

Soft Landings Curriculum of U.S.-China Entrepreneurship¹

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Abstract

Soft landings is a term from the aviation industry to denote a landing which does not destroy the aircraft. The term is commonly used in reference to China's economic growth cooling down to more sustainable levels without first falling into recession. However, the definition we use here, as described by the National Business Incubation Association, formally describes soft landings as a program designed to help a company from one country land softly into the market of another country through a local incubator. The objective of the Soft Landings Curriculum (SLC) is to provide a platform for students (undergraduate, graduate, and executive education) and business communities to engage in U.S.-China entrepreneurship. The E. J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University, in collaboration with business and education partners in China, have developed an action-oriented SLC that enables U.S. and Chinese students to explore business opportunities and develop new global ventures. The program has three basic components: (1) soft landings resources and networks forming the foundation; (2) the soft landings five-step process; and (3) a unique process for cultivating success stories via networking, team building, and coaching. The paper describes how the three elements help Chinese businesses invest in U.S. markets as well as U.S. businesses to invest in Chinese markets by reducing costs and risks and by cultivating talent to support growth opportunities.

Introduction

The soft landings program developed originally by the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA 2011) was designed to help a company from one country land softly into the market of another country through a local incubator. The purpose of the program is to help reduce risks and costs for the company as well as to find business opportunities in the new market. There are two key success factors in the soft landings program: (1) connecting the expanding company with key decision makers from relevant network supply chain companies in the new market and (2) providing revenue generation services for the company (Mencin and Erikson 2009). A major driver behind the two key success factors is global talent retention and recruiting (Hansen et al. 2000; McLean and McLean 2001; Beebe, et al. 2006).

The objective of the Soft Landings Curriculum (SLC) (Chen et al. 2010; Liu et al. 2010) is to provide a curricular platform for cultivating talented people for the expanding companies by linking college students at various levels (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, and executive education) with business communities engaging in the soft landings program. The SLC enables the company to reduce risks and costs, find business opportunities, and identify talented people for its new business venture. Moreover, the participating students are able to (1) network with key decision makers at both the expanding company and the supply chain companies; (2) engage in developing revenue generation models for the expanding company; (3) earn income or internships; (4) become employees or partners of the expanding company; and (5) create their own businesses by leveraging the networked resources developed in the course of participation. The SLC program achieves a win-win situation for everyone involved.

In this paper we discuss how the SLC actually works at LSU. Silberman (2006, p.158-159) raises several questions that should be taken into account when shaping and designing active learning experiences: (1) Does the design achieve the activity's objective? (2) What knowledge or skill level does the design require of participants? (3) How much time will it take? (4) Is the design slow or fast-paced? (5) Is it suited to the size of the group? (6) What skills are required to conduct the design? With that in mind, specifically, we answer the following eight questions with the goal that the lessons learned at LSU could be a real aid for those who might want to set up a similar approach at their own universities.

- What components are necessary for developing an SLC?
- How do we develop an SLC?
- What do the students do from week to week and how do their activities tie into social networking and linking up with local incubators and Chinese student partners.
- How do the students get from making contacts with Chinese students to doing actual projects with real companies?
- How is a trip to China organized and how is it funded?
- At what point do the students develop their business plans?
- Are case studies available that describe these success stories?
- What kinds of area resources are essential in making this kind of course a success?

1. What components are necessary for developing an SLC?

There are three major components of an SLC: first, companies interested in expanding their businesses into other countries; second, local incubators available to assist in the expansion; and third, curricular programs allowing students to help companies land softly into local incubators. In this section, we discuss how we start on these three components.

Companies Interested in Soft Landings to Expand Their Business

In their book on how China's cost innovation is changing global competition, Zeng and Williamson (2007) identify the evolution of foreign multinationals' business relationship with China in the following four stages: (1) made in China, using China to manufacture their products for the global markets; (2) market in China, selling products to the rising domestic market in China; (3) innovation in China, investing in R&D, design, and branding to innovate and lead in China; and (4) global brands from China, selling globally products originated and successfully marketed in China. Industries on the frontier of this evolution include textile and apparel, shoes, toys, consumer electronics, home appliances, and personal computers. The need to transform from Made-in-China to Global-Brands-from-China is discussed by Harney's book on China Price (2008), where she argues that China is losing her cost advantage. With the recent endorsement of China's 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), we see a clearer plan for this transformation, especially with regards to the Chinese market and Chinese innovation (KPMG 2011).

