

Graduate Certificate for Students with Undergraduate Degrees from Foreign Universities: Implications for Students and Schools in Emerging Markets

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Abstract

A small, private, liberal arts college, with a graduate management program (Master of Arts in Public and Private Management) designed a curriculum for students with undergraduate degrees from foreign universities to meet the challenge of attracting international students. This effort was necessary to enable domestic students to meet and work with people from around the world and to enable foreign national students to experience business practice and study leadership and management theory from an American perspective. The program features a business internship experience and cultural immersion. From this curricular platform, the college was able to partner with a university overseas to create a study-exchange program, which enabled the working professionals studying in the part-time graduate management program to attend classes and live from one week to up to one month in an international community. The program design lends itself to partnering opportunities with institutions of higher learning in emerging markets. Elements contributing to the success of the program are identified so that the program may be replicated at other domestic and foreign universities.

Key words: exchange program, international, internships

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A challenge for management education is to prepare business practitioners to succeed in the global marketplace (AACSB 2003; Shetty and Rudell 2002; Porter & McKibbin 1988). Curricular buzz words, “think globally,” “value diversity,” “cross-cultural perspectives,” and the like, have been readily written into text books and course syllabi to denote the international context of current business education. If reading and thinking about international and cross cultural contexts were successful pedagogical methods, then the continued and ongoing demand to internationalize business curricula would be lessening, rather than continuing to gain momentum.

Thus, the challenge is to prepare American students to see and experience issues from historical, economic, and socio-cultural perspectives other than their own and to prepare students from foreign markets to experience and understand an “Americanized” way of doing business and to test their own perceptions of what Americans are like. After September 11, 2001, students are indicating that they perceive the need and value for educational exchange programs to enhance their learning (Kerr 2002; Marcus 2002).

Schools are continuing to report dissatisfaction with the internationalization of their programs (Kwok & Arpan 2002). Higher education is looking for better, more cost-effective ways to enable internationalized business education, particularly for students from emerging markets where economies may not be stable and where the political and cultural environments have historically been internally focused. Failure to meet the challenge would suggest management education lacks relevance for stakeholders other than business schools and students.

There are a number of approaches to meeting this challenge (Ahmed & Krohn 1994; Nash 1997; Pitt, Berthon, Robson 1997). To succeed requires students to

recognize the relationship of the world community to their organizations, to think beyond their own cultural context, thus taking into consideration the cultural, legal, and political values of others. Concerns exist regarding the numbers of students graduating from college who lack the sufficient international business knowledge to manage the requisite responsibilities inherent in these complex settings (Webb, Mayer, Pioche, and Allen 1999).

"Out-of country experiences are particularly effective ways to heighten students' understanding concerning the complexities of international business" (Kwok & Arpan 2002, p. 577). Augmenting management education with opportunities for student exchange programs better meets the challenge of providing management education with international perspectives (Kedia & Cornwell 1994). Therefore, graduate management programs must enable students to genuinely experience international perspectives by collaborating with people who themselves embody a variety of international perspectives. This can be accomplished by collaboration in an educational setting, i.e. classroom, web based degree program, internship, and/or living in foreign communities (Johnson & Mader 1992; Fugate & Jefferson 2001). "Differences of opinion and critical thinking in the classroom environment should be encouraged. Adding some international students from abroad to an American classroom brings a new kind of thinking and an appreciation for how things are different" (Nash 1997 p. 83).

As noted by Shetty and Rudell (2002), it is challenging for small schools to offer international programs. This article will discuss how a small, private, liberal arts college, with a graduate management program, designed a curriculum for students with undergraduate degrees from foreign universities to attract international students and

develop an internationalized program for its domestic students. The structural elements of the program are first described. Features and benefits of the program are then identified. A discussion of the issues in starting and maintaining the program suggest why the program is appropriate when working with students from emerging markets. The paper concludes with a description of core success factors to facilitate the replication of the program elsewhere.

Description of the Structural Elements of the Program

A key mission directive of this graduate management program is to foster the development of managers capable of adapting to a changing world, who can provide organizations with leadership and vision for the future, to lead and indeed to become leaders in complex situations. The international contexts inherent in “doing business” can best be defined as complex. To responsibly educate practicing managers in the international contexts of business requires more than course work. It requires both content and context. Context can be best understood through experience. Relevant experience, for students, is derived from in-class collaboration and cultural immersion through living in a community.

