

Leading by Example

Two new on-campus centers tap into global markets and train tomorrow's leaders

By Erik Esckilsen

“If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader.” These words of sixth President of the United States John Quincy Adams

would hang fittingly above many a doorway on the Champlain College campus today. As College President David Finney, inaugurated in November 2005 (*see article on page 5*), hits his stride, divisions, courses, instructors, and students alike have joined the vigorous march toward an educational experience grounded in the principles of good global citizenship. Or maybe it's a sprint, given the rate of change in the way people live, work, and communicate today. In either case, the College has become a hothouse of international business research and leadership training for the unique challenges of the 21st century.

One doorway over which an inspiring quote about leadership would be particularly appropriate is that of the Vermont Global Trade Partnership (VGTP), housed in the S.D. Ireland Family Center for Global Business and Technology.

Launched in fall 2005 after several years in development, the VGTP is designed to help Vermont businesses tap into overseas markets. “Partner” trade professionals from the Vermont Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Department of Commerce Foreign Commercial Service, and Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development work closely with five student research assistants—paid interns—who conduct international market research for companies seeking VGTP services.



According to International Trade Specialist Ariana Monti, whose tasks also include supervising the research assistants, some 70 requests for services came in to VGTP between June and December 2005. Monti and Dana Eidsness, Vermont director of international trade, anticipate 200 requests in 2006. Prior to the VGTP launch, Eidsness and Monti were a two-person team covering the entire state. “The partnership with Champlain is fantastic,” Eidsness says. “It gives us the time to keep generating new clients while there’s work being done back at the office.” The quality of that work, she adds, speaks well of Champlain: “I think it’s a pretty progressive [institution] and grounded in what the reality is for business in the state and elsewhere. It really seems that they’re addressing the needs of businesses to generate employees who would do well in an international business situation.”

Monti concurs, crediting Lynne Ballard, chair of the Business Administration division and co-director of the Center for Online & Continuing Education, and Julie Eldred, the division operations manager, with offering critical support. “People at Champlain really get our mission,” Monti says. “The promotion of international trade, international services, and international education is a shared mission, so it’s great to have a number of people to work toward that goal.”



GLOBAL GOAL SETTING

While the partnership facilitates international trade, contributing to state economic development, student research assistants gain hands-on experience in diverse facets of today's global marketplace. Two of the five spring 2006 semester assistants are from Champlain College: Tori Sickles '06, B.S., International Business Leadership, and Emily Howland '09, B.S., International Business Leadership. Sickles, who recently completed a year of study in Rome, brings knowledge of product distribution and marketing—gained through her family's retail business in Little Silver, New Jersey. Howland, a Richmond, Vermont, native, draws on four years of study in Beijing, China, and near-fluency in Mandarin. The other research assistants are international business students Nicole Pickman (St. Michael's College '06), Fidan Naghiyeva (Azerbaijan State Economic University '07), and Mike Collins (Eckerd College '08).

One of the most beneficial aspects of the internship derives from the wide range of research questions that come up on a given project. Research may entail helping clients identify potential markets as well as gathering regional information—in critical areas ranging from business practices, marketing strategies, and customs to trade regulations, tariffs, logistics, shipping, business financing, and payment. Research assistants are also involved in helping businesses cultivate networking opportunities, plan trade missions, and organize overseas trade shows. Sickles's project is unusual—"a test run," Monti calls it. The student is conducting market research for Macedonia's Competitiveness Activity, an economic development organization founded by USAID. The initiative is designed to help Macedonia export sheep cheese. "It sounds strange, but it's really interesting," Sickles says. According to Monti, Sickles's work could make a significant contribution to Macedonian economic development. "Vermont has such a strong reputation for the quality of our dairy products, especially for our cheese, so based on our knowledge base, one of the areas that we can add value is doing research," she says, estimating that the project will take roughly two-and-a-half to three months of Sickles's assistantship time. "We're really going to add some value," she says. "It's great when we can help our Vermont clients one on one, but this is a really special project."

Howland's work is more typical of VGTP research. Last semester, she was most excited by a solar-energy technology project that entailed helping two separate Vermont businesses explore import and export opportunities in Canada, the Czech

Republic, France, Japan, Mexico, and Spain. At the time of this writing, she is assisting with VGTP outreach—seminars and trade booths. Drawn to projects that involve trade with China, as projects increasingly do, she cites her time there as a motivating factor in her learning. "I've seen the effects of international trade on people," she says. "That's really the underlying interest I have, how this affects the way people live and how that changes what happens in their way of life, quality of life, and culture." The lead research assistant on the spring 2006 VGTP team, Howland takes leadership to heart when weighing the impact of international business. "A big part of being a leader is knowing what you believe," she says. "I think that people should think of themselves as leaders because then they'll think of the effects that their business practices have."

