The Kelley School of Business has been a leader in the study of international business for at least half a century. Indeed, Richard N. Farmer, one of the chief architects of IU’s program between 1964 and 1987, is recognized as one of the founders of the discipline nationwide. Recently, IU MBA students have moved from international study to international engagement. The Global Business and Social Enterprise (GLOBASE) program, begun in response to suggestions from students themselves, combines classroom study in the U.S. with a brief visit abroad (10 days to two weeks) and makes MBA students real consultants to entrepreneurs overseas. The program began two years ago with linkages to entrepreneurs in Peru and has expanded this year to India and Ghana.

Each country forms the core for a different class. The classes are much in demand; students have to pass an interview before they are allowed to enroll and have to sign Rules of Engagement when they do. Sheri L. Fella, lecturer in management and a consultant specializing in organizational effectiveness and change management, taught IU’s first GLOBASE Ghana course in spring 2011. Her class was divided into four teams, each team assigned to a specific Ghanaian business. The teams spent seven weeks researching the business, working at a distance with individuals from the business,

“the international experience has a direct and immediate impact in whatever business effort students pursue.”
and assembling a formal business proposal. They took those plans to Ghana for an extended visit over Spring Break, worked face-to-face with the companies, and rebuilt the proposals into practical business plans.

**Market Analysis**

Tian Tian He’s group worked with Emefa Jewelry in Accra. Their project was almost a textbook example of this model of MBA consultancy. The team made steady progress at each stage. Before departure, students designed market research questionnaires. When they arrived in Ghana, Emefa presented a sheaf of completed forms. Students and clients could then immediately work on market analysis to find effective strategies other than word of mouth, which had been Emefa’s only form of marketing previously.

**Microfinancing Model**

Jake Hiatt led a group that worked with Kingsbridge, a microfinancing firm. Even though company representatives visited IU, “It took a lot of time to understand the business model,” Hiatt says. Once on the ground in Ghana, the team abandoned a number of early proposals and zeroed in on the management of the network of independent contractors who collected small daily savings (“su-su”) from the entrepreneur borrowers, delivered
Building a Customer Base

Blake Grosch’s team was assigned to All Pure Nature, a maker of cosmetic products using locally available shea butter. For this group, the early stages were frustrating because the company shared little internal information. But while they couldn’t get their contacts to talk to them at a distance, when the students arrived in Ghana, they couldn’t get their clients to stop talking. There was still some uneasiness, but the group spent several days just listening. That patience paid off. They abandoned early recommendations, and focused on building a U.S. customer base through the use of Amazon marketplace.

Anchoring the Strategy

The fourth team, led by Chris Talbott, worked with Aid to Artisans Ghana, a loose cooperative of jewelry designers. “It was a difficult business to get your mind around,” Talbott explains. “We were told that our mission was to help the business create a source of revenue. When we left for Ghana, we were still unclear what the best solution would be. The visit gave us a visual reference; we had to see the workshops and stores before we really understood what the business needed. We asked the company managers about their marketing strategy, and they replied, ‘What strategy?’ They needed to make money so they took any business that came their way. It was hard for them to believe that revenues don’t equal profit, that it was important to tell some customers ‘no’ and to focus on the work that they could do most profitably.” Most of the team’s best work came only
after they were able to see the cooperative at work.

**Testing the Theory**

Faculty partner (and course instructor) Sheri Fella was with the students throughout and watched as the experience on site reinforced the theoretical classroom training. “We arrived in Ghana just in time to share their Independence Day celebrations,” notes Fella. “Our hosts had arranged a boat trip on the Volta River to a small fishing village. This was just what our students needed to get into the rhythm of business in Ghana, which depends much more on personal relationships than on contractual agreements.” Students spent half their time in Ghana consulting in the offices of their clients, and half in doing field work, exploring the markets, talking to businesspeople in the marketplace. “The quality of team recommendations depended on both kinds of experiences,” says Fella, an experienced consultant in organizational effectiveness and change management. “GLOBASE is the ultimate opportunity and ultimate test. I know of no other experience that gives students the chance to give something back to a community and at the same time to put what they have learned in their MBA program to the test. Clients depended on the students, not because the students were smarter, but because the students had knowledge and opportunities hard to obtain locally. The pressure was on for the students to deliver in an unfamiliar setting.” Kate O’Malley also helped in project planning and on site. “Students were completely engaged in building their business plans,”

Very few MBA graduates will go immediately into businesses overseas. Some may eventually get there, and the international experience will be useful for them then, but the value of the international experience has a direct and immediate impact in whatever business effort students pursue. Dealing with insufficient information, navigating ambiguity, recognizing and responding to differences—these are skills of value to everyone in business, whether local, national, or global.