The Certificate program for the graduate program is necessary to enable domestic graduate students to meet and work with people from around the world and to enable foreign national students to experience business practices and study leadership and management theory from an American perspective. The foreign students bring much to the classroom; and for their part, they seek out a quality education, along with exposure to the American culture and business environment. The first student to have completed

the Certificate program was from the emerging market of India. Furthermore, using the framework of the Certificate program, the college has been able to partner with a school in an industrialized country overseas to create a study-exchange program for working professionals studying in the college's two-year graduate management program.

Domestic students in the college's graduate program are, thereby, able to attend classes and live from one week to up to one month in an overseas international community.

Curriculum Elements

The Certificate program differs from the traditional part-time graduate management program in that it is a one-year program for a small number of professionals with degrees earned outside the United States, with a mandated paid internship as a key part of the learning experience. The curriculum is organized around three core courses, up to four elective courses and the internship, which integrates the student into the American business community.

Students in the Certificate program take two academic courses in the college's graduate management program during each regular term and complete a three-term internship. The curricular design ensures that no more than two and one-third ($2 \frac{1}{3}$) courses are carried in any one term, thus enabling the students to participate more fully in activities in the community and at the internship site. Core courses are Perspectives on Management, Ethics, and Internship. Examples of electives from which the students can choose are: Leadership, Decision Analysis, Public Policy Process, Organizational Behavior, International Business, Contemporary Economic Policy, and topical issues,

such as civil rights/human rights. Being located in an urban setting in the southeastern United States provides the opportunity to offer a focus on civil rights.

The Certificate program is completed in one calendar year. International students begin the program with an in-coming class of graduate management students in the fall, spring or summer terms. They attend a weekend seminar/experiential program where the international students can interact with about half of the graduate management student body. Other than the introductory Perspectives on Management course, which is offered over three weekends during the year, the international students are enrolled in two classes, each meeting one night per week, as part of the regular graduate management program.

Administrative Elements

Administratively, the Certificate program is integrated into the roles and responsibilities of existing staff. However, the enrollment of international students requires certain tasks to be revised and new tasks undertaken.

Administrative tasks needing adjustment include the process of admission, class scheduling, recruiting and evaluating internship placements. Additional administrative responsibilities include working with international legal counsel to ascertain and address potential issues raised by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), developing financial support, assisting with social security and income tax issues, coordinating the students' on and off-campus experiences including the provision of housing and transportation.

Discussion of the Program's Features and Benefits.

Features

The Certificate program offers foreign students a broad perspective of management issues from an American vantage point of private business, not for profit organizations, and governmental agencies. Particularly important features of the Certificate program that provide these broad perspectives are the curriculum, the paid internship, cultural immersion programming, and support of the local business community through the college's advisory boards.

The internship placements, which include a market value stipend, are a distinctive feature of the program. "The use of international internships tremendously increases the student's abilities" and "allows students to apply their academic knowledge in real-world decisionmaking situations" (White & Griffith 1998 p. 4). This participation in an American organization enables the students to experience business practices, and collaborate with working professionals in organizational settings. The internship and its sponsoring company have played an important role in the assimilation of foreign students into "real" American life. To facilitate the students' working experiences, a mentor from within the company is assigned. The mentor's responsibilities include encouraging productive work relationships and overseeing an appropriate scope of work in the internship. The mentor and the students meet regularly with the faculty to discuss the students' observations, feelings, and perspectives about their day-to-day experience. The learning, which occurs through the internship, has been valuable for all involved: the companies, faculty and students. Placements have been with organizations that would utilize the talents and perspectives that international students possess, such as sensitivity to diverse customer needs in a heterogeneous market place.

Programming to facilitate cultural immersion is critical to the success of the Certificate program. In addition to orientations to the school and community, incoming foreign graduate students can begin their program with an American home-stay of up to one week. College faculty and staff who have worked with international students and are sensitive to their needs volunteer to host the students. It has been suggested that the role of the faculty should focus on enabling "international students in adapting to the U.S. education culture rather than to bring about, or even encourage, their assimilation" (Ladd and Ruby 1999 p. 365). Yet, using faculty in the role of cultural interpreters has enabled open dialogue on topics, such as appropriate business/business casual attire, cultural differences in the role meal times play in social vs. business settings, the subtle display of deference to those in authority in business settings, gender issues in the workplace, sexual harassment criteria, cultural expectations of patriotism and nationalism, and differing viewpoints on world events. One of the nine learning objectives that underpin the college's Certificate program is global/cultural understanding. These open dialogues are a key component to meeting this learning objective by all the college's graduate management students.

The home-stay provides each student with a personal family type experience; throughout their time in the program, students have continued to cultivate the relationships with these families, thus expanding their social network in a new country. After the home-stay, housing for students is provided in a local residential community, rather than on-campus dormitories. Automobiles are provided for transportation. Living and commuting to work and class further assures complete cultural immersion in U.S. life by the international student.

