

Business

Business with international accent

Brandeis program
is entry to
foreign markets

By Tom Reilly

STAFF WRITER

WALTHAM — If 1992 is going to be the year of Europe, then a group of Brandeis students is hoping that at least it will bring them a few good days.

The students, all master's degree candidates in the university's Lemberg Program in International Economics and Finance, are offering their expertise and contacts to local companies that want to get in at the beginning of the European economic union.

Two of the program's founders, one a native of Luxembourg and the other a graduate of Newton South High, say LINC Associates, a not-for-profit consulting group, is a chance to gain experience in the world of international business and building a network that helps local companies plant a foot in the European market.



STAFF PHOTO TODD MAGLIUZZI

LINC Associates, graduate students are part of a not-for-profit consulting group founded by graduate students of the Lemberg Program in International Economics and Finance at Brandeis University, are from left in front: Deborah Laffert, Adam Dacter, vice president; Alain Westat, president, Jonathan Samuelson, treasurer; and John K. Morris. Back row from left: Wilfred Chikagwa Jr., Nicolai Lachmann, Patrick Breslin, David Teff, and Peter Kotchen.

Adam Decter, the Newton native, says that since the project began in 1990, "I have ready taken away a tremendous amount... learning how to organize, how to work constructively with my peers."

Alain Mestat was born in Luxembourg and attended school in France before coming to Brandeis. Like Decter he hopes to turn his experience with LINC to a career in international business consulting.

LINC (the letters are not an acronym, Decter says) was inspired by student business consulting groups at European business schools, known as Junior Enterprises. "There are only two other American programs comparable to LINC, one at New York University and the other at the Wharton School of Business in Pennsylvania."

LINC aims to provide small and medium-sized companies with affordable and professional consulting and information services. The program's focus is on the countries of the European Community (the old Common Market) but there are LINC connections with the former Eastern Bloc as well as Latin America.

The 12 EC states are moving toward a single European market. Their plan to remove all

barriers to free trade movement of capital and people among the member states goes into effect at the end of this year.

"A lot of American firms look at Europe and they see trade barriers... but actually it will be much easier for Americans to market products," Mestat notes.

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When the EC unification goes into effect, instead of having to deal with the import codes and regulations of a dozen countries, "they just have to do it with one."

But that doesn't mean that a company won't need help in entering the market there. "There will still be 12 different submarkets," Mestat notes, each with its own language, customs and cultural preferences.

Decter and Mestat explain LINC the group, with its teams of student consultants, can provide a range of services to a company that has a product or service to market in Europe but a limited amount of money to spend.

Say, for example, an American company wants to market a cookie in France.

"We would subcontract that with one of our affiliates in Europe that would do product sampling and set up focus groups," Mestat says. They could provide information on

marketing, finance and international trade. Each one is, at least, bilingual. In addition each Lemberg student spends one semester abroad, and the program welcomes exchange students from 13 affiliated universities.

Each project the program accepts is evaluated by its managers. The project is then presented to prospective project leaders in the LINC program to submit a detailed business plan, and officers of the program meet with LINC teams on a weekly basis to discuss and monitor projects.

While these services might cost between \$100 to \$300 per hour by a professional business consultant, LINC Associates would charge a lump sum, probably under \$5,000.

The group has already taken on a couple of projects, one doing research in this country for a major German electronics maker.

For more information on the program, contact the LINC Associates at the Lemberg Program in International Economics and Finance at Sachar International Center, Brandeis University, Waltham, 61754-9110.

competing bakers, available suppliers of sugar and flour, taxes and legal regulations and advice on foreign business protocol. On this side of the Atlantic, the consultants would provide advice and support from their own perspective on such things as export strategy development as well as such services as translation of documents.

The consulting teams are made up of American and foreign master's candidates at Brandeis. (Half the members of the LINC program are from abroad.) Besides their degrees, all have work experience in a range of fields including consulting,