

Center for Information Systems Leadership

Watson spearheads Global Text Project

By Joanna Carabello

Rick Watson was looking for a better textbook. What he found was something much more profound: a quest to share free, quality class materials with students in developing countries who otherwise wouldn't have access.

Frustrated in January 2004 by the market's inadequate selection of textbooks on XML, a data exchange language, Watson asked his students to write an electronic text. That experience led him to undertake the Global Text Project, an ambitious effort to amass 1,000 electronic college textbooks that can be easily shared around the world — and updated, expanded, and improved by the instructors and students who use them.

"You've got to have a big, bold idea to get people's interest, but it's achievable," says Watson, who is interim head of Terry's Management Information Systems department and director of the Center for Information Systems Leadership. "It has to be that size to solve the problem. A few dozen books isn't going to do it."

The problem Watson is tackling is economic access. Although publishing companies offer their textbooks at deeply discounted prices in the developing world, the cost of one book can equal months of per-capita

income in these areas. By making texts available for free over the Internet — so they can be printed on paper or distributed on DVD or CD — the project hopes to tear down accessibility barriers.

The books will be created using a version of Wiki collaborative software that allows readers to suggest content changes and additions to a supervising editor, who will have ultimate control over what modifications are made. Watson says this method aims to not only transform passive readers into active contributors, but to make the texts truly global. Unlike traditional textbooks, which typically are written from a North American perspective, these books are designed to incorporate regional information and examples from Africa, Asia, Europe, South and Central America.

The project is on track to have its first textbook completed by this summer and to launch a pilot program in Ethiopia during the second half of the year. The first two books are about information systems and business fundamentals; eight other texts currently in development explore fields ranging from agriculture to education to science. The project is also beefing up its online library with free textbooks already in existence — mostly those written by professors for their own classes.

Completion of its first book will allow the Global Text Project to seek private underwriters. The plan is to approach Global 1000 companies to sponsor one textbook. In return, a company will reap the advertising and public relations benefit of having its name and logo included on the book's front cover and on chapter headings.

While the Switzerland-based Jacobs Foundation provided start-up funding, the project's goal is to become financially sustainable rather than relying on grants and donations for support. "We have to build a brand and a distribution system," says Watson. "If we can do that, the books will come."

While the Global Text Project's goal of distributing free textbooks might seem at odds with the mission of traditional book publishers, Watson says some publishing companies actually have shown interest in the project as a potential new business model.

"They're looking for better ways, too," he says.

Internet-based, second-hand textbook market has taken a financial toll on these companies. Publishers also have been hurt by their own charitable efforts as the discounted books they sell in the developing world are imported back to the United States and resold.

The electronic format used by the Global Text Project could provide expansion opportunities for traditional publishers, says Watson, who doesn't expect the project's efforts to generate a lot of resistance from the publishing industry.

"It doesn't have to be (adversarial)," he says. "It could be complementary. I would rather help them be successful." ■

For more information, go to: globaltext.org.

Joanna Carabello is an Athens freelancer.



Economics Department

Students discuss policy with Jimmy Carter

By Patti Ghezzi

When he reflects on his days at UGA, Balaji Narain will be able to say he discussed economic policy with a former president ... of the United States. Narain, who is majoring in economics/international affairs, was one of four UGA Honors students with ties to the Terry College who presented economic policy recommendations at an historic UGA conference titled "The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century" that was held in January.

After analyzing the tough economic times of the 1970s, Narain and his fellow students — Ben Cannon, Meghan Claiborne, and Kristen Tullos, who are working toward BBA degrees in economics through the Terry College — took part in a panel discussion with Carter. To prepare for their roles in the conference, "the students devoted long hours without academic credit," says William Lastrapes, head of Terry's Department of Economics, who served as the team's faculty advisor. "The panel was an excellent opportunity for them to apply principles learned in their economic classes to the real world, and to challenge real policy-makers."

Undergraduates from other departments presented policy recommendations on a variety of topics. The economics team focused on productivity growth, deregulation, and price stability. "We wanted to provide constructive criticism," says Tullos, who served as team leader, "but also highlight some positives, like deregulation."

The team gathered data from several sources, including documents from the Carter library in Atlanta. The students had a tight turnaround, with just two months to prepare for the conference. "Timing of the project was difficult," says Tullos, "because most of the deadlines overlapped with finals and winter break."

Narain was chosen to make the three-minute oral presentation. He thanked Carter on behalf of all the students for the chance to study his administration. In critiquing economic decisions Carter made, the group wanted Narain to use just the right inflection, so as not to offend Carter but to still drive home their key points.

Their first recommendation was that the legislative and executive branches shouldn't interfere with monetary policy. "Currency stability is so crucial to economic growth," says Narain, "that the prospect of political influence on the process could be disastrous."

