Internationalizing the Curriculum: A Discussion of Challenges and First Steps Within Business Schools

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Abstract

Many business schools in Canada are either implementing international programming into their curricula or planning for it. This paper is a discussion of the many aspects that senior administrators in business schools are navigating in attempting to find a successful solution for these initiatives. The paper presents the first steps that a school may want to implement when attempting to internationalize their curriculum.

Introduction

Internationalization of curricula is not a new concept in higher education. In fact, there has been much talk about internationalization over the past fifty years. While there is evidence that there is some activity in business schools in the area of internationalization, there is the need for more improved and systematic internationalization efforts. Kwok and Arpan (2002) report that 87% of the 151 business schools they surveyed included internationalization of curriculum in their mission statements and that 88% provided some element of internationalization in their strategic planning documents. However, they also reported that "internationalization of business schools' curricula and faculty…continued to lag behind business needs" (p. 579), and that only a minority of the schools they surveyed were satisfied with their internationalization efforts. These results indicate that while business schools might be embracing the idea of internationalization, they are falling short in its implementation.

The question, then, is: how do business schools go about successfully implementing changes to their curricula in order to achieve the desired form and degree of internationalization? There are many theories regarding this aspect of international activity within higher education. The purpose of this paper is to review the various theories described in the literature, outline some of the challenges involved, and summarize what may be described as the "first steps" which must be considered by business school administrators when deciding how to successfully implement the internationalization process in business schools. Despite the idea that many operators already understand that internationalization is beneficial, this paper shall attempt a step back to explore the reasons why internationalization is pursued in order to provide a better understanding of the issues and challenges involved. This paper begins with definitions of both internationalization and curriculum since these concepts are central to the discussion. Clarity is important since within the various discourses of education, both concepts are defined in a variety of ways and are often challenged and contested.

Discussion of terms

The idea of a curriculum predates, by centuries, the canonical works of higher education, such as Cardinal Henry Newman's *Idea of a University* (1999). In fact, the history of education shows that curriculum dates back to the time of Plato in the fourth century B.C. (Lucas, 1994). With this considered, it is easy to see how varied the usage of the term curriculum is; indeed, the idea of a curriculum depends particularly on the context in which it is used. For this reason, it is fair to say that curriculum in a post-secondary setting is very different than a curriculum in an elementary or high school context.

The two main factors, therefore, which must be considered for a proper understanding of the internationalization of business school curricula are the post-secondary business school setting and the objectives of internationalization. As Brenda Ellingboe explains:

> Curriculum within a higher education institution could be thought of as the complete portfolio of requirements and electives offered by the individual

> co-cultures (colleges, divisions, departments, and units) operating within a larger system of the higher education institution (p. 199).

This definition addresses both the required and elective elements present in many post-secondary business programs. In an earlier discussion, Leinwand (1983) takes this concept one step further when he argues that the curriculum includes all of the activities that an institution of higher education provides to further the education of students. While seemingly more general, Leinwand's definition allows for many factors and variables of higher education to be involved in the discussion of internationalization and curriculum, including such things as campus clubs, sporting teams, interest groups, and associations. As he shows, these extra-curricular activities, while not a part of the formal curriculum, need not necessarily be excluded from a discussion of the internationalization of the business school curricula. The question then is: do business curricula include activities and resources that involve students outside of the formal classroom setting, but which, at the same time, are held within the university setting? This question shall be addressed later in the paper since an understanding of curriculum in this discussion first requires a clear conception of internationalization.

As with the term curriculum, the term "internationalization" can be ambiguous since it is often applied to many different contexts and in many different ways. It has been described in the higher education literature in both very general and very specific ways, from institution or system wide to the individual level. Warzyn (1997), as an example, defines internationalization as integrating international cultural processes into an educational setting. Griffin (1999) is also quite general in her definition when she states that internationalization:

> Is the connection between local and global. It includes diversity and intercultural communication. It is the relationship between common things of everyday life and origins, counterparts, or effects in another culture or region of the world (p. 15).

