# ALTERNATIVE MULTI-MODE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING: A MODEL ESTABLISHING COLLABORATION

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## ABSTRACT

International engagement enriches a student's college experience, broadens thinking, enhances cultural intelligence and makes students attractive to employers. Concurrently, higher education institutions have been under significant pressure to internationalize their business and management curricula in response to the needs of both industry and accrediting organizations. Fittingly, American universities that create and offer students international experiences are becoming the norm. However, still too few college students are in a position to participate in an international experience because of costs, time commitment, or personal concerns. In response, many business schools have implemented a variety of tactics to internationalize.

The authors developed multiple innovative international learning projects. The evolving effort encourages students, faculty, and industry professionals from Spain, the Netherlands, and the United States to meet in multiple modes, network, and learn together. This paper describes the history of the innovative projects, report how it has worked and evolved, and its benefits.

## INTRODUCTION

The need for developing individuals who can work and lead with a global mindset has become more important than ever. Technological advancements have facilitated the integration of seamless supply chain systems satisfying the diverse needs of consumers around the world. This rapid pace of globalization has to be accompanied with the education of individuals to thrive in a multicultural environment (Javidan, Steers & Hitt, 2007). Similarly, higher education experts around the world agree that international engagement enriches a student's college experience, broadens thinking, and makes students more attractive to future employers, facilitating the development of global managers. Two trends are notable in the pursuit of providing a business education that is globally relevant. First, American universities' providing their students international experiences is becoming the norm. In fact, Harvard Business School sends its entire class to study abroad (Sood, 2012). Global, international and intercultural competences enable expansion of leadership skills essential to navigate in a complex and diverse global environment (Earnest, 2003). However, despite acknowledging that cross-cultural

competencies provide advantages, still too few college students are in a position to participate in an international experience because of costs, time commitment, or personal concerns. Second, virtual teams involving distributed, multinational team members are becoming a regular feature of the

workplace environment (Jenster & Steiler, 2011). A recent survey indicates that less than one-third of the white-collar employees in the United States were prepared to deal with the complexities of such team environments. Differences in culture, communication styles, accents and time zone challenges have been noted as the biggest hurdles (Solomon, 2012; Jimenez et al., 2017). Thus, study abroad programs are not sufficient to address the emerging needs of the global workplace. Higher education institutions need to have a repertoire of options to equip students with the essential skills and training approaches to enter the workforce.

In response, many business schools have implemented a variety of tactics to internationalize their programs (Orahood, Kruze & Pearson, 2004). By offering a variety of impactful options, we argue that students are served more fully since they can select from a "menu" of global options that range along a continuum in in terms of time, cost, and personal commitment. Creating an assortment of globalization options that vary in regards to time and financial investment is posited to allow more students a "global" experience.

This paper presents two innovative experiential activities developed for a School of Business to efficiently amplify opportunities to 'globalize' students where they are exposed to and immersed in shorter term international learning environments, networked with global industry experts, and connected with fellow students and international citizens. University students and faculty from Spain, the Netherlands, and the United States collaborated to develop the projects to meet, network, and learn together. We start with a historical background of globalizing efforts and universities and then discuss the two global learning options.


**BACKGROUND ON INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**


Active globalizing efforts by universities have a long history. The University of Delaware established the first study abroad program in 1923 following the horrific Great War (Burness, 2009). From these modest beginnings, now over 3.7 million students receive international study exposure annually and that number is growing by 12% each year (Sood, 2012). Studies show that it enhances the quality of learning for nearly every type of student (Redden, 2010), not just elite students. Not surprisingly, international experiences better prepare students by improving critical thinking and relationship-building skills (Imam, 2014), learning leadership skills, broadening their worldview (MBA.com), experiencing new cultures (TopUniversities.com, 2014), and even advancing their career. Ninety-two percent of firms desire college graduates with skills learned with international experiences (Matthews, 2015). Employers will seek out students with international experiences (Orahood, Kruze, & Pearson, 2004). According to the Huffington Post, a University of California study that found 97 percent of students who studied abroad found a job within 12 months after graduation, while just 49% of graduates who did not study abroad were employed within the same time period (Matthews, 2015). Cross-cultural exposure is no longer an "add-on" to college experience but is necessary to complete today's student. Maybe not surprisingly, the Lincoln Commission, a government-appointed panel of education experts, set a participation goal in 2005 of one million students studying abroad annually by 2015 (Lincoln

Commission Report on Global Competence and National Needs). Bhandari and Blumenthal (2011, p. 2) note that most countries now consider international academic mobility and educational exchanges as "critical components for sharing knowledge, building intellectual capital, and remaining competitive in a globalizing world." A significant body of research speaks to the benefits of study abroad programs

such as recognition of global issues and growth in intercultural awareness and intercultural communication skills (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001; Langley & Breese, 2005; Soria & Troisi, 2014).

