SPEA Develops Interactive Entrepreneurship Course with Dutch University

While most universities have been eager to meet growing student demand for studying the links between globalization and entrepreneurship, there is not yet much of a tradition for teaching such a course from the multiple perspectives that would be required. “Entrepreneurship and small business enterprises, however, play increasingly important roles in world economic development and are a countervailing force to big multinational corporations,” says David Audretsch, Ameritech Chair of Economic Development at Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs (SPEA) and director of the Institute for Development Strategies. Business and management courses look at entrepreneurship from one perspective, while the field of economic development teaches it from another. Moreover, entrepreneurship courses tend to be confined to a specific country, without taking into account activities and policies that differ across countries or under today’s rapidly expanding global conditions.

To fill the void, Audretsch has joined the small but growing group of teachers offering courses on entrepreneurship with an international and interdisciplinary focus. He developed a new course this spring that integrates the study of globalization, entrepreneurship, and economic development, and he brought in a partner institution from The Netherlands to provide the comparative perspective essential to the subject. His co-instructor was a colleague of long acquaintance, Roy Thurik, an economics professor who teaches a similar course at Erasmus University in Rotterdam.

Together they developed an interactive course involving students from both institutions, 7 from IU and 18 from Erasmus, combined into study teams. Each team was to identify and analyze the determinants of entrepreneurship in relation to its development over the past decade in the United States, The Netherlands, France, Germany, and Great Britain. These countries were selected because the entrepreneurial climates in each differed, basic data was readily accessible, and a substantial literature already existed. Among other factors, the students had to look at sociocultural, economic, technological, and demographic factors in these countries. The teams communicated with each other in various modes, via an Internet online discussion service called “Blackboard,” as well as by e-mail, and a videoconferencing session.

In early April, the two groups of students finally got a chance to meet each other when the Dutch students, accompanied by Thurik, spent a weeklong visit in Bloomington to meet their American counterparts. The goal was to have the different teams compare their findings and begin writing up their reports. Each country study will eventually constitute a separate

A third partner has been crucial to the Dutch side of the collaboration. EIM Business and Policy Research in The Netherlands, directed by Sander Wennekers, an expert on small business enterprise, largely sponsored the visit of the Erasmus group to Bloomington. EIM is a private research institute that studies policy links between countries and gives advice to the Dutch government, and Wennekers is very optimistic that the published country studies will be welcomed by the governments of those countries studied. Wennekers accompanied the Erasmus group and also worked with Audretsch and Thurik during his brief stay. EIM also put up funds for a prize of $500 for the best paper awarded to the British team consisting of Timothy Sexton of SPEA, and his Erasmus teammates Andries Hof and Joost Passenier.

A highlight of the week was a lecture, “Evaluating Entrepreneurship: Policy in Europe and the United States,” given jointly by Wennekers and Chuck Wessner of the National Research Council in Washington, D.C., who is an expert on government-industry partnerships. Other activities for the whole group included tours of Cook Inc. and the Crane Naval Base, as well as a Pacers game in Indianapolis.

In summing up this new experimental course, Audretsch emphasizes the need to get SPEA students interested in more international perspectives by studying economic and policy issues of other nations. Furthermore, when IU students have to work together as a class with students from somewhere else, they will begin learning how to interact with and learn from citizens of another country. In an increasingly globalized world, he says, “This is a generation that expects to be in greater contact with strangers from abroad,” so courses like his encourage that kind of cross-cultural learning. He hopes the next time this course is taught that the IUB students will have the opportunity to go abroad.

In addition to EIM, the course received funds from an OIP International Interprogram Grant to SPEA and West European Studies National Resource Center, as well as support from the Office of the Bloomington Chancellor.

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