—Kate O’Malley, Associate Director of Marketing for the MBA Program of the Kelley School of Business.
O’Malley says. “It was 110 degrees in the African sun, and there was a beach, but the students stayed on task and worked till the end revising their proposals ‘just one more time’ to make sure they would be of value to their clients.”

**Continuity**

Upon their return to Bloomington, the students’ work for the course was done, but not their engagement with their clients. The teams still watch from afar to see what progress the companies have made, and few students were ready to call an end to the international relationships they had built. “I found one student on the phone to his clients in Ghana the day before graduation,” Fella says. Indeed, one of the challenges students see for GLOBASE is the matter of continuity. Students pass on to other ventures, but the companies remain, and students were disturbed by the thought that the work they had done was over. They wanted ways to keep in touch with the progress of their clients, and they hoped that those firms in need of continuing assistance would find it in future GLOBASE Ghana classes. Jake Hiatt is so committed to this organizational issue that in his spare time he is developing some database tools to form a repository of GLOBASE information and ways for tracking the results of GLOBASE teams, for GLOBASE alumni not to lose touch, and for future groups to build upon the experience of their predecessors.

“It is part of my job to assure continuity with our Ghana partners,” Fella explains. “One of the best moments of the experience for me came at the end of our time in Ghana, when students presented their business plans. The reaction of our Ghana partners was ‘Come back. Just come back.’ Students had convinced their partners of the project’s value. And we will be back. Planning for next spring’s GLOBASE Ghana course has already begun.”
A Missionary for the Kingsbridge Way

IU Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) arranged a week of meetings for Raphael Tyson, representative of a microfinancing firm in Ghana, but within a few days of his arrival, he had a full two-week schedule of meetings. Tyson is on the advisory board for Kingsbridge, a microfinancing firm in Accra, Ghana. Because microfinancing can easily get a bad rap as a way to trap the poor in debts they can never escape, Tyson is something of a missionary for the Kingsbridge way. Someone who receives a Kingsbridge loan is treated more as a partner than a client.

“If an individual asks for 100 cedis because that is what she estimates her new business venture will cost, we visit them and assess their total situation,” says Tyson. “It could be that the individual needs to account for personal and family expenses while building the venture, and 100 cedis would not be enough to see her through. We might lend 200 cedis instead. As they are building their business, we will visit frequently to see how things are going. And if they are successful, we don’t abandon them. Our first loan may be a small one, but if they pay it back, we don’t have a strict ceiling on future loans. We are always there for our clients.”

Tyson tells the story of a schoolteacher who was having difficulty putting her son through college. She wanted to start a business on the side selling used clothing. Although she didn’t earn much as a schoolteacher, Kingsbridge wanted her to attach value to the work she was already doing, and offered assistance—as long as she didn’t give up her teaching. “We try to lift up our clients’ self confidence,” Tyson says. “Otherwise, they have less of a chance to succeed.” After several loans and repayments, the schoolteacher still teaches, and the used clothing business is thriving with several employees.

GLOBASE Ghana Contribution and Rules of Engagement

I commit to:

• Being where I am. To attend, engage, and constructively participate in each class session and team meeting.

• Seek to understand before I seek to be heard.

• Challenge my GLOBASE partners, peers, and clients respectfully and to take risks accordingly. I commit to stretching outside of my comfort zone because when I grow, my growth makes US better.

• Bringing solutions to all and problems to none. When I identify an opportunity, I will strive to make it better.

• Staying within the Realm of Positivity (ROP) at all times. ROP is essential for me to stay focused on the greater good so that I can make US better.

• Expect learning and iterative success. As my team and I try new things, most will work, some will not, but all will be an opportunity to learn, i.e., to make US better. I will not take those opportunities for granted or miss the learning.