

UMUC Business and Executive Programs Podcasts
Executive MBA Education in Global World

Interviewer: Nancy Gentry Glenn, Director of Administration, Business and Executive Programs

Interviewees: Mary Ann Spilman, Glenn Molin, and Bert Jarreau

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Glenn: Welcome to Executive MBA Education in the Global World, a weekly podcast that features highlights of the Executive MBA program. Thank you for joining us. I'm Nancy Gentry Glenn, Director of Administration, Business and Executive Programs—your host for this segment.

Our guests today are Dr. Mary Ann Spilman, Executive Director of Executive Programs; Dr. Glenn Molin, CEO and President, Next Generation MRI—a current participant in the Executive MBA Program; and Mr. Bert Jarreau, Chief Information Officer, National Association of Counties—a graduate of the EMBA program and currently working on his Doctor of Management Degree.

The topic for today's show is "Experiencing Business Abroad." Our discussion will focus on the international study trip, a key component of the Executive MBA program. Dr. Molin will share his experience of the study trip to Europe, and Mr. Jarreau will share his experience of the study trip to China.

Dr. Spilman, would you describe the goals of the international study trip?

Spilman: Thank you, Nancy, I'd be happy to. The focus of the international trip is on international trade. So we meet with business leaders and political leaders to see how trade agreements open up global business opportunities and how these agreements operate in practice. When we meet with the political leaders, we're interested in how they perceive U.S. business, as well as our government and the U.S. culture, and how the individuals themselves are involved in understanding the U.S. There's a lot of focus in other countries on understanding the United States, so we like to reciprocate by understanding other countries as well—very important for global business. When we meet with business leaders, we're looking at the challenges that they face in opening new business operations in other countries, both business and cultural differences they experience, and how they adjust to overseas assignments.

The goal of cultural and social experience is also very important because we want to understand how American business people are perceived in other countries and how they're treated. And we want our business people as well to be able to positively influence those perceptions of U.S. business and reinforce positive stereotypes and hopefully counteract some negative stereotypes. Ultimately, what we'd like to do for the participants in our program is create a cultural sensitivity so that they are open to new experiences, they recognize and appreciate different points of view, and they recognize that there are also common and shared values across cultures. The awareness and the importance of history in other countries is much more developed than it is in our country—we're a new, youthful country—and I think it's important for our business

people to recognize how important long histories are in the relationships that still exist among countries and among business people today.

Glenn: And Dr. Spilman, how do you select particular destinations for the study trip?

Spilman: Because the study trip is focused on international trade, we take our participants to Europe to meet with the European Union. The officials in the European Commission meet with us, we visit the Parliament in Brussels and can understand then the issues that the European Union is dealing with as they solve their own political problems, and how those will affect businesses in the U.S. and from other countries. When we visit China, we are interested in China because of the World Trade Organization. Since China has joined the World Trade Organization, it has opened up tremendous opportunities for business, and we like to discuss those opportunities with both the political and business leaders. But the countries are chosen in Europe based on the issues that the European Union is facing at the time. So we've recently been visiting all of the new countries that have just joined the European Union and the kinds of problems that that has created for the European Union itself as it's tried to integrate the Eastern European countries. In China we visit, of course, Beijing because it is the political capital and we visit Shanghai because it is the business capital of that country.

Glenn: Thank you, Dr. Spilman. Dr. Molin, tell us about your experience on the European study trip. What did you do and what did you learn?

Molin: Sure. First and foremost, I just wanted to say what an incredibly well orchestrated the entire experience was, even from getting off the plane and starting our experience. Each aspect of it layered one on top of the other; and then at the end, you were left with a complete package. And that's in deference to Dr. Spilman and her wonderful organizational techniques to make that come off very well. For me, the most profound was, having visited Europe before as a tourist, it was so much different this time going with a cohort of fellow business executives and to see things that you would never choose to see necessarily on a vacation, but on a business-oriented trip, seeing the way the Eastern European Union worked and as new countries came into the European Union and how it all integrated to move that part of the world forward. Very, very important and very profound learning experiences. We started off in Brussels and from there went to Antwerp and then from there, Slovakia. So we have a real dichotomy of a very old economy, to one that is developing and developing very rapidly in a free market society, and there were some really very profound experiences as we moved forward in that trip.

Glenn: And has the study trip changed your perspective on other cultures or on global business?

Molin: In a sense it absolutely did. We were there in a very interesting time in the United States culture. It was really the beginning of our financial crisis here in the States and just to see how important that was and the impact that that had 3,000 miles away, it was very interesting. And what I found particularly interesting was how adept virtually everybody—from cab drivers, to the university professors that we met with, to some of

the political leaders—all knew in great detail how American politics and how the American economy worked, and the impact that it would have on Europe. Unfortunately, at least in my experience, I could not see that relationship coming as an American going overseas. It was only because I was there as part of a business trip that I was able to put all that together and really see the interconnectedness of our global world.

