

DESIGNING PROGRAMS TO INTERNATIONALIZE MARKETING STUDENTS: RESPONDING TO LESSONS FROM THE LITERATURE

Michael J. Swenson, Marriott School, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, (801) 422-2799
W. Burke Jackson, Marriott School, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602, (801) 422-2394

ABSTRACT

Because of the complexity of conducting business in the global marketplace, business educators are increasingly aware of the need to prepare students to better understand customers and competitors within the context of their environment. More than 30 years ago, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business called for an increase in the international business content of the curriculum for business schools. Since that time, studies have examined the "internationalization" of the business curriculum from three important perspectives—practitioners, academics, and students.

The purpose of our paper is to present programs for internationalizing business school students by creating and providing cross-cultural opportunities and experiences.

The foundation for the cross cultural initiatives at our business school is the student body. Students enrolled in the Marriott School at Brigham Young University are unique in several global dimensions. Over 82 percent of the students have spent 18 to 24-months as missionaries for the sponsoring church. A majority of the students have lived abroad and speak more than one language. Nearly 80 percent of Marriott School students have advanced ability in a second language and about 20 percent speak a third language. Thirty-one different languages are represented. Students' language skills are excellent. In addition, their knowledge of various cultures tends to be higher than for students enrolled in other institutions simply because they have experienced two years in another culture.

Given the literature on cross cultural business education and the foundation at the Marriott School, we designed and implemented three programs to internationalize our business school students—business language skills, foreign business excursions, and study abroad.

In order to strengthen and build upon the language skills of our students, a series of business language courses has been created for Spanish, French, German, Portuguese, Japanese, Chinese, Russian, and Korean languages. Two courses for each language are offered. Business Language 1

emphasizes business concepts, practices, and case studies including conversing, reading, and presenting, while enriching business vocabulary. Business Language 2 focuses on expansion of business vocabulary. Approximately 15 percent of the MBA students and approximately ten percent of the undergraduate students enroll in these courses.

Many executive MBA programs today involve an international travel component. The basic premise underlying such programs is that an international experience enables students to gain firsthand knowledge of a culture's business practices. In 1989, we developed a foreign business excursion to supplement the executive MBA program. Three trips are offered each year—Asia, Europe, and South America. The quality of company visits continues to be a strong component and is combined with seminars with top executives from global companies and entrepreneurs from smaller ventures.

Given the results and success of the short courses in international venues, we felt the next logical, incremental step for expanding our international program was to pursue an extended stay, study abroad program. We selected undergraduate business students as the target group for this initiative and Europe as the location. We also decided on a broad, multi-country experience for students rather than an in-depth single country experience. We selected Salzburg, Brussels, and London for our base locations. In addition, we added short trips to Vienna, Prague, Budapest, Munich, Paris, and Stratford-upon-Avon. The model for this program includes course work, business visits, and cultural excursions. The duration of the program is seven weeks.

Our experience represents efforts to build on existing programs and resources based on the findings from academic and practitioner research. Although we believe we have made progress in this area, much work remains to be done. While the approach to global business education may vary by business school, there is much to be learned by exchanging ideas and approaches. Thus, we encourage a dialogue as we move forward.