

August 2010

## The North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship: Lessons Learned and Best Practices on Hosting International Students

Stella Sixing Xu

Kennesaw State University, [sxx0245@kennesaw.edu](mailto:sxx0245@kennesaw.edu)

Gary B. Roberts

Kennesaw State University, [groberts@kennesaw.edu](mailto:groberts@kennesaw.edu)

Dorothy Brawley

Kennesaw State University, [dbrawley@kennesaw.edu](mailto:dbrawley@kennesaw.edu)

Bob Desman

Kennesaw State University, [rdesman@kennesaw.edu](mailto:rdesman@kennesaw.edu)

Kamal Fatehi

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi>

Kennesaw State University, [kratehi@kennesaw.edu](mailto:kratehi@kennesaw.edu)

Part of the [Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations Commons](#), [International and Comparative Education Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](#).

---

### Recommended Citation

Xu, Stella Sixing; Roberts, Gary B.; Brawley, Dorothy; Desman, Bob; and Fatehi, Kamal (2010) "The North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship: Lessons Learned and Best Practices on Hosting International Students," *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective*: Vol. 1 : No. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/jgi/vol1/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy, Perspective by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@kennesaw.edu).

## **The North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship: Lessons Learned and Best Practices in Hosting International Students**

Stella Sixing Xu  
Gary B. Roberts  
Dorothy Brawley  
Bob Desman  
Kamal Fatehi

### **Abstract**

In 2004, Kennesaw State University became a part of the North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship (NACE). Its mission is to advance the study and practice of entrepreneurship in the North American business community and develop successful entrepreneurial careers in the expanding markets fostered by the implementation of the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA). In spring 2006, KSU hosted students from Canada, Mexico, and the United States as part of the NACE global initiative. Volunteers from an on-campus student organization, Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE), coordinated the project. This paper presents a descriptive case study of the semester-long exchange, along with a discussion of lessons learned and some suggested best practices for similar events.

### **The North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship: Lessons Learned and Best Practices in Hosting International Students**

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) defines “high expectation entrepreneurship” as “all start-ups and newly formed businesses which [sic] expect to employ at least 20 employees within 5 years” (Global Entrepreneurship

Monitor Research Consortium, 2005). GEM researchers found the highest concentration of these aspirants to be in North America.

In response to a legislative mandate, the U.S. Department of Education created the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) “to improve the quality of and access to postsecondary education through grants that support reform and innovation” (FIPSE, 1995). In 1995, FIPSE funded the North American Mobility (NAM) in Higher Education Program “to support educational consortia of American, Canadian, and Mexican institutions to encourage coordination of curricula, exchange of students, and opening of educational opportunities throughout North America” (FIPSE, 1995). In 2003, the field of entrepreneurship converged with the NAM initiative when the North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship (NACE) was founded and became one of the 17 projects funded by FIPSE that year.

This paper presents a case study of an iteration of the NACE project noted above. Its purpose is to provide an overview of the operational nuances associated with creating and delivering an international student exchange experience using an all volunteer workforce and management team comprised of members of an on-campus student organization. The paper concludes with a discussion of lessons learned and suggested best practices for staging similar programs.

### **History of NACE**

*The US Department of Commerce News* (June 19, 2002) predicts that in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, over 20% of the U.S. trade volume with Canada and Mexico will be generated by the small business sector. To enhance the role of small business activity in the sector, the North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship (NACE) was formed to develop a specialized program focusing upon North American entrepreneurial management within the business administration discipline at participating universities.

This specialized program of study is intended to offer both entrepreneurial education and experiential learning components for qualified, entrepreneurial-minded students from the United States, Mexico, and Canada. These students are actively recruited across all academic disciplines. NACE’s mission is to advance the study and practice of entrepreneurship in the North American business community and to develop successful entrepreneurial careers in the expanding markets fostered by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

In the spring of 2004, a consortium including Kennesaw State University (Georgia/USA), California State University-San Bernardino (California/USA), Capilano College (British Columbia/Canada), Laval University (Quebec/Canada), Universidad Guadalajara (Jalisco/Mexico), and Centro de Enseñanza

Técnica y Superior (Baja/Mexico) was formed to pursue the NACE objectives. During the first year of collaboration, the consortium members articulated a formal memorandum of understanding that created a student exchange program. They also developed a list of objectives for the program (NACE, 2006).

**Curriculum**

The consortium partners identified three core components of the curriculum and a general set of objectives for each component. These included (a) a cross-cultural management course focusing on North America, (b) a course focusing on North American entrepreneurship, and (c) an experiential practicum or internship. Objectives for each of these components are outlined in Table 1. In addition, it was decided that the hosting institution for a given semester would provide a three-day orientation and familiarization seminar for faculty and administrators from the institutions participating in the program. Finally, students would be given the option to take additional courses offered at the respective host institutions should they so desire.

