

ADDING VALUE TO THE MASTERS OF ACCOUNTING CURRICULUM THROUGH AN INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization of the accounting curriculum has been a primary area of concern for educators and researchers for at least the last fifty years. They have suggested that accounting educators have failed to restructure the accounting curriculum to equip graduates with the tools and expertise needed to compete in today's global business environment. Clearly, however, there is no one "right" approach to internationalization. The most important aspect of the internationalization process is that it be well-designed and executed, and add value to the educational experience of students. This manuscript describes the efforts of one U.S. university to internationalize its Masters of Accounting (MACC) curriculum through the creation of a required, for-credit, international travel course. The findings of a research survey designed to investigate graduate accounting students' (MACCs) perceptions of the educational value added by the international travel course requirement are presented. These findings suggest that even a brief international travel course provides meaningful learning opportunities for MACC students.

Key words: Internationalization of accounting curriculum, globalization, graduate accounting curriculum, international travel curriculum component, accounting education

Data availability: Data are available upon request from the first author

INTRODUCTION

Educators and practitioners have expressed concerns about the state of accounting education for at least the last fifty years (see, for example: AAA, 1973, 1986, 1998; AICPA, 1994, 1997, 1998; Arthur Andersen et al., 1989; AECC, 1990; Albrecht and Sack, 2000). Sundem (1999) reports that, of particular concern have been: (1) what curricular changes should be made; (2) how such changes should be made; and (3) how employers of accounting graduates will react to the changes. One of the proposed changes to accounting education was internationalization of the accounting curriculum. As a result, this topic has been the subject of an extensive body of literature (see, for example: AAA, 1973; Clay, 1975; Burns, 1979; Mintz, 1980; Meek, 1985; Sherman, 1987; McClure, 1988; Stout and Schweikart, 1989; Agami, 1991; Meek, 1991; O'Connor, 1991; AlNajjar and Gray, 1992; Tondkar et al., 1994; AlNajjar and Peacock, 1995; Rezaee et al., 1997; O'Connor et al., 1996; Beed and Shooshtari, 1998; Tondkar et al., 1998; Adhikari et al., 1999; AICPA 1999; Albrecht and Sack, 2000; Palmer et al., 2004).

Albrecht and Sack (2000), in the forward of their monograph, state “accounting education must change if it is to be relevant and add value to our students and the community” (p. vii). They propose that ‘three drivers of change’ are providing the imperative for changing accounting curricula—technology, globalization, and changes within the power of market investors. Some argue that accounting educators have failed to restructure accounting curricula to equip graduates with the tools and expertise needed to help business to compete in today’s global business environment. Information gathered by Albrecht and Sack (2000) indicates that those outside of the academy, primarily business professionals and students, perceive that the academy does not use a global perspective to teach accounting and that memorization is emphasized, while out-of-classroom experiences such as field studies and foreign business trips are not used enough. Thus, it would seem that students and working professionals see value in the internationalization of the accounting program.

In 1999, the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants (AICPA) launched the Core Competency Framework, which identified a set of skills-based competencies that all students entering the accounting profession should possess (<http://ceae.aicpa.org>). Educators identified three categories—functional, personal, and broad business competencies. Functional competencies focus on technical accounting competencies, while personal competencies are more aligned with individual attributes and values. Broad business competencies, directed to basic business understanding, include international/global perspectives, specifically:

“Individuals entering the accounting profession should be able to identify and communicate the variety of threats and opportunities of doing business in a borderless world. The accounting professional of the future must provide services to support and facilitate commerce in the global marketplace.” (<http://ceae.aicpa.org>)

An additional incentive for internationalizing the accounting curriculum came in 1974, when the AACSB, the accrediting body for business programs, changed its accreditation standards to include an international dimension in the curricula of accredited business schools (Nehrt, 1987; Kwok et al., 1994; Hans, 2004). By 1979, the AACSB required that “every student should be

exposed to the international dimension through one or more elements of the curriculum” (Nehrt, 1987, p. 83). Nearly twenty years after the AACSB’s original decision to include an international dimension came the decision to provide coverage ‘perspectives,’ including ‘global issues and global economic environments’ in undergraduate and graduate curricula. These mandates have resulted in a plethora of academic research recommending alternative methods for internationalizing the accounting and business curricula (see Table 1). Today, AACSB-International Standard 15–Curriculum Management reflects this continued and growing focus on global education (AACSB International, 2010).

