INTRODUCTION

The National Economics University (N.E.U.) in Hanoi, Vietnam, and Boise State University in Boise, Idaho (U.S.A.), have been partners since 1994 when Boise State University was invited to offer its A.C.S.B. accredited M.B.A. program in Vietnam. The project was to develop university teachers able to train Vietnam’s future managers who would lead the country into a market-oriented economy (Napier, Vu, Ngo, Nguyen, and Vu, 1997). The relationship included joint teaching and research, training, and cooperation in creating and building the N.E.U. Business School.

The present paper’s three sections examine the history of the National Economics University-Boise State University relationship, the processes of joint project management, ways the universities built a cooperative relationship — through exchanges and internships — joint teaching and research, training programs offered in the U.S. and Vietnam, university and college administrative support and advice, and professional staff mentoring and support. The paper closes with comments on “Lessons Learned” from organizational and individual perspectives.

VIETNAM’S RECENT HISTORY

Prior to the relationship, Vietnam had begun to move toward a market-oriented economy with the introduction of doi moi, or market renovation, in 1986. Prior to and just after this change, Vietnam had traded with and depended heavily upon the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for raw materials and goods, as well as job and educational opportunities. When the
former Soviet Union fell in 1989, the exchange of goods, materials, and people dwindled, forcing Vietnam to learn to conduct business elsewhere in the world. Vietnam progressed slowly toward a market-oriented economy until the early 1990s when government and communist party officials began to realize the need for educational reform to prepare managers for a global economy (Van Kopp, 1992).

The N.E.U. created a Centre for Management Training in 1990 to provide training for managers of state owned firms in areas of business, accounting, finance, and marketing. Subsequently, the government of Vietnam designated the N.E.U. to begin developing managers trained in modern management and business approaches through a $2 million project funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). The objective was to train thirty lecturers to an international standard, capable of developing their own M.B.A. program for Vietnamese managers. The degree granting institution was a Canadian university, in part because the U.S. embargo prohibited American universities from operating in Vietnam.

HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP

In fall 1993, an opportunistic introduction between the onsite project co-ordinator and a Boise State University professor led to a 12 week train-the-trainer workshop for the Vietnamese lecturers focusing on adult learning, training program design, presentation, and evaluation. Two of the four professors who ran the workshop, from Boise State University, got along well with the project co-ordinator, and offered to help if they could after the workshop.

When the relationship between the project contractor (Hong Kong University) and the degree granting institution faltered, the project coordinator and manager approached Boise State University in July 1994 about taking over the M.B.A. granting responsibilities. By mid-August, the deal was done: Boise State University’s M.B.A. degree would be offered at the N.E.U. in Vietnam.

Boise State’s quick reaction time is one reason the Boise State University-N.E.U. relationship worked well. Boise State’s willingness to take risks that are likely to pay off (Glassman, Neupert, Moore, Rossy, Napier, Harvey, and Jones, forthcoming) and Idaho’s small size, making it relatively easy to reach influential players, worked in its favor. Within two weeks of the offer, the Dean of the College of Business and Economics (C.O.B.E.) and the university Provost contacted key players in Idaho (i.e., about 30 key business leaders, the U.S. Senators and representatives, the governor and key officials, the State Board of Education members, and representatives of the M.I.A. and P.O.W. groups) to gauge reactions to the university taking on such a project; the positive reaction led administrators to accept the offer.