

INTEGRATION OF A MARKETING DEPARTMENT-BASED
EUROPEAN TRAVEL ABROAD COURSE: A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL.

Rob Allerheiligen
and

Robert A. Lupton
Colorado State University
Department of Marketing
College of Business
Fort Collins, CO 80523
(303) 491-5063

ABSTRACT

Both educators and students must prepare for the changes and challenges of the global market environment. The authors describe and explain how to develop a four-week study abroad course in Eastern, Central, and Western Europe, and discuss the promotional and pricing issues. They conclude with cautions and recommendations.

should be required to study abroad with the opportunity to discuss "real world" issues with business people in all aspects of the global arena, an International Comparative Management Travel Abroad course offers students this alternative. Such a course is the focus of this paper.

The objective of this paper is to illustrate an "in-house" program development. The dual marketing plan will be discussed including how to develop international contacts, bid out the travel arrangements, and secure a permanent course status. In addition, pricing concerns, promotional issues, and student evaluation will be addressed.

OVERVIEW

As we near the end of the 20th century, international study abroad experiences and student education have become inextricably related, as academicians look for additional programs that prepare the university student for global competition. The world is growing global and business is under tremendous pressure to become global. Recent studies indicate that only 10-15 percent of college students "can be presumed to have adequate understanding of the world [Haglund 1990]." Marketing students must be exposed to this as part of their business education.

THE MODEL

The International Comparative Management Travel Abroad experience, which was completely developed and implemented via the marketing department, is a study tour presented in English to learn about Eastern, Central, and Western European marketing and management techniques. This course is a marketing department-based program, but carries a generic College of Business course designation and incorporates all the functional areas of business. The program was developed internally within the business school and not from an international study abroad office, although one may chose to work in conjunction with university study abroad officials.

Currently, many colleges offer quality study abroad courses with business applications. These programs usually require semester/year residency, feature classroom type environments, and often command some foreign language skills [*Transitions Abroad*, Mar/Apr 1991]. These types of programs do provide solid learning. In fact, the AACSB has long supported the incorporation of international classes that better prepare students for a global business environment [Chattopadhyay 1991]. However, the university or marketing department that is deficient in this type of program creates an environment where the student is not afforded the opportunity to explore the international business market. Since some academics feel all students

The core program remains essentially the same year to year, but changes slightly as companies and countries are added or deleted. Typically, during this four week trip the students visit 12 businesses, 2 multi-national agencies, and eight countries. A full-time, multilingual tour specialist assists the students and professor adding to the cultural learning and basic language skills. Additionally, a full time bus driver transports the students throughout the tour.

The course we have developed includes visits to local firms that do business internationally and are located near our university prior to leaving for Europe. This allows the students to prepare for the comparison part of the class and allows the professor to distribute news announcements, study material, and any paper work. During the four week trip the students visit both U.S. businesses operating in Europe [*Hewlett Packard, Caterpillar, EDS (Electronic Data Systems) and Citibank*] and indigenous European businesses [*BMW (Bayerische Motoren Werke), Opel and BSE (Badische Steelworks)*] are just a few. Each participating business invites the class to their facilities for an in-depth presentation on international marketing and business. Issues regarding the implications and/or opportunities as a result of the European Community, 1992; the unification of Germany; and the opening of Eastern Europe are explored. In addition, the speakers address their role and company's role in the emerging global economy, and, if it is a manufacturing firm, a tour of the production facilities is included.

Between companies, the students are educated by local tour guides, learning about history and culture. These tours complement the business elements resulting in a well-balanced travel abroad course. The following course objectives reflect both ingredients revealing the vitality of the International Comparative Management Study Abroad program.

1. To study first-hand European management and marketing techniques within the context of operating European businesses.
2. To meet and learn from European managers within the context of their operational environment.
3. To observe and compare distribution, retailing, and advertising systems.
4. To have an overseas academic and cultural experience.

