

CALVIN
College

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To Whom It May Concern:

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I am most pleased to write a letter of endorsement for the semester program in Romania launched by Dana Bates and the New Horizons Foundation two years ago in partnership with Northwestern College. As the director of Calvin's International Development Studies program, I will continue to press the Calvin College administration to approve this program for Calvin students. Unfortunately, that day may not come until both our enrollment picture and the general economic climate take a turn for the better.

That is indeed unfortunate because I know how strong the Romanian semester program is and how well it could serve our students. In Autumn 2008 we did manage to get one student approved to join the Northwestern group and my conversations with her afterward convinced me all the more that we need to find a way to get this program approved.

My support for this program is based on my own experience leading semester abroad programs, on the three weeks I spent with Dana and New Horizons in Lupeni in 2006 and on watching the organizing and shaping of this program over the last few years. My own experience with off-campus programs comes from the three years that I led the Latin American Studies Program of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) after I started the program in 1986. Then, after returning fulltime to Calvin in 1989, I later had the privilege of directing Calvin's Ghana and Honduras programs each for one semester. Finally, as a professor of international development who works with students participating in many different semester abroad programs, I am impressed with the theoretical and experiential richness that this program offers to undergraduate students interested in becoming global citizens.

Like many successful semester abroad programs, the Romania semester offers tremendous opportunities for on-site learning, like home stays, language learning and guided travel to key historical and cultural sites. Any student participating in this program will naturally gain an appreciation for Romania, its history, its religions, its ethnic challenges and the general joys and trials of daily life in Romania. And of course they will also learn a lot about themselves and their own country as many of their own ideas, beliefs and understandings are challenged in ways that will help them grow in their global perspective and also in their own personal virtue.

But what really sets this program apart from many others is the vision that Dana and New Horizons have for making the Christian faith come alive in ways that speak directly to the realities of Romania, both in terms of its brokenness and its blessings. They are not teaching only about Romania, but are also integrating a deep Christian understanding of how we can and should live together in community, in nations and in the world. In addition to all the extra-curricular learning that takes place naturally, the four courses offered in the Romanian semester are nothing less than a powerfully beautiful, integrated whole. The course on Romania and its people, along with an introduction to the language, helps students understand the context. The course on Eastern Orthodoxy gives them greater insight into the Christian faith tradition prevalent in Romania and into their own Christian faith traditions as well. With a clear grounding in context and in faith, a course in sustainable development theory helps students understand what the potential for the future is and how a positive future might be achieved. And finally, bringing it all, so to speak, down to the ground, is a practical course on experiential education that teaches students how actually to promote development in ways that take advantage of Romania's assets and address the real problems that they face, like the lack of self-esteem and the consequent corruption and inability to trust each other or to cooperate and work together. The program's experiential education focus provides students with an amazing opportunity to observe and participate in the innovative and highly successful youth development programs New Horizons is establishing in Romania. Students will thus learn the theory of experiential education, understand why it's important and then see it in action even as they get involved themselves. The four academic components of the semester, faith, context, theory and practice, form a coherent package that students will long remember and be able to apply to many other situations in their lives.

To close, let me say also that I have been thoroughly impressed with Dana's leadership of both the New Horizons Foundation and now too of the semester program. Dana has a great depth of knowledge that I've had the privilege of learning from over the last ten years. This is a great resource in and of itself for the students. But more than that, he has the unique ability to inspire people, to bring out the best in them and especially to help young people grow in their own understandings of themselves and their role as Christ followers in this world.

I continue to want to encourage Dana Bates and New Horizons in every reasonable way and I envy the students who will be able to participate in the Romania semester.

Sincerely,



Roland Hoksbergen, PhD
Director of International Development Studies