

## News Release

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### **IU Kokomo students immerse in Turkish culture, business**

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — Steve Vas is now an expert on Turkey. After spending eight days there, visiting businesses, meeting people, and making connections, he received first-hand experiences that couldn't happen in the classroom.

"It's one thing to read about business in a textbook, but we got a sense of how the principles we learn are applied in real life," Vas said, who traveled with students from the Indiana University Kokomo School of Business. "It gives you a third dimension to your education, plus it's a lot of fun. This was an opportunity I wouldn't get in most places."

Vas, along with 17 other students and two faculty members, also witnessed history while in Istanbul, as anti-government protests broke out during their final days in the capital.

It started as a protest against planned redevelopment of Taksim Gezi Park, and grew, as participants began expressing concerns about increasingly religious overtones of new laws. Turkey has traditionally been a secular state.

"It became a protest about protecting the separation between church and state," Vas said. "They are defending their democracy. It was kind of exciting to witness it in person."

Linda Ficht, associate professor of business law, planned the trip, and was worried the unrest would ruin it. She canceled their free time in the city, keeping everyone at their hotel, as a precaution.

"We were catty corner to the park, and could watch the protests from a safe vantage point," she said. "We were able to see a revolution in the making, civil rights in the making. The students were excited about it."

Before the protests, students spent seven days visiting American and Turkish-owned businesses, meeting IU alumni, and touring cultural sites in Turkey. Ficht's goal in planning the trip was for students to get out of the classroom and meet real people in another country.

"The lens you view business with changes once you go abroad," she said. "It is important to see first-hand what is happening in other countries. When you immerse yourself, you see it up close. You talk to the people, you deal with the currency exchange rate, and you live it. It takes what you are learning from theory to real experience. You can't read that personal experience in a textbook."

They visited American companies, including Starbucks, Price Waterhouse Cooper and Disney, and also met with representatives of domestically owned businesses.

Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) student Gabby VanAlstine, from Noblesville, was interested to learn from one female business leader that while only 20 percent of Turkey's women are in the workforce, about 65 percent of the country's top executives are women.

"I loved Turkey, but that made me even admire it more," she said. "They've recognized the value of women in the workplace."

She believes foreign study is an important part of business education, and said Turkey was an excellent choice for the School of Business' first-ever overseas trip.

"Turkey is quickly becoming a global force economically," she said. "Any time you go to a foreign country, it changes your life. It takes you out of everything you know, and everything you are used to, and makes you realize there is a whole other world out there."

Talal Al Hammad, an M.B.A. student from Saudi Arabia, has been to Turkey many times, as it is a favorite vacation destination in his country. He said, though, it was a different experience visiting businesses rather than being a tourist. He appreciated people taking time to talk to students about their companies, and how they've succeeded.

"This trip covered so many of the topics we study in our classes, like production, brand name, business law, marketing, and international business," he said. "This trip took us beyond the academic courses. We met actual business people and learned how they are facing real problems on the ground, and what they are doing to solve those problems."

An unexpected benefit of the trip was that the Saudi and American students forged closer ties, he said.

“Before, maybe we were shy about interacting with them,” he said. “Now we are all networking, we’re all Facebook friends, we text each other, and we call each other. We’ve been there, but seeing it through American eyes, it was really exciting for us. We learned we share the same values, but because we live in different places, we share those values in different ways. This trip changed something between us, in a good way.”

He owns a business in Saudi Arabia, and was pleased to make contacts on the trip that will be useful to him when he earns his degree and returns home. He especially appreciated meeting members of the IU Alumni Association in Turkey.

“They all have experience in many sectors, and some of them want to explore the Saudi market,” he said. “Now we will have IU in common to make those connections.”

In addition to meeting business executives, Vas, a senior from Kokomo, enjoyed learning more about Turkey’s culture, especially how eastern and western ideas connect in Istanbul.

“It’s the only city where you will see a women in a burqa walking next to a woman in a mini skirt,” he said. “It’s the most western country in the east, and the most eastern country in the west. “

Ficht hopes to return to Turkey with students in the future. She is just starting to plan a trip to Prague, Czech Republic, in 2015. Her own trip to Prague while she was an M.B.A. student made her a strong believer in overseas study.

“If you go, and you participate as a student, not a tourist, you will be changed by the experience,” she said. “Once you get home, and you start to think about what you saw and what you did, that’s when the transformation happens.”

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*

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