The transformation of China's economy means increased opportunities for U.S.-China entrepreneurship. In particular, there will be more U.S. companies in need of soft landings into the China market and more Chinese companies in need of soft landings into the U.S. market. There are various ways to engage with these companies. Here are some of our examples:

- Through the networks of the International Franchise Forum, a component of Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute at LSU, we have received soft landings requests from several U.S.-based franchise companies interested in the growing consumer markets in China (KPMG 2011).
- Through the networks of our partners in China, we have received the soft landings requests from several Chinese companies interested in the U.S. markets, e.g., clean energy and senior care.
- Through our alumni networks we have received the soft landings requests from U.S.-to-China and China-to-U.S. companies. For example, an EMBA alumnus, who is a physician, is interested in the market opportunities of health care in China (KPMG 2011). Another example, a student from China is interested in expanding his family business into the U.S.

Local Incubators Available to Assist Soft Landings

Local incubators for soft landings are those having the capacity of helping foreign companies develop their new local markets through their incubators. Consider, as an example, Louisiana Business and Technology Center (LBTC), a local incubator at LSU. In operation since 1988, LBTC was selected as the 2005 Technology Incubator of the Year by the National Business Incubation Association. In 2006, LBTC won the Excalibur Award from the Association of University Research Parks due to its leadership in housing numerous technology

companies displaced by hurricanes during the post-Katrina and Rita period. More significantly, LBTC's mobile classroom program received the 2009 Excellence in Rural Economic Development award by the U.S. Economic Development Administration.

LBTC's capacity of helping companies develop new markets consists of three pillars:

- Business incubation services: These services include facilities, management and technical assistance, financial analysis, access to capital, referral to fee-based professional and advisor resources, technology transfer and commercialization assistance, and entrepreneurial educational training.
- Business counseling and networking: These services include offering seminars and workshops on current practices and changing trends, providing networking opportunities to gain resources, providing access to resources and expertise within the federal laboratory system, outreach to the rural communities in Louisiana through the mobile classroom, business emergency operations, and providing a key link between LSU and business communities for joint venture exploration and program development in the U.S. and China.
- Talent cultivation and recruiting: LBTC's regional, national, and international resources and networks provide fertile ground to cultivate talents for expanding companies. Consider three examples. First, MBA students with qualified skills work as business development counselor assistants at LBTC. Second, LBTC works closely with LSU's Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute's Entrepreneurship Fellow Program to provide students with the opportunity to network with and be mentored by top executives. It thereby gives these students an extra edge in developing their business plans. Third, LBTC provides a Student Incubator to help students develop and advance their business plans.

Curriculum Designed to Help Foreign Companies to Land Softly

Based on the literature review, a meaningful SLC shall cultivate talents (Hansen et al. 2000; McLean and McLean 2001; Beebe, et al. 2006) who can help soft landings companies get connected with key decision makers within the supply chain in the new market and provide revenue generation services for the soft landings company (Mencin and Erikson 2009).

An SLC can be interpreted as a strategy for instruction leading to learning. According to Smith and Ragan (2005) instructional design "refers to the systematic and reflective process of translating principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials, activities, information resources, and evaluation." Considering their concepts for design and instruction, it is possible to rephrase, saying that instructional design is the field responsible for the process, activities and people engaged to improve the quality of their subsequent creations in order to develop and deliver information and outputs that are created to facilitate attainment of intended and specific learning goals. Based on the process involved, instructional design is divided into three major activities, which are to perform an instructional analysis, to develop an instructional strategy and to develop and conduct an evaluation. The first activity aims to answer "where we are going", the second "how we will get there" and the third "how we will know when we are there". The instructional design structure is based on learning that meets learners' needs.

