

DEVELOPING A GRADUATE BUSINESS CURRICULUM IN RESPONSE TO A GLOBAL ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT:

In a global business world that is integrated from economic, social, and cultural perspectives, it is important for business students to be prepared for a world of diversity and multiculturalism as well as to possess the synthesis of knowledge from different disciplines. The traditional MBA programs have focused on the technical skills, at times at the cost of a broad-based education, that includes critical thinking, analytical skills and communication. The MBA programs which have a global approach limit themselves to business disciplines. In order to understand global business, one must understand the complexities and nuances of global politics, different cultures, psychology, and sociology. The curriculum for the Master in International Business program discussed in this paper addresses the issues outlined above.

Keywords: International Business, Liberal Arts, Master in International Business

INTRODUCTION

International business includes all business transactions that involve two or more countries. International business embraces both imports and exports, as well as direct foreign investment from/to the country. During the period 2000-2008, investment abroad by US firms grew from \$1.3 trillion to \$3.2 trillion. During that same time period, investment by foreign firms in the US grew from \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion.¹ All companies, large or small, are affected by global events and competition because the most of them sell output to and/or secure suppliers from foreign countries and/or compete against products and services that come from abroad.

Houston is on the verge of becoming the third largest city in the United States (US). It is the largest port in terms of gross tonnage and is a major gateway to Latin America. Houston is second to New York in the number of corporate headquarters for Fortune 500 companies and has over 30 foreign consulates. Consequently, Houston-based companies will require more internationally-oriented professionals as they expand overseas, and foreign companies will require these same professionals as they expand into the US.²

This paper examines globalization challenges and opportunities in the business community, and discusses the response by the School of Business at Houston Baptist University to meet these needs.

BACKGROUND

Employers seek college graduates who, in the face of persistent ambiguity and within increasingly complex environments, are able to collaborate with people with a broad diversity of backgrounds, cultural origins, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (McInnis-Bowers and Chew, 2008). In a global economy, it is increasingly important for graduate students to develop these skills irrespective of the type of future employment: even if a company is not engaged in business overseas, its employees will be exposed to global business due to global sourcing, competition and a diverse workforce.

¹ According to the US Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis.

² This type of activity is called Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). An example of outbound FDI would be Halliburton establishing an operation in Brazil to provide services to the Brazilian oil and gas industry. An example of inbound FDI would be Toyota establishing a manufacturing facility in Texas.

The non-availability of an international business major within the liberal arts colleges and universities across the country has created a generation of business executives who are experienced in the basic principles, theories, and practices of business management from an American perspective, but who lack the global managerial dexterity to perform successfully on the international business arena (Ahmed and Krohn, 1994). While this situation has improved over the last several years, it still falls short in integrating business disciplines with the liberal arts courses in anthropology, psychology, politics and economics.

Because of intense international competition both at home and abroad, MBA education needs to change to prepare business leaders that match the emerging needs of American business and industry (Kedia and Harveston, 1998). Leading US and European universities were first to recognize this new international component in business education and started examining alternative business education models since the 90's (Kedia and Harveston, 1998). Naturally, such universities are always at the forefront of business education and do not miss any effort to revitalize their business schools (Acito *et al*, 2008).

The typical compartmentalization of courses and separation between general education and professional curricula aggravates this challenge. Furthermore, the prominence of emerging economies in the global marketplace requires that educators develop curricula that go beyond global awareness and help students gain knowledge and skills to function effectively in an increasingly globalized world (Martinez, Padmanabhan & Toyne, 2007). A major cause for this compartmentalization are the silos created in a university environment where the business school operates independent of the other schools including humanities and social sciences. In order to truly integrate business disciplines with liberal arts, universities have to not only encourage different schools to work together, but also encourage the concept of team-teaching by combining faculty expertise from these schools. While team-teaching with faculty from one school can be challenging, the issues will be compounded when the faculty from two different schools are involved. These issues relate to different perspectives, teaching load, and compensation differentials. Despite these challenges, a truly international business education will require the co-operation of faculty from different schools.