Next, the group noted that Carter's deregulation of the oil, finance, rail, trucking, and airline industries can serve as a lesson for today's leaders. Possible applications include "supporting freer international trade, promoting market solutions to health care, refraining from intervening in oil markets and replacing minimum wage laws with more efficient means of wealth redistribution."

Finally, the team reported that the Carter administration focused on short-term unemployment, yet its economic stimulation package increased inflation, according to the students' research. However, the students noted that some of Carter's actions laid the foundation for prosperity in later years.



At an historic UGA conference, "The Carter Presidency: Lessons for the 21st Century," four Terry College students were chosen to analyze economic policy during the Carter years. The students included Ben Cannon, Meghan Claiborne, Kristen Tullos, and Balaji Narain (shown here with President Carter), who delivered a three-minute oral presentation that summarized months of research.

In his response, Carter jokingly expressed "partial thanks" to the students. He said he admired them for their diligence, and he was delighted to hear their insights. When planning the conference, the only request he made was that he get to interact with students.

"We did have a very serious problem during my presidency on the economy," he said in response to the economic team's presentation. The problem escalated when conflict in the Middle East doubled oil prices in just 12 months creating "runaway inflation" worldwide, Carter added.

"We tried to maintain a proper balance between the benefits of the economy for working-class people compared to the wealthiest people in the world," Carter said. "If anything, we favored the working class and poor people above the richer people."

The students praised Carter for his honesty and admitted they were in awe of his stage presence. "He exudes this inner strength despite the fact that his administration didn't always go so well," says Narain. "That brought it home for me that this is a president of the United States." ■

Patti Ghezzi is an Atlanta freelancer.

Management Department

Business plan teams head to Moot Corp

By Matt Waldman

MBA candidates Mike DeGasser and Eric Jackson didn't anticipate that Charles Hofer's class would propel them into an award-winning business plan that could lead to a successful real-world partnership. But that's what happened to these students in Terry's entrepreneurial tract.

DeGasser and Jackson are partners in T&T International, a company still in the conceptual stage that is designed to import and distribute high-end seafood. They are

to teaching that symbolizes the kind of relentless pursuit of excellence that students will need to succeed as entrepreneurs.

"I'd describe him as brilliant," says Jackson, who has 20 years of experience in the food industry. "The guy is just astonishing with the amount of knowledge he has across the board, from entrepreneurship to turnarounds. I just love working with the guy."

What is it that made T&T International another in a long line of successful business plans generated within Hofer's classroom?

"The bottom line, the bottom line, the bottom line!" says DeGasser, who laughs as he describes Hofer's mantra. "This is what he says all the time. Sometimes we call his classes a Hoferathon. They start at 2:45 and end at 4:00, but if we have questions it has

sometimes dragged on till 6 . . . sometimes later. It's like one long sentence with Dr. Hofer, but it's all good stuff."

To add a dose of reality to concept and feasibility reviews, Hofer enlists the aid of judges who work in the industries that his budding entrepreneurs will have to approach to get their plan off the ground. "It might be a wonderful product, but will you make money?" says

"I'd describe him [Prof. Charles Hofer] as brilliant. The guy is just astonishing with the amount of knowledge he has across the board, from entrepreneurship to turnarounds. I just love working with the guy."

— MBA candidate and Moot Corp competitor Eric Jackson, who has 20 years of experience in the food industry

also teammates whose business plan won the 2007 Georgia Bowl competition in January, earning them a trip to the International Challenge of Moot Corp this spring.

Winning Moot Corp is one challenge. Even bigger is for DeGasser and Jackson to pursue, say, \$5 million from a venture capitalist. "We wouldn't have thought about pushing to that level," says DeGasser, who originated the idea after moonlighting part-time as a sales consultant for a seafood supplier based in Vietnam. "But Dr. Hofer brought out what the potential was."

Hofer, a Regents professor of entrepreneurship and strategic management, is legendary among students for his knowledge and enthusiasm. The rigorous process he puts them through is intended to help students create award-winning business plans and ultimately profitable businesses. He is so successful at it that three Terry teams made it to the Moot Corp finals in 1999, prompting officials to invoke the "Georgia Rule," which now limits the number of teams that can qualify from one school to two.

The key to Hofer's technique is meticulous preparation, plus a level of dedication

DeGasser. "A lot of people don't consider the basic demand. Dr. Hofer will bring in marketing, market research, venture capitalists, banks, and people who know how to deal with bankruptcy."

Both Jackson and DeGasser agree that feedback from Hofer and his industry pros is the crucial part of the development process.

"I don't know how in the world Dr. Hofer finds the time to do this," says Jackson. "It is the most detailed, meticulous feedback I have ever gotten in any walk of life. He gives us a written tally of the judges and himself versus the other teams."

So what was Hofer's approach to T&T's plan? First, he sought out Jackson, a partner to complement DeGasser and forge a strong management team. Then he focused his efforts on the pitch.

