

Monday, February 15, 2010

Tapping displaced workers, students SBA's CIBRE helps reshape Michigan's economy

Through its integrative thinking philosophy, the Center for Integrated Business Research and Education (CIBRE) at OU's School of Business Administration (SBA) is helping small manufacturers explore innovation and shift the industry into emerging sectors such as defense, energy and aerospace.

A donation from the Society for Information Management (SIM) Foundation combined with a matching contribution from Craig Stinson SBA '84, chairman, Norma Group, and chair, SBA Board of Visitors, provided the seed money to initiate several pilot projects through CIBRE, under the umbrella of the **Tool and Die Futures Initiative (TDFI)**.

The TDFI and CIBRE are bringing together teams of displaced white collar business and technical professionals, small manufacturers and OU students to work on economic transition projects to help reshape the manufacturing industry in southeastern Michigan.

"Through the projects, we are mining the people who have skills, but are between jobs. They are a think tank to move things forward," says Paul Peabody, OU Board of Visitors member and past president of the SIM Detroit chapter, an organization of senior level IT professionals, and recently retired vice president and CIO, William Beaumont Hospital. "This is a unique approach and one that could help provide economic stimulus for the community."

Stinson agrees that the projects can provide much needed assistance for the manufacturing community, helping them work collaboratively and compete in the global marketplace.

"I am glad to see that our funding, matched with what the SIM Foundation provided, helped jump start the projects," says Stinson. "This fits well into the theme of the SBA -- Excellence through Integration."

In addition to support from the SIM Foundation and Stinson, other organizations such as Fanuc Robotics, Expert Tech, the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center and Takata are making in-kind contributions in support of these projects.

Providing experiential learning opportunities

The backing of the SIM Foundation and Stinson is a critical component in the projects, providing students with important experiential learning opportunities.

"The students who are working on these projects are supported by the funding," says Mohan Tanniru, SBA dean. "The tool-die companies and the technical and business professionals are busy with the technology development. They need additional support from students on market analysis, financial planning and customer acceptance of these technologies."

Projects range from preparing business plans and conducting market analysis to developing strategies to diversify from automotive to aerospace. Other projects include developing strategies for a non-profit agency and helping the manufacturing firms become competitive by allowing them to explore new technologies such as robotics.

"To what extent it will lead to economic development is dependent on project success and the firm's ability to generate new orders," says Tanniru. "We think the students are helping them answer some critical questions as they market new technologies and services."

Bob Quinn, CIBRE affiliate, and president, RCM Inc., is coordinating the projects, and is impressed with the far-reaching benefits of student involvement.

"From an entrepreneurial standpoint, the students are exposed to the whole gamut, from obtaining financing, working with intellectual property, selling a new idea and thinking out of the box," he says. "It's not mainstream business as usual, as we're looking at new ways of doing business to become more competitive."

Bringing together manufacturing, technical and managerial talent with OU business students, through innovative projects, is just one of those new ways the SBA's CIBRE is helping to shape a new future for Michigan's manufacturing industry.

For more information or to get involved see the **Tool and Die Futures Initiative Web site**.

SUMMARY

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