Vanguard Program Promises to Increase ROI for Meeting Planners

March 9, 2005 (Tempe, AZ) – Organizations have recognized the value of conferences, special events and professional meetings as strategic business tools, resulting in a multi-billion dollar global meetings industry. The Meeting Professionals International (MPI) Foundation is even developing ROI measurement tools that enable a planner to compare meeting costs with the economic impact of the event in terms of its objectives.

But, what Jim Fausel, faculty associate in the Arizona State University School of Community Resources and Development, has discovered is that far too many part-time employees without training in meeting planning may be unwittingly losing money for their employers. Their lack of knowledge and skills is a shortcoming, particularly when negotiating with hotel sales and catering managers, who gain an economic advantage in the planning and budgeting process.

Part-time meeting planners are often administrative assistants or clerical staff and are not included in professional conferences and ongoing educational sessions. They are found in every sector and account for 51% of the personnel responsible for planning professional events and meetings.

To attack this issue, Fausel convened a focus group of 18 meeting suppliers and planners to discuss how Arizona State University could help increase the skills of part and full-time meeting planners, particularly how to lessen dependence on hotel staff to make their decisions and to do their planning. Subsequently, a statewide survey was conducted by Fausel’s Meetings and Conference Management class and his students secured names of more than 2K meeting planners from government, universities, associations, corporations and other
organizations who could benefit from a comprehensive training program on meeting management.

Research was conducted across more than 25 U.S. universities offering meeting management curricula. It was discovered that only two or three schools offer community-wide education programs.

The School of Community Resources and Development partnered with the ASU School of Public Affairs’ Advanced Public Executives Program to offer the courses in downtown Phoenix. Other program sponsors include America West Airlines, which provides transportation for course speakers, and the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Phoenix, which covers speaker accommodations.

In February 2005 the professional certificate program, Professional Meeting Planners Partnership (PMMP) was launched, with both a beginners and an advanced program. Ongoing registration for the courses will continue through the fall 2005 semester.

The courses count towards the Certified Meeting Professional (CMP) designation (http://www.conventionindustry.org/cmp/index.htm), which was developed and is administered by the Convention Liaison Council, an organization of 30 hospitality and meeting professional organizations across the country. In addition, ASU has received more than 35 inquiries from faculty at other universities who are interested in how the program was initiated and how it will be sustained. Launching of the program was also discussed on the Meetings Industry Mall internet discussion list including more than 4.5K meeting professionals, and it received only positive praise.

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