Others still are more specific in their description of the concept. Leinwand (1983) for example, cites several different particular examples of internationalization. He claims that in some cases, internationalization refers to the act of encouraging foreign students to enroll in their institution. To others, it means creating or increasing exchange programs. In some cases, it is providing the means necessary to allow faculty to teach and do research abroad, or to enable official, negotiated faculty exchanges. Some think it means, simply, introducing foreign language requirements into programs, while others believe that the integration of international business cases into business syllabi is sufficient to achieve internationalization.

Raby (1996) argues that internationalization includes more than one single element integrated into business courses and addresses the education of the complete person. In adopting the definition of curriculum that includes all aspects of education, as opposed to just the core and elective components, it could be argued that internationalization could be achieved by providing support for cultural clubs, language associations, invitations to foreign sporting teams, and by hosting cultural arts programs. Ultimately, institutions of higher education have generally ignored this definition of curriculum and have therefore worked within the more traditional areas at institutions at the course and program levels.

Why Internationalize the Curriculum?

Recent economic and market changes, primarily globalization, have created new demands for post-secondary business school programs. These changes have increased the need for business school graduates to be skilled in collaborating and competing with businesses and individuals around the globe (Warzyn, 1997). Since there are few global issues that do not impact domestic markets or policies (Leinwand, 1983; Raby, 1996), business schools have begun to recognize the need for students to learn to be skilled in recognizing and considering the local/global dynamic in their work. As Wood (1997) explains:

> A person can no longer be considered well educated who is unaware of the major trends in population growth and natural resource utilization and management, the principal pros and cons of alternative energy sources, the opportunities for and constraints on expanding the world's food supply, the broad issues affecting the harvesting of the oceans and the mining of seabeds, the dynamics of growth as these relate to problems of transnational pollution, the dangers of nuclear proliferation or the radical disparities between the developed and undeveloped parts of the world (p. 18).

Along these lines, Raby (1996) suggests that institutions should be required to educate students to be politically and morally conscientious in the global business market, along with being prepared economically to enter *tomorrow's* job market. Understanding the elements required to maintain international cooperation and interdependency is critical for those in pursuit of employment in business, technical, vocational and professional sectors.

The current business environment is making it possible for every business, both large and small, to have an international dimension. Operating within the international arena is no longer reserved to the large multi-national companies. Sole proprietors, working out of their homes, can now transform themselves into international companies simply by connecting to the Internet; they may instantly have access to new markets and new customers and new suppliers from anywhere on the globe. Virtually anyone can compete in business from anywhere in the world (Warzyn, 1997). New markets are opening up globally and business school graduates must be able to identify viable new business opportunities while critically assessing how to employ resources and execute plans. They must provide their company with a competitive edge over other firms and prevent lost opportunities due to insensitivity to cultural norms (Satterlee, 1997).

In this context, the internationalization of the business school curriculum becomes an essential instrument in the success of business school students. As the work place becomes more internationalized, employers are demanding that students be better prepared to work in what Kenichi (1989) refers to as a "borderless world". Skousen and Bertelson (1994) state in greater detail what the important issues are for international curricula:

> The challenge for management education is to help students learn to manage change ethically, effectively, and efficiently, whether the changes involve international boundaries, human resources, financial considerations, political constraints, asset allocations, work ethics, process and productivity, total quality management of a combination (p. 14).

One of the major accreditation bodies for business schools, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), requires that every student be exposed to the international dimension of business via one or more aspects of the curriculum (AACSB, 2004). While they do not provide specific details as to how this is should be achieved, leaving this as a decision for the schools to make, it is a requirement for accreditation. The assessment process in this category is currently somewhat liberal, allowing institutions some flexibility. For the most part, the accreditation team looks for any number of indicators, ranging from international course content within the course offerings, to exchange programs for students and/or faculty, to joint courses or degrees with foreign institutions (citation needed here?).

The Process of Internationalization

The increase in scholarship specifically addressing internationalization of business school curricula is perhaps an indicator that this is now a more widely accepted model for curriculum development..