**Table 1.** Core Curriculum Components

Cross-cultural management	North American entrepreneurship	Practicum
To familiarize students with the social, technological, political/legal, economic, and market differences that impinge upon cross-border management practices	To familiarize students with entrepreneurship as a social/economic institution and the practice of entrepreneurship in a cross- or multicultural setting	To familiarize students with the practical world of work in the host country

**Consortium Rotation**

The first NACE exchange visit took place during the fall 2004 semester. The first term, students from the Mexican and Canadian consortium member institutions attended California State University, San Bernardino, USA. In spring 2005, the program moved to Capilano College in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, where students from Mexico and the United States participated in the exchange. The third host institution was Universidad de Guadalajara in Jalisco, Mexico, where students from Canada and the United States attended in the fall of 2005. Located in Metro Atlanta, Georgia, USA, Kennesaw State University hosted

nine exchange students—four from Canada and five from Mexico in spring 2006. The 2006–2007 host institutions are Centro de Enseñanza Técnica y Superior in Mexicali, Mexico, and Laval University in Quebec, Canada.

By spring 2007, the consortium will have supported the exchange of at least 10 students from each member institution and 20 students from each participating country. At the conclusion of the programs, 60 expatriate students will have completed 3 months of international study and entrepreneurial internships on foreign host campuses (FIPSE, 2006).

## **Kennesaw State University's Experience**

### ***Prearrival, Arrival, Student Engagement, and Closure***

As noted above, Kennesaw State University (KSU) was the fourth host institution in the rotation. It was designated to receive students from Mexico and Canada during the spring semester 2006.

As a point of reference, KSU is a large, regional state university in a growing metropolitan area on the outskirts of Atlanta, Georgia. It is the third largest unit in the University System of Georgia with an enrollment approaching 20,000 students. Offering over 55 academic programs, KSU is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

Having over 100 full-time faculty, the Coles College of Business enrolls over 20% of the university's student body. It is accredited by The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Both the university and college are dedicated to teaching as their accreditation missions. Nontraditional students comprise 60% of the enrollment; however, with the introduction of on-campus housing, undergraduate programs have reflected a trend toward a more traditionally aged student population.

Students are formally admitted to the Coles College of Business in their junior year after meeting course completion and grade requirements. KSU's Coles College of Business's entrepreneurship program has been recognized as a model program by the United States Association of Small Business Enterprises (USASBE) and is listed among the top programs in the country by such publications as *US News and World Report*, *Business Week*, and *Success Magazine*.

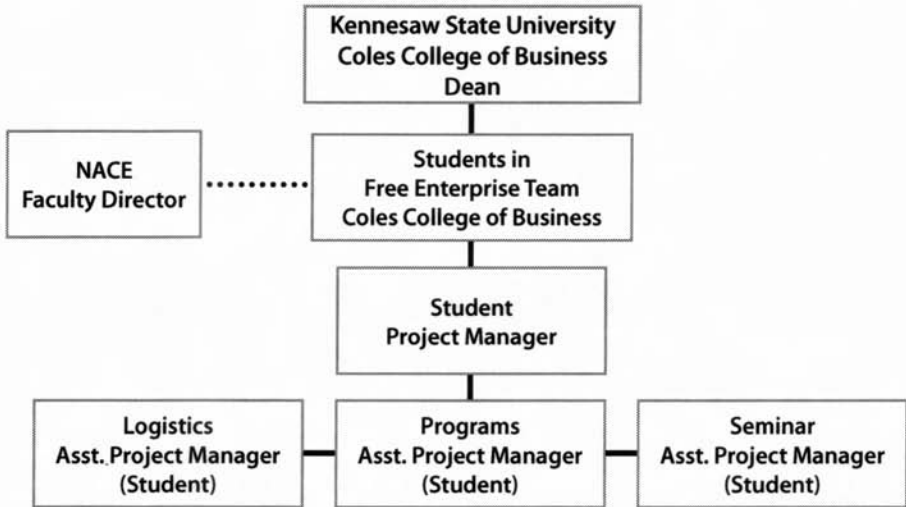
### ***Prearrival***

In anticipation of KSU's hosting semester, program coordinators made a concerted effort to collect data on the experiences of the previous three hosting institutions and solicit feedback from KSU students who had attended

previous exchanges in Canada and Mexico. In part, this was an effort to avoid “reinventing the wheel.” And, in part, it was to remedy weaknesses, build upon previous successes, and enhance the program to provide the visiting students with a world-class exchange experience. Drawing on what program leaders learned, planning began 9 months prior to the international students’ arrival in January of 2006.

The NACE faculty representative and administrators from the Coles College reached an agreement during summer 2005 designating Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) as official hosts for the 2006 NACE experience on campus. Students, using a project management structure led by a student project manager, would manage the entire experience. Ms. Adriana Strougo, a 20-year-old business management major, was appointed project manager. Ms. Strougo is an international student from Mexico and is fluent in English and Spanish. Figure 1 outlines the organizational structure used to manage the project.

**Figure 1.** KSU-Coles-NACE Project Organizational Structure, spring 2006



There were several compelling reasons to pursue the project in this manner. First, accommodating the cadre of visiting students and faculty required a considerable expenditure of effort to ensure that their stay was seamless, productive, enjoyable, and safe. Such issues as assistance with grocery shopping, medical emergencies, social activities, transportation to and from internships, and faculty visitation arrangements depend on broad-based volunteer effort for their success.