With this background of instructional design in mind, we have developed a five-step SLC:

- Step 1: Develop social networking opportunities for LSU students to learn the *needs* of U.S. decision makers interested in doing business in China as well as Chinese decision makers interested in doing business in the U.S.
- Step 2: Develop a social media platform, like Twitter, Facebook or Skype, for U.S. students to communicate with Chinese students at partnering universities and explore *solutions* to the needs identified in the first step.
- Step 3: Develop student mobility for students to visit and network with the decision makers in the U.S.-China *supply chains* related to the solutions explored in the second step.
- Step 4: Assist students to develop robust *business plans*.
- Step 5: Work with our soft landings clients and student ambassadors to build their businesses in the U.S. or China utilizing the *local incubators*.

Due to the effects of the recession on higher education, we realized at the outset in Spring 2007 that in order for the SLC program to be sustainable, we needed to be self-sufficient. Fortunately, we have been graced with collaborative partners who are willing to share resources and move the SLC program forward. Specifically, in collaboration with partners in China, this action-oriented SLC program is the concerted effort of the following entities at LSU:

- (1) *The Emerging Markets Initiative*: The Initiative has developed courses and resources for doing business with emerging markets.
- (2) *The Flores MBA Program*: The Program, ranked 31st in 2010 by Forbes, provides the linkages to business communities, including the development of soft landings 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 3rd as America's most entrepreneurial campus by the Princeton Review and Forbes in 2004. SEI organizes seminars and provides business plan development advice.
- (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 soft landings participants. The LSU 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 international business programs around the world.

2. How Do We Develop the SLC?

In order to move the SLC program forward, we have developed a rich repository of resources and networks focused on U.S.-China business education and entrepreneurship. The resources include a knowledge repository of courses and cases on U.S.-China business opportunities. Consider, for examples, the following three courses:

- Sourcing in China: Sourcing plays a vital role in global business competition. Understanding how sourcing in China works and doesn't work is critical for firms seeking to thrive in the 21st century. Students take this course to understand the general characteristics behind the successes and failures of sourcing in China and show what firms can learn to succeed in executing their sourcing strategies. The students will explore opportunities of helping U.S. companies choose strategic partners and suppliers in China.
- Entrepreneurship in China: Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in modern Chinese business. Understanding how Chinese entrepreneurs thrive is critical for foreign firms seeking to grow in China. Students take this course to understand the general characteristics behind successful Chinese entrepreneurs and to show what foreign firms can learn from them to thrive in China.
- Emerging Markets and Supply Chain Opportunities: The rise of emerging markets, such as China, India and Brazil, produces various entrepreneurial opportunities in global supply chains. The course seeks to understand the general characteristics behind successful business cases in retail global supply chain, product life cycle and global supply chain, supplier clusters and emerging markets, information technology and global supply chain, life-saving supply chain and disaster management, and greening the global supply chain. The students explore entrepreneurial opportunities for local communities playing the role of growing the U.S. economy.

U.S.-China business education and entrepreneurship networks include key decision makers of U.S.-China businesses, success storytellers and their networks. The networks are developed from various sources, including LSU international alumni networks, Chinese faculty, LSU students from China, members of the globalization committee in the Dean's Advisory Board, the Louisiana Business & Technology Center, the Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce, the Baton Rouge Center for World Affairs, Social Entrepreneurs of New Orleans, the Louisiana Cultural Economy and World Cultural Economic Forum, the Port of New Orleans, and the World Trade Center in New Orleans.

3. What Do the Students Do?

The first step of the SLC process is to develop social networking opportunities for LSU students to learn the *needs* of U.S. decision makers interested in doing business in China as well as Chinese decision makers interested in doing business in the U.S. In this section, we discuss what students do from week to week and how their activities tie into social networking, linking up with local incubators and Chinese student partners.

Social Networking

Three effective networking approaches for students to learn the needs of decision makers are the following:

- Invite interested decision makers to speak at related classes, such as Sourcing in China and Entrepreneurship in China, to discuss what they need and what incentives they can offer for inspired students to pursue further to the next steps.

- Invite success storytellers as speakers to inspire the students about their journeys and connect the students to their networks.
- Hold seminars and workshops on Doing Business with China for students, faculty, and Louisiana business communities. They provide opportunities, such as internships, for students to network with business people.