There are different approaches to blending liberal arts and business to add value in delivering an international business program. In some cases, the architecture of academic programs has been specifically designed either to bridge professional studies and the liberal arts or to enable students to make connections across learning experiences and academic domains. These purposes are often accomplished through a discipline distribution approach to course planning that mandates a percentage of courses be taken outside of the major. But how much more powerful would it be if students saw and participated with faculty in blending purposes from across domains? (McInnis-Bowers and Chew, 2008).

While the discussion above would be applicable to international business curriculum at the graduate and undergraduate level, this paper describes the need for the program and the implementation of a international business at the graduate level – Master in International Business (“MIB”) – in the School of Business at Houston Baptist University. The paper also includes an analysis how this degree is different from a MBA with a global business concentration.

DIFFERENTIATION FROM MBA

International Business courses differ from MBA courses in both their core concept and essential design. The MIB course design incorporates a fundamental international orientation, while MBA courses supplement their content with international material. By reorganizing MBA content and focusing on international issues, HBU will draw from a new market of students, and thus expand market share. Given this new market, the MIB admission requirements will differ from those of the MBA. Table 1 provides a side-by-side comparison of the MBA and MIB programs.

Table 1 – Comparison of MBA and MIB programs

	MBA	MIB
Purpose of program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To produce graduates with a broad set of skills in multiple business disciplines • To prepare graduates for a variety of corporate positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To produce graduates with a strong understanding of culture, language, and the international dimensions of every business discipline • To prepare graduates for positions in global corporations.

	MBA	MIB
Structure of program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CPC knowledge is covered within the 11 core MBA courses • Students take an additional 5 courses beyond the core <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May be used to diversify - May be used to concentrate • 48 hours for all students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 foundation courses, if needed • 12 lock-step advanced courses • 36 to 51 hours for the degree, depending on entry status with regard to the CPC
Candidate profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 50% enter with a BBA • Corporate work experience is required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer than 50% will have BBA • Corporate work experience is preferred, but not required
Foreign language	Not required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required. • For foreign students, the foreign language is English
Travel/Internship	Not required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Required • Foreign students with visa problems will complete an internship
Types of course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional MBA • Diversified content 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MBA-type courses, but with inherently international design • Three interdisciplinary courses, combining MBA focus with Humanities content

CURRICULUM FOR MIB

Since the MIB degree is offered by the School of Business, it means that the MIB must cover the Common Professional Component (CPC) in its curriculum. The CPC in the MIB program will be fulfilled in one of two ways: 1) students who have a BBA degree will be considered to have satisfied the CPC requirement; and 2) students who do not have a BBA degree will be required to take foundation courses (i.e., prerequisites) to satisfy the CPC requirement. Both the MIB and the MBA students share the CPC knowledge requirements. For MIB students, these are completed via the five classes shown in Table 2. Students with a bachelor’s degree in business will generally be exempt from these five foundation courses.

Table 2 – Foundation Courses (MIB)³

Foundation Courses	Commentary
ACCT 54xx Foundations of Accounting and Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combines the content modules of two existing MBA courses: ACCT 5360 (Survey of Accounting) and FINA 6330 (Corporate

³ ‘xx’ indicates a number to this course has not been assigned.

Foundation Courses	Commentary
	Finance) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses the same teaching techniques and setting
MKTG 53xx Foundations of Consumer and Organizational Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combines the content modules of two existing MBA courses: MKTG 6310 (Principles of Marketing) and MGMT 5349 (Organizational Behavior) • Uses the same teaching techniques and setting
MGMT 53xx Foundations of Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combines selected content modules of three existing MBA courses: MGMT 6333 (Human Resource Management), MGMT 6341(Operations Management), and MGMT 6376 (Business Strategy and Policy) • Uses the same teaching techniques and setting
ECON 53xx Foundations of Economics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the same content and structure as an existing MBA course: ECON 5360 (Survey of Economics)
MGMT 53xx Foundations of Decision-Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the same content and structure as an existing MBA course: MGMT 5360 (Decision-Making)

Students who have already completed their CPC will not take the MIB's foundation courses. The MIB program for these students will consist of just 12 courses (Table 3.) One can see from Table 3 that five of the MIB courses (#1 through #5) are existing courses in the MBA or MS-HRM program, with some minor changes that are appropriate for MIB student focus. Four of the new courses (#6 through #9) are designed for the MIB program, but could be offered as an elective in the MBA programs. The remaining new courses (#10 through #12) are interdisciplinary, combining business content with content from non-business disciplines.

