

# **The Soft Landings Curriculum of U.S.-China Entrepreneurship<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

Soft landing is a process which helps a company from one country to land softly – without crashing, into the market of another country. The objective of the soft landing curriculum is to provide a platform for students at various levels (undergraduate, graduate, and executive education) and business communities to engage in entrepreneurship in emerging markets. The E. J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University in U.S., in collaboration with its partners in emerging markets such as China and Brazil, has developed an action-oriented program to achieve this objective. The program enables the students and the Louisiana communities to explore business opportunities and develop new ventures in emerging markets. To perfect the curriculum, specific projects on emerging markets opportunities are pursued through the partnership with leading experts/organizations in the relevant areas. In addition to adding significant value to the development of the curriculum, each participant also helps in expanding the curriculum to its partners.

## **1. Introduction**

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The Soft Landings program (NBIA 2011), developed by the National Business Incubation Association, is a process helping a company from one country to land softly – without crashing, into the market of another country through a local incubator. The purpose is to help the Soft Landings company to reduce risks and costs and find business opportunities in the new market. There are two key success factors in the program (Mencin and Erikson 2009): (1) connecting the Soft Landings company with networks of key decision makers in the new market; and (2) providing services of revenue generation for the Soft Landings company. A major driver behind the two key success factors is talent retention and recruiting (Hansen et al. 2000). The objective of the Soft Landings Curriculum (SLC) is to provide a platform of cultivating talented people for the Soft Landings companies by linking university or college students at various levels (undergraduate, graduate, and executive education) with business communities engaging in the Soft Landings program.

Thanks to a grant from the Business and International Education of U.S. Department of Education, the E. J. Ourso College of Business, the School of Human Ecology, and the International Programs at Louisiana State University (LSU) in U.S., in collaboration with the partners in China, sought to cultivate global entrepreneurs through U.S.-China business education with three objectives: (1) develop basic Chinese language skills and vocabulary specific to a business context; (2) increase knowledge of Chinese culture, business, and professional etiquette and protocol; and (3) develop an import/export business plan between U.S. and China for the students' sponsoring companies in the U.S. Through this grant, we have developed an action-oriented SLC. In this paper, we outline a template that any university or trainer could adapt for teaching/training in engineering a SLC for cultivating global entrepreneurs in doing business with China.

## **2. The Soft Landings Curriculum**

The SLC enables LSU students and the Louisiana communities to explore business opportunities and develop new ventures in China through the following process:

- (1) Course content development: New courses on business opportunities related to China are developed. Examples are Entrepreneurship in China, Sourcing in China, and Emerging Markets and Supply Chain Opportunities.
- (2) Social network development: Guests with success stories of doing business with China are invited to speak in China related classes. Seminars on Doing Business with China for students, faculty, and Louisiana business communities are held. They provide opportunities, such as internships, for students to network with business people. In addition, international resources such as Chinese students at LSU and their networked resources are leveraged to help interested students and faculty to explore business opportunities in China.
- (3) Business trips to China: A major purpose of the trips is to help students to connect with networks of key decision makers in the China markets. To make the trips fruitful, three types of seminars are delivered for participants: Pre-trip seminar, focusing on the social and cultural aspects; During-trip seminar, focusing on the business opportunities; and Post-trip seminar, focusing on "What's next?" Students also learn two very important skills: how to be self-sufficient, e.g., find ways to reduce the costs of traveling and fund the trips, and sustainable, e.g., planning a trip well which leads to opportunities for future trips.

- (4) Business plan development: Individual coaching to advance a student's business interest is engaged with the goal of developing a well-thought business plan.
- (5) New business incubation: A promising business plan is incubated at the Student Incubator at the Louisiana Business and Technology Center to reduce operation cost and business risk by sharing and leveraging the network resources at the incubator.
- (6) Continuing resources leveraging for business advancement in emerging markets: Resource portfolios are developed to enable incubated companies to perfect the business process and land the business softly in emerging markets. For examples, resource portfolios at LSU include talented students; networks of alumni; and a large population of international students and faculty originally from emerging markets. Resource portfolios of Louisiana Business and Technology Center include networks of national and international incubators.