TABLE 1
Proposed Methods for Internationalizing Curricula

<u>Study</u>	<u>Internationalization Recommendations</u>
Burns (1979)	Integrate international accounting topics throughout accounting curriculum
Mintz (1980)	Integrate international accounting topics throughout accounting curriculum
Meek (1985)	International managerial accounting topics incorporated into introductory managerial accounting course
Harkins and Mills (1985)	Utilizing foreign annual reports in intermediate accounting course
Stout, Wygal, and Volpi (1988)	Case study approach using comparative income statement from companies located outside the U.S. to add international dimension to upper level financial accounting courses
McClure (1988)	Incorporate international topics into introductory financial accounting course
Aggarwal (1989)	Infusing international dimensions into all core business courses
Sarathy (1990)	International internship program
Schechter (1993)	Overseas study
Nehrt (1993)	International internship program
Bazaz and Parameswaran (1994)	Teach international accounting from both internal and external perspectives
Tondkar, Adhikari and Coffman (1994)	Adding international dimension to upper level accounting courses by utilizing foreign annual reports
Kwok, Arpan and Folks (1994)	Out of country experiences
Kedia and Cornwall (1994)	Domestic study focused on interactions with international students in a domestic setting

(continued)

TABLE 1 (continued)

O'Connor, Rapaccioli, and Williams (1996)	International component added to advanced accounting course through comparison of U.S. accounting practices and policies with those of a select group of countries
Nash (1997)	One or two week travel abroad programs for credit (learn culture, visit companies and business executives, and prepare final report for presentation)
Kedia and Harveston (1998)	Overseas trips focused on work directed team projects sponsored by companies
White and Griffith (1998)	International internships
Muuka, Harrison and Hassan (1999)	Overseas trips of short duration focused on lectures, on-site industry visits and cultural excursions
Harrison (2000)	Infusing or integrating international dimensions into all core courses
Kedia, Haveston and Bhagat (2001)	International travel and international internship
Currie, Krbec and Matulich (2003)	U.S. graduate business students work with students from a university in another country on a prearranged project for a sponsoring company located in an international setting
Thein (2007)	Teach international accounting using textbooks and supporting materials such as newspapers, journals, websites, seminars and conferences

Preparing accounting graduates for the realities of the global marketplace can be accomplished by internationalizing the accounting curriculum. Clearly, there is no one "right" approach. The most important aspect of the internationalization process is that it be well-designed and executed, and add value to the educational experience of students. Thus, the purpose of this manuscript is threefold: 1) to describe one university's efforts to internationalize its graduate accounting curriculum through the creation of a required, for-credit, international travel course; 2) to present the findings of a research study designed to investigate masters of accounting students' (MACCs) perceptions of the educational value added by the international travel course requirement; and 3) to describe the ongoing process of closing the assessment loop as it relates to the design of the international travel experience course.

SUPPORT FOR AN INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL COURSE EXPERIENCE

Many of the early studies focused on internationalizing the accounting curriculum, had a commonly stated goal: that is, to increase the awareness of accounting graduates to different cultures and to social-political forces in today's world (Agami, 1991; AAA, 1986; AECC, 1990). Although international travel courses do not appear to have been the subject of these studies, compelling arguments do exist about the value of these trips for graduate business students (Alon and Ballard, 2003; Cotner et al., 2003; Currie et al., 2004). It has been suggested that students participating in international travel experiences have the opportunity to discover some of the complexities of dealing

with cultures that are different from their own (Henthorne et al., 2001), whether they participate in longer or shorter programs (DeLoach et al., 2003). The benefit derived from these experiences is increased levels of 'worldmindedness,' as a result of students "moving beyond their comfort zone and exploring cultures and peoples who differ significantly from themselves and their personal experiences" (Douglas and Jones-Rikkens, 2001, p. 64). Similarly, Saghafi (2001) states that, "students who have traveled internationally are less ethnocentric than those who have no international travel experience" (p. 73).