Second, the decision for students to manage the project would foster the development of peer-to-peer relationships that would enhance the students' visitation experience and advance the core objective of NACE. Further, students simply relate better to other students than they do to faculty because of social distance. Personal and interpersonal issues and conflicts would be more likely to surface and be remedied if the visiting students had "familiar" means for remedying any problems or issues.

Third, the SIFE students would receive the same benefits in terms of relationship building and cross-cultural awareness as would the visiting students. An additional benefit was that students would also have an opportunity to apply their management education to a very practical management challenge.

Planning began immediately using a "W5H2" process (Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, How Much). A team of students from MGT 3100 (Management and Behavioral Science) formed to write the basics of the plan under the guidance of the SIFE project manager. The intent was to write the initial plan during the spring 2005 semester, secure staff to oversee the exchange, clarify the details during the fall 2005 semester, and then implement the plan in the spring 2006 semester when the NACE students arrived at Kennesaw. Table 2 provides an excerpt from the preliminary student plan.

**Table 2.** Excerpt Preliminary Student Plan, Early Fall 2005

<b>Plans</b>			
<i>Prearrival</i>	<i>Arrival</i>	<i>Postarrival</i>	<i>Departure</i>
The students will have preassigned rooms. Upon their arrival, rooms will be stocked with different amenities that they may need such as milk, bread, toiletries, paper, and so on.	A welcome committee, comprised of SIFE students, will greet the students at the airport upon their arrival. Transportation arrangements will have to be planned and scheduled for the exchange students. SIFE students will give exchange students a campus orientation to show them the resources available to them. As the initial amenities that were given to them might not be enough, we will take the students to a grocery store so that they are able to buy anything extra they might need. A checkup will have to be done to make sure the students are correctly registered for their classes and that any fees are paid.	A "host" or "buddy" program will provide one-on-one interaction with the foreign students. Three cell phones will be given to the students according to room assignments. A list of important phone numbers will also be provided to them. A series of social events will be planned to encourage further interaction. The students will also get a chance to be part of other student organizations on campus. Some social events will be planned with the Kennesaw Business Association and the Acworth Business Association.	A small good-bye dinner will take place to give final closure to the student event on May 12 <sup>th</sup> (tentative date). At this dinner, the students will have the opportunity to share their thoughts about their experience. The rest of the night will be free for socializing.

<b>Responsible Parties</b>			
POR: Students in Free Enterprise PPR: Team Members: Organizations: Office of International Services and Programs, Coles College, Management and Entrepreneurship	POR: Students in Free Enterprise PPR: Team Members: Organizations: Office of International Services and Programs, Coles College, Management and Entrepreneurship	POR: Students in Free Enterprise PPR: Team Members: Organizations: Office of International Services and Programs, Coles College, Management and Entrepreneurship, Student Activities, International Student Association	POR: Students in Free Enterprise PPR: Team Members: Organizations: Office of International Services and Programs, Coles College, Management and Entrepreneurship

**Note.** Definitions: POR = Primary Organization Responsible for implementation; PPR = Primary Person Responsible; Team Members = individuals who will work with the PPR; Organizations = groups that require coordination



SIFE is a global nonprofit organization active in over 40 countries and territories. SIFE is funded by financial contributions from corporations, entrepreneurs, foundations, government agencies, and individuals. Working in partnership with business and higher education, SIFE establishes student teams on university campuses. These teams are led by faculty advisors and are challenged to develop community outreach projects that focus on SIFE's four educational imperatives: market economics, entrepreneurship, personal financial success skills, and business ethics.

The Kennesaw State University SIFE team has been active on campus for 21 years and has a strong track record of supporting the Coles College of Business's goals, objectives, and programs. Organized into project teams, students regularly plan, organize, and implement over 15 major projects each academic year. Working with the NACE initiative allowed the SIFE team to contribute toward its global market educational goals.

SIFE team members leverage their personal educational experiences, the expertise of their faculty advisors, the support of their local business advisory boards, and the resources of their institutions to implement programs that create real economic opportunities for members of their communities. The effectiveness of their programs is judged at regional and national competitions. At these competitions, SIFE teams present the results of their educational outreach projects and compete to determine the team most successful at creating economic opportunity for others. The Kennesaw State SIFE team has won its regional competition for the past 6 years.

### ***Arrival***

International students began arriving from Canada and Mexico in January 2006. Events planned for these 12 NACE students were divided into three broad categories: welcome activities, engagement activities, and closure activities. Except for academic events, a student member of SIFE managed each of these activities. In addition, the SIFE students assisted in programming, supporting, and executing a significant portion of the faculty/administrator visitation program in early spring 2006.

It was determined that early incorporation into the life and events of the university would facilitate successful engagement among the NACE students. Consequently, a number of welcome activities were designed to help them become involved in campus activities and feel a part of the university community.

Events began with a welcome reception hosted by the faculty advisor for SIFE. This event allowed the NACE students to visit an American family in their

home and to experience Southern hospitality. The welcome reception was also a timely reunion for the NACE participants from KSU who had studied at the Universidad de Guadalajara the previous semester. These NACE alumni were invited to attend the welcome reception, and later they helped the incoming NACE exchange students adjust to their semester in the United States. The dean of the College of Business delivered a welcome address and extended an invitation to his home for an informal cookout at a future date.