To perfect the curriculum, specific projects on China opportunities are pursued through the partnership with leading experts/organizations in the relevant areas. Consider, as an example, a recent project entitled "Senior Care Supply Chain Management: A Framework for Knowledge Dissemination in China." There is a growing population of seniors in China<sup>2</sup>. It has been predicted that Chinese senior population over the age of 65 will grow in a fast pace to 247 million in thirty years<sup>3</sup>. This phenomenon renders increasingly complicated new social issues. One of the issues requiring immediate planning is to develop comprehensive institutional senior care provisions and system<sup>4</sup>. Our project intends to identify a comprehensive approach to developing institutional senior care provisions and system in China from the perspective of supply chain management. We propose a senior care supply chain management model based on previous related research<sup>5</sup>. The goal of the project is to identify global best practices of senior care supply chain management and develop a framework for disseminating the best practices knowledge for senior care supply chain development in China.

The curriculum is delivered through the collaboration of the following entities:

- (1) *The Emerging Markets Initiative*: The Initiative has developed seminars including courses and resources available for Doing Business with Emerging Markets.
- (2) *The Flores MBA Program*: The Program, ranked 26<sup>th</sup> in 2009 by Forbes, provides the linkages to business communities, including the development of soft landing curricula for Fulltime, Part-Time, and Executive MBA students. The Program also organizes business trips to emerging markets.
- (3) *The Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute*: The outstanding success of SEI allowed LSU to be ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> as America's most entrepreneurial campus by the Princeton Review and Forbes in 2004. SEI organizes seminars, provides business plan development advice, and holds globally recognized training programs in franchising which is gaining popularity in emerging markets.
- (4) *The Louisiana Business Technology Center*: The Center, designated the 2005 Technology Incubator of the Year, provides incubating facilities that assure the successful implementation of business plans developed by the soft landing participants. The LSU

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<sup>2</sup> Xinhua, 2008. China Has the Fastest Aging Population in the World *China Daily*.

<sup>3</sup> Li, J. 2007. China's Lopsided Population Pyramid. *China Security*, 3, 54-65.

<sup>4</sup> Xinhua, 2009. China to improve social welfare for seniors. *China Daily*, Feb 6.

<sup>5</sup> Chen, Y.-S. and Lin, Y. 2009. Supply Chain Models in Senior Care Management. *Journal of the Chinese Institute of Industrial Engineers*, 26, 184-194.

business incubator also provides space and services to companies from emerging markets or joint ventures with U.S. firms to give them a starting place in which to develop their businesses in U.S.

- (5) *The International Programs at LSU*: The Programs leverage the network resources of LSU international students from emerging markets. The Programs also provide the linkages to the international business programs at junior and community colleges, and at undergraduate and graduate schools of business interested in helping their business communities to develop soft landing curricula.
- (6) *The Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing, China*: Through LSU's partnership with this institution, CUFEC will develop Chinese business networks for the soft landing participants, furnish facilities for scheduled activities in China, and provide courses in Chinese language for business.
- (7) *The University of São Paulo in Brazil*: Through LSU's partnership with this institution, USP will develop Brazilian business networks for the soft landing participants, furnish facilities for scheduled activities in Brazil, and provide courses in Portuguese language for business.
- (8) *The Chang Gung University, a part of Formosa Plastics Group in Taiwan*: FPG transformed the health care industry in Taiwan and is taking the lead in addressing the senior care supply chain management issues in Taiwan. CGU plays a vital role in developing the Senior Care Supply Chain Management project.

