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Eastern exposure: A conversation with SBA global scholar Waseem Samaan

From jet lag and the threat of a swine flu epidemic, to unpredictable schedule changes and limited access to communications, a visit to China was an eye-opening experience for SBA student Waseem Samaan, who went as one of OU's first-ever Global Scholars.

But then, that's precisely the point of the Global Scholar program, says Samaan, an accounting and finance major from Sterling Heights, Mich.

The three-week sojourn in China helped illuminate what the real world of international business is like, he says, and more vividly than it could have in the confines of a classroom.

"I understand better what people have to deal with when conducting business internationally," he says. "It's really a lot more complex than I realized."

Samaan was one of several OU students who traveled to universities in Beijing and Shanghai this spring to collaborate on projects with Chinese business students.

The Global Scholars program, the newest addition to the school's Scholars program, is part of the SBA's Center for Integrated Business Research and Education (CIBRE). Its purpose is to help strengthen the background of SBA students for dealing in the dynamic world of international business.

Samaan and others worked with Chinese counterparts on projects involving the international marketing of automobiles. Samaan's part was to help create a survey to collect information on consumer preferences in the U.S. and China.

"I discovered some major differences in the two markets," he says. "For instance, the size of a car is an important concern there. Smaller is better, because parking is so limited in China."

Fortunately, language never was a problem, he says, since most students in China know some English.

"It was really an even exchange, in that we both learned something from one another about our cultures," says Samaan. "In my case, I learned about the way the Chinese barter and negotiate to purchase goods."

Samaan, who serves as treasurer for the local Beta Alpha Psi chapter, says the SBA's Global Scholars program is a valuable step in the right direction for business students focused on the global marketplace. Samaan also serves as vice president of the National Association of Black Accountants, is a member of Oakland Accounting Students Information Society and an SBA peer adviser

"We're moving to a world that is globalized, and that's very important to a finance and accounting major like myself. In 2011, the universal accounting standards will change from Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) to international standards, so we have to be ready for it."

By Kevin Knapp, OU staff writer

SUMMARY

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