"We're pitching [T&T] as the best product you can buy," says DeGasser, who notes that T&T International already has a relationship with a Vietnamese supplier who is poised to ship them Black Tiger shrimp. "While we know that's true, Dr. Hofer spent a lot of time showing us how to convince everyone else."

"By the time we go to an external competition, we're ready," says Jackson. "Dr. Hofer is a microcosm of what you'll get in the world. You'll get rejection and tough criticism once you're in front of lenders and VCs (venture capitalists). Once you get through these competitions, you feel confident you can ask for \$5 million."

[Pls. note: As *TM* was going to the printer, a second Terry business plan team, Mullis Enterprises, had qualified for Moot Corp by winning a pair of spring competitions.] ■

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Marketing Department

Meshing right- and left-brain thinking

By Kent Hannon

Rajiv Grover's interaction with real-world marketing executives over the past several years reveals that they make a lot of errors. His analysis concludes that in many cases they run into trouble because they use only their right brain ["that's a nice idea, let's do it"] or only their left brain ["data from analytical research models says we should proceed"]. And, more often than not, it's the right brain that predominates.

"In reality, the two sides — right brain and left brain — need to mesh," says Grover, who heads Terry's Marketing Department. "Many creative ideas that on the face of it look very sound, end up failing. Creative ideas, therefore, should be supported by data. And, likewise, a decision based solely on data may be misguided if the quality and analysis of that data aren't carefully examined. Marketing is unique in that it requires both the creative (right brain) and the analytic (left brain) for great decision-making. Those two facets of marketing are sometimes seen as yin and yan, but in reality they should be a tandem."

To help combat the problem, Grover will edit and serve as a contributing author to *Essential Marketing Knowledge ... And Wisdom*, a textbook that he envisions being used in the capstone course for undergraduates and the first-year MBA core course. He will write the introductory chapters; the other 14 will be written by experts in the marketing field.

"Our task in this text," says Grover, "is to provide the wherewithal for comprehensive analysis of marketing problems in a reader-friendly environment." When marketing students and executives err, he adds, it's likely because they oftentimes don't pay enough attention to the left brain/analytical side of marketing.

"Marketing people typically have trouble establishing credibility in an organization," says Grover, "and the CMO may not have a seat at the board table. Why not? Because some marketing people don't have formal training, and I can tell you that the 'anyone can do it' syndrome is wrong."

"There is some evidence that the average life of a CMO is only two years. Beyond that, they can't cut it — usually because of a lack of training. The problem oftentimes is that they can't present the kind of compelling analytical reasons that will persuade a CFO or CEO. Unless you have a total belief in marketing as a business science, you may come off as someone speaking mumbo-jumbo. Whereas, if you're the kind of CMO who can explain marketing research, consumer behavior research, sales research — and, hence, the overall marketing approach based on this kind of analysis — then your COO and CEO can, indeed, grasp what you're saying and be in a position to act intelligently on your advice."

Grover says the marketing academy has been guilty of "watering down what we teach students, which may partially account for why marketing plays second and third fiddle to fields like finance and accounting."

He feels this is especially true in the first core marketing course in the MBA program. "When students incorrectly learn marketing the way it is taught, they think it is intuitive," he says. "They don't see the need to take electives, and they continue with that attitude in the business world. They don't listen to wise marketing advice. Hence, they tend to make decisions by the seat of their pants. That is the status of our profession, and I want to fix it."

Grover says he doesn't advocate turning marketing students into statisticians.

"But we are warning them be careful about misusing or ignoring data," he says. "If you don't fully understand the statistical analysis you have hopefully been given, then hire someone who does. In similar fashion to a CEO who may not be an expert in research and development but who hires R&D executives who are, marketing executives should hire appropriately trained analytical talent if they aren't comfortable with numbers. If you're a right brain type, then hire someone who's a left brainer — and vice versa."

Grover's long-term goal is to create marketing executives who possess both the creativity and the analytical savvy to carry their weight in the boardroom. The new textbook will be a step in that direction.

"If it were just Rajiv Grover saying that, it would be one thing," he adds. "But in this textbook, we have 14 other experts sending a clear signal — telling students that they need to buy into this philosophy."

Marketing principals are not as predictable or as fool-proof as scientific equations.

"You can't say, 'It worked for Honda, so it'll work for us,'" says Grover. "If the conditions are the same ... maybe. But they never are; it's not a clear-cut process."

Grover envisions the new textbook as a compendium of real-world examples and situations designed to give students as much knowledge as possible as they prepare to leave school or begin their MBA studies.

"It will be very practical," he says. ■



To help students learn to use both their creative and analytical sides, Grover, who heads the Terry Marketing Department, is hard at work on a new text, *Essential Marketing Knowledge... And Wisdom*. He'll serve as editor and also write the introductory chapters.