IUK and DELCO: A Working Partnership

As a product of what has proved to be a successful partnership between the IU system and state business, a culture awareness seminar focused on doing business with Brazil was held at IU Kokomo on October 11-12, 1995 for DELCO Electronics, a multinational corporation headquartered in Kokomo, Indiana.

DELCO specializes in automotive electronics and is expanding its operations in Brazil amongst other countries. The October seminar was the third in a series developed by the IU Bloomington language and area studies centers at the request of IUK's Continuing Studies Department, in which issues relating to the national characteristics and cultural idiosyncracies of a country are addressed as they affect international commercial activities. Previous seminars have focused on Germany and Korea, and — like the latest on Brazil — have been geared to addressing the particular interests and training needs of the company’s most senior managerial personnel, including its chief executive officer and other top echelon executives. Although the seminar program was designed essentially for the benefit of DELCO managers, interested Brazilian graduate students studying business at IU were also invited to attend.

Included in the seminar’s lively program were presentations which provided crucial information about the present commercial environment of Brazil. Such sessions looked at the overall economic and political climate of the country and current trends in its automotive industries. Other segments of the program provided very practical guidelines for business conduct and operations by describing salient cultural characteristics of the Brazilians. The latter served to highlight the importance of understanding the social and business behavior of host country nationals in order to achieve or enhance business success. In one session, a senior executive of the Indiana-based Cummins Engine Co., Karin Patel, offered an especially cogent contribution by sharing the experiences he had had while serving as president of his company’s Brazilian subsidiary. He recounted the challenges, trials, and tribulations he had experienced, as well as the rewards of ultimate success.

The October cultural awareness seminar was the product of the combined efforts of staff and family on three IU campuses. Don Lane, director of Continuing Studies at IUK, coordinated local arrangements and liaison with David Csokasy, director of training at DELCO, while Diana Pritchard, assistant director of the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at IU Bloomington, organized the seminar program on the basis of suggestions garnered from Brazil specialists at IUB and IUPUI. Associate Dean for International Programs Kenneth A. Rogers served as a consultant/facilitator for the project, as he had for the previous two seminars. The seminar on Brazil gave the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center a timely opportunity to contribute its region-specific expertise to an innovative outreach program.

In delivering these seminars, the University is sharing with the state’s business sector its considerable international resources, providing academic skills and speakers, as well as use of its facilities. These efforts are an important component of IU’s public service role and fulfill the spirit of the university’s objectives to forge partnerships with and provide services to the local and statewide community. They affirm IU’s standing as a leading public university as defined in the university’s new charter.

In closing the seminar, DELCO president Gary Dickenson paid tribute to its organizers and invited suggestions as to which country should be looked at next in the continuing IUK-DELCO cultural awareness seminar series. It would seem that, from his perspective, this model partnership is indeed a highly successful one.

— Diana Pritchard
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