Consider, for examples, the needs of U.S. franchises interested in doing business in China. There are three general needs. The first need is to help them establish the company headquarters in China through trustful Chinese partners in legal, site selection, human resources, supply chain, and marketing. The second need is to help them develop the franchise strategy to grow the business, including standard operation procedures for franchised units and franchisee selection. The third need is to help them develop R&D for product development. This is because the Chinese market is highly competitive and intellectual property protections are relatively loose. A common strategy to address the two issues is to constantly develop new products which Chinese consumers like.

As for Chinese decision makers interested in doing business with U.S., here are some examples:

- A growing natural medicine company in Beijing. The company has R&D, manufacturing facilities, and a hospital focused on natural medicine. The company is growing into the vertical market in natural medicine in China by, mergers and acquisitions and purchasing land for growing the herbs found in natural medicine. Seeing the demand of natural medicine among the increased population of retired baby boomers in the U.S., a senior executive of the company visited LSU for six months in 2010 to develop collaborative projects with the teams, including faculty and students, at LSU.
- A leading jean manufacturer in China. The owner has much knowledge and a strong network in the textile industry in China. By leveraging their networked resources, the company has developed a new fashion brand ready to go global. The owner visited LSU for three months in Spring 2011 with three objectives: exploring the market opportunities for the new brand, looking for U.S. brands with a rich history to adapt for China markets, and exporting good U.S. household brands to China's developing markets.
- A large solar energy component manufacturer in China. The company's raw materials come from a U.S.-based company specializing in turning sand into high quality silicon. The company is interested in expanding into the U.S. market by first finding solar panel installers and distributors here. Once they understand the market demands in U.S., they plan to invest in domestic solar panel manufacturing. It is worth noting that the owner's children are studying at LSU. They are expected to participate in the U.S. venture and eventually become executives of the company's U.S. office.

Week-to-Week Activities

Students inspired by the opportunities presented by the decision makers of an expanding company may work on a class project, individual or team to fully understand the needs of the company in the new market. The project includes five major questions:

- What are the demand and supply chains of the company in the home country?
- What is the current business model for revenue generation in the home country?

- What are the demand and supply chains of the company in the new market?
- What are potential revenue generation models in the new market through the local incubator?
- How can companies relate the findings from the first four questions to the specific needs of the decision makers?

The students have to present a weekly report summarizing their activities, findings, and questions. The students also have to make one mid-term presentation and another final presentation allowing them to learn how to effectively present what they found and gain valuable feedback from the audience, including classmates and the representatives of the soft landings companies. From time to time, Chinese student partners at LSU or in China are introduced to help answer the questions.

4. From Networking to Real Projects

The second step of the SLC process is to develop a social media platform for U.S. students to communicate with Chinese students at partnering universities and explore *solutions* to the needs identified in the first step. In this section, we discuss how the students get from making contacts with Chinese students to doing actual projects with real companies.

A key feature of the SLC program is that international resources such as Chinese students at LSU, businesses, and their networked resources are leveraged to help interested students to explore solutions to the needs. For example, consider the natural medicine company in Beijing described above. The interested U.S. students need to first know the company's demand and supply chains in terms of history, management, market shares, etc. The visit of the senior executive at LSU was helpful in providing needed information. However, the serious U.S. students still needed to use all means available, such as social and physical networking in China and LSU, to fully understand the company.

Another question was to explore how the natural medicine products of the company can fit U.S. markets. Three markets were identified and analyzed: drug, medicinal foods, and over-the-counter health supplements. The medicinal foods market was selected as a good target for the company's U.S. investments. In the course of exploring solutions for the company, other market opportunities were identified. For example, some U.S. entrepreneurs had patented natural medicine products, but they did not have the manufacturing capacities to make them. Those entrepreneurs were interested in having the Beijing company manufacture their products for the U.S. and China markets. Another example is that a senior care franchise in the U.S. was interested in the growing senior care market in China. The franchise company was interested in partnering with the Beijing company to venture into China's market.