Alon and McAllaster (2005) suggest that students need to move away from simply being aware of globalization to being actively engaged in the process, stating, "[h]igher levels of immersion in global activities can produce a greater depth of knowledge and a higher cross-cultural level of competence" (p. 1). Kwok et al. (1994) argue that "out-of-country experiences are particularly effective ways to broaden and deepen students' understanding about the complexities and realities of international business" (p. 618). Researchers tend to agree, suggesting that students' critical thinking and decision-making skills are enhanced through exposure to new cultures and global markets (Cotner et al., 2003; Henthorne et al., 2001, DeLoach et al., 2003; Alon and Higgins, 2005). Thus, one means of bringing about improvement in these areas is through international field studies.

International field studies provide students with the opportunity to better understand global participation by organizations, both local and multinational. Research indicates that various types of international trip experiences are being utilized by graduate programs (Duke, 2000; Alon and Ballard 2003). Some programs offer international trips as an elective service experience in which there is no course grade or credit given (Gordon and Smith 1992; Schuster 1993). Other programs may offer the trip as a dedicated and required element of a degree program, especially for an MBA or Executive MBA (Alon and Ballard, 2003). Brokaw (1996) suggests that integration of academic issues may be enhanced if the trip is preceded with a graded course to introduce the concepts and culture being explored. However, the integration of academic credit into the trip is dependent on each university's goal, objectives, and attitude toward the trip as an appropriate source of academic credit (Duke, 2000).

International trips of short duration have been suggested as a means for internationalizing the business curriculum while helping both students and faculty expand their international appreciation through exposure to foreign cultures and business practices (Muuka et al. 1999). Moreover, shorter trips fit better into the schedules of most students than do stays of longer duration. Some universities require students to participate in work-directed team projects proposed by sponsoring companies (Kedia and Harveston, 1998). Often times, these projects expose students to an emerging market, and include visits to manufacturing, service, and non-profit organizations (Cotner et al., 2003), providing more academic rigor to trips of short duration.

Most programs require significant pre-travel "academic" preparation. However, some of these programs simply focus on delivering the content of an international business course with students gaining cultural experiences through their sightseeing in new cultural atmospheres (Gordon and Smith, 1992). Schuster et al. (1998) suggest that students' cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral learning are enhanced by a more targeted approach, such as those emphasizing interactions with international business people through visits or interviews. Post-travel, students generally make presentations, write self-reflections, finish projects related to entry-level strategies or business plans, etc.

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ONE UNIVERSITY'S MACC CURRICULUM

The study university's initial efforts to internationalize the Masters of Accounting (MACC) curriculum resembled that of many other programs, i.e., the inclusion of an elective international accounting course. Later, the university changed the course content to include taxation, and the new course title became International Accounting and Taxation. This course is currently an elective offering in the university's MACC curriculum.

Further internationalization efforts included the offering of a short-term international travel course for elective credit. During a three-year period (fall 1997 to spring 2000), only 59 students (both MACC and MBA) participated in these elective trips. In the fall of 2000, after surveying stakeholders to get their opinions and determine their needs in the international area, and benchmarking similar graduate MBA and accounting programs, the university decided to include the international travel course as a required core course in both the MACC and MBA programs. The first required trip was offered in spring 2001.

Challenges

As noted in previous studies, most part-time MACC and MBA programs do not require an international travel course due to the complexity of scheduling overseas trips for working students (Curie et al., 2004; Doyle et al., 2004). Thus, given that this university's graduate programs are designed for full-time working adults in professional positions, it came as no surprise when the school experienced similar challenges during its curricula internationalization efforts. Classes are offered exclusively in the evening, Monday through Thursday, to accommodate student work schedules. Additionally, given the working-professional population served, the MBA and MACC programs are designed to provide flexibility in pace and sequencing. Thus, developing a workable strategy for providing international exposure beyond the classroom was no small feat.

In an effort to provide flexibility to students, the school committed to offer at least four trips per year. The global destinations would vary, have different foci, be seven to ten days in length, be led by different faculty, and take place between sessions.

Trip Purpose and Destinations

The purpose of the required international travel course is to provide students with an integrating experience that broadens and deepens their awareness and understanding about the complexities and realities of global business. This is accomplished through international visits to multinational corporations, local enterprises, government agencies, etc., and through cultural activities designed to promote cross-cultural understanding and worldmindedness.

Trip destinations have varied widely since the inception of the required international travel course (i.e., Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, and Western Europe). Foci of the trips have been diverse including outsourcing, technology, export/import issues, international financial markets, international accounting standards, emerging economies, the entertainment and music industry, etc.