### **3. Statement of Impact And Benefits for Instructors, Students, And Other Participants**

#### **Statement of Impact**

In order to successfully conduct business in an emerging market, students must acquire knowledge (such as language, economy, business, and culture) and must have the opportunity for hands-on experience in the emerging market. In a similar manner, Louisiana business communities need to acquire knowledge and skills with respect to doing business with emerging markets in order to prepare them to strategically expand their businesses into emerging markets. The soft landing curriculum is designed to take advantage of resources from the participating organizations with the impact of enriching our students' educational experience and enabling Louisiana business communities to engage in emerging markets opportunities. Its significant impact is achieved by:

- (1) Integrating the ongoing efforts of several vibrant entities to enhance awareness of the strategic importance of trade relationships between the U.S. and emerging markets and to promote international business education in Louisiana in order to cultivate more entrepreneurial potential in a global marketplace;
- (2) Bridging the gap between the manpower and information needs of Louisiana businesses and LSU's emerging markets business education curricula and programs;
- (3) Developing a long-term constructive relationship with academic institutions and the business communities in emerging markets in order to promote international business education and global business in Louisiana in a sustainable manner.

#### **Benefits for Instructors, Students, And Other Participants**

This action-oriented program enhances our higher education curriculum and instructional effectiveness by providing the following benefits for instructors, students, and other major participants:

- (1) Students at various levels (undergraduate, graduate, and executive education). Our primary goal is to enhance and enrich the business education experience of LSU students in order to produce the next generation of global entrepreneurs and corporate CEOs. In addition to learning real-life business practices in the global context, the curriculum provides the ideal combination of theoretical knowledge, practice, and networking opportunities to prepare students to confront successfully and confidently the challenges and opportunities presented by the global marketplace.
- (2) State of Louisiana. The State of Louisiana, engaging in economic recovery from the damages by Hurricane Katrina and Rita, has a lot to gain from the soft landing curriculum. State entities focused on business and commerce will benefit immensely through the increased linkages and business opportunities created by the proposed program.
- (3) Louisiana certified minority, women-owned, and small businesses. The soft landing curriculum provides a direct link between Louisiana certified minority, women-owned, and small businesses and resources in emerging markets. For example, this linkage enables those businesses to gain access to high-quality and low-cost products directly from reputable producers in China. As such, these small businesses will become competitive suppliers for major U.S. corporations.
- (4) U.S. Corporations. Doing more business with certified minority and women owned businesses in Louisiana would add value to corporate America. Working through the soft landing curriculum, U.S. corporations can take advantage of some of the best supplier diversity programs through sponsoring entrepreneurial LSU students to travel to emerging markets.
- (5) Emerging markets businesses interested in going global. Louisiana companies can enjoy successes in the global market by working together with Emerging Markets firms. This can be accomplished through linking those firms with Louisiana certified minority and women owned businesses that have extensive knowledge of the U.S. and international markets, and speak English when presenting products and services to the U.S. buyers.
- (6) Instructors involved in the developing and teaching soft landing curriculum. The knowledge accumulated and networked relationships built through the curriculum will be documented on an Internet-based knowledge repository. This will help the instructors to teach the curriculum more efficiently and effectively. In addition, the enlarged number of participating companies in U.S. and Emerging Markets will be very valuable for conducting research in enhancing the curriculum.

#### **4. Brief Outline of Topics to be Covered in the Presentation**

The following three experiences of implementing the soft landing curriculum will be discussed in more detail during the presentation: (1) grant submissions to fund the activities; (2) leveraging resources to expand the curriculum; and (3) enhancing the curriculum with significant projects in Emerging Markets.

#### **Grant Submissions to Fund the Activities**

The soft landing curriculum is developed based on two principles: self-sufficient and sustainable. Seeking grants to fund curriculum activities is a major source of self-sufficiency. For example, an earlier version of the curriculum was partially funded by a grant from the Business and International Education of U.S. Department of Education, entitled "Cultivating Global Entrepreneurs through U.S.-China Business Education at Louisiana State University." The project sought to establish a non-traditional internship program for LSU students to develop Chinese language skills and increase knowledge of Chinese business and culture. The project enables LSU students to enroll in a Chinese language course; enroll in LSU courses on global trade and doing business with China; work with Chinese Executive MBA and MBA students to jointly identify business opportunities; meet with Chinese executives; meet with Chinese government officials; and develop business plans for the U.S. companies they represent with respect to the business opportunities in China. Below are some of the accomplishments:

