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**Delta State’s Cooper presents research at international conference in Cuba**

**CLEVELAND, Miss. —** Fa’Darryl T. Cooper, a Delta State University senior marketing major from Belzoni, recently presented at the ninth annual Workshop of Strategic Alliances for the Internationalization of Higher Education (Cuba TIES), hosted at the University of Cienfuegos in Cienfuegos, Cuba. His research presentation, “Boosting Enrollment and Retention in Higher Education Using Marketing Strategies,” was delivered at the conference’s main session and the student forum, highlighting the impact of digital and traditional marketing strategies on higher education recruitment.

Cooper was part of a multi-institutional delegation of students, faculty, staff, and administrators from DSU, California State University – Los Angeles, State University of New York – Cortland, the Fashion Institute of Technology (NY), and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU).

“My primary goal for traveling to Cuba was to share my research on boosting enrollment and retention in higher education through marketing strategies, particularly focusing on the role of social media. I was excited for the opportunity to present my work on a global platform and engage in meaningful discussions with peers and professionals from around the world,” said Cooper.

“I also hoped to connect with experts and students, especially those from Cuba, and form lasting relationships that could be beneficial for future collaborations. Additionally, I wanted to immerse myself in the Cuban culture and gain a deeper understanding of how education and other systems function in different parts of the world,” he added.

Working with DSU’s International Student Services office, Cooper successfully applied for and received a full scholarship from Civitas Global Educational Services (Civitas GES) and the Study Mississippi consortium, covering conference registration, airfare, visa, pre-conference sessions, ground transportation, accommodations, meals, insurance, and English-speaking guides. He also received a DSU Goes Global Passport grant, which enables DSU students to receive their first U.S. passport to take advantage of international education opportunities.

Dr. Victor Millo Carmenate, director of the International Relations Office at the University of Cienfuegos said, “There are three main goals of Cuba TIES: first, to revitalize and build alliances for sustainable higher education development through internationalization in various fields of knowledge and research, discussing global actions and strategies. Next, to encourage the exchange of experiences and working strategies in international relations between higher education institutions, promoting cooperation based on sustainable development in its three dimensions: economic, social, and environmental within local and regional contexts. Finally, to reflect on action plans in favor of the academic, cultural, and scientific development of university students.”

Cooper and the delegation attended the international conference, which included keynote speakers from the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education; AASCU Vice President and Chief Operating Officer Dr. José A. Cabrales; Dr. Leteska Moeketsi from the University of South Africa; and Dr. Shannon Márquez, Dean of Global Engagement and Director of the Columbia University Center of Undergraduate Engagement. The event featured two days of research presentations as well as a student forum on the final day, which included American and Cuban graduate and undergraduate students.

Dairo Moreno, CEO of Civitas GES and co-founder of Cuba TIES said, “We’re fortunate to have grown a robust student forum over the years. It is an opportunity for student delegates to share their work and their innovation with peers from Cuba and around the world. Fa’Darryl’s work on university retention through social media sparked a lot of interest among our Cuban colleagues, who are also exploring this issue. We hope that Fa’Darryl returns to share his completed work with the entire delegation once again.”

Cultural immersion in Cuban culture and history is one of the highlights of Cuba TIES. Pre-conference sessions included an educational day trip to Trinidad, a city founded in 1514 and designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. A unique aspect of Cuba TIES is that Cooper and other delegates stayed in *casas particulares*, private homestays with Cuban families who provided breakfast and dinner. Cooper’s student housemates included students from SUNY – Cortland and the University of Pinar del Rio (Cuba).

Cooper said, “One of the most enjoyable experiences I had in Cuba was participating in the annual softball game between conference attendees and Cuban national baseball hall of famers. Baseball is a huge part of Cuban culture, and coaching the game was a unique and unforgettable experience. It allowed me to connect with Cuban athletes and showcase teamwork in a way that transcended language and cultural barriers. The passion and skill of the Cuban players were inspiring, and it was a great way to bond with peers from both Cuba and the U.S. One challenge I faced was navigating the language barrier in some situations. While many of the U.S. delegates were fluent in both Spanish and English, there were times when Spanish was predominant, and communicating through translators or guides made me realize how important cultural and linguistic competence is in international settings.”

Cooper was selected for the travel scholarship based on his research, strong academic performance, and demonstrated campus and community leadership.

Dr. Tomeka Harbin, interim dean of DSU’s College of Business and Aviation, wrote a glowing letter of recommendation for the scholarship. “I couldn’t be prouder of Fa’Darryl for representing Delta State in such a professional setting. He has a natural way of stepping into leadership roles, thanks to his attention to detail, impressive organizational skills, and his ability to motivate and inspire those around him. Fa’Darryl’s commitment to education and his passion for leadership shine through in everything he does on campus.”

Cooper serves as a campus resident hall director, a Delta Diplomat in the admissions office, and a member of the Student Government Association Cabinet. He also served two years on the Executive Board of the Delta State University Future Business Leaders of America Collegiate Chapter and is the 2024-2025 Mississippi State President for Future Business Leaders of America Collegiate. He was recently selected as the Spring 2025 Delta Research Foundation Congressional Fellow and will be in Washington, DC, interning in U.S. Senator Roger Wicker’s office.

In addition to the International Student Services office, Delta State’s McNair Research Scholars Program, a federal TRIO program, provided logistical support for Cooper’s journey to Cuba.

McNair Research Scholars Program Director Dr. Dannielle Taylor commented, “Fa’Darryl is highly engaged as a McNair Research Scholar. He is naturally inquisitive, and research is a newly discovered passion for him. This conference presented the perfect opportunity for him to experience a part of the world that many rarely get to see while also sharing his research. He was the perfect ambassador for McNair, for Delta State, and for the state of Mississippi.”

Cooper added, “International opportunities are invaluable for broadening your perspective, especially as a student. Traveling abroad allows you to experience different cultures, understand global issues, and see how your field of study is approached in different countries. For DSU students, these opportunities can be transformative, opening doors to both academic and professional growth.”

To learn more about International Student Services and other global educational opportunities, please contact the International Student Services office at 662-846-4574 or email [mjohansen@deltastate.edu](mailto:mjohansen@deltastate.edu).

Cutline: Fa’Darryl T. Cooper presenting his research at the ninth annual Workshop of Strategic Alliances for the Internationalization of Higher Education in Cienfuegos, Cuba.

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**About Delta State University:**Delta State University is a four-year public institution whose nearly 2,700 students come from most U.S. states and more than 45 countries. Acknowledging its beginning as a teacher’s college, the University sustains excellence in teacher education while continuing to expand offerings in traditional as well as unique fields of study. Programs such as those available through the Delta Music Institute, the Commercial Aviation Department, and the Center for Interdisciplinary Geospatial Information highlight the University’s commitment to meeting the evolving needs of the students it serves with world-leading, industry-acclaimed programs. Situated in the heart of the Mississippi Delta, Delta State offers top-notch academic programs in business, arts, sciences, nursing, education, and more. DSU Athletics has won 14 national championships, 70 conference championships, and 37 regional titles.