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USFSP Entrepreneurship Director to give talk on his 45-day trip to Iraq

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William Jackson, Ph.D

William Jackson, Ph.D., director of Sustainable Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the USF St. Petersburg [College of Business](#), will give a presentation Friday at the [Nelson Poynter Memorial Library](#) on the 45 days he spent in Iraq this summer leading workshops on incorporating entrepreneurship in higher education business curricula.

The event, which is free and open to the public, will be 10 a.m. at the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. [View maps and directions.](#)

The 45-day training mission in Iraq was an eye-opening experience and one of the most challenging projects of his career, Jackson says.

“They’ve got a long way to go,” Jackson said. Issues with security and infrastructure cut across all walks of life, but they are only part of the challenge, he said.

“There was a significant brain drain in academics across the country,” he said, with about 7,000 faculty leaving the country starting in 2003 and 300 to 400 who were assassinated. Those who remain have few professional development opportunities and limited resources, including technology and textbooks, he said.

Jackson stayed at a well-guarded compound in Baghdad for most of his visit, except for a week working with universities in Kurdistan. His trip was sponsored by USAID.

On his first day in Iraq, violence broke out along the Kurdish border and in the first week a bomb killed 40 people at the Ministry of Higher Education in Baghdad, he said. “So we never ended up going to the ministry,” he added.

Two hours before he arrived for a workshop at Baghdad University, an Iraq general was assassinated at the front gate.

Still, Jackson adds, “I was well protected. Anytime I went out I was in a three-vehicle convoy with lots of guards, involving significant coordination efforts.”

The language barrier made communication difficult and the heat could be unbearable. It was 128 degrees one day, hot enough to crumble his Topsiders, Jackson recalled.

Despite the challenges, Jackson is hopeful. “It’s a very confused country right now,” he said. “It’s not a poor country but it still must deal with the degeneration that occurred during the wars and economic embargoes. The money’s there to build it back up again. Entrepreneurship is gaining a little momentum and it may be more progressive outside higher education than inside for the next year.”

To keep the momentum going, he has arranged for some Baghdad faculty to visit USF St. Petersburg in January for professional development.