

SAP INFO

THE SAP-MAGAZINE • REPRINT FROM SAP INFO 140 • SEPTEMBER 2006

The transforming world of business – organizing global business processes

Tomorrow's Experts

We can see globalization happening all around us, but how are tomorrow's employees being prepared for the new world that they will work in? A pilot project at the University of Applied Sciences Brandenburg and Indiana University, supported by the SAP University Alliance program, is creating innovative methods for training graduates.



Campus University of Applied Sciences Brandenburg

Globalization is everywhere. Companies today develop, manufacture, and sell their products worldwide. Business essentially takes place around the clock, seven days a week. Companies and employees do not think only of their own operations, they also collaborate closely with business partners worldwide. Tightly woven global supply chains and customers that demand constant availability in global marketplaces set enormous obstacles for business process management to overcome.

Learning globalization

Many technological aids for solving these problems are already available, but the most important element is often overlooked: people. In the working world, people are often wary of globalization, not recognizing the great opportunities it offers them. This realization led the University of Applied Sciences in Brandenburg, Germany, and Indiana University to establish the Cross-Cultural Collaborative Learning (3c Learning) project.

▶ In this program, students gain real-life experience in today's working world in addition to their standard business and academic education. They face realistic conditions and aspects of international careers:

- Working in international project teams
- Working in virtual project teams where people are spread across different locations
- Dealing with language barriers
- Being aware of varying cultural backgrounds within the teams
- Collaborating across time zones
- Facing intense time pressure

Teamwork and time pressure

"You have three weeks to get your company ready for the handover."

Out of the blue, this semester's students in Brandenburg faced a tricky surprise of cooperating with an independent group of students in the United States. The business process models and strategies that the students in Germany had developed for a fictional local automotive firm were suddenly useless: The lecturers announced that the German company had decided to buy a fictional U.S. automotive supplier, on which the students in Indiana had been honing their process modeling skills.

Both sets of students immediately had to start thinking – and acting – globally. The existing processes for procurement, production, quality management, delivery, and recruiting had to be redesigned for the companies' merger. At the same time, new organizational structures and the IT landscapes for the two companies needed to be drawn up. But before the German-American teams could grapple with content and functions, they had to overcome several technical, linguistic, and cultural obstacles. Unable to meet in person, they established virtual teams by incorporating telephone and video conferencing, file sharing, and e-mail into their work processes.

With the sudden deadline looming, students knew that they would present the results of their efforts to a real management panel of industry repre-



Globalization as opportunity: The University of Brandenburg and the Kelley School of Business are living this principle in their joint project.

sentatives after just three weeks. Representatives from British Petroleum, General Mills, John Deere, and SAP were intrigued by the pilot project and agreed to sit on the panel. Given the panel's collective experience with acquisitions and mergers, the students knew their work would face in-depth critical examination. The panel, like the students, comprised a variety of nationalities and locations, so the students' final presentations were held by video conference and in English.

The Indiana and Brandenburg students were dropped in at the deep end, but discussing potential processes with people far away, whom they had never met before, provided invaluable experiences for the up-and-coming generation of consultants. "It was hard but exciting work," says an American participant. "Now I know that there's more to understanding someone than simply speaking the same language."

3c Learning project essential for the future

Especially with the transition of the German university system to bachelors' and masters' degrees, internationalization and practical abilities taught

in the 3c Learning project will be essential for students. The projects in the program helped enable them to build the real skills needed in their future careers at the same time as they hit the books for theoretical and academic knowledge.

*Professor Robert U. Franz,
University of Applied Sciences Brandenburg,
Professor Daniel G. Conway,
Kelley School of Business,
Indiana University ■*

*Contact:
University Alliances Germany:
Heino Schrader
uasupport.germany@sap.com*

*University Alliances US:
Heather Czech
heather.czech@sap.com*

*University Alliances global:
Dr. Amelia A. Maurizio
amelia.maurizio@sap.com*