

Accelerator Partners with MBA Students to Help Companies Break into New Markets

Langham Logistics wanted to develop a market strategy for Brazil, a country that posed unique challenges for the 23-year-old global freight management organization.

Most roads in Brazil are poor quality, and many are not paved. Certain parts of the country don't have a railway system. In addition, Brazilians place a high priority on personal relationships — knowing and trusting someone before agreeing to do business with them. Since Langham is headquartered in Indianapolis, how could the company make the right contacts and begin cultivating those relationships?

"As the world economy becomes more global, it's more important than ever to have strategic business partners on the ground," said John Langham, co-owner and vice-president of finance for Langham Logistics. "The class collaboration was an excellent way to meet those partners face to face, develop those relationships and determine how we could work together."

"The class collaboration" is Butler's Applied International Business MBA course, with business professionals from the Accelerator, professors and students researching and recommending how a Central Indiana company can do business in a foreign market. The class is led by Roberto Curci, The Eugene Ratliff Endowed Chair of Finance, with assistance from Brian Landis, Accelerator managing director, and Scott Troyer, Butler College of Business executive partner.

The semester-long course involves a trip to a foreign country within which Indiana companies want to do business. In this case, the AIB team and Langham Logistics representatives headed to Brazil to learn firsthand about the culture by meeting with representatives of both Brazilian as well as Central Indiana companies with plants and subsidiaries in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

During the trip, Margaret Langham, co-owner and vice-president of operations, developed and enhanced key Brazil business relationships at the executive level through face-to-face meetings.

The AIB team met with AMCHAM (the American Chamber of Commerce), the U.S. Commercial Service,

and Brazilian representatives of such Indiana companies as Eli Lilly & Co., Allison Transmission and Cummins. They also met with representatives of Brazilian companies such as Braskem, a thermoplastic resins leader in the Latin American market, and H. Stern, the largest jeweler in South America.

The AIB group attended seminars by professors at partner universities on Brazilian multinationals, business ethics and infrastructure problems.

"We serve the client in much the same way as if they went to a large consulting firm such as Accenture or Boston Consulting," said Adam Townsend. The 28-year-old West Lafayette resident graduated from Butler's MBA program in December. "Data collection, competitive analysis, field research — we even toured Customs and met with the U.S. Consulate in Brazil. The class is a very challenging and rewarding experience."



Back in Indiana, the students developed formal presentations for Langham Logistics and made recommendations to the company:

- Hire a trade specialist in Houston, Texas, and Long Beach, California, jumping-off points for Brazilian trade.

- Continue to develop relationships with a Brazilian liaison and AMCHAM.

- Set up a methodology for developing Brazilian partners.
- Develop an international marketing brand.
- Follow up with eight Brazilian businesses visited during the trip.
- Update the Langham website and brand.

The AIB experience provided "excellent recommendations and business cases for Langham growth in Brazil," John Langham said. The involvement of Landis and Troyer of the Accelerator ensured "a high-quality output."

Since adopting the recommendations, Langham reports an increased number of loads being transported to and from Brazil.

After piloting the AIB class in Brazil, the College of Business decided to give students the option of using this course as the capstone class needed to complete their MBA program. AIB students journeyed to Tokyo and Kyoto, Japan, in May and will trek to China in October. Future planned trips will include visits to Argentina, Hong Kong, Mexico and India — all desired markets for Central Indiana companies.