host on as many sponsored trips as possible. Travelers have consistently reported that the value added benefit of traveling with a knowledgeable faculty member is a key reason that they choose to travel with the Traveling Owls. In cases where we cannot send a faculty member but have earned the ability to send a representative, we rely on Alumni Relations staff members to serve as a staff host.

STAFF HOSTS

When reviewing proposals for new trips from tour operators, some trips already feature a renowned lecturer, presentation, or other educational element that will be of value to travelers. On these trips, if a Rice faculty member was sent, they would be in competition with the educational programs guaranteed to be offered. In these cases, the Traveling Owls opts not to send a faculty member so that their value is not diminished or insignificant compared to what is already being offered by the tour operator. From feedback surveys and in line with peer institutions, when faculty members are included on a trip where the operator has arranged for on-board lecturers, criticisms are received describing there was conflict between the faculty member and on-board lectures. To ensure faculty does not feel belittled or underappreciated, these trips are the ones where a host is sent when minimum numbers have been met.

A staff host, while not able to add educational value, plays a valuable role during the travel experience and is responsible for building a sense of community among Rice travelers, organizing exclusive gatherings, and helping connect travelers to relevant opportunities on campus and where they live – among other responsibilities.

The Associate Director of Alumni Engagement (Traveling Owls program manager) is responsible for tracking and ensuring that staff hosts are selected in an equitable and fair manner in keeping with the rotation and timing of Alumni Relations staff hosts, in the following order:

1. Associate Director of Alumni Engagement (program manager): up to two trips per calendar year
2. Assistant Vice President of Alumni Relations: up to one trip per calendar year*
3. Director of Alumni Programs: up to one program per calendar year*
**If no trip is available in a given calendar year, the following year the Director will be asked first, followed by AVP.*
4. Associate/Assistant Directors/Specialists/Coordinators: after the AVP and Director, in rotation based on seniority up to one program per calendar year

FACULTY LECTURERS

In most other cases, the Traveling Owls sends a faculty member once a complimentary spot is earned. This occurs once a certain number of spaces on the trip are sold. Sometimes, this does not happen until after the official brochure is produced and mailed which is why they may not be originally advertised. However, once we are able to commit to sending a faculty member, we then update the marketing piece to inform alumni and friends of the addition and post it online. In some cases, if we feel confident that the trip will sell well, we will commit to sending a faculty member in advance. If in those cases we do not earn the complimentary space, the cost for their travel will be absorbed by the travel program's budget.

The selection of faculty members for trips is taken seriously. We have a database of faculty members that have served as lecturers on trips dating back decades or participated in other lifelong learning initiatives, such as Alumni College/Classroom Connect. In addition, as staff members meet and get to know faculty members, we add them to the database to consider for future trips even if they have not yet served in that role. In the post trip evaluations, travelers are asked to comment on their faculty lecturer and this feedback is also taken into consideration when determining who to invite on future programs. We prefer to send faculty members who have research or teaching expertise that is directly related to the areas of the world visited on the trip.