It is clear that there are many reasons to internationalize business curricula. What is less clear, as was seen in the earlier discussion of curriculum and internationalization, is how to school should undertake achieving this goal. Indeed, many university presidents have stated that the internationalization of the curriculum is the most difficult component of international education (Hanson & Myerson, 1995; Dobbert, 1998). The need to internationalize business school curricula is, for the most part, no longer an issue that is. However, there is little consensus regarding which approach to take in order to implement internationalization.

There have been several different modes of implementation suggested in the literature. However, there are some commonalities within varied approaches. Top down support is crucial to the success of any internationalization initiatives, whether it be a department head, a dean or a president (Leinwald, 1983; Mestenhauser, 1998; Raby 1996). As with many initiatives within higher education institutions, support from senior administrative officials increases the program's chance for success.

There are also other tactics for internationalization common among several authors, such as infusion (Mestenhauser, 1998; Satterlee, 1997; Kwok & Arpen, 1994; Kendrick, 1993; Loch & Deans, 1997), development of new international courses (Raby 1996; Kwok & Arpen, 1994,) and development of partnerships with institutions abroad. (Raby, 1996; Satterlee, 1997.)

Infusion is the addition of specific content added that includes perspectives and information from other cultures or geographic regions that are relevant to the topic of the course into existing courses. . For example, a marketing course review new product launches in different countries, investigating packaging constraints or product names that may be inappropriate in different cultures. With this method, it is preferential if core courses in a given subject area are infused first so that all students are exposed to international issues and perspectives (Raby, 1996). The belief is that if a sufficient number of courses are infused with an international component, the effect on students will be cumulative, exposing them to numerous and varied perspectives.

While this may appear to be a straightforward strategy, it is not without its challenges. Mestenhauser (1998) reports that in some U.S. schools, while some courses were infused, there was not a department-wide adoption of the strategy. Furthermore, the content was often poorly introduced, so it was not a cohesive part of the subject. The overall impact was negligible. Raby (1996) states that due to limited time, international topics are only injected into the existing outline at a superficial level. This is particularly true in business schools where the pressures to get the required content completed is already high. In Canadian schools, accounting courses, for example, struggle to complete the content to ensure the students can meet the requirements as outlined by external accreditation bodies such as the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants (Chartered Accountants of Canada). Working within these constraints, the infusion method often results in a lack of in-depth study that only emphasizes that the international information is an "add-on", and not part of the core curriculum.

In order to minimize these problems, an alternative strategy is the introduction of new courses with a concentration in international business issues. While this addresses the lack of depth characteristic of the infusion model, course development is time consuming and expensive (Raby, 1996). Faculty must be given time to design the new courses, and departments must locate funds to compensate faculty for the increased work load, or to hire replacement instructors to allow faculty time for new course development. If the financial priorities of the faculty are not aligned with internationalization initiatives, then this can be a serious impediment (Raby, 1996).

Developing new, internationally-focused courses is also a slower way to internationalize the curriculum as most, if not all schools, require approval by the departments and other administrative bodies for new courses. This can involve lengthy vetting processes and requests for significant revisions to meet the requirements of the approving bodies.

Raby (1996) lists several other challenges inherent in the infusion and new course strategies. One such challenge may bea lack of expertise in international issues within the department. The department must then determine how to best prepare faculty to deliver international content. Mestenhauser (1998) suggests that faculty be encouraged to travel abroad, participate in international conferences, participate in joint research projects with colleagues from different parts of the world, or spend sabbatical time abroad.

Raby (1996) suggests an additional method of internationalizing faculty by recommending that schools look for international expertise when hiring. This develops a base of in-house expertise, which provides a stable foundation on which to build a solid international component within a curriculum. This also will help maintain the momentum of any initiative. It can be problematic if a faculty has only one or two individuals involved and are the resident "champions" of internationalization; should they leave, those initiatives may struggle. The more supporters involved, the better the chances that the strategies implemented will persist and become a fully integrated part of the curriculum.