5. Gaining Experience in China

The third step of the SLC process is to offer students a chance to visit China and network with the decision makers in the U.S.-China *supply chains* related to the solutions explored in the second step. In this section, we discuss how the trip is organized and how the trip is funded.

Trip Organization

The objective of the trip is to allow students to network with those decision makers and fine-tune their drafted solutions with real-life data and facts. Consider, for example, the natural medicine company in Beijing described above. During the senior executive's six months visit at LSU, we were able to meet with the key decision makers of the U.S. supply chain in the natural medicine industry. The meetings were arranged by our networked partners in U.S. Some participative students found the meetings very valuable. In return for our assistance, the Chinese senior executive arranged for our students and faculty to visit in the summer of 2010 the key supply chain companies in the Chinese natural medicine industry. The visits include (1) the herbal medicine city Anguo in Hebei, China, famous for its herbal medicines; (2) a top science park, where leading natural medicine R&D projects are developed; (3) the company's manufacturing facilities in Beijing, where we found that some of their sophisticated machineries were made in the U.S.; (4) the company's hospital in Beijing, where we saw lengthy processes for treating chronic diseases using Chinese acupuncture; (5) a U.S. company manufacturing capsules in China for the world market; (6) a large pharmaceutical logistics distribution company, where we saw highly automated processes handling the inventory and distribution of the products; and (7) a large natural medicine museum, where we saw how Chinese herbal medicine was developed and modernized. Most importantly, the students were able to meet, discuss, and network with the key decision makers in the vertical market of the natural medicine industry in China.

To make the trips to China fruitful, three types of preparations are needed by participants. Consider, for example, the LSU MBA study trip to China. First, we conduct a pre-trip seminar, focusing on linguistic, social and cultural aspects of China. The students are also required to read one or more books, such as *China Shakes the World* (Kynge 2007), and write a report before the trip. Second is the *Doing Business in China* group study journal. All students are involved in documenting their study trip experience in a group effort to include narrative and photos. Each group is assigned one of the following five topics discussed in *The China Rules* (Paine 2010): Dealing with Government, Managing Business Conduct, Developing the Workforce, Competing for Customers and Markets, and Coping with Complexity. The group members are responsible for answering the sub-questions associated with each topic for each company visited.

In addition to the assigned topic, each group will be responsible each day to summarize the specific learning that occurred during the day (including site visits, events, seminars or business meetings). Third is the group presentation, summarizing what they have learned during the trip and what they plan to do next. In addition, pictures from the trip will be used to help prepare a Shutterfly.com documentary. This book will be used for promotional purposes targeting both potential MBA prospects as well as potential International Study Trip sponsors. The book will focus on the learning that has occurred during the trip, primarily regarding global business practices but is also reflective of history, culture, geography, politics, law, government, and language.

Trip Funding

Typically students have to pay for the trip on their own. Sometimes we are able to get some financial support from grants or private donations to partially cover travel expenses. For students serious about U.S.-China trade relationships and the opportunities the SLC program can bring, we encourage self-sufficiency. That is, we try to find funding sources from which the findings of their China trips can add value to them. In addition, we prepare trips well so that every fruitful trip may lead to opportunities of another trip funded by someone who can benefit the next time. t

6. Developing the Business Plans for Incubation

The fourth step of the SLC process is to help students develop robust *business plans*. Consider, for example, the leading jean manufacturer in China and the large solar energy component manufacturer in China described above. Three graduate students and two faculty members were involved in developing the business plan for the jean company's new brand to market in U.S. The business plan focused on the strategy of using social media to market its products. Two students and one faculty member were involved in developing the business plan for the solar energy company's market in the U.S.

The fifth step of SLC is to work with our soft landings clients and student ambassadors to build their businesses in U.S. or China through the *local incubators*. For example, the solar energy company in China established its U.S. business in March 2010 and incubated at the LSU incubator in January 2011. Through the SLC, the new company was able to reduce risks and costs and recruit human capital talent relatively easy.

