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Improving commerce curricula

RU Correspondent

RAJSHAHI: Dr. Gary N. McLean, Professor, Business Education and Co-ordinator, Training and Development, University of Minnesota spent his second summer in Bangladesh as a consultant for World Bank's Bangladesh Business Management Education and Training Project.

The BMET Project, which aims at improving the quality of commerce education in Bangladesh, also seeks to help commerce faculties organise seminars for managers in both public and private sector organisations and to help them write case studies describing problems currently faced by such organisations so that students can use them in the classroom and become better at problems solving and decision making in our context.

"If people who are moving in to responsible positions in business industry and government receive a strong background in commerce and economics, then the chances of a bright future for the country increase dramatically," feels Dr. McLean.

While most of his considerable experience in business education and management development had been in Canada, the United States and the West Indies, Dr. McLean's only Asian experience to date is in Bangladesh. "Each experience has been different because of the different needs of the people with whom I have been working and the cultural variations that influence business practices. When I was in Bangladesh last summer, much of my time was spent in Chittagong. While the experience there was quite similar to my experience here in Rajshahi, I have had support from a much larger number of faculty here than I had in Chittagong," Dr. McLean said.

When asked to compare his current experience with those of the Americans, Dr. McLean said, "Making comparisons across cultures is not easy to do, nor is it valid to draw many conclusions from such comparisons. In the US and Canada the case study method has been well-established for decades. My own business education took place in Canada in the early 1960s consisting almost entirely of the use of case studies. In both the US and Canada there is a long-standing tradition of managers and executives attending programmes sponsored by universities to receive in-service education. University faculty also frequently serve as consultants

to major corporations to deliver executive development programmes.

"In contrast, in countries that have relied more heavily on the British system of education, such as the West Indies and Bangladesh, such patterns have not prevailed.



University classes are often taught by people who do not have practical business experience and much of the material presented is from textbooks without devoid of practical experience. As a result much of the education of potential managers has

consisted of theory only, most of which is based on research conducted in other cultures, primarily the U.S. and the U.K."

"Thus, it has been harder to bring about changes here, though it was perhaps more important to bring academic and business/industry together and to underscore the importance of both theory and practice for both groups.

"Both the methods are important and both should be used. The lecture method can be very appropriate if 'textbook learning' is combined with practical, real-life situations of Bangladesh organisations," Dr. McLean said. "Combining the traditional with case studies permits the strengths of each to support the other. The secret is to improve the traditional method and combine its use with the case study approach. It is being done here. I am arranged at how quickly major adjustments are being made here and hope that both academics and business/industry will remain committed to bridging the gap."