Intensive Programme “International Approaches to Entrepreneurship”

Interview with Project Coordinator, Łukasz Jasiński and Project Officer, Aleksandra Niezbrzycka from the University of Economy in Bydgoszcz

- In 2011 the University of Economy in Bydgoszcz received EU funding for the LLP-Erasmus Intensive Programme called “International Approaches to Entrepreneurship”. Could you please explain us first what is the LLP-Erasmus Intensive Course?

Łukasz Jasiński: An Intensive Programme, denoted IP, is a short programme of study that brings together students and teaching staff from higher education institutions of at least three participating countries. In other words, this is a kind of workshop for students that lasts from 10 continuous full days up to 6 weeks. An IP enables students and teachers to work together in multinational groups so that they may benefit from favorable learning and teaching conditions and bring new perspectives on the topic being studied. It is worth mentioning that the content should be innovative and as multidisciplinary as possible in order to enable interaction of students from different academic disciplines.

- What is then the Intensive Programme INTERATE exactly about? Would it be beneficial for students to take part in this IP?

ŁJ: Definitely it would be beneficial, as the IP International Approaches to Entrepreneurship aims to improve students’ entrepreneurial competences. Most generally INTERATE is all about learning by development. By taking part in the project students will seize an opportunity to gain knowledge in a very practical way, not to say in action. The participants will study some real-life cases and try to find a creative solution to authentic business problems. Secondly, INTERATE is about intercultural communication. The thing is that students will cooperate in the international teams where each and every represents different culture, tradition and most of all – different approach to business problems.

Given that after the series of intensive workshops, every student will acquire the same or at least similar background economic knowledge. Not to mention the fact that this very cultural diversity will undoubtedly help to solve business problems in a creative way using “intercultural approaches to entrepreneurship”. We are very glad that we managed to build up a very interesting project consortium consisting of all together eight universities and colleges from six different countries: Belgium, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Spain and Poland. The above mentioned cultural diversion of participants will allow to learn in practice how to solve business problems while working in a multicultural group of people which indeed is a significant asset as far as a professional career path is concerned. Moreover, due to the fact that project teachers have various academic backgrounds, students will be able to learn and experience new teaching methods. Every institution already has the significant contribution to the project and we are sure that when the workshops start, everyone will bring in its own experience and this will be very inspirational for students, teachers and us as the organizers.

- Aleksandra, would you let us in on the secret, what activities are planned for students, what is the IP schedule?

Aleksandra Niezbrzycka: The teaching programme is divided into five modules: economic mix, intercultural communication, presentation skills, project management, and strategic management. This allows students to learn both hard and soft skills. What is more, in the second part of the programme the participants will take part in an economic simulation game.
Now, INTERATE is not only learning and teaching; there have also been planned some “get-to-know-each-other” activities, such as local-sightseeing, a trip to one of the most beautiful places of Poland and other attractions that we would rather still keep as a little secret. All of these will allow the better integration of participants and this in turn may contribute to effective group work and communication during the workshops. Both, students and teachers should not be disappointed (laugh).

- The content and schedule of the IP seems to be well-thought-out! How did you come up with an idea of the project? Is that an innovative offer or a kind of continuation of some previous project you have done with your partners?

LJ: Well, thank you for this question. Firstly, I should point out that it is already five years the University of Economy in Bydgoszcz has been organizing a big international event “WSG Bydgoszcz Entrepreneur Cup”. The main purpose of this simulation game is to solve a real problem of a real enterprise. What really flatters us is that since the very beginning this event has steadily been gaining popularity among our partner institutions. In a five year history of the Cup almost 150 students and 20 teachers from abroad took part in this game. All participants represented different higher educational institutions from Belgium, Czech Rep., Finland, Holland, Hungary, Germany, Great Britain, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia and even Mexico. Coming back to your question, actually, we have noticed that each and every year the final projects created by students did differ, not only in cultural aspects. And this diversion combined with our experience has generated a brilliant idea of INTERATE. Together with coaches of international teams we have decided to create a special workshop designed to equip the participants with comprehensive, though equal practical knowledge concerning economics, management, presentation skills and intercultural communication. So to sum up, one can say that INTERATE is an extended version of the WSG Bydgoszcz Entrepreneur Cup...

