

DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT GEOGRAPHY...

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Abstract

That phrase was put to music by Sam Cooke in a song entitled, "Wonderful World" which was not only a hit in 1960, but became a 'classic' within the soul music genre. Sadly, the phrase may also adequately describe U.S. students' knowledge of geography, and the title of the song is an inaccurate characterization of the world in which we live when geographic illiteracy is so prevalent. This paper suggests that geographic literacy is required to compete effectively in this globalized world, and that a marketing course - and in particular an international marketing course - provides an excellent opportunity to expand this knowledge. The paper suggests that geography can be infused into an (international) marketing curriculum by frequent use of country examples from less familiar places (and perhaps an additional incentive in the form of extra credit geography questions included in an exam). The paper suggests that a burgeoning interest in geography through the increased use of maps, newsmagazines or even online news sources may lead to greater interest in topics related to that country and that facts about a new country or region of interest can be mentally stored and recalled more easily once the geographic location is used as a frame of reference, or anchor for additional knowledge.

The popular book, "The Travels of a T-Shirt in the Global Economy" (Rivoli, 2001) intimates that a workforce, regardless of where they are based, must have the preparation to deal with the globalization of business and that they must be aware of world events, cultures, and geography to competitively manage a global distribution chain. As a result, an international marketing course can be used to heighten students' geographic literacy. This paper suggests that the frequent use of examples or cases in class from less familiar countries (such as Burkina Faso or Namibia in Africa, for example) will serve as a catalyst for students to fine-tune their geographic literacy by inspiring them to pull out maps to pinpoint the countries' location relative to other more familiar nations. Students might also expect to find geography-related extra credit questions on exams. This approach can be used throughout an entire semester.

This instructor has repeatedly used this basic tool throughout a semester and has often found students intently studying world maps just prior to an exam. I propose that the effectiveness of this approach in enhancing geographic literacy be assessed by looking at the frequency with which students accurately identify country locations on extra credit, geography multiple choice questions on several exams throughout the semester. The accuracy with which students identify "obscure" countries' geographic locations is expected to increase as the semester progresses, given their new-found interest in geography. Moreover, experience also suggests that students' geographic curiosity will be heightened with the use of this tool, leading possibly to increased comprehension of the world, its inter-connectedness and how today's globalized world works. Geographic literacy may enhance students' understanding of the globalized world in which we live and may convince them that events in Mongolia matter in Montana...and what happens in Azerbaijan matters to Argentina.

Coincidentally, students often discover the location of the "obscure" countries after re-discovering geographic locations for more familiar countries. This approach also challenges the instructor to be constantly in search of new examples, and thus serves to keep the course "fresh" and exciting for the students.

It is expected that this presentation will lead to a fruitful discussion on other approaches, novel instructional materials or other assessment methods that may lead to a clearer understanding of best practices for teaching and learning geography in international marketing courses.

A review of the marketing and international business literature found very little in the way of references on this topic, suggesting that this area is under-researched – yet fruitful, given the benefits that can accrue to individuals, businesses and to society overall if geographic literacy is enhanced. Only one international business article was found that tangentially addressed the topic by focusing on creating global mindsets in students and the propensity of that leading to interest in working internationally. Most references came from the social sciences, although these, too, were limited.

References Available upon Request