

ECBU Gains International Perspective

BY MARY PRICE

It's a cliché to say that it's a small world after all – but in VMI's Department of Economics and Business, the shrinking world is a reality that's affecting the curriculum.

Starting this fall, economics and business majors will have the opportunity to sign up for a concentration in global management. The new concentration was approved last spring by VMI's Academic Board.

To earn the global management concentration, cadets must choose four out of six electives: International Business, International Marketing, International Finance, International Trade, Developmental Economics, and Institutions and Economic Development. Study abroad may be substituted for one of those courses. There are also five international studies courses that may be substituted for one of the ECBU courses, with the department head's approval.

The global management concentration was conceived as a way to align the curriculum with the needs of today's business world, said Lt. Col. Ray MacDermott, associate professor of economics and business and one of the chief architects of the new concentration.

"In putting together the concentration, we were trying to achieve two goals," he said. "The first was to allow or even encourage cadets to focus their economics and business electives on global management. Second, the concentration serves as a signal to future employers of this preparation."

The need to strengthen VMI's offerings in the area of global economics was first pointed out by the department's accrediting agency, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business-International, during a visit in the 2009-10 school year, explained Col. Bob Moreschi, professor of economics and business and now department head.

At that point, Moreschi noted, the only internationally oriented classes

the department offered were international finance and international economics. "We were kind of light on international courses," he acknowledged.

Moreschi explained that the need to offer more internationally focused courses has had an effect on hiring within the department over the past few years. "In hiring, we want the best candidate," he said. "But with all other things being equal, we want the best candidate interested in teaching electives with a foreign bent."

Now, five out of the 13 professors in the department were born overseas. "There's some natural interest in overseas courses from foreign-born faculty," he noted. In keeping with this, Bulgarian-born Maj. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl is teaching institutions and Economic Development, while Col. Tinni Sen, a native of India, is teaching International Finance.

One cadet who's decided to undertake the global management concentration sees a clear path between the courses it offers and the future he's planned. "After VMI, I hope to work with an international marketing firm," said Hunter Linton '15. "So I feel this concentration will give me a good basis for global awareness upon entering into that field."

Building such global awareness is the main goal of offering the new concentration, said Dimitrova-Grajzl. "Anyone in any profession would benefit from taking this concentration," she said. "We're connected through the Internet and we're connected financially with the rest of the world."

The other concentration offered within the ECBU Department is financial management. Moreschi said that concentration, which typically attracts 10 to 20 cadets per class, was already in place when he arrived at VMI in 2002.

New Class, New Grant Enhance ECBU Curriculum

BY MARY PRICE

This fall has brought changes to the Department of Economics and Business, with one new class being offered as part of the department's new global management concentration and an existing class incorporating undergraduate research for the first time through funding from a Jackson-Hope grant.

The new class, Institutions and Economic Development, taught by Maj. Valentina Dimitrova-Grajzl, is designed to help cadets understand how the complex interplay of laws and social systems affects a nation's economic development. Sixteen cadets, all 1st and 2nd class cadets majoring in economics and business, are enrolled this fall.

Within the field of economics, Dimitrova-Grajzl said, institutions are defined as "the combination of formal rules (laws, political systems), informal constraints (religious beliefs, norms or more broadly what we refer to as culture), and organizations that together affect economic behavior." Together, she explained, these forces create the "rules of the game," or the framework within which economic activity must be



Col. Tinni Sen teaches her writing-intensive International Finance class. – VMI Photo by Kevin Remington.

conducted.

In class, Dimitrova-Grajzl encourages her students to explore questions such as why taking one country's laws, for example, and using them in another country might not spur economic activity. "Sometimes the rules will not make sense in the context of the culture," she said.

Other topics include corruption and bribes, the role of religion in economic growth, and the relationship between a country's colonial origins and its present pattern of economic activity.

In lieu of a final exam, cadets are required to produce a research paper in the area of institutional economics. To prepare for this, Dimitrova-Grajzl's students read papers written by working economists and published in professional journals. Dimitrova-Grajzl also schedules computer lab time so cadets can use an econometrics software program, and she requires that they visit the Institute's Writing Center for help with their papers.

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VMI Offers Students Real Work Experience

BY MARY PRICE

In what might be termed a win-win situation for all involved, special education students from Rockbridge County High School have been gaining real-life work experience at VMI this year.