- You mentioned that during the game students are going to solve a real problem of a real enterprise. Thus it seems to be a good idea to cooperate with representatives of the real business life on the project. Are you planning to involve any companies into INTERATE?

AN: It is a well-known fact that the world of science and the world of business merge. The vast majority of business ideas have their begins at the universities. In the Western countries enterprises and universities cooperate very often with each other and it is very profitable for both sides. We are aware of the importance of combining theory and practice and this is why we decided to involve big international companies into our IP. The negotiations with two well-known IT enterprises are nowadays in an advanced stage. We don’t want to give away the names of the companies as it should be a nice surprise for the students. They are supposed to design the problem for the simulation game which will be held at the end of our IP. We are sure that the task will be very interesting and challenging for the students. On the other hand, we hope that the solutions proposed by students will be also beneficial for our partner companies and they can use them to solve their problems.

- Who is allowed to participate in the project? Are these only students of “economics” or “management” or other students as well?
AN: Every Bachelor second- or third-year student representing different fields of study, not only economics, finances or management can participate in the project. We even suggest our partners to recruit students from diverse fields of study in order to combine different approaches and perspectives to entrepreneurship. Nowadays, entrepreneurial skills are necessary in the globalized world not only for future economists but also people working in all other areas.

- What kind of skills should a student have to take part in INTERATE?

ŁJ: The most important and required are very good English skills. The language of the workshops will be English therefore it is very important for students to communicate in this language fluently. Recruiters should also pay attention to the general economic knowledge of a student, team work ability, communicativeness and openness for new challenges. Moreover, student’s positive attitude and creativity will also play a very important role during INTERATE.

- How would you describe INTERATE in three words?

AN: Entrepreneurial, intercultural, challenging!

- Sounds interesting! Now, the last question. What do you expect from INTERATE as organizers of the event?

ŁJ: The most important goal for us is to organize the project in such a way that the students will be interested knowing that they have learned skills which will be useful for them in the future! Practical skills that can be taught only in an international environment and that can’t be taught at one single university or college. We also hope that students will make use of new contacts in their future working life. So, the only thing left is to encourage students to take part in INTERATE! Let’s all meet in May 2012 in Bydgoszcz!

- I wish you all good luck for the whole project! Thank you very much for the interview.

Interviewer: Viana

Łukasz Jasiński has a Master’s degree in German Philology and is currently doing his Ph.D studies in linguistics (Language of the New Media) at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. As Director of the International Office at the University of Economy in Bydgoszcz he is responsible for coordinating and developing international cooperation as well as the university’s internationalization process and has been involved in numerous international projects such as: LLP-Erasmus (for 5 years Institutional Coordinator of the programme at the University), dual degree programmes, WSG Bydgoszcz Entrepreneur Cup or Intensive Programmes (2008-2010: “Promoting Intercultural Management for Working Life” and 2011-2012: “Intercultural Approaches to Service Innovation and Design Methods” – both coordinated by Laurea University of Applied Sciences / Finland). In addition, he is a lecturer at the University’s Department of Linguistics. The biggest hobbies of this crazy football fan are foreign languages, books, travelling and IT technologies.

Aleksandra Niezbrycka got Master’s degree from the University of Economy in Bydgoszcz in Tourism and Recreation. She is currently doing Master studies in English Philology at the KazimierzWielki University in Bydgoszcz. As a member of the International Office at the University of Economy in Bydgoszcz, Aleksandra is responsible for incoming students within the Erasmus Programme, coordination of the international workshops and relations with other universities. As a student, she participated in the Intensive Programme “Intercultural Approaches to Service Innovation and Design Methods” in Leicester. She has also been a participant of Camp America programme. For the past two years Aleksandra has been an assistant on WSG Bydgoszcz Entrepreneur Cup. She is keen on travelling, Indie rock music and sport, especially rollerblading.