However, gaining international experience isn't yet perfected. There is evidence of student learning not meeting expectations of what a global experience should be for multiple reasons. The benefits of intercultural development tend to be short-term rather than long lasting (Rexeisen, Anderson, Lawton, & Hubbard, 2008). In addition, in spite of the recognition of the significance of developing a global perspective, students are not embracing the study abroad option in growing numbers (Bandopadhyay & Bandopadhyay, 2015). In fact, fewer than 10% of all US undergraduate college students study abroad (Klebnikov, 2015). Moreover, there is a lack of diversification within the students who do study abroad. Those students who are studying abroad are "the same type of students who always studied abroad," (Salisbury, 2012). The existing model of study abroad is not serving new markets of young students. The familiar international study 'product' is not appealing to additional segments of university students. Research notes that most study abroad programs in the United States do not adequately represent the broader student population. For instance, students of color do not participate in comparable numbers as white students owing to financial constraints or fear of encountering racism abroad (Dessoff, 2006; Van Der Meid, 2003). Similarly, students opting for such programs have been identified as predominantly females (Institute of International Education, 2008; Redden, 2008). Further, cost continues to be a major hurdle for students that lack the resources to pursue study abroad options (Shaftel, Shaftel, & Ahluwalia, 2007).

## A NEED FOR MULTI-MODE GLOBAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The premier body for accreditation of business schools, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) notes that it is imperative for business schools to adapt to the changing dynamics of higher education fostered by new learning environments and changing student demographics and aspirations. It is desirable for business schools to form connections with other business schools and become co-creators of knowledge. Thus, institutions enable development of global leadership skills as multinational, diverse, global teams work together (Iannarelli, 2016).

"International experience" includes more than extended travel abroad. Research calls for teaching pedagogies that require students to deeply engage their cognitive abilities with cross-border and cross-cultural interactions (Aggarwal & Zhan, 2018). It also considers domestic interactions with representatives from other cultures, networking with international peers and working with a cross-cultural team (Douglas & Jones-Rikkers, 2001). Networking and collaboration opportunities aid the development of a global mindset as well as behaviors and skills to lead globally. For instance, students attending the university hosting international students or faculty benefit from the transactions they have with the international guests. These non-traditional options have proven to efficiently change student thinking, broaden understanding of international business practices, and increase interpersonal skills.

Moreover, technology has enabled schools to offer impactful interactions with peer international institutions and their students. Students are now in a position to easily and commonly interact globally with their international partner school peers in a directed classroom setting via myriad internet options. It could be expected that those previously unavailable experiences have the potential to add more global experiences, prepare students better for their face-to-face interactions when they occur, and generally engage the students earlier in the globalizing process. If live experiences (delivered either face-to-face

or via internet conversations) are the driving force of engaging students in globalization, then it makes sense to understand how educators can further deliver these experiences via available internet technologies. Research has recognized the limitations of technology mediated communications in the richness of information conveyed. Recent research in the realm of Global Virtual Teams calls for examining the role of collaboration platforms and more advanced tools for virtual communication (Jimenez et al., 2017)

## RESEARCH GOALS

Scholars and practitioners alike emphasize the need for students to have a global mindset (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001; Levy, Beechler, Taylor & Boyacigiller, 2007). In light of the constraints associated with study abroad programs, the authors collaborated with instructors from two other universities in Europe to develop unique projects that attempt to address the limitations of extent study abroad programs, is in line with recent pedagogical innovations in the realm of global education and provides a cost effective alternative to long duration study abroad programs. In the subsequent section, we detail the approach undertaken and the nature of the planned projects.

### The Globalizing Menu

Based on the research, the authors collaborated with two other schools: a partnering Spanish university to develop an intensive (4-day), international sport business conference-like event and a Dutch university to create a shared inter-university case study. The goal was to collaboratively design the global experiential events to involve active learning incorporating inter university projects and faculty from the United States and Spain and from the US and Netherlands. The two projects are intended to fill the void between "No International Experience" and the resource-heavy "Semester-long Study Abroad," which should offer more students multiple modes of global experiences. See figure 1.

| No International Experience | Inter-University Shared Project | Short Inter-University Experience | Semester-long Study Abroad |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |

**FIGURE 1**

### *Project1: Multicultural Sports Networking Conference*

The purpose of the first collaboration project is to support an annual international-focused, experience-rich event (hosted alternating years by the two partnering universities) to provide students from both universities with career-relevant, industry-delivered experiences where business industry knowledge obtained from classroom theory is delivered, integrated and magnified with close interactions with

students from both universities and business professionals from the US and Spain. Students participating in the program are invited to engage over the two-year cycle. Spanish university students would visit the United States and attend this U.S.-based class on alternating years (e.g. 2019, 2021, and 2023). A similar format, occurring on alternating years (e.g. 2020, 2024) is planned for the Spanish University. Students from the American university could attend the conference with the Spanish students to get a remarkable immersive international experience, affordably, right on the American University's campus.