- (1) New courses on doing business with China were developed. A student's research project on U.S.-China relations was presented at Harvard<sup>6</sup>. Internship in China was developed<sup>7</sup>.
- (2) A seminar for students, faculty, and the Louisiana business community on Doing Business with China was held in February 2009. A new one will be held in February 2010.
- (3) Four business trips to China were held with one trip attended by the Mayor<sup>8</sup>.
- (4) One business plan was implemented with the business incubated<sup>9</sup> at the Louisiana Business Technology Center.
- (5) The China Public Livelihood Economy Research Center<sup>10</sup> was established at Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing, China to intensify the joint development of the curriculum.
- (6) Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil joined the soft landing partnership<sup>11</sup>.

### **Leveraging Resources to Expand The Curriculum**

In order to make the curriculum sustainable, efforts of leveraging resources to expand the curriculum are constantly being engaged. Below are some examples:

- (1) Leverage LSU E. J. Ourso College's nationally-recognized programs, such as Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute and Louisiana Business Technology Center, by participating in the collaborative projects with the emerging markets partners. For example, the International Franchise Forum, a program of the Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute, has an online component that can be utilized by potential foreign franchisees or franchisors affiliated with our partners in developing their business plans.
- (2) Leverage LSU's diverse programs to add value to and enrich the collaborative projects with the emerging markets partners. For example, with the mission of improving life quality, the School of Human Ecology at LSU promotes micro- and home-based enterprises and social entrepreneurship via service learning which is quite important in emerging markets. In fact, the School of Human Ecology is instrumental in our winning the grant from the Business and International Education of U.S. Department of Education and the establishment of the China

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<sup>6</sup> [www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.03.27\\_Yuan\\_Harvard.asp?dept=64](http://www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.03.27_Yuan_Harvard.asp?dept=64)

<sup>7</sup> [www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2007.11.27\\_Hicks\\_China.asp?dept=64](http://www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2007.11.27_Hicks_China.asp?dept=64)

<sup>8</sup> [www.theadvocate.com/news/politics/43325307.html?showAll=y&c=y](http://www.theadvocate.com/news/politics/43325307.html?showAll=y&c=y)

<sup>9</sup> [www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.04.09\\_Far\\_East\\_Student.asp?dept=64](http://www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.04.09_Far_East_Student.asp?dept=64)

<sup>10</sup> [www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.08.14\\_China.asp?dept=64](http://www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.08.14_China.asp?dept=64)

<sup>11</sup> [www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.11.23\\_Deans\\_Seminar\\_Series.asp?dept=64](http://www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.11.23_Deans_Seminar_Series.asp?dept=64)

Public Livelihood Economy Research Center at Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing, China.

- (3) Leverage the international students at LSU from Emerging Markets to participate in the curriculum development. For example, the Mandarin Association of Language and Life has partnership with the Chinese Students and Scholars Association (with close to 400 members, mainly graduate students) to develop a Buddy Program which helps U.S. students to learn the Chinese language on the LSU campus. The Buddy Program is very significant in enriching the soft landing curriculum.

## **5. Directions on How Participants Can Use the Tool, Including URLs for Any Website Materials**

The knowledge accumulated and networked relationships built through the curriculum will be documented and shared with those interested in emerging markets opportunities. They include course syllabi, invited presentations, past seminars, success stories, and other resources. For example, we are in the process of sharing the curriculum with the international business programs at junior and community colleges to develop four stages of Soft Landing the Import:

- (1) Recruit Emerging Markets students with parents interested in going global with their businesses.
- (2) Perfect their English at community colleges in Louisiana and prepare them to enter into LSU.
- (3) Help the students to write up business plans for their parents' businesses in U.S.
- (4) Incubate the business plans at Louisiana Business & Technology Center.

## **6. Conclusion**