THE STUDY

This study was undertaken as part of a continuous improvement process to assess student learning and goal achievement in the international business component of our graduate curricula. Consistent with AACSB requirements, successful quality and continuous improvement strategies require processes to measure and document performance (AACSB International, 2010). A survey was developed to measure the perceptions of MACC alumni and soon-to-be graduates (i.e., those

who had already taken the international travel course) regarding the educational value added by an international travel course experience.

Sampling Procedure

The data for the study was collected via an internet-based survey. The sample consisted of MACC students enrolled (obtained via class rosters) in our graduate program during the period from spring semester 1997 to spring semester 2008 who participated in an international field study/trip. A total of 211 MACC students participated in these trips. Trips taken from spring 1997 to spring 2000 were elective rather than required. Contact information (i.e., university e-mail addresses) for currently enrolled students was readily available; however, contacting alumni was more challenging. Alumni Relations was contacted to get the email addresses for the identified alumni. E-mails were sent to potential respondents asking them to willingly participate in the survey. One hundred forty-five (145) recipients completed the survey for a response rate of 69%.

Methodology

A questionnaire was developed based on the international travel experience course objectives and a review of the existing literature on the benefits of exposing students to international field studies/short term trips (see for example: Kashlak et al., 1999; DeLoach et al., 2003; Cotner et al., 2003). This resulted in the development of twenty questions pertaining to students' perceptions of the educational content and shared interactions associated with an international study trip.

Previous studies present compelling arguments about the value of an international travel course experience for graduate business students (Alon and McAllister, 2005; Cotner et al., 2003; Currie et al., 2004; DeLoach, et al., 2003; Schuster, et al., 1998). Views range from increasing the "global mindedness" in students to "building more meaningful relationships" among students. The survey instrument, as described above, was designed to measure students' perceptions on the following twenty (20) statements concerning the value of an international travel experience as provided by the required international travel course. These statements are:

- **SOPHISTICATED GLOBAL MINDSET:** The experience laid a foundation for the development of a sophisticated global mindset in a manager.
- **BROAD GLOBAL ISSUES:** The experience changed my attitudes about broad global issues.
- **CRITICALLY THINK:** The experience helped me to think critically about broad global issues.
- **CULTURAL COMPLEXITIES:** The experience allowed me to discover the complexities of dealing with a culture which may be, at times, very different from my own.
- **CULTIVATING GLOBAL CLIENTS:** The experience increased my willingness to cultivate foreign clients or competitors.
- **UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL CLIENTS:** The experience increased my willingness to understand foreign clients or competitors.
- **ANALYZE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES:** The experience improved my ability to analyze cultural differences systematically.
- **ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INTERACTIONS:** The experience enhanced my understanding of the interactions between changes in economic and political systems and pre-existing culture.
- **BIG QUESTIONS EXPOSED:** The experience exposed me to "big" questions related to global issues.

- **MOTIVATION FOR GLOBALIZING:** The experience improved my understanding of motives for and degrees of global participation by a wide variety of organizations.
- **MULTI-DISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION:** The experience helped me to integrate multiple disciplinary constructs.
- **MACROECONOMIC INFLUENCES:** The experience improved my understanding of macroeconomic influences.
- **IMPROVED DECISION-MAKING SKILLS:** The experience enhanced my decision-making skills.
- **ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENTS ADDRESSED:** The experience addressed macro-level, industry-level, and firm-level environments.
- **APPRECIATION OF STRATEGIC MENTALITIES:** The experience enhanced my appreciation of different strategic mentalities employed by organizations in the international context.
- **COMPREHENDING GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS:** The experience helped me to comprehend the reasons things happen and their implications for conducting business domestically and internationally.
- **GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING** The experience helped me to move from global awareness to global understanding.
- **SHARED MEMORIES:** I benefited from the creation of shared group memories.
- **SAME EXPERIENCES DIFFERENTLY:** I benefited from recognizing that fellow students understand the same experiences differently.
- **ENHANCED STUDENT INTERACTIONS:** The experience enhanced my interactions with other students.

These items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale with one (1) indicating “strongly believe no educational value added” and five (5) indicating “strongly believe educational value added.” Participants were asked to respond on the basis of the incremental benefits of the international travel course, over and above the traditional classroom experience in the required international business course.

