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Global teams open up new world of opportunity for SBA students

To gain true business success, students must think both outside the box and outside the classroom. Through its new International Learning Experience Program, Oakland University's School of Business Administration (SBA) moves beyond the traditional classroom by offering virtual classrooms, global team projects with international students and study abroad opportunities to expose undergraduate and graduate students to relevant international business experiences.

"To expand on our SBA mission of global understanding and leadership, the SBA's Center for Integrated Business Research and Education (CIBRE) is piloting three models to enable our students to work on real business-driven projects with international student teams," explained SBA Dean Mohan Tanniru.

The all-virtual model allows Oakland and international students to work together on business projects through a virtual classroom. Under the hybrid model, the students meet face-to-face overseas for the initial project startup, then utilize the virtual classroom for the remainder of the semester. The international immersion model affords students the opportunity to study abroad for an entire semester working on global projects. The global team component makes Oakland's business program unique.

"Certainly many schools immerse their students in study abroad programs and use technology to connect students internationally – but our programs, whether virtual or face-to-face, leverage our business connections to add value to the program that will differentiate our students and program from others," said Tanniru.

With the assistance of a Chrysler Foundation grant, SBA's new virtual classroom became a reality in winter 2009. The pilot all-virtual class linked five Oakland students and four students from Hohai University in Nanjing, China together to work on a challenging business project provided by the Ford Motor Company.

"Ford's representative, Alan Fisk, encouraged students to think out of the box in conducting the project," said Associate Professor, MIS, Xiaodong Deng, who facilitates the course. "He asked students to treat the project as their own and take a more active role to move the project forward." Deng was encouraged by the student's enthusiasm and initiative as they presented initial project ideas and molded them into workable concepts.

Yet another project creates five teams, each comprised of one SBA graduate student and five undergraduate students from the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade international business program, to complete a project analyzing the automotive market needs in China.

The SBA will partner with Beijing Jiaotong University in Beijing, China on a new summer program this year, where SBA and engineering students will visit China for three weeks to launch a global project. Upon their return, they will complete the project with the same team in the virtual classroom.

"As they become immersed in another culture and work with their foreign counterparts, they will need to build trust and cooperation," explained Ron Tracy, associate dean. "The students will discover that process is a bit more complicated within an international environment. It's an important experience which will enrich their university experience and their professional life."

While the SBA is starting out with a small group for the pilot, it will expand quickly as other universities in China and India have expressed interest in joining the program.

The third, and completely face-to-face model, will engage OU students in global team projects as they visit another country for the full length of the project. Still in development, this model will take shape in the 2009-10 academic year.

Several other SBA total immersion programs allow students to visit other countries for extended periods of time. For example, the SBA has joined the Consortium of Universities for International Studies as a sponsor of CIMBA, a study abroad program located in Italy, where Oakland students can earn transferable credits by taking undergraduate or MBA courses at CIMBA.

OU MBA students in the Management 681 course also get a unique European perspective on business. The summer class, instructed by Frank Cardiman, will tour Germany, France and the United Kingdom to learn not only high-level management skills, but how the culture, language, history and economic conditions of other countries impact international business.

This year, the group will visit the U.S. Embassy and the European Parliament as well as companies such as Daimler, Siemens, Harley Davidson and AT&T. Not the typical sightseeing excursion, students must complete extensive research and elaborate coursework prior to the trip.

We're meeting a business need," said Tanniru, summing up the International Learning Experience Programs. "Our graduates will be even more effective in the workplace, and thus more desired by employers thanks to these experiences."

"Long term it will attract more students to Oakland and our international universities," he added. "A partnership such as this is always a win-win for all parties involved."

SUMMARY

The SBA's new International Learning Experience Program offers virtual classrooms, global team projects with international students and study abroad opportunities.

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