Students from the Spanish and American universities would attend panel presentations in the morning on the American University's campus. Afternoons include group case work integrating teams mixed with American and European students. Here, students engage in interactive discussion to further incorporate learned concepts. Following this, the attending students visit host city sport venues and meet additional sport managers that expand the day's learning.

A draft of the 4-day schedule can be found in Table 1.

Presentations in this example deal with topics such as the international fan behavior, international sport sponsorship, international brand iconography, and more. Industry experts and faculty from the aforementioned universities who specialize in the topic deliver the sessions. The noted faculty and industry speakers confirmed willingness to participate in the summer event six months prior to the event for planning purposes.

### Project2: Multicultural Virtual Teaming Project centered on a case

The purpose of the second project is to expose students to the elements of working in multicultural, geographically dispersed team, such as interacting with individuals from different cultures and thus may speak different languages, hold different perspectives regarding work expectations and decision making (Janssens & Brett, 2006), and rely on technology for getting the work done. It is an inter-University project that brings together via audio-video technology a class from a U.S. university and a class from a Dutch university. The two classes would each study an international case that deals with a global issue but students from each university would be randomly assigned to join a mixed-nationality team (half American, half Dutch). Using high quality audio-video technology resources, students at both institutions could collaborate on shared projects. This virtual teamwork, crossing international and university boundaries, exposes students to live global problem-solving situations. Students from the two universities collaborate to resolve decisions to a case ("Which Way for Huawei?", Griffin, Pustay, 2020) over a short duration. The time period is chosen to allow enough time for students to acquaint themselves with their counterparts in the other university and develop a team culture to work on the small project. A small sample of students from both universities will be considered. The exercise will expose students to the challenges of working and communicating in distributed virtual teams, providing opportunities for learning essential skills and knowledge in teamwork. Appendix 1 provides the set of activities around the case. The case is chosen because it requires students to deliberate on different political, economic, technological, legal and cultural issues in a global context involving the Chinese Multinational Corporation, Huawei.

Students from the American and the Dutch universities will be randomly and equally distributed in five to six teams of about six students each (actual number of teams depends on class size). Each team will

be assigned to complete the tasks as detailed in the Appendix on specific dates during the semester. Students work virtually on the tasks. The faculty involved in the creation of this project met virtually to identify the main case and then discuss the student activities around the case.

**TABLE 1 - PROPOSED INTERNATIONAL SPORT MARKETING COLLABORATION**

| | Day 1 National Brands and International Fandom | Day 2 Minor League and Amateur athletics in America | Day 3 Managing Brands | Day 4 Sport Revenue and Economics | Day 5 Free Day, Tour Philadelphia |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9:00-10:15 | Speaker 1 – Philadelphia Eagles<br><br>Speaker 2 – Uvic (Spain) | Speaker 3 – Wilmington Bluerocks<br><br>U.S. Archery Olympic coach | Speaker 4- Blanquerna University (Spain)<br><br>Speaker 5 Philadelphia Union | Speaker 6 – Philadelphia Phillies<br><br>Speaker 7 - Schiller University (Germany) | Meet at Widener, go to train station. Tour city with Widener students. |
| 10:15-10:30 | Coffee break | Coffee break | Coffee break | Coffee break | |
| 10:30-11:45 | Speaker 8 – International Star Wars fan group organizer (501st Legion) | Speaker 9 - Widener U.<br><br>Speaker 10 – Widener U. | Speaker 11 – Widener U. (discuss International Sport Broadcasting) Freedom Hall | Speaker 12 – Montclair St. (International Sport Sponsorship) | |
| 11:45-1:00 | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch | Lunch at Xfinity live | Lunch |
| 1:00-2:15 | Attend screening with commentary of *Sons of Ben* movie - Freedom Hall | Network with Widener coaches | Case study or interactive discussion | CBP planner | |
| 2:15-5:00 | Sons of Ben Fan Group panel Q&A | Quick Stadium and Widener facilities tour | Tour PPL soccer park. Compare it to European stadiums. | Speaker 13 – Philadelphia Phillies CBP tour | |
| Evening | Tour Lincoln Financial Field | Tour Frawley Stadium (MiLB) | Banquet dinner, Widener U. | Tour Citizens Bank Park | |

The faculty from Netherlands also visited the American university, met with the American students face to face and finalized aspects of the virtual project, such as scheduling deliverables. Students are required to also provide comparative viewpoints based on non-U.S. and non-Dutch policy-making.