The college has a network of advisory committees whose mission is “meeting students’ needs.” Two of these committees have added oversight of the Certificate program to their scope of work. Members of the advisory committees support the program by securing paid internships for the students, securing housing and transportation, hosting industry tours to widen the students’ views of business activities, and providing social/cultural excursions, such as attending sporting events.

Benefits of the Program

The Certificate program for students with undergraduate degrees from foreign universities benefits the graduate management program, foreign students, the local business community and the college’s relationship with external stakeholders in the business community. Quality graduate management education must enable students to both learn about and experience the implications of “doing business” from an international standpoint. As others have suggested, this part-time graduate management program should be more effective in providing internationalized business education, because the Certificate program provides a continuous conduit of students from various parts of the world to enrich the class discussions, collaborate on team projects, and exhibit the richness of diversity (White & Griffith 1998).

This blending is valuable from both domestic students’ and international students’ perspectives. Through in class and out of class interactions, students learn from each other’s accumulated knowledge and experiences about topics like the role of governmental regulations on business, the cultural norms of minorities and women in professional settings, cultural norms of business interactions in formal and informal

settings, cultural differences in valuing time, organizational hierarchy, and perspectives on leadership.

The need for internship placements in local business settings makes the business community an important stakeholder. Recruiting talented business students from overseas is paramount to sustaining the support of the business community. It is important that local business leaders believe a tangible benefit will result from hosting a foreign student in their organizations as an intern. Prior to the start of the internship, faculty work with the selected mentor from the sponsoring organization to identify projects or responsibilities that fit with the background of the student, thus enabling a good fit and increasing the likelihood of the internship providing a clearly identifiable value outcome. Business people who sponsor internships report that their organizations benefit in a number of ways. Stated benefits include helping the businesses enhance employee sensitivity regarding changing demographics in local markets, specifically how to more effectively reach an increasingly culturally diverse customer base. Another benefit expressed by representatives of the host companies was having the interns integrated into the workflow which produced natural dialogues and cross cultural sensitivities throughout their organizations. Interns have also enhanced Internet B2B initiatives because of their developed skills in the use of technology.

Although not stated as an educational outcome goal, the people to people relationships that have developed as a result of this program are significant not only to the individuals themselves, but also to the larger communities in which these people live. Bridging across borders is accomplished through human dynamics and the relationships that are built and sustained. The continued connections that have been maintained

between foreign students with their domestic colleagues, foreign students with professors, and internship sponsors with foreign students are important. The nature of these continued relationships seems to emphasize the personal domain, rather than business; but, understanding that business is fueled by, stimulated, and transacted at personal levels, it is probable that these connections will lay the foundation to future global business connections. As pointed out by Nash (1997 p. 79), "A foreign student hopes that by attending a U.S. college, he or she will have an opportunity to make many new friends. They tend to recognize, more than American students do, the future business relationships that might accrue from these relationships."

Issues in Starting and Maintaining the Program

One of the first challenges was developing a written articulation for the Certificate program that successfully addressed the United States government's requirements as administered by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The complicating factor in the Certificate program is the paid internship for foreign nationals in combination with traditional academic course-work. The design phase required assistance from legal counsel with expertise in international and immigration law. It is important to offer the internship to meet a clear educational need from the foreign student's perspective. These complexities added the better part of an academic year to the development of the Certificate program.

A continuing issue is the recruitment of suitable students into the Certificate program. There are three components to this problem. First, it is difficult to make institutions of higher education, particularly in emerging markets, aware of the program.

Because of limited financial resources for marketing the Certificate program, the primary way potential partners, or individual students, learn about the program is by word of mouth; secondary means of program identification is through internet searches. Second, some assurance must be communicated to foreign institutions that a quality educational experience will be provided to their students. Finally, the cost of study must be kept low and the means to cover the cost for the foreign students identified. The next section describes the steps taken to address the problem.

Adapting the Certificate program into a Platform for Institutional Exchange

The Certificate program is a cost effective and flexible curricular platform for institutional exchange of students. Joining with foreign universities, rather than recruiting individual students, addresses a number of the challenges such a program faces. First, a formalized exchange relationship with another educational institution provided an ongoing process of student recruitment and selection that is the responsibility of the foreign exchange partner, thus ensuring representation of foreign nationals in the Certificate program. Therefore, the goal of providing an enriched student body that combines foreign students with domestic students on a regular basis is achieved.

Second, the ability to benefit from an international business education is made more affordable to the students, both domestic and foreign. Students continue to pay their home institutions the normal tuition charges; hence, the college receives tuition from its graduate students when they are studying at a partner institution overseas. The institutions can negotiate on other charged items, such as lodging, thus further reducing the cost to the students.