Glenn: And Dr. Molin, do you consider the trip an important influence on your own competencies as a business leader?

Molin: You know in healthcare, it's very often difficult to go across state lines, let alone international lines. So directly, probably not. Indirectly, and without question, it has greatly enhanced competencies, because I got to see how much older economies and systems developed and sometimes where it doesn't work so well, where they were kind of stuck maybe in an old method or an old model of doing things. But then also, how they have integrated in a relatively short period of time, many countries with many different cultures, many economic systems, and how they all came together to work together to advance that part of the world. And to see the strength in that, I can directly see how that relates back to my personal business, as an entrepreneur and a business owner, and then as my profession within healthcare, about all of us coming together, and certainly as a country with some very important issues at a very challenging time for us all. So absolutely, it was very influential in how I saw it as a business leader.

Glenn: Thank you, Dr. Molin. Mr. Jarreau, you participated in the study trip to China. Tell us about your experience, what you did, and what you learned.

Jarreau: It was an eye-opening and wonderful experience. As Dr. Molin said, our host was the Chinese government, so there was no way a tourist could have gotten the same kind of insights that we got with our cohort. I spent three and a half days in Hong Kong and three and a half days in Beijing. Hong Kong was very much a metropolitan city, much like New York or Toronto. Beijing in many aspects was very much going into a third-world country. It was quite a dichotomy. We experienced candid conversations with our Chinese professors, the Chinese MBA students that we met with, toured magnificent landmarks such as Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, and the Great Wall. Developed a first-hand appreciation of the Chinese people and culture, better understanding of how the Chinese want to learn from us and beat us at our own game, I might say, and a greater understanding and an appreciation of the viewpoints of the Chinese people. Finally, I learned how to become a shrewd negotiator with the Chinese market vendors!

Glenn: Thank you. How does a study trip change your perspectives on other cultures, global business, and on yourself as a manager and business leader?

Jarreau: It certainly provided me with a greater appreciation of their rich culture and their proud traditions. I didn't expect to see the degree that the Chinese have prepared to beat the Americans at our own game. While attending the show of the Chinese acrobats, which is the Chinese version of Cirque du Soleil, I asked a man if the chair was available next to him. He couldn't speak English at all, but his young son and daughter spoke English

fluently. They had already taken several years of English in school. So from my perspective, they're gearing up to be a next super power and surpass the U.S. So unless we get that same focus, I'm afraid that this will inevitably happen. I learned that doing business in China is getting easier by the day. The Chinese see foreign direct investment as the engine of their economic growth and they will make it very easy to set up shop there. It made me a better manager by expanding my insights first hand. I believe it would be very difficult doing that without first-hand experience.

Glenn: And Mr. Jarreau, as a business leader, what do you consider the most lasting influence on your own executive development?

Jarreau: It changed my perspective entirely. It piqued my interest in wanting to learn more about international business. That served as a catalyst for me enrolling in the Doctor of Management Program. I am currently working on my dissertation in international business. When I complete the doctorate program, I will seek employment with a multinational company in the international area, preferably China, from going back to the experiences I got there. I was really excited by everything I saw.

Glenn: And the final question for both Dr. Molin and Mr. Jarreau: How important do you think this kind of experience is in developing today's business leaders?

Molin: It's vital. The world is becoming flatter. We have to reach across borders in future advancements. As we speak, they're preparing for a meeting with the G-20 to help the global financial crisis. One of the downsides for me in being in healthcare is that it's really a microcosm and very often you can't look outside of the profession, just because there's so much to do within the profession, so much to know, so much to keep on top of. Parts of this trip through the EMBA program greatly opened up my eyes about how important it is to connect with the world. So as a business leader, the most important or most lasting influence that I have is just how large we all are and how small we all are and how we need to, arm-in-arm, work together to move forward and advance our world economy for the betterment of all.

Jarreau: And I agree with Dr. Molin. It's absolutely essential. Let's face it, we live and compete in a global world. Our current financial crisis shows you how much our financial markets are interlinked globally. So I concur wholeheartedly.

Spilman: It's interesting that Bert has highlighted China as a competitor and Glenn has focused on the European Union and the cooperative environment. What we see at the European Union are lots of different countries with different languages and different cultures, all coming together in a cooperative environment. In China it's easier to see the competitive environment with U.S. businesses. But in fact, the European Union as a trade block, does compete against the U.S. And both gentlemen have pointed out that the financial crisis is the impetus for more cooperation among trading countries—more cooperation than competition, generally—and over time, we may see more of that and feel more of a sense of cooperation than competition.

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Glenn: Again, this is Nancy Gentry Glenn. I'd like to thank Dr. Mary Ann Spilman, Dr. Glenn Molin, and Mr. Bert Jarreau for sharing their Executive MBA study trip experiences with us today. Thank you listeners for joining Executive MBA Education in the Global World.

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