Tom Martinek Jr. '97, academic director for study abroad. "It's easier to have a program where it gets all packaged and handed off to a third party."

About 83 percent of UNCG students who study abroad receive financial aid. That reflects the student body, about 73 percent of whom receive financial aid. Over the last decade, Pynes says, International Programs has helped students secure about $800,000 in Benjamin A. Gilman International scholarships. Gilman scholarships average about $4,000 per student. In spring 2014 alone, 11 UNCG students are using Gilman dollars to travel.

IPC also issues smaller travel grants of $600-$1,200 to offset costs. These funds come from private donors.

"The mantra has always been that if you can afford to study abroad, you can afford to study abroad," Martinek says. "The program was designed for anyone, not just financially privileged people."

POINTS OF VIEW

Martinek knows Oulu firsthand. As a student, he studied at Oulu during the second year of the exchange, 1994.

Martinek had not yet declared his major and was struggling to find his way, when his professor mentioned a study abroad exchange to Finland.

"It was not something I'd ever thought about before. It intrigued me because I didn't know much about Finland or even where it was on the map," he says. "I think that 'unknown' part about it really appealed to me."

Martinek did experience culture shock when he arrived at Oulu, mostly due to subtle differences between Finns and Americans.

"People were, on the surface, a lot more reserved than I was used to," he says. "That's a stereotype, but there is some truth to it. Of course as an American I was used to being a little more gregarious and smily."

Sanna Micklin, a junior on exchange from Oulu during the fall 2013 semester, experienced the shift in reverse.

"We don't have that much small talk in Finland," she says. "Actually I really like it. People have been so nice. Now that I'm going back, it might be harder to adjust because I've gotten so used to this."

Despite Oulu's beautiful landscape, which reminded him of Southern Pines, N.C., the climate difference was stark, Martinek says.

"I had never been in a place that was that cold and that dark. The days were really short as it got colder to winter."

Sanna enjoyed the warm weather in the southern states. Skyping with her parents back in Lapland, she found that the temperature there was minus 22°C (or minus 8°F).

"And of course there were educational differences. Finnish universities favor a more independent means of study than most American institutions. Finnish students have fewer assignments and exams, generally taking an exam or submitting a paper at the end of the course."

"They tend to treat people more like adults," Martinek says. "The expectation is you learn the way you want to learn, and we'll test you at the end."

Sanna misses the freedom of study in Finland, which allows for more flexibility, but she appreciates more frequent "checks" along the way. "You can't fall behind," she says, "and that is good."

Sanna, majoring in cultural anthropology, picked up criminal justice courses during her semester at UNCG, including Dr. Sandra Westervelt's class on deviant behavior. Oulu doesn't offer these courses.

Martinek's courses at Oulu, Scandinavian Studies, also offered him general education classes he wouldn't find in the U.S. He took classes in art, history, music and literature, enjoying frequent excursions to cities like Helsinki and Stockholm, and even a research station in northeast Finland.

"It was a combination of lectures and hands-on stuff," he says. "You couldn't pick a better way to learn."

He was pleased to find that most Finns speak English and at least one other language in addition to their native tongue.

Sanna started learning English in the third grade. In fifth grade, she had to choose between German and Swedish courses. At Finnish universities, most textbooks are in English.

"I had ordered a Finnish phrasebook and learned a few words, but I was running into people whose English was as good or better than mine," Martinek says. "At first I was a bit critical and cynical about how we handle language education over here, but Finnish students would say, 'Don't beat yourself up too much because outside of Finland, you're not going to find a lot of people speaking Finnish.'"

The program has seen shifts over the years as administrators at both universities made adjustments to meet the needs of their students.

"There are trends that come and go," Martinek says. "There's been a lot of energy and time and commitment to allowing more education majors to go abroad, and those numbers have spiked dramatically over the past five years. The Finnish system is a model for the world as far as educational styles and systems."

Martinek takes pride in the relationships International Programs has established across the globe. Some, like UNCG-Oulu, began with chance encounters between the right two people.

"I wish we had that rubkin for our archives," he says.

[Marking an anniversary] Check out a video that celebrates the anniversary of this thriving partnership. alumnimagazine.uncg.edu