The geographically-dispersed students have a range of technology options to facilitate group collaboration. Both institutions have subscriptions to Microsoft Office. Teams is a versatile virtual communications and collaboration platform available to Office 365 subscribers. Teams facilitates a one-stop solution for almost all of the needs of virtual collaboration to include video and voice class, instant polling, file sharing, separation of tasks by groups/teams by means of the *channel* capability,

and live chatting, among others. Office Teams helps virtual teams overcome some of the challenges of asynchronous VC tools by facilitating dynamic or live file sharing and communication. Importantly, the ability to segregate by teams allows the instructors significant leverage over controlling the structure and monitoring communication norms of different teams. Nonetheless, students are not restricted to communicate using Teams alone, but can use Skype, Google Hangouts etc. for communication. However, they are strongly encouraged to use Office Teams to maintain visibility and transparency. Thus, we believe that by directing communication and collaboration over a common platform, we can control for several aspects of effective virtual collaboration.

## RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

The high impact international projects outlined in this paper enable students to gain international experience with an option of immersion possibilities. These options not only expose a new group of students to global experiences, but also do it relatively inexpensively. They can interact with international students on a range of engaging projects. They learn from faculty from multiple European universities, network with both groups, and study international business topics – all without leaving their campus. Research says they will better understand international topics, deepen their interpersonal skills, and be more attractive as employees. Steps would be taken to ensure that there is sufficient interaction, both in-class and informal, between the American university students and the international students. Moreover, such projects will help the American university to not only market to global-minded students and parents, but also develop students who are globally-minded. Students without any prior exposure to international experiences gain valuable cross-cultural know-how and become better able at making cross-institutional decisions. Both projects have been developed in cooperation with the respective international partner university and will be launched in the upcoming semester(s). Each project includes a socialization class where students from participating schools get familiar with one another.

## CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that universities are seeking to supply students with international exposure. On the demand side, consumers such as university students are expecting more experiences in their valued purchases (Pine, Gilmore, 1998). Most articles involving international experiences have involved extended student stays. Our study outlined the collaborative use and effect of two "mid-range"

globalizations efforts that serve to add to the menu of international study options available to universities and students: a shorter, immersive biannual course supplemented with teleconferencing efforts, and an inter-university case project. The globalizing effort is replicable and seems to promise positive results for a modest and sustainable investment by all those involved. It seems the model would be welcome as a pedagogical alternative. Importantly, these projects facilitate development of a global mindset. Importantly, the projects will help develop valuable transferrable skills sought after in the global workplace.

## LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Our study proposes a set of projects to overcome the limitations of study abroad programs. It is however, not without limitations. The study will be generalizable only after implementation and repetition with multiple sections and over semesters. However, this will be the next step in the process of developing and improving the menu of options for students to develop inter-cultural competences. Researchers should replicate the study and conduct a study that incorporates multiple collaborations from different fields (i.e., different international university partners from Anthropology, Chemistry, Environmental Sciences, etc.).

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**APPENDIX**: **Multinational, virtual team project involving students from two universities**

## I. Project Intended Learning Objectives

By participating in this project, students will learn and develop/enhance the following knowledge and skills:
1. Communicating virtually across geographical boundaries
2. Collaborating with multicultural teams
3. Jointly solving a problem with global considerations and perspectives (political, legal, cultural and economic)
4. Identify a systematic framework or process to evaluate and propose a strategy involving multiple stakeholders

## II. Team assignments

Since the primary aim of this project is to provide a multinational experience, student teams will be composed of an equal number of Widener and Windesheim students. The instructors of both Universities will make the team assignments.

*Assignment Categories*

A. Get to know your colleagues from USA/Windesheim
- Live virtual meeting
- Share a Vlog or a blog or a brief introduction in your respective team channel

B. Stakeholder Analysis and Interest Map

The subsequent assignments rely on the case "Which Way for Huawei (pages 250-251) from *International Business: A Managerial Perspective, Griffin RW and Pustay MW, 9e. Pearson.*

*Step 1:* Review the case and formulate your initial thoughts on the case. To more thoroughly assess the decisions of each government, conduct a stakeholder analysis and prepare an interest map as outlined below.