Beginning last spring, a group of non-college-bound students has been making the very short trek by school bus from RCHS to Hinty Hall, the off-post home of the Institute's physical plant, to help with chores in the warehouse and the motor pool. Hinty Hall is located within a half-mile of RCHS.

Typically, students come four at a time on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and are always accompanied by a teacher, said Steve LeBlanc, chief of customer services and logistics at the physical plant. During their hour and a half at Hinty Hall, the high schoolers usually wash vehicles in the motor pool area or work in the warehouse.

"They're very good at washing vehicles," said LeBlanc. "They do that as a fund-raiser at the school." He added that the students seem to especially enjoy using VMI's power washer.

In the warehouse, the students help fill orders for cleaning supplies and pack them to be sent to post. LeBlanc asks that staff in the warehouse and motor pool areas save work for the teenagers, but when everything else is done, sweeping the floor is always a useful task.

The kind of experience VMI and other local employers provide is critical to helping these students navigate the often challenging transition from school to work, said David Justice, special education teacher at RCHS.

"We can talk about work in the classroom, but we could not possibly duplicate these real world work environments," said Justice, who has put a special emphasis on getting special education students ready for the world of work ever since he arrived at RCHS in 2005.

"Many of our students are 'experiential learners,'" Justice continued. "Giving them the opportunity to perform work tasks in a 'real world' situation provides a more accurate evaluation of their abilities. We can then better assist them with making decisions about their transition from school to work."

Students who will be working at VMI this fall are sophomores and



Melinda Ramsey, physical plant storekeeper assistant, gives guidance as RCHS students lend a hand in the warehouse Sept. 25. – VMI Photo by John Robertson IV.

juniors in Justice's Work Experience II class. That group of students is ready to go out into the community and practice work skills, such as following safety rules, following directions, and getting along with co-workers. This fall, Justice would like to also take his Work Experience I students to Hinty Hall a few times, to show this group of younger teenagers what a day at work is really like.

Justice is grateful that VMI can provide his students with a chance to practice their work skills. "We appreciate VMI's willingness to become a part of the education of our students and assist us in preparing these young people to enter the world of work," he commented.

LeBlanc, meanwhile, is just as appreciative of the labor the students provide. "They're helping us," he said.

In addition to VMI, other work sites this year include the Rockbridge Area Free Clinic, Country Cookin', the Virginia Horse Center, and Washington and Lee University's Market Place Café.

ECBU Curriculum

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"I'm really trying to take all the foundation that all of their other classes have taught them and apply it," said Dimitrova-Grajzl. "I want them to see how it's actually extended to an application of all the theory."

Col. Tinni Sen is teaching an existing class with a new twist – writing-intensive International Finance. This year, thanks to a grant Sen received from the VMI Center for Undergraduate Research, students have been allowed to pick a country and write short papers about the various aspects of international finance in that country. At the end of the semester, the cadets will compile that information into a long paper.

"I want them outside their comfort zone," said Sen of the move to require more independent research by the cadets. With that goal in mind, Sen asked her students to choose a country that they knew little about, but one for which good economic data is available. In the end, cadet choices included Israel, Brazil, China, Argentina, and Russia.

"My guess is that it's going to be a harder class than it has been in the past but it's also going to be more interesting because they're going to take ownership of the country," said Sen.

That ownership, she hopes, will translate into a deeper interest and a

correspondingly deeper level of learning. "When they walk out of class I want them to spend some time voluntarily thinking about what they're learning in class," she said. "This is one way that I'm hoping that even when they're not sitting and researching the paper, there'll be topics in the news and their ears will prick up, 'Oh, it's my country!'"

The grant that Sen received, Integrating Research into the Curriculum, is supported by VMI's Jackson-Hope Fund, said Maj. Megan Newman, director of VCUR. She explained that the goal of these grants is to provide faculty with additional funds for curriculum development, a process that can be costly in terms of both time and money. Each grant is usually worth \$2,000, said Newman.

"It gives [the faculty member] a chance to explore what kind of program, initiative, etc. would be best for their class and their discipline," Newman noted.

In addition to Sen, other faculty members receiving Integrating Research into the Curriculum grants this year were Maj. John David and Maj. Randy Cone, applied mathematics, and Lt. Col. Mike Krackow, physical education.