



IT'S ONE THING TO STUDY WORLD NEWS AND READ ABOUT DOING BUSINESS IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY. IT'S ANOTHER ONE ENTIRELY TO PACK YOUR BAGS AND TRAVEL TO THE PLACES YOU'VE READ ABOUT. A SEMESTER-LONG COURSE IN BAYLOR'S EXECUTIVE MBA PROGRAM HAS STUDENTS DOING EXACTLY THAT.

GAINING A WORLDVIEW OF STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

BY FRANCI ROGERS

In their final semester of the Executive MBA programs in both Austin and Dallas, every candidate is required to take the Global Strategic Management course, which culminates in a 10-day trip to two international destinations. While they are there, they are immersed in culture, business practices and policies of that country.

"Fairly early on in their studies, in the first semester of their program, they begin talking about where they would like to go and which economies are most relevant to this group of students," said Gary Carini, associate dean of Graduate Business Programs. "We offer suggestions, but they vote on the countries they will visit."

Immediately, the students begin preparing in class by reading articles that focus on those countries and the major companies there. When international issues are discussed, those countries are highlighted. When possible, guest lecturers with ties to the countries are brought into class.

Midway through the program, the class also visits Washington, D.C., and in addition to other seminars and meetings, they visit the embassy of the country they have chosen for their last-semester trip.

During their international trip, they visit corporations that represent the best in that region.



"In every country, we try to visit the industries that represent excellence," Carini said. "If you were to visit Germany, it would be to see how they build cars; in China, you would focus on ship-building; in France you would visit the wine making or fashion or fragrance industries. Those are the industries with the depth of excellence we're looking for."

The class visits two cities, one with a developing economy and one with a developed economy, in order to see the contrast between the two.

Andrea Salinas' class chose to visit Singapore and Chennai, India, last year.

"The differences were stark," she said. "Singapore was almost like a glorified Houston, but when we landed in Chennai, you could immediately see the difference. The level of poverty there is stunning."

Salinas (MBA '12) is the chief administrative officer of Goodwill Industries of Central Texas. She said the course and the culminating trip changed not only the way she does business, but also the way she lives her life.

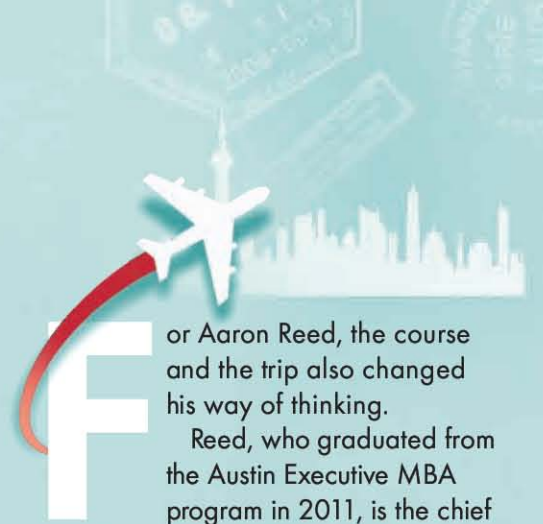
"The whole experience reminds you not to just assume everything is like it is in the United States," she said. "We visited the Ford plant in Chennai, and while the working conditions were not poor, they were certainly different than what we would expect here. There was no air conditioning, for example. And they were being paid what we would think of as a very low amount, but they were working very hard and were appreciative of what they saw as a high salary."

She noted that Ford provided transportation and meals to its employees in India, which made her look at her company differently.

"I apply things I learned there back to my own work because I now look to see what employee engagement really is," she said. "It truly opened my eyes to seeing things from other perspectives. I find myself thinking of ways to care for the whole person."

Salinas said the trip changed the way she evaluates difficult issues as well.

"Before the trip, when you see that companies are outsourcing to other countries for cheap labor, you are quick to judge them for that," she said. "But when you see that they are going in to countries and paying a high, high wage for the region, you see that they are changing lives in those communities. I still debate whether it's a good thing or not, but it really makes me think harder about developing my own opinion and not being so quick to jump on an easy opinion."



For Aaron Reed, the course and the trip also changed his way of thinking. Reed, who graduated from the Austin Executive MBA program in 2011, is the chief operating officer of Hannon Offshore Drilling Equipment. His class had planned to go to Tokyo, but had to make a quick switch after the country experienced a devastating tsunami and earthquake. They chose, instead, to visit China and toured the cities of Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

"It was my first time to travel to Asia, and it does give you another perspective," he said. "It's one thing to talk about a country and discuss it in class. But unless you have been there, you have a pretty limited perspective."

Since the trip, Reed said, he finds himself thinking about things differently.

"For me personally, I tend to try to be a little bit broader in my judgments and perceptions," he said. "I'm not so quick to judge."

In addition, he feels that the trip has allowed him to understand parts of the business community that he may not have had a chance to otherwise.

"You see and hear things from a different perspective when you travel with people with different backgrounds and from different industries than you," Reed said. "My company is manufacturing, but on the trip we saw manufacturing and retail because we had people from both of those areas. It's an opportunity you're not going to get again. Traveling for business is quite different from traveling for academic purposes."

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After visiting Hong Kong and Vietnam on his trip with the Dallas Executive MBA program in 2009, Mike Milovich couldn't agree more.

"The Global Strategic Management class was a huge, delightful requirement of the program," Milovich said. "I would suggest to people looking at MBA programs that, if there is not an international trip in your program, there's a whole level of education that you're missing."

In addition to classroom preparations for the trip, Milovich also began scouring the business section of *The Wall Street Journal* daily for any mentions of the cities they would visit.

"I clipped everything and kept it all in a binder, and I felt pretty prepared," he said. "But spending actual time in those cities, seeing the real inner workings, is very different. You can learn all you want about currency conversion rates and those types of details, but once you get there and shake hands with people and bow politely to them, it's not the same. For me, that was the value of the program. It connected the dots for me."

Milovich is currently a full-time PhD student, working on his doctorate in Information Systems at Baylor. He said the experience is helping him to remember to look at both domestic and international approaches to research as he works toward his doctorate.

The future of the course and its trip are changing each year to reflect current economic and business trends. For the first time ever, the classes will be visiting South America in 2014. They plan to visit Buenos Aires and Santiago.

Carini and his colleagues are also working on expanding the program into African countries in the near future.

"We would be going to Africa in a different way than we've approached these trips in the past," he said. "We are looking at more of a mission-driven trip where we would be consulting for companies or teaching business concepts. It's a vision that's in line with Baylor's mission, and our students love that. That would be incredible."



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