Two local church organizations hosted another welcome reception for the incoming students and NACE alumni. These local churches cooperatively formed an organization, Friends of International Students, a number of years ago, and they regularly provide a friendship family for any interested KSU international student. The NACE students were included in their January 2006 welcome event. The friendship family helps international students learn American culture by taking students to various social and entertainment events. They also cook typical American meals for students and take them to visit the local historical sites during their stay.

Friends of International Students enables international exchange students to meet Americans not directly linked to the university and provides for a more diverse experience for them during their stay. Later in the semester, Friends of International Students hosted an American game night. There the NACE students, along with other international students and their host families, were welcomed to a clubhouse where they were served dinner and introduced to games commonly played by Americans.

SIFE also ensured that the NACE students participated in Casino Night hosted by the KSU Graduate Student Association (GSA). In a mock casino, the NACE exchange students wagered their play money and socialized with graduate students. The event also provided an opportunity for NACE students to interact with members of the graduate faculty and learn more about KSU's extensive graduate program offerings.

Of the several welcoming events, the Coles College dean's cookout was perhaps the most personal. Limited to the NACE and SIFE students and the NACE program faculty and administrators, the event focused on networking and providing a warm welcome to both the United States and the Coles College of Business. The international students had an opportunity to socialize with their peers and faculty, ask questions, and begin to develop the interpersonal relationships that would support them in the months to come.

### ***NACE Student Engagement***

Learning from the experiences of earlier NACE cohorts, KSU determined that a concerted effort must be made to keep students engaged during the entire course of their exchange experience. All too often exchange programs fail to keep students involved after the initial welcoming activities. Consequently, maintaining program identity remained a high priority during the entire semester. SIFE ensured that the NACE students participated in a wide range of enriching academic and cultural activities.

In February arrangements were made for all NACE students to attend the Georgia International Leadership Conference (GILC). GILC is an event designed for international students and U.S. study abroad program participants who are currently enrolled at Georgia's colleges, universities, and technical schools. The conference endeavors to leverage these students' international experiences to promote leadership, facilitate cross-cultural communication, and build social networks. Students learn different styles of leadership and gain a better understanding of other's cultural perspectives by participating in cultural simulation games, discussion groups, and seminars. The conference was so successful that the NACE exchange students who attended GILC spent one week with the friends they met at GILC during the spring break.

SIFE decided not to limit NACE students' cultural exchange activities to the North American continent, and the NACE students were encouraged to participate in other international events. The annual KSU Chinese New Year Celebration was one such gathering. The NACE students not only attended the Chinese New Year Celebration and enjoyed the exotic traditional Chinese food and cultural performances, but also became involved and performed songs in their own native languages: Spanish by the Mexican exchange students and French by the Canadian exchange students.

The NACE students met with their academic faculty advisor once each week to provide updates on their academic and internship progress. This was an opportunity for them to express any concerns or problems that they might have. In addition, the faculty advisor visited each internship site during the program.

The NACE students were also encouraged to participate in the regular SIFE events. The regular seminars on financial literacy turned out to be the most popular area of involvement for the international guests. The Economic Empowerment Initiative (EEI), a local Georgia group, and SIFE hold regular seminars at KSU to increase financial literacy. These seminars range in topics from savings and investment to home buying. The NACE students were very active in assisting at these seminars and frequently shared their perspectives on different consumer behavior and financial planning methods that are practiced in their own countries.

A visit to the state capital of Georgia, in downtown Atlanta, was coordinated and the students met with the governor, Sonny Perdue. The governor proclaimed the day Entrepreneurship Day in honor of NACE ("Georgia Gov. Perdue proclaims March 27 'International Entrepreneurship Day,'" March 23, 2006).

In March 2006, KSU hosted the 3-day consortium member visitation. Organized around a seminar entitled Crafting Entrepreneurship, the NACE students, SIFE members, and representatives from the three countries and six universities met to exchange their experiences and insights. The centerpiece of the event was a luncheon sponsored by the Coles College of Business. Over 200 attendees from the local business community and the Kennesaw and Acworth Business Associations were introduced to the NACE program and its participants. The luncheon included remarks by the Canadian and Mexican consuls general, and the Georgia commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs formally presented the governor's proclamation.

Table 3 highlights the major components of the NACE program: the students, the seminar, and academic work from the final plan.

**Table 3.** Crafting International Entrepreneurship: Excerpts From the Final NACE Plan

---

<b>Students</b>	<p><b>Vision:</b> KSU Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) will organize and manage the KSU NACE Project in coordination with the Coles College of Business and the Office of International Services and Programs. SIFE will use a classic project organization that takes advantage of the matrix approach to coordination.</p> <p><b>Responsibilities:</b> SIFE will assume responsibility for all aspects of the program with the exceptions of (a) the academic component of the program; (b) legal issues relating to international students; and (c) Spring Break activities. Responsibility for these areas remains with (a) the Management Department; (b) the Office of International Services and Programs; and (c) the international students themselves.</p> <p><b>Integrity:</b> All participants will be required to sign the project charter and the integrity pledge: "I will do everything that I promised to do by the time that I promised to do it. If I can't do it, then I'll let people know in enough time so that it causes no one any harm."</p>
-----------------	--

---

**Seminar**      **Plan:** SIFE will be the host for this 3-day seminar. The tentative dates are from March 21 to March 26, 2006.

