

# Students Get Opportunity to Manage Economic Development Project in Peru

Two economics professors from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP) and the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh (UWO) are leading the establishment of an economics and business research station in Lima, Peru, that will give students experience in managing an economic development project. The Wisconsin CIBER provided a grant to Chandini Sankaran, an assistant professor at UWSP, and Marianne Johnson, an associate professor at UWO, to travel to Peru in March 2008 to identify and assess potential projects, locations and private-sector partners. Once established, the station will function as a collaborative, multidisciplinary project for students and faculty from UWSP, UWO, and the Universidad del Pacifico in Peru.

During their March visit, Sankaran and Johnson met with representatives of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Commercial Services Office, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and the Universidad del Pacifico, as well as businesses in Lima, including Kimberly-Clark Peru, Backus (SAB Miller), and Casa Blanca, an organic farm. They also were introduced to Grupo GEA, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving green space that will host a UWO intern this summer.

Initially students will be placed in internships at companies or NGOs in Lima as Sankaran and Johnson work to create the permanent research station. In addition to the summer intern, they hope to place a student for the fall semester. With the assistance of Ron Tschida, a colleague at UWSP, they also are exploring the possibility of offering internships in a village in the Amazonian region of Peru. "The idea for this project originated in

discussions of how we could get students to spend more time abroad," said Johnson. "We also wanted a program that would encourage language competency and an experience that employers would value when students came back." The long-term plan is for selected students to assist in the hands-on operations of a development project such as a micro-credit organization over the course of a semester or a three-month summer period. They will help manage staff and resources, marketing, fundraising, and community relations for a nonprofit development project. This will require them to put theoretical knowledge into practice in order to estimate costs and revenues, plan budgets, collect data, and evaluate the program. Students will take a full semester of related course work while in Peru, including intensive Spanish, a survey course on Peruvian economics and business, and a course that will require them to develop a business expansion plan in cooperation with a local family-run business. They also will participate in economics or business courses at their home

schools via the Internet. Before departing for Peru, they will be required to complete courses in economic development and business management and at least one semester of Spanish.

Sankaran and Johnson developed this project in response to growing student demand for practical experiences and internships, as well as their desire to encourage more students to study overseas. No existing study-abroad program offered at Stevens Point or Oshkosh provides an opportunity for students to become actively and directly involved in the countries they visit. "Our students currently do not have any hybrid semester study-abroad programs. Either they go for three weeks with a UW faculty member or they go for a semester on their own," said Johnson. "We wanted to create a program that operates more as a bridge between the two options." The professors chose to establish the research station in Peru in part because the experience would cost students roughly the same as a semester at their home schools.



*Marianne Johnson and Chandini Sankaran visited the American Chamber of Commerce of Peru.*