

# MSU's Broad School to Offer Free International Business Assistance

By Tomas Hult

**Executive Briefing:** Pro bono work has long been a staple of professions such as law. Now the Eli Broad College of Business at Michigan State University is getting involved. The Broad School's International Business Center has developed a program to help predominantly U.S. owned small- and medium-sized organizations go international. The research assistance comes from small teams, in 10 hour increments, over a month period. This article describes the Center and the globalEDGE Business Team pro bono program as an innovative case study that can increase the international competitiveness of U.S. firms.



In the spirit of Michigan State University's "world-grant" initiative, MSU's Eli Broad College of Business is implementing a pro bono program for businesses in the greater Lansing, Michigan, region which are striving to engage in the global marketplace. The program involves students in the Broad School along with faculty and staff mentors. The faculty members in the Broad School come from 23 countries and are collectively ranked at the very top in the world in research and editorial influence in international business. In addition, the Broad School's undergraduate program in international business has some 250 high-quality students, making it among the very largest in the country. The combination is a powerful force that will be beneficial to businesses in the Greater Lansing Region in their quest to go international.

The program is orchestrated by the International Business Center (IBC) in the Broad School. It involves faculty, staff, and students providing a few hours of free service to local businesses to assist them in taking the best possible advantage of the global marketplace. Each year, IBC offers this service to a select number of local firms based on a match of the center's expertise, the needs of the firms, and the opportunities that exist. This article highlights IBC's infrastructure as a means to offer the larger international business community a framework for the foundation needed to offer such a pro bono program in a local serving area.

Broadly, IBC is the nation's leading national resource center in international business (of the 31 centers that exist at the nation's elite business schools), as ranked and funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The mission of IBC is to leverage its leading-edge competencies to provide superior education, research, and assistance to businesses, public policy

The faculty members of the Broad College of Business at Michigan State University come from 23 countries.

makers, academics, and students on issues of importance to international trade and global competitiveness using our guiding principles as the foundation. To realize this mission, IBC focuses its efforts on three areas that are vital to all aspects of organizations' global value chains: knowledge development, knowledge deployment, and cultural competitiveness.

## Knowledge Development

Knowledge development centers on conducting research that produces leading-edge international business knowledge. IBC develops innovative knowledge via a programmatic research agenda. The focus is on how to improve the international competitiveness of firms and non-profit organizations. IBC's broad skill-set allows the center to tackle research by qualitative and quantitative solutions. The focus is on originality and especially managerial relevance. The main expertise of IBC centers on the globalization potential of corporations, global supply chains, what makes small and medium enterprises thrive globally, opportunities in emerging markets, and global product development. Published since 1996, IBC also maintains the annual Market Potential Index for Emerging Markets.

Some of these topics are investigated by IBC, while others are tackled in collaboration with a worldwide network of researchers. MSU has a world-leading international business research faculty (*Management International Review*, 2004) and influence (*Journal of International Business Studies*, 2005). At MSU, IBC draws on

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more than 170 interdisciplinary colleagues throughout some 25 international units to conduct cutting-edge research and to mentor doctoral candidates. MSU has produced the 6<sup>th</sup> most Ph.D.'s in business since 1960 (METF, 2003), and its doctoral students rank #5 in total citations (Academic Assessment Services, 2004).

## Knowledge Deployment

Knowledge deployment centers on offering leading-edge professional development programs and products in international business. IBC deploys leading-edge knowledge via an assortment of activities. For faculty and advanced students, IBC provides customary support - such as grants, support for conferences, seminars by lecturers, collaboration with scholars, links to industry - along with a portfolio of customized activities designed to elevate each scholar's capability. For businesses and public policy makers, IBC offers a variety of products - such as training programs, benchmarking of global value chains, and diagnostic tools - and innovative vehicles such as globalEDGE™ (<http://globalEDGE.msu.edu>). globalEDGE™ is the leading source on international business and trade on the web with some five million page views per month (as of March 2009).

Achieving maximum reach and impact is the goal of IBC's knowledge deployment in international business. IBC offers vast opportunities for knowledge deployment. A local effort is the Global Business Club of Mid-Michigan - its executive luncheon with high-level industry speakers six times per year is a great source for learning and networking (<http://gbclub.msu.edu>). All activities are embedded in a coherent, sustained program of research and development, including incremental, radical, and disruptive innovations that can advance knowledge. Anchored in its history, IBC strives to be in the forefront of knowledge development while maintaining consistency in delivering superior products to its constituency groups.

## Cultural Competitiveness

Cultural competitiveness centers on permeating leading-edge international business knowledge into corporations and society. IBC's purpose is to instill global values in business and society, such as a stakeholder focus and a sustainability view. The center develops and deploys global business knowledge that helps businesses, public policy makers, academics, and students achieve maximum personal value and benefits. Each program is typically customized, with the common thread being to increase participants' knowledge of international business and trade. The collection of projects - such as those for businesses, community college faculty, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and students - exemplify the wealth offered.

IBC also provides leadership in professional global communities such as the Academy of International Business™, the globalEDGE™ Network, and CIBERweb™. Established in 1959, the Academy of International Business has members in 76 countries, with IBC being its headquarters since 2004. The globalEDGE™ Network, established in 2001, includes a unique cross-section of more than 37000 global professionals from the majority of the countries in the

world. IBC also serves as the "web hub" for CIBERweb™ - an online portal that integrates the activities of all CIBERs funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Five million page views on globalEDGE monthly, 37,000 business professionals in the globalEDGE Network in more than 100 countries, 3200 academic members in the Academy of International Business in 76 countries, and the leader in international business research, editorial influence, and as a national resource center – and offering pro bono assistance! If you are in the Lansing area, I suggest you consider taking advantage of the capacity and capability of MSU's International Business Center for the initial research into your next, of first, international opportunity.

## The Pro Bono Program

The pro bono program by the Broad School's International Business Center offers free assistance that targets mainly small- and medium-sized business in the Greater Lansing Region with a predominantly U.S. ownership structure. The typical tasks that our faculty, staff, and student teams engage in focus on information generation, information dissemination, and information interpretation. Up to 10 hours of research assistance involving a globalEDGE Business Team of one to five members for each organization will be made available at no cost. Features of the pro bono program and the work of the globalEDGE Business Team:

- Small teams of faculty, staff, and/or students.
- Projects are accepted based on IBC's capacity, a match with IBC's expertise and needs of the firms, and likely international opportunities.
- Up to 10 hours of free research assistance using secondary data during a one-month period.
- Generation, dissemination, and interpretation of international business information and data.

Additional research assistance is available in most cases for a fee. In such cases, the International Business Centers organizes the continuation of the project and/or relies on the Broad School's affiliated Spartan Consulting, Inc. (a student-led consulting organization, <http://www.spartanconsulting.org/>) and similar organizations to continue the project. ♦ gBR Article 04-01, Copyright © 2010.

## About the Author

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