Real-World Partnerships Reap Valuable Experience

MBA STUDENTS TRAVELED all over the country this year to discover what people eat and drink for breakfast and lunch as well as where and how they shop for meal products. The results of their findings had real-world applications.

Through Partners in Progress, a unique educational program at the Walton College, full-time MBA students conduct retail marketing research. Each year, for the past ten years, projects with Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and Procter & Gamble have given students first-hand experience exploring actual retail issues. The companies provide the key business questions and general direction. Then Tom Jensen, Wal-Mart Lecturer in Retailing and chair of the marketing and transportation department, guides the team and helps them develop scope and objectives, action steps, and budgets for secondary and primary research. This year, the students’ assignment on “train” products took them all over the country, conducting surveys with consumers, executing focus groups and analyzing competitive data in Dallas, Miami, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and other cities. The projects culminated in May with presentations at Procter & Gamble and Wal-Mart.

Jensen said, “These students bring a fresh eye to the projects. Their experience in these self-managed teams ultimately helps them in the job market.”

In addition, the team used Homescan, a consumer data bank, donated by ACNielsen U.S. to the Walton College in January. The gift, valued at $500,000, enabled the team members to learn from the same tools and information used by retailers and manufacturers in the consumer packaged goods industry.

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BENTON WALKER, MBA '01, said, “My study abroad experience was the pinnacle of my educational career. It afforded me the opportunity to take my business knowledge to an international level and see the world while I was at it.”

For more information on making a gift to the Study Abroad Business Alumni Scholarship Fund, go to: waltoncollege.uark.edu/ECOM/ international.asp.