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Faculty Profile: Martin Grossman



"If you are going to do business in China and elsewhere in East Asia," Dr. Martin Grossman says, "you've got to have *guanxi*." The term describes an old concept, but one that has a new vitality in the knowledge-based economies of growing Asia Pacific countries. Simply put, *guanxi* describes the deep networks of social relationships among businessmen; the series of long-term, mutual commitments of loyalty and obligation, favors freely given and equitably delivered. "*Guanxi*," scholars Xiao-Ping Chen and Chao C. Chen claim in an article in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* (2004), is "a dynamic reciprocity." Gaining access to that world is no small feat. And *guanxi* is what you need if you want to *study* Asian business.

A third-year Assistant Professor in BSC's School of Business, Dr. Grossman has come to know the importance of culture to understanding international business. Originally from Queens, N.Y., he came to BSC after more than 20 years of work in the field of information technology for such private-sector firms as General Electric, Johnson Control, Sprint, and Aeronautical Radio, in Washington, D.C. and Miami, Florida. With a grounding in both International Business and Information Technology Management, Professor Grossman is making his mark in BSC's new School of Business by forging ties between these nor-

mally disparate fields in both his research and teaching agendas. "Our recent renaming as the School of Business signified more than just a name change," he said. "We are doing some curricular soul-searching and reinventing ourselves collectively and individually. For me, this process has made me realize that I am passionate about Information Systems *and* Global Studies, and has pushed me to think about how I might combine the two."

Professor Grossman's current research examines the interrelationships between government, the private sector and academia (the "triple helix") in developing nations in Asia, particularly China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, India and Singapore. His specialty is Knowledge Management (KM): the study of how organizations manage intellectual assets in business, government and higher education. He seeks to measure how different strategies and policies for developing knowledge economies affect economic growth, both regionally and globally.

Technology is, naturally, an essential part of his inquiry. "One particularly vibrant example of this sort of intellectual partnership can be seen in what are called 'technology incubators,' or 'science parks,'" he said. "These are regional clusters of companies and universities that share space, equipment and knowledge 'flows' —the outcomes of research. They complement and rely on each other." With research support from a 2006 CART Faculty and Librarian Research Grant, Dr. Grossman



Professor Martin Grossman in Shanghai, China, with Professor Wing-Kai To, Coordinator for Asian Studies at BSC and Bill Crampton, a BSC graduate who has been in China for 10 years. Crampton is currently CEO of Boston Training Technologies.

spent six weeks in China and Taiwan, visiting more than 10 colleges and universities and several science/technology parks. “I wanted to understand the roots of what the World Bank calls the ‘East Asian Miracle’; that is, how countries in eastern Asia managed to experience such high and sustained economic growth over the past three decades.”



Professor Martin Grossman at Hsaiiping Institute of Technology in the Taichung area of Taiwan, developing Guanxi with colleagues there.

Economists attribute some of the “Miracle” to government intervention – in subsidies to business and in “human capital” (training) – but equally important, to Professor Grossman, is the emphasis on knowledge and innovation. East Asian countries’ nurturing of technological innovation “allowed them to leapfrog from a relatively poor developing status to competitive, cutting-edge knowledge economies.” In November 2006, he presented his preliminary findings from this research to the Second Forum on Global Education and Research, hosted by BSC.

But technology is only part of the picture. So much of success in enterprise depends fundamentally on culture: the ability of people to understand one another’s aims and methods. “Cooperation depends on trust, especially in the new knowledge-based economies of the 21st century,” Grossman notes. It is here that *guanxi* comes in. “Once in Asia, I learned pretty quickly about the importance of cultivating a social network of contacts, friends and associates. In order to understand business networks there, I had to develop networks of my own.” This he did successfully, though at first tentatively. “Initially, I made some contacts through the Academy of International Business and the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office (TECO), both U.S.-based, through which I made connections to students and gained access to science parks in Taiwan.” From there, he built his network patiently but determinedly. Grossman now claims a network of “friends” in China, Taiwan and

beyond whose members are familiar with his research interests and have opened doors for him—to schools and businesses in particular.

Language is the most difficult cultural barrier, and one that Grossman has yet to fully overcome. “I audited one semester of Mandarin here at BSC, but my language skills are still very bad. If nothing else, studying Chinese has taught me something about the complexity of Asian cultures. That, and humility.” These attributes will be needed for Professor Grossman to achieve one of his new goals: to some day teach Information Management to students in Asia.

For Grossman, research is a part of a bigger mission at Bridgewater State. “Research, teaching and service all go hand-in-hand. There’s no big divide.” Professor Grossman’s mission includes involving his students in his two central research areas: Information Systems and Global Studies. “Many of my colleagues in the School of Business realize that we cannot give our students a full preparation for careers in business unless we introduce them to international business cultures and sensibilities.” A New Yorker living in Red Sox country, “I know that culture matters,” he says with a wink. “The American managerial style is dramatically different from those in China and Taiwan.” Grossman’s visit last summer to business schools in Taiwan and China made this clear. “In Taiwan, for example, business schooling—and culture—is much more formal and polite than it is here. It would be interesting to see how business education in East Asia and the U.S. might borrow from one another.”

The Hong Kong Science Park.



To that end, Dr. Grossman is working to develop links between the School of Business and the Asian Studies Program at BSC. He has developed a new course for business students entitled “Technology Innovation in Asia.” It is the first of its kind at BSC and one that Grossman hopes will become a regular offering in the Department of Management and in the College’s Asian Studies Minor. Moreover, in summer 2008 he hopes to head up an international business-themed study tour of China. “I hope to build on the contacts that I have made at Wuyi University in Guangdong province. Of course, I know I can lean on [BSC History professor] Wing-kai To, too,” who has also run BSC study tours to Asian countries in the past few years. The course will incorporate study of Mandarin and Chinese business culture, and include site visits to factories and industrial parks, along with guest speakers.

Meantime, Dr. Grossman’s research has drawn the interest of others outside his network of cultivated contacts. His expertise was recently recognized by the U.S. Department of State’s International Information Program, when he was awarded a “U.S. Speaker and Specialist Grant” to conduct workshops for small and medium-sized businesses in northern India. During

March 2007, Grossman visited eight cities in India to deliver lectures and workshops at universities and technical institutes, and to industry groups on the emerging field of knowledge management. In summer 2007, Professor Grossman will travel to Singapore, where he plans to expand his research into government/business/academic partnerships in the development of knowledge management.

In at least one respect, business culture in East Asia is a good deal like what Grossman and his colleagues in Asian Studies and in the other international programs are constructing here, across disciplines, at Bridgewater State. “It’s not only about what you know, or where your particular expertise lies; it’s about developing networks of contacts, support and trust.” *Guanxi* indeed.

— Andrew Holman.