

Student WHU Commentary

Shenika Watlington

I studied abroad for a semester during my undergraduate years, and that experience was one of the highlights of my education. When I enrolled in the University of Michigan's MBA program, I wanted to repeat that experience, but I knew I couldn't take a semester away from my graduate studies. So, I decided to attend the three-week, three-credit summer course for non-European students offered at WHU-Otto Beisheim Graduate School of Management in Vallendar, Germany. The course spanned the first three weeks of May, so it did not interfere with the start date of my summer internship at Kraft Foods.

The theme of this year's course was "The Changing Environment for International Business in Europe." In class, European professors with expertise in different areas talked about the changes taking place in post-communist economies, the challenges facing developed nations and the new trends emerging in global business. To round out our studies, we visited a leading German banking institution in Frankfurt and an international manufacturing company. European financial specialists who spoke with us underscored the importance of ongoing efforts to achieve economic and social unity among member-countries of the European Union.

During my three weeks in Germany, I lived in a dorm on campus and networked with American students from the University of Michigan, Georgia Institute of Technology and Southern Methodist University, as well as New Zealanders from the University of Auckland. We've kept in touch over the last few months.

My most valuable takeaway from this experience is the realization that in a global economy, you cannot use a blanket approach to doing business, because every country has a unique economic structure and culture. To be effective, you must tailor your approach to meet these individual needs.

Overall, the WHU course provided valuable insight into global business, which will be useful to me at Kraft, where I have been offered a post-graduation position as associate brand manager. In order to rise through the corporate ranks in the company, I know I'll have to do an international assignment at some point. I'd definitely recommend WHU as a useful course for anyone who will be engaged in the global marketplace.

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