Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

For the 2007 volume of Global Business Languages we suggested that authors consider addressing some aspect of “Security” in their manuscripts. Security is an increasingly greater challenge facing everyone in all businesses around the world.

Threats of war, terrorism, natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tornados, earthquakes, and fires, all contribute significantly to the daily challenge of keeping the world safe. Human greed, fraud, and other dishonest business practices further threaten individuals and corporations more than ever before.

Computers, which enhance and assist all aspects of the private and public sphere, unfortunately also enhance the efforts of criminal minds. Potential or intended misunderstandings in intercultural communication and multilanguage transactions often lead to complications and insecurities. Despite the complexities of doing business internationally and globally, no one expects the business world to become less international in the future.

The year 2007 has been a difficult one for the US economy. The drastically declining housing market, rising oil prices, and the significant loss of the dollar vis-à-vis the euro and other currencies leave the stock market volatile and lacking in confidence. The national political scene with its many unknowns, an unpopular president, largely due to the war in Iraq, and an even more unpopular Congress do little to inspire confidence. The mood of the country is one of insecurity and even unrest. This probably will not change to any great extent until some progress toward peace in the Middle East can be achieved.

All these realities underline the importance of imparting increased cultural understanding among people here in the US and abroad. It is imperative that Americans grow in their awareness that there are many different ways to transact business and to approach and solve problems. We hope that this volume will be another stepping stone toward achieving greater global understanding and thus contribute toward making the business world a little more secure.

The articles in this year’s volume represent a wide-range of issues and approaches that are truly global in their pertinence. As security concerns become increasingly important each year for governmental agencies around the world, these concerns have filtered also into the business community. It has never been more critically required that businesses, and our students preparing to enter the business sector, be culturally and linguistically competent when dealing with trade partners, in order to promote safety and security in the international marketplace.

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In their article “Business German in the USA Today: Knowing Our Students and Collaborating with Our Colleagues,” Stefanie Borst and Ann-Karin Schenck present the details of a survey they conducted to determine the skills and knowledge students indicate as having the greatest importance in a Business German class. They measured the level of student motivation, and offer useful suggestions to engage students in programs outside the classroom. Maria Bourlatskaya examines ways in which Russian culture can be incorporated in a Business Russian course by using literary texts and examples. In her “Literature in a Course for Business Professionals,” she describes a variety of themes in folktales and novels that allow students to better understand the Russian mind, and which also contain examples of cultural heritage that can be used to advantage in business transactions.

Strategies for a successful internship program are explored in Rubén Araiza Candia’s article “International Internships: Preparing for the Challenge.” The cultural contexts that shape meaning are analyzed by Christine Uber Grosse’s “Web-Based Communication of Global Companies: Do Languages and Culture Matter?” She presents the ways in which language and culture matter very much in corporate Web sites and homepages, as she surveys a large variety of American and foreign Internet sites. Technology is also a major component of the article “Teaching Professional German with the Use of a CD-ROM.” Michael Hager provides several types of exercises and activities related to Business German that can be taught using material on a CD-ROM, a format that reinforces student learning.

In their article “An Innovative Curriculum for Basic Spanish Students: Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S.” describes strategies American Expatriates Adopt for Learning Chinese Culture indicates the results of twenty in-depth interviews with American expatriates working in China. Hongmei Gao and Deanna F. Womack explore the various difficulties faced by Americans living and working in China, as they strive to learn Chinese culture. They measured the level of student motivation, and offer useful suggestions to engage students in programs outside the classroom. Maria Bourlatskaya examines ways in which Russian culture can be incorporated in a Business Russian course by using literary texts and examples. In her “Literature in a Course for Business Professionals,” she describes a variety of themes in folktales and novels that allow students to better understand the Russian mind, and which also contain examples of cultural heritage that can be used to advantage in business transactions.

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A course developed at the University of Illinois that meets the needs for American professionals in many fields in this country to be more culturally and linguistically competent in Spanish. Several features of the course are mentioned, including appropriate materials, as well as the use of grammar, audio recordings, and videos. While the Hispanic population in the United States is quite large, the Basque population is small, although concentrated in Idaho. The challenges of teaching courses about Basque are discussed in the article by Nina M. Ray and Nere Lette entitled “Basque Studies: Commerce, Heritage, and a Language Less Commonly Taught, but Whole-Heartedly Celebrated.” Many of the characteristics of the Basque program and activities that it fosters are informative, and also can be applied to other less commonly taught languages.

In the article “Strategies for the Design of the Second-Semester Business French Class,” Will Thompson examines the content and goals of a course on Business French. He presents several sample syllabi that correlate with both a particular textbook, and an approach chosen for the course. The final article, by Germán Torres, demonstrates how a shift in the economic and business culture in Latin American countries has had a significant impact on global business, and in preparing our students for that business. The article “The New ‘Export Culture’ in Latin America” explores various changes that have occurred, and emphasizes the importance for instructors to incorporate new curricular materials that reflect the changes.

It is our sincere hope that our readers will find much in the articles presented this year that will be both enjoyable and useful. In some cases the particular language or culture may be one of interest, in other cases it may be a specific topic. And as always, some articles may be of great value because the findings or methodology can be adapted to another context or area of interest, so that, for instance, an examination of Chinese business culture from one perspective might provide insights to a Business Spanish instructor.

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