For some Champlain students, the hands-on experience has meant getting their hands on their passports. So far, students have been involved with Vermont trade missions and business development projects in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Student Maxime Grangien '07 recently traveled to Shanghai (*see article in the fall 2005 issue of Champlain View*) as part of his VGTP internship. There he conducted market research for the Vermont Chamber of Commerce and also set up an internship program for Vermont college students and a sister-school program with one of the local universities in Shanghai. For "Max," that experience complements an education he feels has been comprehensive. "Champlain has stressed the understandings of globalization, allowing students to be better prepared for different and rapidly developing markets and environments," he says. "A student couldn't get more relevant examples of business practices and operations."

A WORLDWIDE WIN-WIN

According to Tom Myers, program director of International Business, who works closely with research assistants, the Vermont Global Trade Partnership is an excellent complement to coursework in the International Business program (*see spring 2004 issue of the Champlain View*). "The International Business major students provide research for Vermont companies through the VGTP. Students also offer their expertise in varying levels (knowledge of a country) to Vermont businesses for entry into those international markets," he says. "There are times when students are provided opportunities to attend international trade missions with the partnership. All of this affords the students real-life international business experience."

Monti sees the research assistants' academic backgrounds in international business as a key component of their effectiveness. "The fact that they have prior coursework is really beneficial," she says. "I've been really pleased with how quickly the students pick up and start providing the work we need done." But a high grade in an international marketing class isn't the only criterion Monti and Eidsness look for in research assistants. "I'm very proud of the fact that the students working with us have all spent time abroad, whether it's for a semester or longer," Monti says. "They've all made an effort to learn another language. They've shown an interest in other cultures. They're an interesting bunch of people in addition to being really good workers."

According to Eidsness, the research assistantships amount to a win-win situation. "What we get out of it is three times the staff that we would normally have and a lot more output so we can serve a lot more Vermont businesses," she says. "What we hope they get out of it is a terrific experience, for starters. The experience of working on these projects for real Vermont

businesses says a lot about them. Hopefully they're developing a professional portfolio that will serve them well when they go out into the business world." Myers sees himself as well positioned to help make valuable connections when opportunities arise. "The VGTP will provide me with companies that need help, and I can find the students to fulfill that need," he says. "The partnership is our external business entity for me and the College."

That strategy aligns well with these words of another leader: "Students graduating from Champlain must understand how the world of today came to be. But they must also be equipped to dream of a better world—a better tomorrow—because that is where leadership begins." These words from President David Finney's inaugural speech (*see article on page 5*) already echo in the work of the Vermont Global Trade Partnership, the multifaceted leadership initiatives under Tom Myers's direction (*see sidebar below*), and the Champlain College graduates stepping up, each new day, to the responsibility of good global citizenship. ○

Leadership from the Inside Out

Part of true leadership entails training those who will lead next. That's the thrust of another new campus initiative—the Global Reach Leadership Center. Developed by Tom Myers, who directs the International Business Leadership program and also runs a semester-long Global Leadership Initiative co-curricular activity, the new center will offer workshops and seminars designed to foster core leadership traits: leadership awareness and skills, ethical integrity and ethics in leadership, cross-cultural understanding, and physical and mental well-being. "All of those components intersect to create global leadership," he says.

According to Myers, several companies and organizations are planning workshops and training at the center in summer 2006. He is particularly enthusiastic about addressing the vital leadership component often overlooked: physical and mental well-being. "Mental and physical well-being help to create a heightened confidence and self-esteem necessary for effective leadership," he says. "As a leader, you must project a positive and confident physical presence. Followers watch very intently how leaders react and interact with others. Feeling better about oneself, I feel, helps one to make more ethical and positive decisions that are better for all involved."

To help promote this idea, Myers has recruited two leaders savvy about the body-mind-leadership connection: retired world-class professional cyclist Andy Bishop and National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) graduate and environmental leader Katey Gordon. For Gordon, a group-dynamics expert who, until moving to Vermont recently, taught international environmental policy and environmental ethics at Juniata College in central Pennsylvania, leadership requires a heightened awareness of followers. Some of the strategies she uses focus on leveraging that awareness to improve communication. "What's most important is that people get to experience themselves differently within a group," she says, "and as a result of that, the practice of communication shifts," with "mindful, intentional communication" being the result.

Better communication lies at the heart of better community, she adds, noting that "mindfulness" of others is critical on the global as well as organizational and individual planes. "Participating as members of a global community requires an ongoing and creative concept of what it means to be a member of a global community," she says. "As we understand ourselves as a global community more and more, that will entail more responsibility." —EE