Marketing Professor Builds Real-World Connections for Students and Alumni

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Zafar Iqbal remembers the exact moment when he discovered the depth of his identity.

He was a teenager in the 1980s living in the pensioners’ paradise of Pune, India, when he turned on his television and saw pop icon Michael Jackson “moonwalk” backward across a stage. It was an image that resonated for Iqbal—he wanted to share in the individuality that he saw in American culture.

Iqbal, an associate professor of marketing at DePaul, says seeing such visions of uniqueness and originality spoke volumes to him as he struggled to find his identity in the formal Indian culture, where familial ties often override individual desires. “I grew up Indian,” Iqbal says, “but, in my mind, I’m more American because I always wanted to be an individual.”

Today, Iqbal is helping DePaul students, faculty and alumni discover their identities, both globally and professionally. Because of his cross-cultural experience, Iqbal was tapped by university officials to spearhead DePaul’s educational exchange initiatives with Symbiosis International University in Pune. To date, more than 100 students have traveled to India with Iqbal and Marketing Instructor Luis Larrea to attend classes, visit businesses and nonprofits, meet students and faculty, and learn about Indian culture. Since the partnership with Symbiosis began last year, several DePaul graduates are now working with the likes of Amazon and Groupon on their Indian-focused business initiatives.

When he’s not traversing the globe helping members of the DePaul community live and work in India or teaching business classes, for which he has won multiple teaching awards, Iqbal is conducting essential research for marketing professionals. Currently, he’s working on a large-scale research project to identify and categorize different types of marketing careers.

“There’s not really much (information) out there about what different types of marketing careers exist today,” says Iqbal, noting that the field has expanded rapidly beyond advertising and sales in recent years. According to Iqbal, the job title of marketer is an opaque banner that obscures a host of extremely diverse job types.

Iqbal surveyed 400 DePaul marketing alumni about their careers to develop a career profile for what he has defined as the 14 categories of marketing jobs. “The research will serve as a repository for current students or alumni to understand the different job types that are in marketing and visualize a day in the life of those job types,” Iqbal says.

Decades ago, Iqbal came to the United States seeking his true purpose. Now, he spends his days helping DePaul students and alumni find theirs. Iqbal says, “This is not work, this is a mission.”