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International scholar exchange enriches OU education

By **Marcus Popiolek**, contributing writer

In a world where businesses struggle to find new markets in the United States, it has become important for companies to cross borders and think globally.

It's this philosophy that led Oakland University's **School of Business** to seek new methods of teaching students how other countries operate. The first step in this new teaching method is an exchange program that has OU faculty traveling abroad and faculty from India and China coming here.

Under the purview of the School of Business' long-term strategic plan, an international collaboration, called "The GLOBAL" (Global Business and Academic Linkages) Project, was established.

As part of the strategic plan, a memorandum of understanding was signed with three Indian universities — the Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) in New Delhi, Symbiosis Institute of International Business (SIIB) in Pune, and TAPAI Management Institute (TAPM) in Manipal — to facilitate collaborations. Under this agreement, OU and the Indian universities will progressively engage in faculty exchanges, student exchanges, business internships and joint degree programs.

"Such international collaborations are imperative to equip our business students with knowledge and understanding of different environments abroad to enable American firms to effectively meet the challenges posed by increasing globalization," said Assistant Professor of Management Deepak Sethi, the first of OU's business faculty to travel to India under the agreement.

Sethi currently is teaching students at the Symbiosis Institute of International Business, but this is not the first of the faculty exchanges. The program began in May when Professor of International Business Rajani Gupte of the SIIB arrived at OU to teach a seven-week program.

"It's been a wonderful time. The students are committed to learning and they understand the importance of learning a new culture," said Gupte, who taught international business to OU MBA students, a course where students benefit from the global perspective and teachings of a foreign professor.

When Sethi travels to the SIIB this summer, he will teach a course that matches the same needs of Indian students.

"It's important that our students are taught courses that will best meet their needs, and we need to present material that meets the needs of foreign students," Sethi said. "It's in this way that we can truly benefit from the exchange."

Matching curriculum isn't the only goal of the faculty exchange. The program also seeks to meet the needs of the current marketplace.

"We identified those foreign countries that had the best opportunity for growth in the United States market and where American businesses would have the opportunity to grow," Sethi said. "Besides India, we are negotiating with schools in China, Germany and France. We will also look to do exchanges with universities in South America."

Sethi expects the program to show real results in three to four years. During this time, he hopes to have all aspects of the program in place and to have agreements with several foreign countries. He doesn't see any problems arising, but does say there are differences in teaching classes in different countries. In America, it isn't unusual for students to attend class part-time while working to pay for school. In India, that is not the case.

"In their culture, it is understood that it's the parents responsibility to pay for college and their child's living expenses. From that aspect, students in American face many more challenges," Sethi said. "But that doesn't mean their students

won't face challenges. The cultural differences are many, and it's up to the faculty to make sure that those differences are bridged."

His counterpart from India shares the optimism expressed by Sethi. Gupte said there are many similarities between the two schools and the communities in which they reside. While OU is situated in the heart of Automation Alley, the Symbiosis Institute of International Business is at the heart of India's growing automation industry.

"It's important for our students to take advantage of what this area has to offer. Our backgrounds are similar, but yours has a longer history. We are becoming the center of computer and technology and are automotive companies continue to grow," Gupte said. "From a business perspective, this is a excellent agreement. Culturally, we can learn from each other, and in the future, I hope to see even greater participation."

SUMMARY

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