Because the final data collection instrument was crucial to the success of this research project, the instrument was refined several times. A developmental pretest was conducted, and respondents were asked to make comments regarding question wording, order, redundancy, omission, response categories, question clarity, or any other aspect of the questionnaire. The survey instrument was then revised to clarify any ambiguous questions and to improve flow. A polishing pretest was also conducted. Both pretests used small samples of current students who had completed the international travel component of their curriculum. No pretest respondents were included in the final sample. The twenty item scale was then tested for its reliability using Cronbach’s Alpha. This resulted in a score of .95, which greatly exceeds Nunnally’s (1978) minimum requirement of .70 for internal consistency.

Sample Characteristics

Respondents were asked to indicate whether the international trip was a required or elective component of the curriculum at the time they participated. Of the 145 MACC respondents participating in the study, 92% (133) indicated they were required to take the international trip while 8% (12) took the trip as an elective. The difference in response rate may have been anticipated given the study time frame (i.e., spring semester 1997 to spring semester 2007) and the fact that the

international trip became a required component of the graduate curriculum in fall 2000. Additionally, the total number of possible MACC respondents enrolled in the program from spring 1997 through spring 2000 was much smaller than the number enrolled from fall 2000 through spring 2008. Finally, one might expect that the longer the time span between international trip and survey participation request, the less likely the individual will respond.

Data was also collected on trip destination (see Table 2). The largest percentage of survey respondents participated in one of the trips to Prague (21%), followed by Chile (12%), Singapore (10%) and France (9%).

RESULTS

Identification of Important Global Education Attributes

The means, medians and standard deviations of the twenty global education attributes are shown in Table 3 in descending order. Attributes with a mean score equal to or greater than three were considered acceptable, since this value denoted moderate belief on the scale used. The descriptive statistics suggest that the respondents perceive the international travel course does add value to their educational experience and relationships with other students as demonstrated by the high ratings on the following items: broad global issues, enhanced interactions, cultural complexities, understanding global clients, economic and political interactions, shared memories, critically thinking, global understanding, motivation for globalizing, comprehending global implications, and appreciation of strategic mentalities. The lowest rating was attached by the respondents to improving decision-making skills.

A key element in the study of international business is the ability to understand cultural differences. Henthorne et al. (2001) specifically suggest that personal international experience contributes to a student’s appreciation of the complexities introduced into business relationships by multiple cultures. An analysis of the global education attributes reveals that “broad global issues”

TABLE 2
Trip Destination and Participation

<u>Destination</u>	<u># Trips to Destination</u>	<u># MACC Trip Participants</u>	<u>% Trip Participants</u>	<u># Survey Respondents</u>	<u>% of Survey Respondents</u>
Argentina	1	10	5%	4	3%
Brazil	1	13	6%	11	8%
Chile	2	20	9%	18	12%
China	3	15	7%	12	8%
India	2	12	6%	9	6%
Singapore	1	20	9%	15	10%
France	2	15	7%	13	9%
Germany	2	12	6%	9	6%
Ireland (South)	5	38	18%	11	8%
London	2	14	7%	10	7%
Know Europe	5	6	3%	3	2%
Prague	4	<u>36</u>	<u>17%</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>21%</u>
Total		211	100%	145	100%

TABLE 3
Means, Medians, and Standard Deviations of Global Education Attributes

		<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>
Q2	Broad Global Issues	4.28	4.00	.80
Q20	Enhanced Interactions	4.25	4.00	.95
Q4	Cultural Complexities	4.24	4.00	.82
Q6	Understanding Global Clients	4.19	4.00	.87
Q8	Economic and Political Interactions	4.08	4.00	.92
Q18	Shared Memories	4.08	4.00	1.03
Q3	Critically Think	4.06	4.00	.93
Q17	Global Understanding	4.06	4.00	.88
Q10	Motivation for Globalizing	4.05	4.00	.90
Q16	Comprehend Global Implications	4.03	4.00	.89
Q15	Appreciation of Strategic Mentalities	4.01	4.00	.93
Q1	Sophisticated Global Mindset	3.92	4.00	1.00
Q14	Economic Environments Addressed	3.91	4.00	.96
Q19	Same Experiences Differently	3.87	4.00	.94
Q12	Macroeconomic Influences	3.84	4.00	.96
Q5	Cultivating Global Clients	3.79	4.00	1.03
Q11	Multi-Disciplinary Integration	3.78	4.00	.99
Q9	Big Questions Exposed	3.71	4.00	1.01
Q7	Analyze Cultural Differences	3.61	4.00	1.00
Q13	Improved Decision-Making Skills	3.22	3.00	1.02