**Seminar—Day One:** The Coles College of Business dean will speak and provide a keynote speaker as part of our seminar and as part of the Tetley Lecture Series. The Kennesaw, Acworth, and Smyrna Business Association members will be invited to attend. The event will take place at the KSU Student Center and will include a reception.

**Seminar—Day Two:** Seminar topics include NAFTA's future, doing business in Canada, doing business in Mexico, and partnership opportunities.

**Local Excursions—Day Three:** Trips are planned around Atlanta to showcase the city and its historical legacy.

**Reception—Day Four:** If the seminar extends to a fourth day, the program will include a dinner reception. University faculty and administration will attend with the College of Business dean giving the closing speech, thanking the guests and faculty for attending. A commemorative plaque could be given to each university as a remembrance of the event.

**Program:** Speakers of interest to the audience would include Miguel Navarro Sandoval from Bancomext; Remedios Gómez Arnau, Mexico's consul general to Atlanta; and Malcolm McKechnie, Canada's consul general to Atlanta.

**Meals:** A food plan consisting of a variety of food from all of the three different countries will be developed. During this meal, music will play in the background, perhaps a string trio.

**Media:** SIFE students will attempt to gain media coverage of the event from the student newspaper, local and metro-area newspapers, and business related periodicals and magazines.

---

---

**Academics** *Internships:* All students are required to have an internship as part of this exchange program. SIFE students will make sure that the exchange students will have great working experiences. The Small Business Development Center, the Cox Family Enterprise Center, and the Cobb Micro Enterprise Center—all hosted by Kennesaw State University—and the Business Associations from Acworth, Kennesaw, and Smyrna are just some of the sources for securing potential internship sites.

*International Entrepreneurship Class:* All exchange students will take the MGT 4125 class. This class is also open to all KSU students and should serve as a terrific opportunity for interaction among the NACE students and the general student population.

*Other Classes:* Students can take as many classes as they want, and SIFE will help them in the registration process.

*After-Action Report:* Throughout the entire semester, there will be periodic reports compiled by each SIFE team. When the project ends, these reports will be collected, and one final report will be submitted. It will be shared with the dean and faculty of the host university, the director of international programs, and other interested parties.

---

SIFE is a nonprofit organization that gives students the tools to learn the free enterprise system in a real-life work setting. Each year the SIFE teams compete at the regional level first to present their annual report of projects. The NACE exchange students were involved in many of the SIFE ongoing projects, and one NACE student compiled the SIFE annual report. KSU's SIFE team won the regional championship at the competition. Two of the NACE students were invited to accompany the KSU team to Kansas City for the SIFE national competition, and one of them participated in the team presentation. This degree of involvement is a testament to the effort put into maintaining the engagement and integration of the international students into the host institution's programs and activities.

### **Closure**

Successful programs end on a high note. SIFE conducted a festive farewell party for the NACE exchange students at KSU's International House in May 2006. SIFE and the Graduate Student Association hosted this event with significant support from the Coles College of Business and the KSU International Office. Each NACE student received a KSU souvenir, courtesy of the Department of Management and Entrepreneurship, and a picture taken with the Georgia governor.



The Friends of International Students hosted a final social event as a farewell to the NACE exchange students. The venue was a major water amusement park near the university.

### ***Lessons Learned***

#### ***Partnering With a Student Organization***

The inclusion of SIFE proved to be highly successful. Not only did it permit the work to be distributed among the host institution students, it enabled them to participate in a unique educational experience where they planned and implemented a major international project. The project was subject to frequent “scope creep,” however, and the undergraduate students found themselves ill-prepared for the uncertainties that resulted. Strong faculty presence and guidance are necessary at every stage of the process.

A “loose-tight” relationship is necessary for success. Faculty need to let the students learn and make mistakes but must be prepared to step in at the appropriate moment to provide necessary structure. Undefined project scope and the lack of boundaries caused some frustration among the SIFE students who managed the project. Hosting international students, arranging internships, organizing seminars, and arranging seminar programs are all challenging and time-consuming activities. Students need to be coached that every project of this type will witness continuous redefinition of scope. They need to be reminded early in the project that more work is typically added to a project of this magnitude and that cost management and conflict management are normal issues encountered when managing such projects.

Project managers need a high tolerance for ambiguity and also need skill sets that lend themselves to structuring unstructured situations. The best way to learn these skills is to have real responsibility in a supportive environment. This also means that students need to be empowered to make real decisions as project managers and that nonfaculty participants need to be reminded that this is an iterative educational process where the learning is as important as the results of the project.

#### ***Work Structure and Responsibilities***

Work structure is at the heart of successful project management. The original approach was based upon functional organization structures and individual assignments. The SIFE students learned that the program might have run more smoothly had more time been spent looking at the project work demands than

on allocating assignments to organizations and individuals.

The traditional functional organizations included the Coles College of Business, the Office of International Studies, Student Housing, Students in Free Enterprise, Management 3100 class participants (where part of the work was done through service learning projects), and other student organizations. The reliance on this configuration resulted in numerous “white space” problems. These problems are classic and are based upon assumptions that someone else will assume responsibility for a task. Students encountered ongoing problems with communication and responsibility that had to be revisited throughout the life of the project.

