

Worldly View

Local Universities Expand International Programs to Meet Growing Demand

By Emmet Pierce

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Mark Ballam oversees the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) at San Diego State University. There are about 550 students in the program. Photo by [Melissa Jacobs](#).

As U.S. companies increasingly compete for international trade, local universities are ramping up their efforts to prepare their business students to meet the challenge.

“Our mission is to help companies compete better in a global market,” said Mark Ballam, Managing Director of the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) at San Diego State University. “We do that through educational programs that help prepare the workforce of tomorrow for how business is done internationally.”

There are about 5,600 graduate and undergraduate students studying business at SDSU, he said. Currently, there are about 550 students enrolled in the CIBER program. In the future, many companies will need to compete worldwide in order to succeed, he added.

“Because of advances in transportation and telecommunications, all of our economic activities, all of our trade, all of our business has become increasingly interdependent,” he said. “We need to continue to look for new business opportunities all over the world.”

Ninety-five percent of consumers live outside the U.S., he continued. If U.S. businesses ignore them, they will limit their ability to grow.

“Even if you decided you didn’t want to sell your products all over the world, you have to understand where your competition is coming from,” Ballam said.

Commercial Diplomacy

One of the best ways to develop good political relationships with other nations is to do business with them. The recent effort to normalize U.S. trade relations with Cuba has the potential to bring the two nations closer, Ballam said.

“We call that commercial diplomacy,” he said. “It’s the opportunity to change lives and the economy for the better.”

The San Diego region’s businesses are strategically well placed to trade with Latin America and Asia, he added. One of his goals is to persuade local companies to investigate opportunities in new markets. Even companies that trade overseas don’t always maximize their opportunities, he said.

“We are the doorstep of the Pacific Rim of Japan and China, Australia, the Philippines,” he said. “One of the things we are finding is that many of the companies here, if they do trade intentionally, only trade to one market.”

Catalin Ratiu, an assistant professor of management at California State University, San Marcos, is the academic director of the Global Business Management Option degree program, which included 74 students in the fall of 2014.

“The current generations of students are recognizing that their jobs are not going to be local,” he said. “They will be impacted by the global environments” no matter where they are based.

A Global Mindset

“What we are trying to do is equip students with a global mindset,” he continued. “They may go on and work in a typical bank or financial institution or marketing department, but a global mindset is absolutely necessary.”

The University of San Diego is ranked No. 2 in the country for the percentage of undergraduate students who study abroad, said Denise Dimon, professor and director of the Ahlers Center for International Business at USD.

“At the School of Business Administration USD, we have several degrees that have an international focus,” she said. “All of our undergraduate business students must study an international language and culture prior to graduation.

“If they want an international business focus, they can major in international business, which requires additional language expertise, international study abroad, extended international business courses, and the opportunity to develop a regional expertise” through greater understanding of a region’s history and politics.

At the National University School of Business and Management, global economic perspectives are part of many undergraduate and graduate programs, said Dean Steven Lorenzet of the School of Business and Management.

The most internationally focused degree program there is the master of global management, he said. The most immersive international program is the school’s international experience course. This elective is available to students across a wide range of programs. It includes a faculty-led study tour abroad.

Making a Commitment

Wendy Patrick, a lecturer at SDSU's Department of Management, urges students to commit to learning more about other cultures. In the future, this will be an important asset, she holds.

"More and more companies are becoming international, sometimes by way of outsourcing," Patrick said. "We have become such a global society. Students really want to become culturally savvy. They have to know the culture, the customs, the practices."

In order to do business abroad, you have to know a lot about the people you are working with, she stressed. Sometimes, it is the small differences between cultures that matter.

"It's as simple as how to greet people at a business meeting," she said. "Do you bow? Do you shake hands? You have to learn the customs."

Patrick encourages students at SDSU to study abroad in order to immerse themselves in other cultures.

"We are doing business globally whether we like it or not," she said. "We are entering a society where there is an international component to almost everything."