The Dual Marketing Plan

With respect to program development, the professor should use a dual marketing plan (*note: a teaching assistant could perform many of these duties*). The first part of the plan involves administrative duties which include contacting domestic and international companies, bidding out the itinerary to travel agents, and securing permanent course status. Additionally, when selecting the businesses one can chose to be either focused or diverse. A focused tour or specialty tour can profile certain industries, such as automobile, textile or advertising. A diverse program,

such as we have chosen to conduct, would present many different industries and offer students a cross-section. A list of both American companies doing business internationally or global companies can be developed through many sources including those illustrated in exhibit #1:

EXHIBIT 1

- ✓Directory of American Firms Operating in Foreign Countries
- ✓Directory of Foreign Manufacturers in the United States
- ✓Directory of United States Importers
- ✓State International Trade Directories
- ✓United States Department of Commerce
- ✓Embassies and Consulates
- ✓International Handbook of Universities and other Institutions of Higher Education
- ✓Local business contacts
- ✓University professors
- ✓Student's parents/relatives

EXHIBIT 1. Selected list of international business sources.

Soon after developing a contact list, a tentative schedule needs to be prepared and letters sent to the potential businesses. This should be done at least 6-10 months in advance of the arrival date. Keep in mind that not only in Europe but also other parts of the world, different holidays will affect the schedule. Usually your travel agents can provide you with the holiday schedule.

The travel program probably needs to be at least two weeks in length to yield enough exposure to be of value. We have found that travel beyond four weeks tends to be very draining and students become jaded. We have also discovered that the dates to schedule the class is crucial for success. Many schools have a three or four week recess period between spring and summer classes. This is an ideal time for the trip allowing the school to capitalize on better pricing, warmer weather, and fewer tourist.

When approaching European businesses either by letter or fax (*we recommend sending a letter first, then, subsequently faxes*), be sure to include the tentative date and time of arrival. In the correspondence explain the purpose of the class, how many will be attending, and what areas of interest you would like presented. A specific contact name can make the task easier. Exhibit #2 lists important information required in the letter.

EXHIBIT 2

- ✓Who you are and the school
- ✓The goals of the class and trip
- ✓Date and time of arrival and departure
- ✓How many students will attend
- ✓Request for maps and/or directions
- ✓Your address and contact numbers including fax

EXHIBIT 2. Include the who, what, where, when and why type information.

We have found that at least 20 business students are needed to make the trip affordable. We have set our maximum number at 26 students since most tour companies give a quantity price break at 25 or 26, and this number is easy to manage and easily accommodated by participating businesses. However, ultimately the student numbers reflect how many individuals the various businesses can accommodate, the size of the touring bus, and how many students the professor wishes to handle.

Which travel agents to solicit creates additional concerns. Most state run universities require at least three vendor bids; however, this could prove advantageous from a financial savings or improved service viewpoint. Each travel agent will provide tentative itineraries which are important to facilitate the second part of the market plan, which will be addressed later.

The third issue is permanent class status and the university curriculum committees. Each school will vary, but pursuing permanent status can be a long, involved process of justification and repeated resubmissions with refinements. There is often a feeling from curriculum committees that these types of programs are simply a "boondoggle" and, therefore, it is incumbent to make sure that the academic program is complete and that the pedagogy is stressed in all submitted material. The authors' program demanded two years before complete university approval was granted.

Part two of the dual marketing plan is directed towards the student and involves the promotional aspects. Class announcements; promotional flyers and brochures; informational classes and videos; and guest speakers all provide maximum exposure and impact. Be sure and include in the promotion material an application and liability release form. The application will provide administrative information and, if more than your maximum apply, will be useful as a screening device. Exhibit #3 lists important information required on the application.

EXHIBIT 3

- ✓Personal data
 - name
 - local/permanent address & phone
 - student identification number
- ✓GPA
- ✓Passport number
- ✓International experience
- ✓Business courses completed
- ✓Application and supporting material
 - deposit check
 - signed liability release form
 - photo of applicant
 - where to send application
 - one page essay "Why this class will benefit me"

EXHIBIT 3. A good application is required for both administration duties and screening.