Table 3 – MIB Courses

	Advanced Courses	Commentary
1	CISM 6367 Global Business & Tech Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing course, minor changes
2	FINA 6333 International Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing course, minor changes
3	MGMT 6378 Management of Global HR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing course
4	MGMT 6395 International Mgmt Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing course
5	MKTG 6333 International Marketing Seminar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing course, minor changes
6	MGMT 63xx International Law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course, with business content

	Advanced Courses	Commentary
7	ACCT 63xx International Accounting Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course, with business content
8	MGMT 63xx Global Supply Chain Mgmt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course.
9	MGMT 63xx Global Business Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course. Much of its content derived from existing course MGMT 6376
	Interdisciplinary Courses	New courses: Team-taught and shared between business faculty and faculty from other HBU schools / colleges.
10	INDC 63xx Global Political Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course • Interdisciplinary approach, combines business knowledge (economics and management) with law and political science • Will use team-teaching, existing teaching techniques, and setting. Existing business faculty might be qualified to team-teach
11	INDC 63xx Foreign Cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course • Interdisciplinary approach. Combines business knowledge (organizational behavior and management) with psychology and sociology • Will use team-teaching, existing teaching techniques, and setting. Existing business faculty might be qualified to team-teach this
12	INDC 63xx International Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New course • Interdisciplinary approach, combines business knowledge (economics and management) with political science and law • Will use team-teaching, existing teaching techniques, and setting. Existing business faculty might be qualified to team-teach this

Another major shortage of the United States in the international relations area is the paucity of foreign language requirements at many colleges and universities. Foreign language study should be an integral component of any university's efforts to strengthen its training programs in any international field, including business. (Ahmed and Krohn, 1994). The School of Business faculty has a significant amount of international experience. Of the 15 full-time faculty members, seven are fluent in a foreign language, six by birth and one by advanced study. These languages include Russian, Hindi, Mandarin Chinese, Greek, and Polish. Although many members of the Business faculty are fluent in a foreign language, no instructor will be required to teach one. Foreign languages will be handled in one of two ways. First, native speakers of English will be required to pass the American Council on the

Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) test at the Novice-High level by the midpoint of the program. The second way takes into account the fact that English will be the foreign language for foreign-born students. Testing of those foreign students for English fluency will be accomplished through the TOEFL exam, which is an admission requirement (score of 90). Some US citizens will be bilingual, speaking Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, and other languages at home. These students, products of the US educational system, will be considered to have English as their first language and will be tested on their in-home language through the ACTFL test.

A critical component of the MIB is the foreign travel; therefore, all US-born students in the program will be required to take a foreign trip. For over 20 years, the School of Business has been taking MBA students on foreign trips; undergraduate students have been taking trips abroad for the past six years. Due to visa restrictions, it may not be possible to require that all foreign-born MIB students take an international trip. Consequently, in the case where foreign students have visa restrictions, the foreign travel will be substituted by an internship with a local company actively involved in foreign trade.

CONCLUSION

After the analysis of significant trends affecting the future of business education, HBU School of Business is introducing its first Master in International Business program. The MIB, as outlined above, is a graduate degree with a foundation in business disciplines and complemented by inter-disciplinary courses. We believe that such degree will better prepare a student for the challenges of global business world. MIB is by no means a replacement for our traditional MBA program. It is rather an attempt to reach students with specific skills and attitudes that can and will play an increasing role in the business of the future. Top US universities recognized this trend in business education more than a decade ago (Kedia & Harveston 1998). The fact that we are introducing this new business curriculum at our relatively small liberal arts university is an advantage for integration and delivery of inter-disciplinary courses. The MIB program will allow the University to grow with Houston as global business expands in this city and the country.

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