WITH virtually every business doing some business overseas, international business knowledge, cultural awareness and relationship-building skills are critically important for professionals today. Faculty at the Driehaus College of Business are nurturing these qualities in DePaul graduates in a host of ways—through classroom encounters, study abroad seminars and international business education initiatives that offer students numerous points of entry into the global economy.

“Global business opportunities are so pervasive that every one of our students must receive an international perspective, even though they may never plan to do business abroad,” notes Dean Ray Whittington.

DePaul business majors Lizbeth Aviles and Heather Bear studied abroad in Germany, where they visited the Berlin Wall. The inscription behind them, attributed to African wisdom: “Many little people who live in many small towns can do many little things that can change the face of the world.”
For nearly a decade now, Associate Professor of Marketing Zafar Iqbal has witnessed firsthand the benefits students gain through exposure to other customs and cultures. Together with Executive-in-Residence Luis Larrea, Iqbal leads groups of business students on study abroad seminars to his native India, as well as to Japan. “Obviously, who you are determines what you get out of the experience,” he observes, “but everyone who participates in the seminars has one important realization: business is all about relationships. Over the course of two weeks, you watch students’ perspectives change—they’re no longer fearful of ‘the other.’ They’re inundated with new experiences—differences in class, cuisine, culture and temperature—which is mentally exhausting, but also exhilarating.”

Students expand their horizons and hone their ability to break the ice with strangers, Iqbal explains, both of which enhance their self-confidence. They also gain greater empathy for others, having experienced that feeling of utter foreignness themselves. “Everyone returns with an appreciation for the intensity of friendships and a much better understanding of what a multicultural learning environment is really all about.”

Michael Korycki (MBA ’13), a participant in the summer 2010 study abroad seminar in India, says his two-week sojourn provided him with more relevant experiences than he could have gathered in two months in-country on his own. Today, Korycki is putting those insights to work as a project manager at Global Cloud Exchange, an international provider of integrated communications solutions for businesses and a business unit of Mumbai-based Reliance Communications.

“Exposure to different cultures and other ways of doing business is so informative, particularly in an emerging economy like India,” he says. “Encountering so many new people, cities and companies in a short amount of time forces you to think harder and look at things more critically. I wouldn’t trade the experience for anything. The trip increased my confidence during the interview process and enhanced my ability to interact successfully with my Indian colleagues.”

Christopher Huberts (BUS ’09) is similarly enthusiastic. A manager of product management for Amazon.com in India, Huberts majored in marketing at DePaul and was a member of the first international business seminar Iqbal led to India in 2008. “Despite reading every book on the recommended reading list, I was still blown away with what I experienced.”

Huberts returned from the trip determined to work in India one day, and six years later, his dream was realized. He’s now wrapping up his overseas assignment and says he’s had a life experience that he’ll never forget. “As a businessperson, working so closely to an epicenter of technology has given me instant ‘street cred’ with the software engineers at my company and made initial conversations with hiring managers much easier. Studying abroad can offer perspective and insights that go way beyond the classroom.”

AN EYE-OPENING EXPERIENCE FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students who come to DePaul also derive great value from the cross-cultural experience, whether they choose to remain in the States after graduating or return to their home country. Chelsea Cai (MS ’13), an assistant manager with JLL (formerly Jones Lang LaSalle) in Tianjin, China, says that her two years at DePaul exposed her to American culture, improved her interpersonal skills and generally “opened my eyes to the world.”

Cai identifies three aspects of her educational experience as particularly important: DePaul’s program location in Chicago’s financial district, the extensive career preparation offered by Kellstadt Graduate School of Business’s Career Management Center and the multitude of alumni resources and networking opportunities available at DePaul. It was through alumni resources that Cai found an internship at Barrington Research Associates and later a position at Chicago-based Cambridge Realty Capital.

“These training opportunities and interactions with different levels of people enhanced my professionalism and increased my ability to communicate effectively,” Cai says. Back in China, the benefits continue to accrue.

“My international experience helped me to grow faster than my peers and has given me the confidence to grasp any opportunity I feel like trying,” Cai explains.

Business Exchange Fall/Winter 2015
A WIDER VISION OF BUSINESS

Another aspect of DePaul’s global education strategy involves collaborations with international partners, including the Bahrain Institute for Banking (BIBF), an educational institution with which DePaul has enjoyed a thriving relationship since 2001. Through this partnership, DePaul business faculty continue to be blessed with the arrival of our son, Max, a little over a year ago. He has definitely been a game changer! Like many other DePaul graduates, AlMoayyed found that multicultural learning experiences enhanced not only her technical skills, but also soft skills like presentation, critical-thinking, and decision-making techniques that every person in business must master to succeed. 

Like many other DePaul graduates, AlMoayyed found that multicultural learning experiences enhanced not only her technical skills, but also soft skills like presentation, critical-thinking, and decision-making techniques that every person in business must master to succeed. Although already in a CEO role and a board member when she began her MBA, AlMoayyed says that the experience helped her immeasurably. “It re-emphasized to me the fact that there is no end to continuous learning, introduced me to the latest management practices and brought me up-to-date with technology, research and rationalizing output,” she says. “Cross-cultural exchange helps to widen our vision, allows us to study best practices on a macro level and adopt what’s best for us within our own business culture.”

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