United Airlines Changes Unaccompanied Minor Fee Program

The airline industry is critical to the success of international student exchange programs the world over. Without the convenience and relatively easy access to air travel many of us enjoy, student exchange programs simply wouldn’t exist as a vital tool for global diplomacy. So, when airlines adopt new policies, we plan accordingly. But, when United Airlines revised its unaccompanied minor fee program without warning in 2016 to require travelers as old as 15 to pay an additional $300 round-trip to fly alone, CSIET knew this could be profoundly disruptive for the International Student Exchange Community.

However, we were delighted to recently learn United is changing the unaccompanied minor policy, once again. The unaccompanied minor fee will instead be applied only to children between the ages of 5 to 14, meaning the youngest exchange students can fly United without incurring the exorbitant fee.

We believed then, as we do now, that students participating in an exchange program demonstrate, among other things, a level of maturity that qualifies them to act as ambassadors of their country and culture and should be exempted from the additional fee. Soon after learning of the unexpected change, we discussed this issue with representatives of United and petitioned them for an exemption.

While United initially disagreed with our assessment of the program participants, we believe that CSIET’s early advocacy efforts and using our collective voice aided in bringing this issue to the airline’s attention, forcing them to revisit the policy.

CSIET is always working for you—our members—and with our voices combined we can affect real change, from the local to international levels.

All the best,
Christopher Page, Executive Director of CSIET