To maximize the promotion impact, your travel agents can provide you with commercial brochures and videos. Ultimately, word-of-mouth will carry the program as students from previous trips spread the international word. The promotion duties can be delegated to a teaching assistant or a student desiring independent study. Our studies indicate that the majority of students heard about the program through class announcements.

A key ingredient, and the most often asked question, is "what is the cost?" Price is the most challenging to predict, especially in the fall before airlines have committed to next year's pricing and before the vendor bids have been returned. However, with the help of your travel agent, a tentative price can be predicted early allowing promotional pieces to be disseminated in the beginning of the fall semester. When forecasting price, several associated costs are fixed allowing some price preparation. Additionally, price your package 10% higher than your tentative forecast to allow for volatile market conditions. Besides a rebate of overestimated charges can act as a surprise bonus to both students and parents, and is much easier than having to charge an extra fee immediately before the departing date. The following exhibit represents the basic pricing concerns.

EXHIBIT 4

- ✓Fixed Costs:
 - Professor salary
 - Administrative fees i.e. bookkeeping and handling of papers
 - Instate/out-of-state tuition fees
 - Contingency fees
 - Additional costs
- ✓Forecasted costs:
 - Ground expenses i.e. Bus transportation, hotel rooms, meals, tips
 - R/T air

EXHIBIT 4. Pricing issues and concerns.

In respect to the price, many schools offer continuing education classes. To minimize your cost to the students for academic credits, you may wish to register the class through continuing education. The class can be listed in the official catalog but usually at a savings to both in-state and out-of-state students. Obviously, price is a sensitive issue, however, the difference between a \$3700 trip and a \$4000 dollar trip is relatively insignificant when students and parents make the final purchase decision, especially if a payment schedule is set up over a number of months. However, be sure to collect an initial deposit. This gives you operating capital plus commits the student/parents to the program.

Providing students with a minimum price can be gained by developing and evaluating several alternative trip schedules. The International Comparative Management Study Abroad program offers both breakfasts and dinners. To provide yet lower prices, another university's International Seminar provides less travel days, fewer meals, and hostels rather than hotels. The point is to be flexible and creative.

Grading and Evaluation

Grading and evaluation issues are not only concerns of the curriculum committees, but also concerns of the students. We suggest that two written papers be submitted by the undergraduate students two weeks after the conclusion of the class. The first paper the student shares his/her cultural experiences and observations. The second paper has the students compare American management styles with those of European management. An additional paper with more focus is submitted by graduate students; however, the third paper is collected at a later, predetermined date. Participation, conduct, and discussion by each student during the trip are also noted by the professor and used to further evaluate the students.

SUMMARY

Students of today are the leaders of tomorrow, and these leaders will be faced with a plethora of complex, dynamic global issues. To assist and prepare students for this embarkment, academics must continually strive to offer international education within courses. The International Comparative Management Travel Abroad class is a powerful tool that can be developed and implemented by the marketing department or university. This magnitude is exemplified by this typical student quotation.

"This class offers an experience which cannot be taught from a text... It is clearly, without a doubt, the best course on campus!"

Finally, we wish to submit recommendations and cautions. **Recommendations**

1. Require some level of prior business course work/experience by the student to be eligible.
2. Achieve your minimum student number at least four months before departure.
3. Some countries and participating businesses require visas or passport numbers prior to the visit. So maintain accurate records. (*Lotus 1-2-3/Excel spreadsheet*)
4. Develop your own textbook featuring current and relative articles. i.e. include articles about the individual businesses and countries - foreign phrases and customs.
5. Create a solid bookkeeping program. (*We pay an individual to handle these duties.*)
6. Both the students and professor represent the United States and should exhibit the highest, professional standards.
7. Both casual and professional attire should be packed.
8. Work closely with financial aid officials. (*Often a minimum of six credit hours is needed for students to qualify for financial aid during summer sessions.*)

Cautions

1. Many university insurance programs are voided when travelling abroad. One may want to purchase additional insurance (*often available through tour operator*).
2. Since many students may be under 21, the legal drinking age is considerably lower or nonexistent in Europe. Prepare the students to be responsible individuals.
3. Do business with reputable travel agents both domestically and internationally.

REFERENCES

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