Raby (1996) notes that many universities and colleges in general, and business schools specifically, have established a international exchange programs for students. These programs facilitate the travel, education, and movement of students abroad, thereby making it easier for individuals to gain international experience during their academic career. At the same time, students coming to Canadian and American schools in the context of similar programs at their home universities serve to internationalize their host campus. They bring new perspectives to class, and enrich in-class discussions. They also share their culture with other students informally during social interaction, and when working in group assignments.

Faculty exchanges are one method by which faculty can gain international experience. Many business schools in Europe, for example, welcome North American business faculty to their programs to teach one or more courses for short periods of time (Helsinki 2004; Uppsala 2004; IESEG, 2004). This means that North American faculty do not have to be away for extended periods of time and that the arrangements to work in and visit another culture are simplified. Warzyn (1997) notes that upon return, these faculty often serve to champion internationalization initiatives, and work to foster the continued development of international strategies and programs within their institution.

Other approaches for internationalization are the comparative approach, the multidisciplinary approach, and the issue approach (Raby, 1996). The comparative approach compares two or more countries or cultures within a given topic or course. This can serve as a straightforward method of effectively infusing and assimilating international material into an existing course in a meaningful way. Examples of such topics within business courses could include the creation and regulation of joint ventures between companies in Germany and Thailand, or off-shoring service contracts to India. By contrast, the multidisciplinary approach integrates two or more disciplines to develop a unique perspective on an international topic, such as world religions and their impact on business. Finally, selecting issues that are cross-cultural in nature, such as how to hire, place and manage human resources abroad, or measuring the financial impact of trade barriers and tariffs, and building courses around these topics characterizes the issues approach. These three approaches offer flexibility and relatively straightforward implementation, providing malleable and cost-effective methods of internationalization.

Lamy (1993) offers a further method: the technical approach. This method uses computer simulation activities or electronic links between colleges in different regions or countries. Students at two different institutions around the world would be linked together via technology to work on a common assignment or problem. Working in cross-cultural teams, students are exposed to the different approaches and ideas of other culture. While today's technology makes this is relatively easy to achieve, the teaching method relies on the initiative of particular instructors. Should the home or international instructor leave his or her institution, their expertise and curriculum leaves as well. Such an approach must thus be systematized to ensure its stability within a program.

Some Canadian business schools, have adopted some of these approaches, while other have developed additional criteria that their students must meet. Queen's School of Business (2003) requires that students take at least one course in an international area outside of the business program, which can include a language, comparative religion, fine arts, or world philosophy course. As well, students must also take at least one course in international business. Certain programs at the Sauder School of Business at the University of British Columbia require students to study at least one foreign language (University of British Columbia, 2004). The Eric Sprott School of Business at Carleton University has a mandatory exchange component for students in its International Business program (Carleton University, 2003).

In general terms, the creation of centres that focus on, and centralize, international activities within business schools is a logical part of the process of widespread internationalization (Mestenhauser 1998; Raby, 1996). Such centres ensure that there is no duplication of activity and allow for a more efficient use of resources. Such a centre can also act as a "data warehouse", monitoring which departments and scholars are pursuing which, and identifying sources of expertise within the school. The establishment of a centre sends a signal to faculty that international activity is a priority for the administration, while also acting as a support for faculty wishing to get involved. Such a centre would facilitate the internationalization of courses, contributing to the adoption rate among faculty and to developing the critical mass required to maintain the internationalization process.

An internationalization centre could take the shape of a centralized office within the business school that serves as a repository of information and coordinates international initiatives. It could also take the form of a more elaborate centre that operates with a broader scope than strictly working with faculty and course development. For example, in the United States, there is a very formalized network of Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERs). Currently numbering 30 across the U.S., these centres receive funding from the federal government to coordinate their research efforts and promote internationalization in their schools (CIBER, 2001).