received the highest mean score (4.28), followed closely by “cultural complexities” (4.24). Thus, students perceive that the travel course experience enhanced or changed their attitudes about broad global issues and gave them the opportunity to discover the complexities of dealing with a culture that may have been very different from their own. These positive sentiments were also expressed in student response to “understanding global clients” (4.19). In adapting the Nelson-Perry model, Kedia et al. (2001) suggest that the initial mindset of a manager is that of a “defender” who is inwardly focused and makes no effort to recruit or understand global customers or markets. Moving to the next level of global awareness requires efforts to understand and cultivate new business from around the world. At a practical level, survey participants reported that the international travel course increased their interest in understanding foreign clients and customers. The majority of students also viewed positively their increased understanding of “economic and political interactions” (4.08), ability to “think critically” (4.06), “global understanding” (4.06), “motivation for globalizing” (4.05), and “comprehension of global implications” (4.03), as well as a greater “appreciation of strategic mentalities” (4.01).

Another key element in the study of international business relates specifically to the social issues involved with participating in an international travel experience with other individuals. Cotner et al. (2003) propose that the international travel experience binds the students more closely together and that such interpersonal connections improve classroom dynamics in all future classes. These assertions appear to be supported by the mean responses to three of the global education attributes.

Respondents believe or strongly believe that the international travel course “enhanced interactions” with other students (4.25), permitted them to “share memories” (4.08), and enabled them to understand that fellow students understand the “same experiences differently” (3.87).

Global education attributes receiving weaker support were those concerned with “improved decision-making skills” (3.22), “analysis of cultural differences” (3.61), and “big questions exposed” (3.71). Collectively, these items might be referred to as “thinking” skills. Experts contend that these skills are strengthened by international study experiences. Cotner et al. (2003) assert that exposing students to businesses operating in different cultures enhances their decision-making skills. This view appears to be shared by study participants; however, the moderate response received would seem to indicate they do not perceive that the international travel course experience improved their “thinking” skills as much as some of the other skills measured.

Grouping of Important Global Education Attributes

Exploratory factor analysis was utilized to group the 20 attributes into meaningful, manageable factors representing the dimensions of global education gained through an international travel experience. Prior to running the factor analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of specificity were performed. Per Kaiser and Rice (1974) the generated KMO score of .94 is considered “marvelous,” supporting the appropriateness of using factor analysis to explore the underlying structure of global education. The Bartlett’s test of specificity (Bartlett, 1950) was highly significant ($p < .000$), rejecting the null hypothesis that the 20 global education attributes are uncorrelated in the population. Using principal components with varimax rotation, only attributes with factor loadings of .5 or greater on a factor were regarded as significant. The factor analysis generated two factors explaining slightly over 62% of the common variability of the original data. Cronbach’s Alpha for each factor exceeds Nunnally’s (1978) minimum requirement of .70 for internal consistency. The results of the two factor solution are displayed in Table 4. These two factors represent the different dimensions that form the overall student perceptions toward global education as gained through an international travel experience.

As shown in Table 4, 17 variables had high loadings on the first factor. These attributes were: comprehending global implications, motivation for globalizing, critically think, global understanding, big questions exposed, appreciation of strategic mentalities, economic and political interactions, macroeconomic influences, sophisticated global mindset, understanding global clients, analyzing cultural differences, multi-disciplinary integration, cultural complexities, economic environments addressed, cultivating global clients, broad global issues and improved decision-making skills. This factor is labeled “Educational Content,” since the variables that loaded on this factor relate to the educational knowledge gained through participation in an international travel experience course. The second factor had high coefficients on three variables: enhanced interactions, shared memories, and same experiences differently. Since these variables relate specifically to interactions with other students participating in the travel experience course, this factor is labeled “Shared Interaction.”

