Far and Wide Orfalea students, staff and faculty circle the globe while engaging in immersive learning experiences throughout the year.

ORFALEA GOES GLOBAL

Students and faculty embrace opportunities waiting half a world away
On a foggy morning in December, a plane left the tarmac in San Francisco bound for Saigon with 25 Orfalea College of Business students on board. Two weeks later, those students landed in San Francisco again; each claiming they’d been changed forever by the experiences they had abroad. Exploring the cultural sites and business hubs of an emerging Vietnam and a thriving China gave each student the chance to learn that the world of business was bigger than they thought.

“My biggest takeaway was how much there is for me to learn about the world,” said Trenton Scharrenberg, a business administration sophomore. “But by traveling, meeting new people, and exploring, I’ll continue to become a more well-rounded and successful individual — both personally and professionally.”

Dean Scott Dawson, who led the trip to Asia, said that kind of big-picture perspective can’t always be taught in a lecture hall. He sees immersive international experience as a core component of Orfalea’s polytechnic edge over more traditional business programs.

“I think it’s essential that our students have opportunities to experience for themselves business within other cultures before they graduate,” said Dawson. “There are so many challenges and opportunities that globalization brings, and being career-ready means you aren’t afraid to embrace it all.”

Orfalea’s adventure to China and Vietnam was the first of a new wave of international excursions that are intended to encourage students to Learn by Doing in a global context. In 2016 alone, the college will offer five international field studies inside and outside of class to Brazil, Cuba, New Zealand, Germany and Argentina.

These trips are just one facet of the college’s efforts to infuse global insights into its learning community.

International Perspectives
The college has a long track record of weaving global concepts into its curriculum. More than 50 percent of Orfalea’s tenured or tenure-track faculty have strong international experience — studying, teaching or doing business in different countries. This translates into more diverse case studies, authors, guest speakers and resources integrated into the Cal Poly classroom setting.

And each year Orfalea’s faculty continue to seek new experiences beyond borders. This August, economics Professor Matt Cole and accounting Professor Kim Westermann plan to work with educators at the University of Aarhus in Denmark before Cole presents at the European Trade Study Group conference in Helsinki, Finland.

Scholarly Partnerships
Dean Dawson and Orfalea’s associate deans have established lasting partnerships with academic institutions across Europe and Asia. In the past year, college representatives have forged connections with the Stockholm School of Economics, the University of Milan, Munich University of Applied Science, Shanghai University of Finance & Economics, and the Central University of Finance and Economics in Beijing. As a result, Orfalea attracts multiple visiting professors each year who teach courses and team up to conduct meaningful research.

Collaboration continues to thrive with Orfalea’s closest partner, Politecnico di Milano in Italy. The two programs exchange students throughout the year and connect like-minded faculty; last year, Cal Poly management Professor Jean Francois Coget partnered with Milano’s Professor Michela Arnaboldi on a social media study that appeared in the peer-reviewed journal Organization Dynamics.

Study Abroad
For years, Orfalea Travel Grants have supported study abroad opportunities for students. Roughly 200 students from the college travel abroad each year, thanks to additional philanthropic funds. In 2015, a generous donation from alumnus Scott Cooper (Business Administration, ’91) sent 11 additional students to study in Australia, Spain, France and Italy.
Alumni Abroad
International programs have allowed Orfalea to reconnect its many alumni living and doing business abroad. Bill Chillingworth (Business Administration, ’78), co-founder and director of Dash Brands, organized an insider’s tour of Domino’s Pizza headquarters in China during the college’s trip in December. Chillingworth also shared valuable insights on breaking into the growing Chinese market — and culinary culture — with a new product. In Japan, alumnus Ayano Kumazawa (Business Administration, ’12) is helping Costco establish stores. Her real estate development position also closely surveys how wholesale shopping can mesh with the country’s culture and established shopping habits.

Once-in-a-Lifetime Field Studies
In addition to Asia, Orfalea sent students on the college’s first official trip to Cuba over spring break. The visit, which coincided with President Obama’s time in the country, gave students a rare glimpse into a nation emerging from isolation and searching for economic opportunities. Business meetings were paired with opportunities for students to experience Cuba’s cultural and historic legacy first-hand. Information systems Professor Barry Floyd, who led the excursion, plans to take another group of students in late 2016.

“After taking this trip, I want to spend at least some portion of my professional career working abroad. I want to be a small force in a movement to break down stereotypes about various cultures.”

— Brittany Oliveria, business student