7. Impact and Benefits of Cultivating Storytellers

Cultivating Storytellers

The SLC, empowered by the resources and networks as the foundation, has cultivated storytellers through networking, team building, and coaching in every step of companies' soft landings. Below are some examples:

- The Harvard Lady²: In a class analyzing the *needs* of U.S. decision makers interested in doing business in China, a motivated student was interested in the need of aligning companies' business strategies with the Chinese government's Five-Year plans. Her study led to a research paper, accepted and presented at the Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations Conference at Harvard University, regarding Google's censorship of information in China. This success storyteller, The Harvard Lady, set up as a role model to inspire others to win awards in other competitions.³
- The China Lady⁴: In exploring *solutions* for a Louisiana-based company to do business in China, an inspired student realized the importance of relationship building and the key role Mandarin plays in the process. She decided to take various Mandarin courses at LSU, attended a study abroad program in China, enrolled in Peking University, and maximized the utility of social media to engage in idea discussions with her friends in

² www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.03.27_Yuan_Harvard.asp?dept=64

³ www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2011.03.01_AKP.asp?dept=64

⁴ www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2007.11.27_Hicks_China.asp?dept=64

China. Due to her impressive proposal, this student, The China Lady, was hired as an intern in China to evaluate industry opportunities and explore synergies between the company and the Chinese market for possible expansion in the future.

- The Language Man⁵: In networking with U.S.-China *supplier chain* decision makers, a gifted student with strong language skills, The Language Man, was able to find a high-paying job in China selling environmental-control products to the global supply chains of multinationals. He also leveraged his supply chain networks to explore a side-business of his own.
- Step 4 – The Who Dat Pig⁶: Inspired by the New Orleans Saints’ victory in the Super Bowl, and their slogan “Who-Dat”, a highly-connected student partnered with an artistic relative and sourced help in China to quickly turn a class *business plan* into a real business.
- Step 5 – The Class-On-Demand Man⁷: During the financial crisis in 2008, an entrepreneurial student reflected on the lessons he learned in the Entrepreneurship in China class; specifically the Chinese character for crisis, which is made up of the symbols for danger and opportunity. This student, The Class-On-Demand Man, began to put a business plan together during his final semester at LSU and incorporated many of the ideas taught in class for the future expansion of his business. The business was incubated at the LSU *incubator* in early 2009. In addition to steadily growing his business, he also incubated another business at the incubator in late 2010. While enrolled in the class, he was afforded the opportunity to work with several students and business people from China. This real life experience gave him an understanding of China’s market. Seeing the increased number of U.S.-China businesses interested in soft landings through local incubators, he is planning to develop another business of providing online cross-cultural business etiquette training services for U.S. decision makers interested in doing business in China and Chinese decision makers interested in doing business in the U.S.

Impact and Benefits for Instructors, Students, and Other Participants

In order to successfully conduct business in the global economy, students must acquire international knowledge, including language, business and cultural etiquette, and must have the opportunity for hands-on experience in local markets. Similarly, business communities need to acquire international knowledge and skills with respect to doing business in local markets in order to prepare them to strategically expand their business in a global economy. The SLC is designed to take advantage of resources from the participating entities with the impact of enriching our students’ educational experience and enabling business communities to engage in global business opportunities. Its significant impact is achieved by:

- Integrating the ongoing efforts of several vibrant entities to enhance awareness of the strategic importance of trade relationships between the U.S. and China and to promote international business education in Louisiana in order to cultivate more business oriented entrepreneurial potential in a global marketplace.

⁵ www.classesondemand.org/videos/CCC_Unsecure/abb8b724867c4be6ac9791d5384fc952

⁶ www.whodatpig.com

⁷ www.bus.lsu.edu/students/news/stories/2009.04.09_Far_East_Student.asp?dept=64

- Bridging the gap between the manpower and information needs of Louisiana local businesses and U.S.-China business education curricula and programs.
- Developing a long-term constructive relationship with academic institutions and the business communities in China in order to promote international business education and global business in Louisiana in a sustainable manner.

