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International research through SBA faculty brings new perspectives

As faculty members at Oakland University's School of Business Administration continue to collaborate with international experts in their fields through the SBA's Center for Integrated Business Research and Education (CIBRE), they bring new perspectives to complex, global business topics and a broader, more worldly teaching and learning experience to the university.

Sherman Folland, professor of economics, researches social capital wealth on a national scale. He recently received a research grant from the Norwegian Research Council for 600,000 Kroner to study social capital (SC) in Bergen, Norway, over the next three summers.

SC is the value of a culture's social connectedness, measured by attributes such as the quality and quantity of social interactions and levels of trust and caring for others. As a country, Norway ranks among the highest in SC while the U.S. stands in the middle of the pack and is on the decline.

Specifically, Folland is looking at whether SC contributes to less health-risky behaviors. Folland's preliminary findings, published in the Health Economic journal, indicates that smoking, excessive drinking and overeating tend to diminish when a person has a strong social network.

"Improving social capital could mean a health revolution," said Folland, who has published two additional papers on SC. "I do think that what health care providers have been saying for a long time is true – that a lot of our health comes down to healing ourselves with our choices."

Mukesh Bhargava, marketing professor, was excited by data related to innovation and adoption that his German colleagues at the Center for European Economic Research (ZEW) shared with him and Professor Fuad Hasanov. The researchers at ZEW, a non-profit research institute in Mannheim, surveyed German companies to discover patterns and influences of innovation. This information is then shared with other counterparts in Europe to help encourage innovation through national funding and incentives.

"They have a good innovation incentive plan in Europe but we have no such policies," Bhargava said. "We tried to incorporate a similar survey here but U.S. companies treat this as proprietary and are not open to sharing information."

Although the team could not duplicate similar results in the U.S., the collaborative research continues and Bhargava remains optimistic. "The data is still encouraging," he said. "We can make generalizations based on the ZEW research so the work is still relevant. We hope to create a need for cooperation and government funding as we continue to research in this area."

Research scholar Ding Yuan, of Hohai University in Nanjing, China, visited OU this winter, bringing a body of research on the motivations, paths of expansion and performance of foreign companies. As a visiting scholar, he worked with Joy Jiang, assistant professor of management, and Ravi Parameswaran, chair of management and marketing, to analyze data on multinational corporations within China.

"Prior studies in foreign investment have focused more on why and where companies establish themselves and less on how they actually expand once they enter a country." Jiang said. "We try to move beyond the entry-point to examine the process of foreign expansion and determine if different paths will lead to differences in performance."

The three professors will submit their findings at an international business conference and present a paper to the Journal of Business Research.

If it's true that every business decision triggers an IT event, then Vijayan Sugumaran, professor, MIS, Decision and Information Science, believes every IT event must trigger well-researched, well-developed IT planning and engineering.

For the last eight years, Sugumaran has collaborated with Professor Sooyong Park, from the department of Computer Science, Sogang University, South Korea, on software engineering issues.

"We look at how to manage the process of producing new versions of software," he explained. "This is important because just like any product, companies need to continually update and re-engineer their software product lines. When manufactured goods, such as cars, are updated, industry standards make it easier to write specs. It's not the same for software, which has different standards throughout the industry. As we work to develop base architecture, it will be easier for software to evolve."

According to Sugumaran, working with international partners helps bring industries together. "It gives us access to different markets and allows us to see different approaches. For example, Park has contacts at Kia and Hyundai; we have our U.S. automotive contacts. We're able to bring these people together for greater knowledge transfer," he said.

Sugumaran visits Korea every year, just as Park frequently visits Oakland. Together they have published nine articles, nine conference papers and one book chapter.

Virtual worlds offer more than fantasy games, group blogs and homemade videos. For Balaji Rajagopalan, associate professor, MIS, and his international colleagues, they represent an opportunity to analyze social interactions and lifestyle choices of individuals who interact within virtual worlds, such as "Second Life," the three-dimensional world where cyber visitors create their own virtual world and characters, called Avatars.

Along with Ye Qiang, professor, Harbin Institute of Technology in China, Rajagopalan is gathering common underlying attributes of virtual world visitors and categorizing them into clusters based on lifestyle choices.

He is also researching "Knowledge Sharing in Virtual Communities" with T.P. Liang, dean and MIS professor, National Sun Yat-sen University (NSYSU), in Taiwan. In addition, he is organizing a mini-track on Virtual Communities and Virtual Worlds at the Americas Conference on Information Systems (AMCIS) with two German professors: Sebastian Richter, Universität der Bundeswehr München; and Jan Marco Leimeister, Universität Kassel.

"Virtual communities offer an opportunity for researchers to study social and political interaction patterns, economic transaction processes, organizational behaviors, management aspects, business models and design concepts exhibited by visitors of virtual communities," Rajagopalan said in reference to the mini-track.

SUMMARY
SBA faculty collaborate with international experts, bringing new perspectives to complex, global business topics and a broader teaching and learning experience to the university.

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