Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Available at: http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/gbl/vol10/iss1/1

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2005, which is rapidly drawing to a close, finds our country still enmeshed in Iraq and the Middle East. The war impacts on every phase of our society at home and abroad. And naturally it substantially influences our economy. The many hurricanes and raging floods, which have struck with unparalleled frequency, too, had a powerful effect on our society and our economy. Thousands of people lost their lives. Many others lost their homes and their livelihoods. Beginning last year with the tsunami overseas, followed by the destruction caused by hurricanes in Florida and especially Louisiana, as well as that of the earthquake disasters in Pakistan and China, the call for assistance here and abroad has been unprecedented. Americans and peoples around the world have responded generously and frequently to these disasters. This all caused a tremendous effect on the price of oil, which in turn affected all segments of the economy.

Despite the fact that the economy and the stock market have recovered to some degree, and that oil prices have fallen back to more reasonable levels, a certain gloom seems to linger in the air. Large companies, such as GM, which to a large extent represent middle-class America, are facing serious deficits which threaten the well-being and livelihood of large numbers of employees. Health care coverage and other benefits for employees represent an ever-growing percentage of expenses for employers. Managers, who look everywhere to save a few dollars, more and more frequently cut benefits to employees, so that they may show a company profit on the bottom line. Outsourcing jobs to countries with lower wages occurs frequently. Resultant layoffs are not uncommon as a belt-tightening measure. And yet all too frequently the CEO of such a company is remunerated with ever-greater stock option packages and other perks in addition to the millions of dollars of salary. Among employees such a situation leads to discouragement and unrest. As the gulf widens between workers and management, the middle class slowly erodes and threatens the very fiber of our free society. Widespread unemployment will have disastrous effects on the economy, the security, and the well-being of everyone.

Yet we must look for new initiatives in our economy. Revitalization and renewal is central to a successful economy. As the new year approaches and as Alan Greenspan is getting ready to retire from his long and distinguished career, the country welcomes a new Chairman of the Board of the Federal Reserve System, Ben S. Bernanke. While following closely in his
predecessor’s footsteps, Mr. Bernanke, a former Princeton professor, promises to be more transparent in his language and thus more accessible to his audience because of his clarity of expression.

We present you this, our tenth volume of *Global Business Languages*, with some optimism that we too are shedding a new light on business languages with these articles.

Although most authors do not explicitly address the question of New Initiatives, the theme of this volume, they do discuss various innovative perspectives and practices in cross-cultural communication relating to a global marketplace. Business challenges and solutions are constantly changing, and the evolving language of these dynamic exchanges requires continual updating of methods and materials in the classroom. The following collection of articles may seem, at least at first glance, somewhat scattered in focus. They differ according to languages and cultures examined, pedagogical approaches adopted, and objectives envisioned. But underneath this, each presents issues and solutions in order for professionals to achieve greater international awareness and communicative competence.

Readers can get a quick sense of the main points and general scope of each article from the brief synopses in the next few paragraphs. In addition, starting with this volume, an abstract precedes every study. We advise our readers, as always, that since many ideas, methods, and solutions can be transferred or readily adapted to fit different cultural contexts, all the articles should be given careful consideration.

The first two articles in this volume were written by business educators for students in an international field. In “The Authenticity of Business Simulations in ESP: Implications for Materials Design,” Diana Phillips and Jonathan Clifton explore the importance of authentic, “real world” simulations to increase students’ managerial and linguistic skills. The classroom exercise discussed in Tracy L. Melin and Nina M. Ray’s “Emphasizing Foreign Language Use to International Marketing Students: A Situational Exercise That Mimics Real-World Challenges” is more narrowly focused on oral introductions to a potential client. Students realize that credibility arises from both business knowledge and linguistic/cultural competence.

The next three articles deal with building bridges between American (business) culture and one other specific country or region. In “A Cross-Cultural Comparison of German and American Graduate Business Students,” Stefanie Borst examines the recognition on the part of several American companies that many US citizens are less prepared than their German counterparts to
function effectively in a foreign environment, according to various components of a questionnaire. In “US-Asian Communication Strategies to Develop Trust in Business Relationships,” Christine Uber Grosse places emphasis on the crucial element of trust, seeking to sensitize Americans to different concerns in Asia centering on patience, humility, friendship, interest, respect, sincerity, and honesty. Charles Calvert, Shinyi Lin, and Lynda Martin, working in the field of Hospitality Management, suggest means to bridge cultural gaps in a course such as Spanish for Hospitality Majors in their article “Doing International Business: From Cultural Perspectives.” The results of an extensive survey suggest that students consider study abroad programs and foreign internships to be invaluable.

Business practices in a specific country are analyzed in the next two studies, which introduce students to issues of non-American cultures. The spread of English, especially as the language of technology and commerce, is explored in detail in Margrit Zinggeler’s “Business Languages and the Use of English in Multi-lingual Switzerland,” while “Miss Universe in the Land of Missery: Ecuador’s Contradictory Development Package” by Isabel Dulfano analyzes Ecuador in terms of economic, social, and cultural factors that have shaped the current country.

Three articles provide information on foreign language classroom activities and programs with a business content. Michael Hager, in “Using Projects to Teach Professional German,” encourages instructors to develop a semester-long project as a sustained and synthesizing learning experience. In his article “Building a French for Business and Technology Program Abroad: Giving Students an Edge in an Expanding Global Job Market,” Lionel J. Lemarchand provides practical details of a French for Business and Technology program established in France, with an objective to increase students’ sociocultural and intercultural competence. And Gregory B. Kaplan outlines principal features of the Language and World Business major at the University of Tennessee in “The Good Business of Language Learning: LWB 199, a Gateway Course to the Language and World Business Major at the University of Tennessee,” which includes, among other things, a required study abroad or internship component.

Finally, William J. Thompson addresses some of the current and future challenges in a field where even the name of the discipline is changing. In “Issues and Trends in the Teaching of Business French for the Twenty-First Century,” he concludes with the “hope that new resources will continue to emerge, that instructors of business French will continue to be provided with
the most up-to-date information and materials as they continue to teach this subject, and that through collaboration and exchange of ideas, those involved will continue to allow this discipline to flourish.” Although our professional interests in global business languages differ widely, we can all share these common hopes.

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We would like to express our deep appreciation to the US Department of Education for its support of our Center for International Business Education and Research here at Purdue University. This publication would not be possible without financial support from CIBER and the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures.

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December 2005