

Study Abroad for Business Students

by Joan Solaun with Charles Gliozzo



For Charles Gliozzo, Director of Overseas Studies at Michigan State University, "an international education without a business component in today's world is no education at all."

Even for students in the most esoteric academic or professional fields, it has become impossible to ignore the importance of business and trade factors in the complex interrelationships among nations. This has not always been so obvious to educators, since the international aspect of most business fields was relegated to a place at the end of the textbook. The number of business students studying abroad is still reported to be no more than 10 percent of the overall total. Students were not encouraged to study business-related coursework away from their home schools. For most students, this was a resounding vote of no confidence for foreign study; a semester without any business courses meant graduating late.

There have been a handful of notable exceptions, namely the Lauder School at Wharton, Tufts, the University of South Carolina and Thunderbird. The principal focus of the innovative international programs has been at the graduate level, with very few institutions having any foreign language component.

How is this scene changing?

The new awareness of the importance of global trade and international economic trends is, fortunately, resulting in a new plateau in the evolution of study abroad opportunities for U.S. students. With growing emphasis upon competitiveness both at home and abroad, even the most traditional business programs are modifying their curriculum to reflect this trend. The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), which accredits business programs nationally, has developed new standards for accreditation that will contain fewer prescribed lists of courses and more emphasis on compliance with an institution's self-described mission.

How can institutions consider implementing these changes, given the shrinking budgets on most campuses?

National concern over the need to prepare an aware and competitive citizenry has resulted in some important funding opportunities for schools of business. Among these are the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) Title VI grants from the Department of Education which provide funding to create Centers for International Business Education and Research; USIA institutional linkage grants; and the 1992 Freedom Support Act designating \$50 billion for exchange programs with Russia which provide opportunities for U.S. educators and students to take an active role in training Russians in the ways of a market economy. These financial incentives can raise the international awareness of

even the most conservative campus with significant advantages for many academic units. The spin-off opportunities for study abroad program development are obvious.

How do you go about creating business programs overseas that are acceptable to your business school faculty members?

It is vital that those with the academic expertise and contacts in the field be the ones to design the programs. Michigan State's business programs have been set up by faculty with seed money from International Programs. This effectively establishes a working partnership. Funds for faculty travel are scarce, but should be built into program budgets when possible to internationalize the faculty. This would impact curriculum development, making students

realize the significance of international business.

What kind of study abroad options do you feel are the most effective for business students?

I have always been a strong proponent of the internship experience. When properly structured and monitored, it can be a much more effective way to convey the working reality than the classroom.

International business internships allow students to test the validity of their academic/career choices while making a contribution to an organization. Employers have the benefit of additional manpower. Secondary gains for both include greater marketability for students and early identification and training of future employees for employers.

Internships can be for a short term of three to six months or long-term for a

continued next page

year, depending on the type of business internship and expectations.

At Michigan State, we have been working in the area of business programs overseas for many years. Our programs in business law, advanced business management, telecommunications, and international relations in Europe are tremendously popular.

An integral part of the curricula of these programs is an attempt to give the student an internship opportunity.

How are these programs structured?

An example would be our International Business Management program, which has alternated between Norway, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Germany for the last 12 years. Six semester credits are earned on and off campus. Students travel to Europe for study visits to international companies, such as Orrefors and Hasselblad Camera, where they can view production processes and participate in seminars led by English-speaking CEOs. An effective program such as this has highly complex logistics, and cannot be accomplished without an energetic and effective on-site coordinator.

Speaking of English, how do you feel about the need for foreign languages for business programs abroad?

How I feel personally and what makes a program go are two different things. In my experience, as soon as a foreign language component is introduced in programs for

professional students, enrollment drops. We cannot subsidize programs with low numbers; they must pay for themselves. Our highest enrollments are in our International Telecommunications program at Telecom in Paris. All of the program courses and site visits are conducted in English by prominent French leaders in telecommunication. It is important that the academic integrity and quality of these programs be maintained. If a foreign language dimension is essential, it should be offered with the curriculum.

What geographic locations do you consider the most important for these purposes?

In order for our students to realize that we are living in a world of intensifying international competition, they must be exposed to successful and dynamic economic systems. For this reason, Michigan State has chosen Western Europe and the Pacific Rim as primary areas for business programs. On the other hand, there are exciting new opportunities for MBA students to be consultants in the developing economies of Russia and the other countries of the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and in Africa. Institutions might want to consider the many benefits to students afforded this type of "peace corps" program. A major example is the grant-funded business school program of

the University of Michigan which utilizes its prospective MBA students as mentors to assist Polish small business owners, industrial managers, etc.

What would you say is the best time frame for business study abroad?

Again, the reality is that the short-term experience works best for students, both in terms of money and time. The curricular squeeze still provides little freedom for professional coursework elsewhere

What impact is our recessionary economy having on business education?

Enrollments in business schools have fallen, making the significance of an international business dimension even more apparent. Business schools now have a unique opportunity to evaluate their programs and focus on disciplines which will prepare students for the 21st century. Integrating international business in their curricula as well as offering overseas study programs and international internships for students will make business schools more inviting and be a catalyst in increasing student enrollments.

Do you foresee more opportunity ahead for students in all areas of business as curricular restraints loosen, and grants become available for the internationalization of the business colleges?

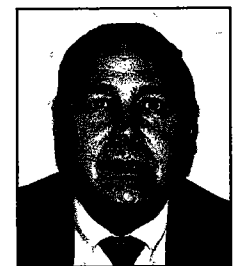
Despite budget constraints, increasing program costs and frustrating attempts to

educate our students about the importance of foreign languages, I am optimistic that study abroad will become a reality for our business students. Please note the increasing number of overseas study business programs and international internship opportunities.

Our business colleges are including more international business courses in their curricula. Concurrently, our U.S. CEOs repeatedly urge that our students have an international business component and foreign language competence.

As international educators, we have a responsibility to internationalize our business students.

Recall Saint-Exupery's words in the *Wisdom of the Sands*: "Your task is not to foresee it, but to enable it." In other words, it's time to move from talking about internationalization to more implementation of business study programs abroad.



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