



Arvind Phatak this summer helped launch an overseas MBA six years in the making.

Temple adds Colombia to its international program roster

SEAN SCULLY
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Temple University business professor Arvind Phatak knows a little something about having his worldview changed by exposure to foreign cultures, so now he hopes to give his American colleagues a taste of the experience.

Phatak, who left his native India four decades ago, is one of the leaders behind a new program at Temple's Fox School of Business in which professors travel to a South American university to teach classes to local MBA students.

"Just going outside the hotel, walking around, eating different meals, is an experience in itself, but when you go into the classroom, you have students form that culture and they bring a different perspective to that classroom," said Phatak, who is also executive director of the Institute of Global Management Studies.

The program, which began in July, is a joint venture between Fox and Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, a private university founded nearly 400 years ago by Jesuits. The Colombian business students take a 16-month Executive MBA program at newly built classrooms at the University's extension in the city of Cali. Ten of the 16 classes are taught in English by Temple faculty, while the remaining six classes are taught in Spanish by local faculty.

In the end, students will earn degrees from both universities.

"They're very excited to have access to American professors," Phatak said of the students, who are mostly mid-career executives in their late 30s and early 40s. "In the classroom, they can ask a lot of questions about the United States, which they would not get from their own professors."

Phatak and the school's staff began working on the project in 2003. Several Temple professors had taught short programs at the university over the past 10 years and they carried back the message that the Colombian university would like to make the informal connection with Temple into a full partnership.

"For someone who doesn't have the opportunity to travel, this is the next best thing," said Christine Kiely, assistant dean of MBA and MS programs at Temple. "If they can't leave the country, if they don't have the means to travel to America or Europe, it's very nice to be able to bring different perspectives right into the classroom to them. If they are managing a business that wants to expand into

the United States, they can find out how it works here."

The classes are taught in compressed five-day modules, which allows the American professors to travel to South America without missing too much of their own work in Philadelphia.

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FOX: Other international programs are in Paris and Tokyo

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gram in Colombia, according to Temple, but it is not the first international partnership for the school. Temple has a similar program in Paris, in conjunction with the Ecole Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées, and a full extension campus in Tokyo.

Kiely said the university hopes to forge a relationship with a university in China later this year as well.

"This is just expanding our network and giving our students more pockets of people around the world to interact with," she said.

Eventually, Temple would like to see a robust international network of alumni that could support the university and offer mentoring and business contacts for fellow students.

"We're not quite there yet, but definitely that's being talked about," Kiely said. "It's still very early, it's in its infancy — we're setting the stage for it — but it opens up a world of possibilities."

The degree that the Colombian students earn is no different than the one

they would earn in Philadelphia, Phatak said. That makes it a valuable commodity for students who are looking to work in American or European markets, which know and respect American business degrees.

"I like to tell my students that when it comes to music, the Germans wrote the book; when it comes to design, the Italians wrote the book," Phatak said. "But when it comes to business, the Americans wrote the book. We know business ... we know how to internally manage corporations. We are very good at that."

Colombia was an obvious choice for Temple to expand into South America. Not only did Temple's professors have an

existing relationship with the university in Cali, but Colombia is a thriving economy — the third largest on the continent, behind Brazil and Argentina, with a population of nearly 46 million.

Americans may know Colombia best for its troubles with cocaine trafficking and drug-fueled civil wars, but Phatak said the country's troubles are "over-

blown" and tend to obscure the vibrancy of its economy.

"We are interested in internationalizing our faculty and there is no better way than being in a foreign culture," he said. "Doing your job in a foreign culture gives you a perspective on how things are different in the foreign culture."

One concrete example, he said, is the remarkably different leadership styles in American and Colombian business. American managers tend to rely on progressive discipline to deal with troubled employees — first a warning, then probation, then firing. Managers in Colombia, and many other developing economies, however, tend to involve themselves in employees' lives, looking for personal matters that might be affecting the employee's performance.

"In the U.S. you fire them," he said. "In those cultures, you try to retain them as much as possible. You consider it a responsibility to take care of the people. I would call that organization much more familial — like a family — than contractual as in the U.S."

Professors who visit these other countries and encounter the foreign students — themselves accomplished executives in their own cultures — find it an eye-opening experience.

"They're changed," Phatak said of his colleagues. "They're changed people." ■

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