Start by visualizing the environment. Then map all parties you (the government) are in contact with and are part of that environment (US, EU, Canada etc.)

*Step 2*: Who are the most relevant stakeholders from the viewpoint of (American, European, Canadian, other) policy makers and why are they important?
- Assume the position of your home government (Widener students in a team would consider themselves in the position of the U.S. government and Windesheim students would assume the position of the EU).
- Identify all relevant stakeholders in the context of the Huawei case, either influenced by Huawei and/or your government's policies towards it. Consider those entities that are relevant to making your strategy decision. Then specify the *importance* and *quality* of these stakeholders for you (as

the government). In determining *importance*, consider the role of each stakeholder in terms of political, social and economic considerations or contributions. Current *Quality* reflects the nature of the relationship with the government.

- Score the above attributes for each stakeholder (*importance* and *quality)* on a suitable scale: - - / - / + - / + / + + *(hardly/not important, slightly important, moderately important, important, very important) and (very poor/problematic, poor, acceptable, good, very good)*

*Step 3*: Use the above information to create a Stakeholder Analysis Map:

- Draw a coordinate grid: The *horizontal axis* may indicate the *importance* of the relationship, and the vertical axis the *quality* of the relationship (the coordinates ranging from: - - / - / + - / + / + +).
- Put your own country/block (e.g. US government) in the center of the cross of axes
- Based on your analysis from Step 2, score the *importance* and *quality* of each relevant stakeholder vis-à-vis your government.

C. Case Reponses

- Discuss your stakeholder analysis with your team members and review the responses in light of your analysis for the different governments. Respond to the questions at the end of the case after deliberating with your team members. Each team will submit a US, EU, Canadian government policy assessment on Huawei.
- Alternative Scenarios

Consider policy decisions by other nations such as Latin American nations (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile) Asian nations (Singapore, Japan, India) and/or African nations (identify the specific nations you considered) and assess their approach in terms of different criteria relevant to international business.

- *Your* strategy assessment

Now that you have analyzed the positions taken by different governments, discuss what position you would take. Explain the basis for your stand.

D. Collaboration Strategy

Once you have developed a good understanding of your team members, work on creating suitable
- Norms and roles of team members (ground rules for acceptable and non-acceptable behavior, modes and frequency of communication, individual responsibilities)
- Dealing with challenges and strategies (conflicts, deadlocks, other obstacles)
- Learning strategies
- Communication tools (Teams Chat, Zoom, Google Hangouts, Whatsapp, etc). MS Office Teams facilitates communicating via chats, audio and video. However each team is free to experiment with tools for communication.

Provide a brief write up of your collaboration strategy, identifying key elements stated above. Which communication tools did you use, how and which worked best?

E. Cultural Intelligence

What did you learn about your colleagues' culture? How do they communicate and collaborate? What are some unique customs and traditions? Did you encounter language obstacles? How has the experience changed (in a positive or negative way) your confidence, understanding and ability to work with people from other cultures and countries?

F. Presentation

Each team will make a presentation showcasing their approach to solving the problem, the stakeholder map and solutions proposed, fun facts learned about each others' culture, challenges and approaches to working in multicultural, virtual teams.

## III. Communication and Collaboration Tools

Microsoft Office Teams
An environment where we can do all things for the project – sharing files, dynamically communicating (via messages and voice calls), threaded conversations, creating channels for teams and instructors and much more. Teams is integrated with Office 365 apps including Word, Excel, PowerPoint and OneNote.

Office Teams provides you with the features to chat one-on-one, in groups and also make calls (up to 50 people can be on the same chat and call). Check the Chat tab to the left to learn more and use it!

*Instructor* Channel: Used by the faculty for delivering key announcements (Welcome, project syllabus)
*Team Members* Channel: Students introduce themselves here – You may upload a picture, a small vlog, etc., blog to orient your colleagues to your interests, ideas, and strengths

Protocols for communication
With Instructors: You can also seek feedback from the individual instructors by addressing them separately or in your group from your own channels.

All team assignments will be submitted as files and addressed to all three instructors only.

With your teammates
• To maintain transparency in your work, students are encouraged to communicate in their respective team channels rather than one-on-one chats or groups. This also ensures you maintain a trail of your work and everyone is always on the same page in your team.

Collaboration guidelines
• Student teams should video call at least once a week. US students have Zoom accounts, which they are encouraged to take use of in initiating chats; or use the Teams environment.

Note: Google Tools require a gmail account
- Google Docs (free, require a gmail account)
- Google Chats
- Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts (text, audio and video calls – Android OS), Google Duo (works as a mobile app as well for quick video calling)