

MBA Goes Global

PC Students Travel to Milan to Explore Luxury Brands

Providence College's MBA program recognizes the importance of integrating travel experiences into the traditional classroom structure of academics. The MBA Goes Global program began in spring 2016, and the international experiences provide students the chance to explore the global business industry. The structure of these courses includes pre-and post-class meetings, and a week-long global experience to a predetermined destination over spring break. While abroad, the students visit companies and hear lectures from faculty and professionals in the industry of focus. From these experiences, students are provided first-hand knowledge and skills that are necessary to be successful in business positions anywhere in the world.

The spring 2016 semester launched the first MBA Goes Global course in global management. Led by Dr. Francine Newth, PCSB faculty-member, and Dr. Jacqueline Elcik, PCSB assistant dean, 13 students traveled to Paris, France and visited Nestle', OECD, Chapal Showroom, Comite' Interprofessional du vin de Champagne, and Charles Mignon Champagne House. The students also visited the headquarters of Schneider Electric in both Andover, MA and France. In addition to these company visits, the students heard three lectures about strategies in global management from Parisian faculty.



Students in front of the Eiffel Tower during the MBA Goes Global trip to Paris, France, 2016

This year, students traveled abroad to Milan, Italy as part of the marketing elective course focused on global luxury brands. The students had pre-class meetings with Dr. Helen Caldwell, assistant professor of marketing, to learn about the global luxury market and how marketing strategies differ internationally. While abroad, the students, along with Dr. Caldwell and Dr. Elcik, were exposed to the high-quality and fashion-driven culture of Milan. Students had exclusive opportunities to visit luxury brand offices and showrooms, and speak with management about their business and marketing strategies. “While in Milan with my classmates, we were immersed into the world of high-end luxury goods from start to finish. We had an opportunity to explore a number of companies to see the process of design, production, and sales. As you might imagine, we were exposed to highly proprietary information,” said MBA student Luke Weichbrod.

The first day of visits included two luxury automobile companies, Ferrari and Lamborghini. At Ferrari, students took part in a marketing workshop led by Brand Director Marcello Caobelli, and toured the Ferrari Museum. At Lamborghini, students were given an exclusive tour of the production line and saw the employees at work in each step of production, from the stitching of leather seats to the exterior painting and detailing. “We were able to see the behind-the-scenes operations of certain companies like Lamborghini, which demonstrated the value associated with an Italian-made product. Seeing the level of precision and individual customization that goes into each product explains how luxury companies are able to sell their goods at such high price points,” said MBA student Rose Mackey.



Dr. Elcik, Dr. Caldwell, and students at the Lamborghini Museum

Other company visits included the fashion house Kering Group, luxury jewelry company Pomellato, luxury fashion brand Bottega Veneta, luxury hotel Bulgari, and the Armani Museum. At Kering Group, students heard about the company’s Ready-to-Wear

communication strategies and then toured the production rooms featuring brands including Gucci, Alexander McQueen, Stella McCartney, and more. At Pomellato, students met with Human Resources Specialist Susanna Toscana, and toured the company's top secret production line, viewing the handcrafted and detailed gems that contribute to this high-quality jewelry. "I found it interesting that a lot of the companies' operations are fairly small in comparison to the popularity and awareness of each brand. For large companies like Gucci and Pomellato, you picture huge factories, when in reality, it is a relatively small number of skilled artisans who have been with the company for decades," said MBA student Ava Landry.



Dr. Elcik, Dr. Caldwell, and students are accompanied by IES Abroad faculty at the Pomellato headquarters

Along with the business visits, the students also heard numerous guest lectures. Executive Director of the Milano Fashion Institute Nicola Guerini discussed the history and structure of Italian fashion in his presentation, "The Italian Model: From Designers to Vertical Integration." Luxury Goods Strategic Consultant and Bocconi University Professor Donatella Zappieri gave the students insight into the luxury jewelry industry. Providing a new and unique insight, Francesca Natali, tea stylist and managing director of the Orientis Group, explained to the students her journey as a tea stylist and how she created a luxury tea market in Italy. By the end of the week, many students agreed that one of the most insightful and interesting presentations was with Margherita Missoni, the heiress to the Missoni fashion house, who chose to follow her own path away from the family business and create a children's clothing line. "My favorite lecture was from Margherita Missoni. She spoke very candidly about her personal and professional experiences. I was most impressed with her entrepreneurial spirit to start a company on her own, even though she came from a very well-off family business," said Weichbrod.



Dr. Elcik, Dr. Caldwell, IES Abroad faculty, and students with Margherita Missoni (5th from left) after explaining the strategy for her new children's clothing line

The purpose of each MBA Goes Global course is to integrate real life experiences into the academic curriculum, while giving students the chance to explore a new culture. In between the company visits and lectures, students attended Sunday Mass at the Duomo di Milano, and climbed the 250 steps to the top of the cathedral for a stunning view of the city. They also visited Da Vinci's famous mural painting "The Last Supper" at the monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie.



Students enjoying the view after taking the 250 steps up to the top of the Duomo

Dr. Caldwell expressed great satisfaction after returning from the Milan trip, and she believes this year's trip met the expectations and objectives of the MBA Goes Global program. She said, "The trip to Milan and visits to luxury companies gave the MBA students both experiential learning and global exposure to how companies operate in the international environment."

In addition to the management and marketing courses offered in 2016 and 2017, PC also offered courses in global project management both spring semesters. In 2016, four students acted as project managers for two teams of computer engineering students at Napier University in Edinburgh, Scotland. This spring, two students are working as project managers for computer engineering students at Napier on a project funded and provided by IGT. Class meetings are held at PC, IGT headquarters in Providence, RI and IGT Canada in New Brunswick, Canada.

The Providence College MBA program plans to continue the MBA Goes Global program in the following years. Next year's course and destination have not been finalized at this time, but the faculty and students who have been on past trips can attest to the invaluable knowledge and experiences they have gained from this program.