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

- **Instructors involved in developing and teaching the SLC:** The knowledge accumulated and networked relationships built through the curriculum are documented in a knowledge repository. This will help the instructors teach the curriculum more efficiently and effectively. In addition, the enlarged number of participating companies in the U.S. and China will be valuable for conducting research towards enhancing the curriculum.
- **Students at various levels (undergraduate, graduate, and executive education):** 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.
- **The State of Louisiana:** The State of Louisiana, engaging in economic recovery from the damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, has a lot to gain from the SLC. State entities focused on business and commerce will benefit immensely through the increased linkages and business opportunities created by the proposed program.
- **Louisiana certified minority, women-owned, and small businesses in related sectors:** The SLC provides a direct link between certified minority, women-owned, and small businesses Louisiana and resources in China. For example, this linkage enables those businesses to gain access to high-quality and low-cost textile/apparel products directly from reputable producers in China. As such, these small businesses will become competitive suppliers for major U.S. fashion manufacturers and retailers.
- **U.S. Corporations:** Doing more business with certified minority and women owned businesses in Louisiana adds value to corporate America. Working through the SLC, U.S. corporations can take advantage of some of the best supplier diversity programs through sponsoring LSU students' travel to China.
- **Businesses in China interested in going global:** Many Chinese apparel manufacturers have competitive advantages of producing high quality products at lower costs than their counterparts in the U.S. These manufacturers are also looking for opportunities to work with the U.S. businesses on establishing their brands to compete in the China market. Business opportunities can be created or facilitated through linking Chinese fashion entrepreneurs with those firms with Louisiana certified minority and women owned businesses that have extensive knowledge of the U.S. and speak English when presenting products and services to U.S. customers.

8. Essential Area Resources

There are three essential area resources in making the SLC a success:

- **A local incubator with a proven track record of success:** The incubator plays two major roles: (1) connecting the soft landings company with the key decision makers from the relevant networked supply chain companies in the local market; and (2) providing revenue generation services for the soft landings company. The example at LSU is the Louisiana Business and Technology Center.
- **A U.S.-China business education program:** The program plays two major roles: (1) recruiting Chinese companies interested in soft landings their businesses in the U.S. and U.S. companies looking to do the same in the U.S.; and (2) developing U.S.-China curricula resources to cultivate students' capabilities to engage with soft landings companies. The example at LSU is the Emerging Markets Initiative in the Ourso College of Business.
- **An entrepreneurship program with a proven track record of success:** The program plays three major roles: (1) cultivating students' entrepreneurial skills; (2) coaching entrepreneurial students to develop business plans to be incubated at the Student Incubator; and (3) facilitating the communications between the entrepreneurial students interested in the SLC with the two essential area resources above. The example at LSU is the Stephenson Entrepreneurship Institute in the Ourso College of Business, as well as the Entrepreneurship specialization available to all MBA students.

9. Conclusion

Soft landings is a term from the aviation industry to denote a landing which does not destroy the aircraft. In our work, we use it to refer to a process which helps a company from one country land softly into the market of another country. The E. J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University, in collaboration with business and education partners in China, have developed an action-oriented Soft Landings Curriculum that enables U.S. and Chinese students to explore business opportunities and develop new global ventures by actively helping the Chinese businesses to invest in the U.S. and for U.S. businesses to invest in China. The SLC consists of three basic elements: (1) resources and networks for soft landings as the foundation; (2) five steps of soft landings; and (3) cultivating success storytellers through networking, team building, and coaching.

In their study of Chinese businesses investing in U.S., Kwan and Sauvart (2008) identified two major challenges: building human resource capacity and navigating overseas political environments. Based on the success of Japanese businesses investing in the U.S., they suggest that Chinese businesses understand the U.S. market and build key relationship within governments and communities and build positive social capital for their companies. The SLC enables the Chinese companies to understand the U.S. market and build key relationships within governments and communities through local incubators in the U.S. The SLC also enables U.S. companies to understand China's market and build key relationships within governments and communities through local incubators in China. By doing so, the costs and risks of investing in U.S. or China are significantly reduced. The SLC also allows the Chinese and U.S. companies to build positive social capital for their businesses by investing in university or college students through a five-step soft landings process. By doing so, the Chinese and U.S. companies are able to cultivate students for their talent recruiting and retention to feed growth opportunity. The SLC is a win-win program for everyone involved.

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