In retrospect, one of the primary lessons learned from this experience is that a project manager needs to focus more on the coordination of activities than on the actual execution of activities. A comprehensive work structure is the best way to ensure that this happens.

### ***Information and Priorities***

The consortium did not have a mechanism for capturing and communicating lessons learned from previous exchange semester programs at other institutions. The knowledge base consisted of the memories of those who attended earlier consortium member gatherings. The current exchange program organizers would have benefited from a comprehensive “data scan” earlier in the planning stages. Sources of this crucial information would include previous student participants in the program and organizers who had hosted programs at their institutions earlier in the rotation. Of particular concern would be what occurred in the daily lives of the students who attended the foreign institutions. To avoid an ethnocentric perspective, previous participants from all three countries should be queried.

Likewise, student organizers need to recognize that there are some inherent conflicts among the priorities within the program. Such conflicts are natural, and the literature suggests that a certain level of conflict actually makes programs improve over time. Well into the planning process the priority conflicts that needed to be resolved became manifest.

The SIFE team believed that the highest priority was for the participating NACE exchange students to be integrated into the campus life and experiences offered by their host university. Consequently, considerable effort was spent on planning social and nonacademic activities for the participants.

The teaching faculty was most concerned with the content, appropriateness, and rigor of the academic courses in which the NACE exchange students would be enrolled. An International Entrepreneurship course was designed to fulfill the NACE program requirements and promoted to draw enrollment from KSU



students as well. The cross-cultural class composition would and, as it turned out, did enrich the experience for both the foreign and domestic students.

Faculty concerned with the long-term viability of the NACE exchange program concentrated on the seminar for representatives visiting from the other participating institutions. They wanted to ensure that the content and the structure of the seminar was interesting, informative, and not repetitive of earlier programs. They wanted their colleagues to be received hospitably and leave with positive memories of Kennesaw State University and the surrounding environs.

The International Student Office (ISO) faced the constraints of balancing personnel and financial resources with the demands of the NACE program and more than 1,200 other international students and faculty during this same semester. On the one hand, it was committed to ensuring the NACE exchange program's success; on the other, it was equally committed to the success of myriad other competing initiatives. It was challenged by the additional strain the NACE program placed on its already strained resources. At the same time, ISO staff were interested in providing the best overall experience for the exchange participants and positioned themselves somewhere between academic and nonacademic activities at the university. As a result, the program coordinators were forced to take on a more expansive role and juggle the priorities and expectations of the constituencies upon whom they depended for support and assistance.

Clearly, the planning process must embrace the often conflicting issues engendered by working with disparate support groups and organizations. Anticipating potential conflicts and addressing them early in the planning stage would not have eliminated all such problems, but it would have reduced their incidence and the debilitating shock of surprise when they were encountered.

### ***Coordination***

Successful international exchange projects are characterized by proper coordination. In the case at hand, one coordination failure began causing problems before the semester began. The KSU program coordinators advised the NACE exchange students to arrive at Kennesaw State University before January 2 so the SIFE students could meet with them and assist them with course registration. Unfortunately, the coordinators failed to check the dates when on-campus housing would be available for occupancy for the spring 2006 semester. Finding that housing would not be available until January 5 for new students, the coordinators attempted to solve the problem by advising the exchange participants to delay their arrival until student housing opened. This, in turn, created a problem for the traveling students who had already booked their travel arrangements and whose tickets could not be changed. The ultimate solution

caused considerable extra work to arrange temporary housing for the students during the 3 days before the dormitories opened. Another housing coordination gap revealed itself at the conclusion of the semester when there were serious misunderstandings concerning the refund of room deposits.

### ***Transportation***

Kennesaw State University is a suburban campus with limited access to public transportation. The plan was to use student volunteers, drawn from management classes, to transport the NACE exchange students to shop and attend their internships. The volunteers would be rewarded with service-learning credit in their respective classes. In addition to solving the logistics issues, the plan had the advantage of creating greater interaction between the resident KSU students and the visiting NACE students.

The exchange program coordinators seriously underestimated the challenges of coordinating the availability of volunteer drivers with the variable demands of the visiting students. Managing and coordinating this initiative took far more time, effort, and patience than was ever predicted.

Problems associated with transportation included unscheduled trips, drivers and passengers alike failing to show up at agreed-upon times and locations, last minute changes, and communications failures. The planners learned that flexibility commands a high price in terms of dependability and efficiency. In retrospect, the exchange planners recommend that schedules be fixed and exceptions tolerated only if the resources are readily available. By focusing on the individual student's preferences to the exclusion of other considerations, the program encouraged students to become undisciplined, and the system became progressively more unwieldy. The coordinators learned that the ideal system would be somewhat flexible, allowing it to accommodate unique needs, but the basic design should make efficiency and reliability the top priorities.

### ***Internships***

The local small business internships are a critical part of the NACE program. Local business associations, the Kennesaw Business Association and the Acworth Business Association, were used to assist with this part of the program. Finding internships was relatively easy; however, the actual process of matching the NACE exchange students with appropriate internships turned out to be very difficult. The coordinators wanted to meet the needs and interests of the international exchange students but were constrained by the available options and transportation complexities.

