



## **Gateway Students Gain a Global Perspective, Completing Real World Projects**

Gateway's Biz Squad is a multi-disciplinary course where members work collectively on problem-centric learning with local businesses. The Biz Squad course is a semester long and consists of a cross-functional team of students from the following tracts: Accounting, Marketing, Information Technology, Administrative, Graphic Design, Supervisory Management and Business Management programs. Collectively this team works with local business on a consultant basis to complete projects which are reviewed and selected by the students and instructors.

As a student in Gateway Technical College's Biz Squad, Deborah Kohn worked as a member of a Biz Squad Team on a business plan for Lys Creation, in Oujda, Morocco. The team also developed logo and branding options for the company. This business partnered on multiple projects with the college, Ecole Supérieure de Technologie (EST).

Deborah worked with two other students, Wesley Ditzler and Beth Tyykila. Wesley possessed graphic skills and created animated banner ads for existing websites and designed alternative logos. Beth a student in Gateway's Marketing program, worked on t-shirt and flier designs.

Deborah felt the most important thing that she learned while working on this project was how to connect with people and that connecting really surpasses cultural differences. "It was about respect, which is how I define professionalism," she said.

Deborah said you can learn to "see yourself in other people," and gave an example of the students in Morocco because they were learning the same skills as she was. Deborah also said that "We have cultural differences in our own country and can apply it here as well as abroad," and that "When you focus on the other person it is easier to see what is working and what is not and you adapt accordingly."

Academically, Deborah felt she gained a greater appreciation for the importance of research, a critical part of creating a business plan. Before they engaged in any video conferencing, they researched the Moroccan culture and how business was conducted to be better able to work with their EST counterparts. Deborah never realized how geographically close Morocco was to Europe and how this affected the business culture and practice. The languages that were spoken were French and Arabic. Since the business was web based, they realized the target market would include European countries. The students learned that entrepreneurialism is a new concept for this culture. A majority of the population works in government and industry so having your own business is not common.



Deborah felt that not having a shared language was sometimes an obstacle. Through emails both parties submitted a document in their own language and then used *Google* and other translator tools. Although, a literal translation can miss the essence of what needs to be communicated. As a result, they needed to reconnect often to clarify. Deborah's technical communication skills grew from the experience and she even learned some French as she became familiar with greetings and signatures.

Deborah expressed appreciation for the faculty who were involved in the project because they did not expect perfection and acted as a safety net in case the Biz Squad students ran into problems. Gateway faculty and staff had the established background and relationships with EST which made it easier for the students to communicate. The business partner was also enrolled in an English class and was trying to sharpen his skills which helped the process since both groups were trying to work on improving their communicating skills.

Deborah's is just one perspective out of a group of Gateway students and instructors who participated in the Biz Squad. This experience took place from September through December 2012 to demonstrate and involve EST in the process of providing services to businesses. Two meetings occurred each week, one included instructors from Gateway, EST, and Gateway students. The second weekly meeting included instructors from both colleges to discuss the weekly progress, challenges and how to coach students in the project outcomes, as well as interpersonal team dynamics, problem-resolution and problem-centric learning. The Biz Squad communicated through emails and video conferencing. Initially, much of the discussion took place through the help of translators.

The learning objective for this training was to include instructors from EST to participate in the problem-centric learning process. The goal of the project was to increase entrepreneurial capacity by working with businesses to solve unique problems for business owners. This training served as the foundation of EST implementing a Biz Squad course which fits the current educational model at EST along with the climate of the local economy. The two local businesses from Oujda Morocco included Lys Creation and Metacon.

Unexpected outcomes of this training include a continuation of a partnership approach in the development and implementation of EST's new Biz Squad programming. In January 2013 EST implemented its first Biz Squad course which included 12 students from cross-functional programs. During the spring 2013 semester, EST and Gateway Biz Squad instructors and students worked collectively on two projects from Wisconsin and two projects from businesses in Oujda, Morocco.

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