Third, through an exchange partnership, each school is able to provide curricular offerings from their strengths, while drawing upon the strengths of another school to shore up weaknesses in faculty expertise or course content. For example, by partnering with universities abroad, the domestic students are able to study with faculty who can more effectively address how international business is conducted in the geographic area and cultural milieu wherein their school is located.

A specific benefit of partnering is the ability to negotiate courses offered in a timeframe that allows for participation of the majority of the domestic graduate management students. In this particular Certificate program the domestic graduate students are also working professionals with jobs of their own. They have received an international educational experience, flexibly offered for one week to one month, because of this Certificate program. Courses are taken at the partner institution overseas and are taught in English, totaling thirty-five hours of instruction per week. The partnering foreign institution is also able to deliver specific cultural immersion experiences, such as living accommodations in the local community, rather than on campus, evening meals with groups of international students, and attendance at cultural events.

Fourth, the Certificate program lends itself to being adopted into a foreign school's curriculum in whole or part. Partner institutions articulate a transfer of credit agreement prior to the students' arrival on campus. Students are then able to select courses at the foreign university that their home institutions do not offer but will accept for course credit, i.e. ethical decision making discussed in the context of American business.

Assurances of quality are being made through several sources. The graduate management program is AACSB International accredited. Recent efforts by AACSB to become the international leader in accrediting business programs should globalize the brand. The graduate management program should benefit as institutions around the world come to understand the quality inherent in the AACSB brand. The Certificate program has been in existence for several years and may now lay claim to testimonials from students who have matriculated as well as other stakeholders, such as internship sponsors. It is also possible to track the career paths of students completing the program.

The paid internship helps to defray the cost of the educational experience for the foreign students. However, when students were first admitted to the program, it became clear that it is necessary to coordinate with the human resources department at each of the sponsoring businesses to handle issues related to reporting and filing for taxes and applying for social security numbers. These tax issues are common (Burbach and Fisher 1996). The procedures are now codified within the administration of the Certificate program.

Factors Allowing for Successful Replication with Schools in Emerging Markets

The international Certificate program, with the associated institutional exchange, was designed and is run by a small college with limited financial and faculty resources. Other partnering institutions may replicate factors contributing to the success of the program. The model is particularly appropriate for students and their universities in emerging markets.

The design of curricular platforms that enable flexibility in partnering with foreign institutions does not require extensive infrastructure. Schools, particularly in emerging markets that may not have significant resources to develop and market programs, can design customized offerings that are tailored to the program needs of one or two American institutions during an academic year. These customized programs can be “exchanged” for the ability of placing their students into courses and business internships in the U.S., thus enabling schools, domestic and foreign, to work together to enhance international business education. The benefit to small schools in the United States is that by partnering in an ongoing relationship there is a continuous process of infusion of foreign students into the program and offerings can be tailored to specific needs of the students regarding language, timeframe, cultural immersion, etc.

The institutional exchange model presented does not need a large number of students to “make classes” or to develop internship placements. The program may be run with one or two students visiting the host institution. The small number of students needed to mount a program makes it attractive to universities that may not have large number of students able to participate but still desire to offer an international experience. Because of the small number of students participating, the institutional exchange would not get significantly out of balance.

The faculty and administrative costs to each institution are relatively low in comparison to establishing separate administrative units to recruit business internships or other offer educational/cultural immersion endeavors. An institutional exchange of one term that includes an immersion experience with a paid internship lowers the cost to the student and requires less time away from home. The lower cost and shorter duration of

time may be attractive to students from emerging markets. Some students may also be attracted to the personable and individual approach to cultural immersion offered by such a program.

There are four structural elements that need to be in place to replicate the program at other colleges and universities. First, is a faculty that is willing to accept and embrace foreign students into their classes and their homes. Second, is the active support of the local business community. Business leaders must see a benefit to hosting and helping the foreign student. This Certificate program is housed in a college with a large and active business advisory council. Third, it is important to have a knowledgeable legal advisor with specific expertise in international and immigration law to work with INS issues. Finally, the program will need an advisor on tax and human resource issues to work with the companies hosting the internships.

Business students from emerging markets need and want a complete international experience working with a company and living in a country with a developed economy. Cost, time, and cultural unfamiliarity may be obstacles to their international experience. The Certificate program described in this paper offers a lower cost option, with a flexible time commitment and a cultural immersion, which is personable, almost familial. The domestic host school receives the same benefits for its students with the additional benefit of providing domestic students with the opportunity to study in a growing, challenging, emerging market.

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