For analysis, trip destinations were combined to form four broad international regions—South America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Western Europe. Argentina, Brazil, and Chile represent South America; Asia is composed of China, India, and Singapore; France, Germany, South Ireland, London, and Know Europe (a 4-week summer program on ‘Doing Business in Europe’ for graduate

TABLE 4
Factor Analysis of Global Education Attributes

<u>Attributes</u>	<u>Factors</u>	
	I	II
Factor I: Educational Content		
Comprehend Global Implications	.814	
Motivation for Globalizing	.812	
Critically Think	.807	
Global Understanding	.792	
Big Questions Exposed	.781	
Appreciation of Strategic Mentalities	.781	
Economic and Political Interactions	.780	
Macroeconomic Influences	.744	
Sophisticated Global Mindset	.740	
Understanding Global Clients	.723	
Analyze Cultural Differences	.681	
Multi-Disciplinary Integration	.671	
Cultural Complexities	.651	
Economic Environments Addressed	.628	
Cultivating Global Clients	.618	
Broad Global Issues	.616	
Improved Decision-Making Skills	.608	
Factor II: Shared Interaction		
Enhanced Interactions		.823
Shared Memories		.810
Same Experience Differently		.657
Eigenvalues	10.91	1.54
Percentage of variance explained	54.56%	7.71%
Cronbach's Alpha	.958	.745

students, organized by four European partner institutions¹) from Western Europe; and Prague represents Eastern Europe (see Table 5). While each city/country is a complex society with unique characteristics (language, history, culture, economic, political and regulatory forces, etc.), it is these

¹ Hogeschool Universiteit Brussel, HUB, Inholland University Haarlem, Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya (FIB) and EM Normandie

TABLE 5
Trip Participants By International Region

<u>International Region</u>	<u># Trip Participants</u>	<u>% of Total Trip Participants</u>
South America	33	23%
Asia	36	25%
Eastern Europe	30	20%
Western Europe	<u>46</u>	<u>32%</u>
Total	145	100%

characteristics, along with the physical location of the city/country that were used to identify similarities for grouping purposes. The cities/countries grouped together to form an international region are considered more similar to one another than they are to cities/countries assigned to other international regions. Thus, one can expect that differences in student perceptions will emerge when one international region is compared to the other regions.

One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests were designed to determine the effects of the independent variable—international destination/region on student perceptions toward the two dependent variables—“educational content” and “shared interaction”—associated with the international travel course. The results are reported in Table 6. Significant test results ($p \leq .05$) are indicated by asterisks. There is no significant difference in student perceptions of “shared interaction” between the four regions, $F(3,138) = 1.41, p > .05$. There is a significant difference in student perceptions of the “educational content” of the international travel course between the international regions, $F(3,138) = 3.45, p < .05$.

The Welch and Brown-Forsythe statistics confirm these results (see table 6). To determine where the differences between international regions exist on “educational content,” the Gabriel post hoc test was performed. This test indicates there is a significant difference between Western Europe and South America ($p < .05$). This finding is not unexpected given that a comparison of mean values on the seventeen individual items forming the “educational content” factor reveals that for each item, the mean values for the South America region were much higher than for the Western Europe region. Additionally, students travelling to the Western Europe region registered a higher percentage of neutral responses than did students travelling to South America.

REDESIGNING THE INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL COURSE

As noted earlier, the international travel course was designed as an elective course in 1997 and three years later (in 2000) became a required core course in the MACC curriculum. At the time this course was created, the course architects were more focused on the idea of including an international travel experience in the curriculum than on student learning outcomes. Thus, this course was not included in any formal assurance of learning plan (i.e., a process of clearly defining learning outcomes and the periodic assessment of these outcomes to assure that students achieve these outcomes). Additionally, the flexible nature of the course gave faculty members the freedom to design the course in any manner they chose.

Although the findings reported in this study are encouraging, and the addition of the travel course has resulted in a more fully internationalized MACC curriculum, the university was not satisfied that the course was living up to its full potential. Given the disparity in the course offering,

TABLE 6
Test Results - Region/Trip Destination

ANOVA for “Educational Content” Factor

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Between Groups	9.839	3	3.280	3.451	.018*
Within Groups	131.161	138	.950		
Total	141.000	141			

* Significant at $p < .05$

ANOVA for “Shared Interaction” Factor

<u>Source</u>	<u>SS</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>P</u>
Between Groups	4.177	3	1.392	1.404	.244
Within Groups	136.823	138	.991		
Total	141.000	141			