Internship planning began well before the NACE exchange students arrived, but the organizers quickly learned that it should have started even earlier in the process. The NACE students should have been contacted long before their arrival to determine their specific interests and qualifications. Had this been done, both the expectations of the participants and the internship hosts would have been better met. It should also have been anticipated that some of the internships would not work out and that a contingency plan should be in place to handle the exceptions.

### ***Cultural Conflicts***

The Canadian and Mexican students were housed together in the same apartments in an effort to provide a more enriching cross-cultural experience. However, conflicts arose as the students encountered difficulties in adjusting to each other. In addition to differences in individual personalities, the Mexican students tended to be more socially oriented, preferring to visit with friends and listen to music, while the Canadian students tended to prefer privacy. When, ultimately, the difficulties escalated to open conflict, the housing unit's resident advisors were compelled to intervene. Resolution was achieved by negotiating a contract among the disputants that detailed roommate rights and acceptable behavior in the apartment. Some interpersonal conflict is inevitable in a communal living setting; it cannot be avoided and must not be ignored. It was learned that a provision for conflict resolution must be incorporated into the plan.

Although cross-cultural understanding is a pillar of the NACE program, cultural ignorance and insensitivity can thwart the process. It is not the blatant disregard of others' norms, values, and roles that causes problems; it is the more subtle issues that are most likely to cause an affront. Figures of speech, expressions of emotion, perceptions of what is humorous and what is not, the significance of certain words and symbols, and a host of other "soft" issues are culturally embedded and operate below one's threshold of awareness. The Mexican students tended to be effusive in their manner, prone to physical contact, unguarded in their use of speech and choice of subject, and seemingly unconcerned about time and place commitments. In contrast, the Canadian students were more reserved, exhibited a wry humor, were sensitive to social distance and dynamics, and were more academically serious and punctual. The Americans were behaviorally erratic, casual in their manner, prone toward bantering, and grade driven. The differences in perceptions and expectations impeded the students from using each other as resources to the extent anticipated. The most significant lesson learned from the exchange dynamics was that the program process was as profound a teaching tool as the content.

### ***Student Organizations***

SIFE played a key role in organizing and promoting nearly all activities for the NACE exchange program. The experience was a great opportunity for management students to apply classroom learning in a practical, but failure proof, environment. Rising to the many challenges that confronted them during the course of this project, several strong student leaders emerged as a result of their experiences.

### ***Community Awareness***

NACE fosters the development of ongoing, mutually rewarding, relationships among its North American partners, and the NACE seminars promote greater awareness of NAFTA and its implications for the community. Local business and entrepreneur support not only enabled the program coordinators to provide the internships for the NACE students, but it also helped KSU enhance its reputation in the community and encourage attendance at the NACE seminars.

The SIFE students took the initiative to gain state government support for the NACE program. They requested the governor's proclamation, invited elected officials, and requested the consuls general of Mexico and Canada to be keynote speakers for the seminar. The SIFE students also actively promoted the program to university officials and secured the unqualified support of the dean of the Coles College of Business, who provided major resources for the seminars.

SIFE student volunteers managed the NACE exchange student internships, the logistics, the cultural activities, the consortium member visitation, and a variety of other critical tasks and events. In addition, the exchange program involved over 100 students enrolled in Management 3100 classes and rewarded them with a practical awareness of both NACE and NAFTA. As a result of their participation, several student volunteers have applied for the spring 2007 NACE program in Canada.

The diverse and international cultural programs, both on and off campus, provided many great opportunities for NACE students to interact with each other, with their domestic student peers, and with the community at large. They witnessed, firsthand, that one international activity could positively influence many people in many ways.

The NACE project enabled the SIFE students to hone their skills in project planning and management. They gained knowledge about scheduling, budgeting, resource allocation, logistics, organization design, effective communication, writing press releases, media relations, managing volunteers, negotiating, seminar and event planning, community involvement facilitation, conflict

management, and contingency planning. They experienced the practical essence of management: planning, implementation, and control.

### ***Best Practices***

Based on the success of the experience and the lessons learned, several “best practices” have been identified to make international student exchange programs such as this more efficient and effective. These best practices also address the void in the NACE design for capturing and improving upon previous experiences in later iterations of the program. They include the following:

#### ***Project Planning and Scope***

Program coordinators should define the boundaries of the project and project structure in terms of information requirements, goals, objectives, responsibilities, time frames, costs, and expected outcomes. A matrix of project management responsibilities and a network chart help everyone understand his or her respective role and responsibilities. Issues of flexibility, efficiency, and contingencies along with potential miscommunication, scope creep, and conflict should be addressed as early as possible in the planning process..

#### ***Coordination, Communication, and Culture***

Effective communication among all parties involved in the project is crucial to its success. Steps must be taken to ensure that information provided to students is timely, accurate, clear, complete, and current. Because of national differences in custom, law, and language, it is critical that students thoroughly understand the conditions to which they must conform (e.g., visa requirements, local laws, school policies, student honor codes, etc.) the documents they sign, and the responsibilities and obligations to which they commit. Numerous misunderstandings and conflicts can be avoided by spending a little extra time explaining and testing for mutual understanding. For example, there were serious misunderstandings concerning the refund of room deposits at the end of the semester.