This idea is supported by the research done by Kwok & Arpan (2002), which demonstrated that the most important factor for developing membership in consortia and initiating exchange agreements for students and faculty for non-U.S. business schools is a senior position, such as Director, dedicated to this area. Such a position, housed within an international centre, would promote international activity program-wide.

Barriers to Internationalization

Encouraging faculty involvement in the process of internationalization can be a challenge. Raby (1996) argues that faculty apathy is the number one cause for failure. Even if the administration supports internationalization, without faculty participation, the process of internationalization will almost certainly be unsuccessful. More specifically, tenured faculty may not be interested in the effort required to internationalize their courses (infusion) or develop new courses. Part-time faculty may not be interested in revising their courses if they are not adequately compensated or if they do not have a sense that their employment is stable enough that they will be able to see the benefits of their work.

Within some business schools, internationalization may still be seen as a luxury. In challenging fiscal situations, international activities, such as international travel and research initiatives, may not be prioritized for funding as faculty work to maintain other aspects of a program. Raby (1996), however, notes that if the administration continues to support international initiatives during these trying times, departments may be more likely to perceive internationalization as a priority and secure its place in the curriculum.

In some business schools an additional challenge exists where departments operate in isolated functional silos, such as marketing, accounting, finance, or human resources. This can hamper the effective implementation of internationalization. Satterlee (1997) states that in order to overcome the silo effect of business schools, cross-functional initiatives should be developed to cover the breadth of international business, integrate international business throughout the curriculum, and teach international business as an approach to managing.

External Influence on Internationalization

The impetus to internationalize does not solely come from within; there are also outside pressures. Some accreditation bodies in both the U.S. and Europe require a certain level of internationalization in the curriculum. AACSB, the largest accreditation body in North America, requires that all accredited schools maintain an international component in their program that reaches all students(AACSB, 2004).

The European accreditation body is much more rigorous in its requirements for the certification of business schools. EQUIS requires that all accredited schools have a significant level of internationalization. Each school should have a clearly-outlined policy for the internationalization initiatives that it is actively pursuing and committed to. The EQUIS includes specific requirements for the internationalization of the student body and faculty, including the recruitment of international students, the establishment of exchange programs for students, the ability of faculty to teach in English, the presence of international perspectives in all the main functional areas, and the availability of courses jointly taught with partner institutions abroad(EFMD, n.d.).

As this accreditation is available to North American business schools, the levels of internationalization it requires has begun to affect the core aspects of the curriculum of Canadian business schools as they design their curriculum to meet EQUIS requirements. As of June, 2005, four of the 34 Canadian business schools have achieved the necessary elements of internationalization within their curricula to be EQUIS accredited (EFMD 2005).

Some scholars suggest, however, that accreditation should not be perceived as a universally sufficient level of internationalization, and that institutions must be careful not to become complacent once they have met the international requirements for accreditation. In fact, both AACSB and EFMD require ongoing annual reporting, and re-accreditation every three to five years, suggesting that internationalization is a continuing process that must be monitored and assessed. Zoffer (1987) states that "accreditation cannot guarantee excellence, it can only set minimum standards, a threshold concept which suggests satisfactory performance" (p 43).

First Steps

Now that a basic outline of what internationalization means and the challenges and rewards involved with this initiative have been described, recommendations for institutions that choose to undertake this initiative can be developed. Harris (1993) suggests three initial steps . The first step would be an assessment of faculty within the school. A detailed inventory of faculty expertise should be conducted to see where there are strengths that can be leveraged in the process of internationalization. Further, it would be prudent at this stage to ascertain what is already internationalization activities are already taking place within existing courses.

This step also includes a survey of peer programs. What are the services available on campus that support international initiatives? Are language programs available which train students quickly in business terminology? How are the library holdings with respect to international journals and other publications? Is there another faculty or department that achieved a substantial level of internationalization that could act as a model? By knowing what is already in place, duplication of services/initiatives can be avoided. Coordination of efforts can increase the efficiency of program development.

