Professors R. Rajagopal and Edwin Brands will team teach the winter Course 44:197 International Development: Microfinance for Women-run Enterprises (to be cross listed as 165:197). The concept of financing and underwriting the enterprises of the rural poor has evolved from a few experimental outreach projects to modern multi-billion dollar global programs. There is an extensive body of literature in this emerging field of economic development, also known as microfinance. The field provides an extraordinary opportunity for students to observe, critically evaluate, and compare such bottom-up approaches with those of existing top (or trickle) down approaches to economic development.

During the last eight months, Professor Rajagopal has visited Tamil Nadu three times. He has met with the Vice-Chancellor of Gandhigram Rural Institute (GRI) (http://www.ruraluniv.ac.in/) and the Founder of a Women’s Cooperative “Mahasemam.” Both of these individuals have expressed a keen desire to assist with the UI Study Abroad Program. The GRI is in Dindigul, about 65 Kms from Madurai (see map). Mahasemam is a women’s self help cooperative consisting of over 110,000 members (organized around 3,000 groups of 30-50 individuals) scattered around the state of Tamil Nadu, India. Mahasemam will be one of our cosponsors for the UI Study Abroad Program and will assist us with the necessary local arrangements in Chennai and Madurai. Both of these institutions will also host a “2-day Leadership Summit on Microfinance” from January 8-10, 2006. This Summit will give the UI students a marvelous opportunity to hear and interact with Indian scholars and practitioners and also share their own study findings with others.

The course will consist of a mixture of readings, discussions, field work, and a final presentation at the “2-day Leadership Summit on Microfinance.” Each student will be placed and introduced to work with one group of women’s self help group members (30-40 women entrepreneurs) in Chennai or Madurai. Before the end of the winter session, each student is expected to produce a high quality PowerPoint presentation detailing their findings on a research topic of their own choosing. Adequate access to computers (if students do not own or bring a laptop with them) will be arranged. The following themes are examples of topics that could be explored within the context of microfinance and international development:

- Gender and capital formation
- Comparison of small business types
- Comparison of women’s self help groups
- Ethnography of microfinance
- Microfinance’s impact on child development and well-being
- Microfinance and women’s leadership
- Top down versus bottoms up approach to economic development
- The role of women in business creation and sustenance
- Women versus men in small business enterprise
- Creative and developing new engineering and health-related products
- The process of creating markets for small businesses
Students with strong interests in economics, finance, business, engineering, innovation, creativity, entrepreneurship, sociology, social work, education, women’s studies, geography, international studies, political science, history, anthropology and other related subjects will find the course extremely useful.

The instructors are in the process of putting together a course packet consisting of essential reading material on “Microfinance,” “India,” and “Women’s Self Help Groups,” that will be available for purchase at cost around November 20, 2006. We are also in the process of preparing a document that will highlight travel tips including airline bookings, visa requirements, medical alerts, health insurance and other do’s and don’ts.

We expect to depart by air from Iowa to Chennai, India on December 26, 2006. The class size will be limited to 20, though 15 would be preferable. We are currently in the process of securing certain number of travel scholarships for deserving students from potential local donors.

For further information, please contact r-rajagopal@uiowa.edu or Edwin-brands@uiowa.edu

Registration for this course should be entered under Geography 044:197 or Study Abroad department number 165:197. Contact Janice Perkins, Director, Study Abroad, 120 IC, for more information.

Source: [http://www.ruraluniv.ac.in/Contacts.html](http://www.ruraluniv.ac.in/Contacts.html)
Selected Recent References


Ahmed, Mostaq. 2002. Key to achieving sustainability: Simple and standard microfinance services of ASA. Published by The Association for Social Advancement (ASA), Dhaka, Bangladesh.