It is important that the program design facilitates cultural orientation, training, and cross-cultural communications. Care must be taken with NACE students to define the social norms of the hosting community and the academic expectations of the hosting institution. Organizing student support groups, providing peer-to-peer mentoring, or using faculty mentors can accelerate enculturation and eliminate a considerable number of potential problems.

## ***Planning and Control***

Prioritizing what needs to be controlled and deciding how it would best be controlled should take place well in advance of the implementation.

***Benchmarking.*** It is crucial to establish success criteria and a reliable evaluation system to ensure that deliverables are meeting the expectations of the NACE exchange program and the standards of the hosting institution.

***Monitoring.*** Program coordinators must formally monitor each student's status or progress in three areas of concern: cultural adjustment, campus life, and classroom performance. This is a good way to prevent misbehavior, address concerns early, and prevent academic failure. Student mentoring may provide an alternative means to accomplish this, but it requires a process to effectively communicate the information to the program coordinators.

***Review and adjustment.*** The best way to keep everyone informed and to make timely adjustments is to review and provide updates on individual and program progress each week. A checklist covering each benchmark will ensure nothing is overlooked. Status reports should be maintained for the duration of the project.

***Progress and exit interviews.*** Program coordinators should solicit feedback from NACE exchange students regarding what they enjoyed or benefited from the most and least out of the experience. The feedback mechanism should allow students to provide input for improving the program or enhancing the services provided to them. Organizers should do this continuously throughout the program and should not wait until the end of the program when it is too late to implement adjustments.

Program organizers should establish and enforce a system for student project coordinators, volunteers, and assistants to provide real-time summary reports of their insights, feedback, and lessons learned. It is easy to assume that things are going well when no feedback is solicited or provided. Feedback from host-student monitors provides an important early warning system if faculty intervention is needed.

Finally, a robust system needs to be established for host faculty, internship coordinators, family event sponsors, and administrative offices to collect feedback regarding program strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. This system needs to operate throughout the project. Upon its conclusion, the program coordinators must act on this feedback to ensure the completion of a useful after-action report that spans the life of the project.

***Documentation.*** A database repository must be created that all participating institutions can access. The database should include (a) student feedback, (b) resource materials, (c) syllabi, (d) documents and schedules, (e) photographs, (f)



alumni information (with biographies and contact information), and (g) reports and feedback. First, the database will create a historical document that can trace the progress of the program. Second, it will enable all participants to learn from the experiences of others. This documentation needs to be done as an ongoing part of the NACE initiative to ensure that the data are not lost and can be utilized by all institutions in future years of the program.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the NACE experience provided the students—both the NACE participants and the SIFE student volunteers—with a real-world, applied learning experience in a field setting. The experience also provided implications for improving personal global citizenship. NACE provides an opportunity for students from Canada, Mexico, and the United States to better understand each other and to learn about alternative approaches to creating new ventures, running businesses, and conducting personal lives.

A valuable by-product of the program was the opportunity it afforded SIFE students, volunteers, and project coordinators to apply the lessons they are learning in class in a practical and meaningful setting. They added value to the project, and their unselfish involvement added value to them.

Together, all participants are better equipped to live in the global village—to understand each other's commonalities while embracing each other's differences and to go into the world with an increased awareness and understanding of culture and its impact on our lives. Global initiatives like NACE serve to bring the world closer together and teach students how much we can learn from each other.

### **References**

- Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). (1995). North American Mobility in Higher Education Program. Retrieved November 11, 2006, from <http://www.fipse.aed.org/subject.cfm?program=3>
- Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). (2003). North American Mobility Program, *Project Abstracts—FY 2003 Awards*. Retrieved November 11, 2006, from <http://www.ed.gov/programs/fipsenortham/northam2003awards.pdf>.
- Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). (2006). North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship (NACE). Retrieved November 11, 2006, from <http://www.fipse.aed.org/grantshow.cfm?grantNumber=P116N030014>

- Georgia Gov. Perdue proclaims March 27 “International Entrepreneurship Day,” (2006, March 23). *dBusiness News*. Retrieved November 11, 2006, from [http://atlanta.dbusinessnews.com/shownews.php?newsid=67806&type\\_news=latest](http://atlanta.dbusinessnews.com/shownews.php?newsid=67806&type_news=latest)
- Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Research Consortium. (2005). GEM 2005 Report on High-Expectation Entrepreneurship. Retrieved November 11, 2006, from <http://www.gemconsortium.org/document.asp?id=444>
- North American Consortium for Entrepreneurship. (2006). Retrieved November 11, 2006, from <http://www.naceonline.net/index.cfm>
- U.S. Department of Commerce (2002, June 19). Secretary Don Evans spotlights U.S. corporate citizenship supporting education in Mexico City. *U.S. Department of Commerce News*. Retrieved on September 30, 2006, from [http://www.commerce.gov/opa/press/Secretary\\_Evans/2002\\_Releases/June\\_19\\_Mexico\\_Evans\\_Corp\\_Citizenship.html](http://www.commerce.gov/opa/press/Secretary_Evans/2002_Releases/June_19_Mexico_Evans_Corp_Citizenship.html)