The second step evaluates the level of internationalization appropriate for the school. Does the senior administration support the idea of a degree program in international business, or would a minor concentration be more appropriate? Should exposure to international issues be mandatory or optional? Is there room in the curriculum for more mandatory courses, or would the infusion model be the best fit? What type of advice should be solicited from business to ensure that students are exposed to the international issues that will best meet their future employment needs?

The third step evaluates resources. Are the financial resources coming from the business school itself, or from central administration? Are the resources a regular budget item, or "soft money" that will only be available for a given period of time? What are the resources that are required and where should they be applied? The response to this question must not be limited to faculty. There are other stakeholders that should also be taken into consideration. Students will one of the largest groups, particularly in a plan that has a study abroad component as a significant component of the initiative, as this additional expense will require a reconsideration of funding mechanisms. If the resources are not available to do pursue all desired initiatives, then how will limited resources be applied?

Smaller schools, without the resources to attract international students and scholars, or develop exchange programs, may encounter greater barriers to establishing international programs (Lienwald, 1983). These business schools may consider establishing internationalization through a small but coordinated effort. Lienwald (1983) argues that a program that starts with a few international students on campus can make a difference. A small number of courses on international topics will also make an impact. However, Mestenhauser (1998) suggests that the idea that a little internationalization is better than none is dangerous. Exposed to some information about other business cultures and practices, students are mislead into believing that they are "internationalized". It is thus even more critical for smaller institutions with limited resources to have a strategy for comprehensive internationalization with clear plans and policies for implementation.

In developing a plan for internationalization, it would be important to remember that the process of internationalization is a long-term effort. All stakeholders must be aware of the "master plan" so that there is a clear understanding of why each stage of the plan is being introduced, and that it is a coordinated effort, not several independent initiatives, and each new program is understood in terms of the ultimate goal of comprehensive internationalization. Keeping all the stakeholders informed could maintain enthusiasm, and by demonstrating that input into the program is valued, doubts can be addressed, and the importance of the plan reinforced.

It is important to realize that even though the majority of faculty may be in favour of international initiatives, there may be "pockets of resistance" that should not be ignored. Warzyn (1997) proposes several methods to address this issue. Representatives from business the future employers of students to discuss their needs and problems in international trade

Warzyn also reinforces the need for evaluation of initiatives. Any initiative must have a well-articulated process for evaluating its impact. Periodic reviews of all initiatives in the internationalization process should be conducted to ensure the effects match the desired outcomes. Because of the length nature of developing a comprehensive internationalization program, benchmarks should be set along the way to ensure that the implementation of the overall strategy is on track.

Initially, interviews with students and faculty members about their experiences abroad could provide such feedback. It is at this early point that impediments can be identified, and necessary adjustments made. As the program evolves, similar interviews with faculty regarding the performance of international students in their courses may provide helpful information. Course evaluations could be modified to assess the impact of the international components that have been infused into content.

In the longer term, the collection of supporting evidence could be expanded to include employers. For some this may be the most important assessment of the success of the program. Are internationalized students better prepared for the "real world"? Are employers witnessing improvements in the abilities of students educated in this new curriculum compared to their predecessors?

A process for reviewing the allocation of resources should also be included in the budget process to ensure that funds are being assigned appropriately. Financial pressure on many institutions only reinforces the need to demonstrate the effective use of resources in order to ensure ongoing support for internationalization initiatives.

Conclusion

Despite the many benefits of internationalization, an administration contemplating the implementation of such initiatives faces significant challenges, including resources, in the support of faculty and administration, and student expectations. Institutions must assess their ability to achieve such goals, the most appropriate approach to use, and their budget for such reform. While it could be said that any international activity is better than none, there are dangers in not carefully developing a long-term strategy to ensure that all efforts are coordinated such that the impact of each initiative is fully realized.

As with any other strategic initiative, the internationalization of curricula must have an assessment component that examines input from all stakeholders, and a mechanism in place to make the necessary changes to address any unsatisfactory results. The importance to all stakeholders of internationalizing the business curriculum means that institutions must acknowledge the challenges, rewards, and best practices of aggressively pursing comprehensive internationalization.

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