* Significant at $p < .05$

Robust Tests of Equality of Means

		<u>Statistic</u>	<u>df1</u>	<u>df2</u>	<u>Sig.</u>
“Educational Content” Factor	Welch	2.943	3	74.605	.038*
	Brown-Forsythe	3.616	3	126.499	.015*
“Shared Interaction” Factor	Welch	1.473	3	75.320	.229
	Brown-Forsythe	1.482	3	134.751	.222

depending on which faculty member was teaching the course (AACSB International, 2010), and insufficient specification of intended student learning outcomes for the course, this was a valid concern. Thus, the faculty began to ask “What do we want our students to get from our international travel course” and “How do we make sure they get it?”. Accordingly, the university, eager to demonstrate that students were achieving learning appropriate to their program, and to ensure that MACC graduates possess the knowledge and skills appropriate to their earned degrees, developed a set of eight learning goals, one of which is focused on the acquisition of international/global knowledge:

Graduates of the program should be able to recognize key concepts related to international business and demonstrate how a global perspective can inform business decisions.

This resulted in the creation of the following student learning outcomes, which formed the basis for assessment of the international component in the curriculum:

- Students develop an understanding of diverse cultures and an appreciation for the complexities associated with conducting business internationally (values).
- Students gain confidence and experience while participating in an international consulting team (attitudes).
- Students analyze and develop solutions to a corporate client's real-world problems (knowledge).
- Students conduct primary research and analysis on an assigned country (skills).

These learning outcomes were to be introduced and practiced in the core international business course with greater mastery occurring in the travel experience course. Assessment is to take place in both courses, utilizing a combination of direct course embedded measures (i.e., examinations, team projects, case analysis, reflective essays, and research reports). These measures will be supplemented with an indirect assessment measure—the survey described in this study. All students will be asked to complete the survey at the conclusion of their international travel experience, giving faculty immediate feedback with which to measure student perceptions of the trip.

For the past year, the university has been studying and evaluating proposed changes or enhancements to the international dimensions of the MACC curriculum. This has included a pilot assessment of a redesigned international travel course, incorporating the student learning outcomes described above. Rubrics and other assessment measures have been developed and tested on the required components of the course. Improvements in student mastery of the learning outcomes have been observed. Going forward, all future offerings of the course will have a common syllabus that incorporates the student learning outcomes presented above, and the course will be structured as follows:

Pre-Trip

Students will attend at least two one-half day Saturday class meetings. These meetings will focus on the following:

- A series of country specific lectures, discussions, videotapes and readings on the cultural and social context of international business, the economic and political environment of international business, and the implications of these factors for managerial decision-making and business practices.
- The assignment and presentation of individual student research papers on country specific topics. Students are required to thoroughly research a topic that will better prepare them to understand the culture of the host country. They share their research with classmates via classroom presentations.
- The assignment of students to a team-based market entry project focused on an industry specific and company specific business issue in the country/countries to be visited. The study includes a country risk assessment, a cross-cultural analysis, and a market entry strategy plan.

International Trip

Students will take a seven to ten day international trip to the country/countries selected. Given the industries specified for the research projects, field trips will be organized to meet with host country officials and visit select companies where corporate executives will make presentations. During the trip, each student is required to complete a trip experience journal in which he/she is asked to reflect on and record what is learned during the trip and the significant things taken away from the overall trip experience. Students will also experience the richness of the country's culture by participating in guided city tours, authentic local dining, local entertainment, etc.

Post-Trip

Students submit experience journals for grading. Students will attend a post-trip one-half day Saturday class meeting where team-based market entry research projects are presented.

Future Course Enhancements

Given the likelihood that many accounting students will seek and gain employment with large, international accounting firms, serving multinational corporations (MNC) with global operations, it is important to focus on broadening their horizons. Future plans under consideration include establishing relationships with partner universities. Such relationships, if established, would provide students with the opportunity to experience the interconnectedness of the business world by working on projects with student counterparts in the international study region.

The university also recognizes the importance of developing relationships with more international organizations. These relationships will give MACC students access to real world international learning opportunities, where they can apply the technical knowledge and theory developed in their accounting courses and in their business courses, better preparing them for the realities of global commerce.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations which need to be considered when interpreting these results. The first limitation concerns the issue of generalizability. The respondents participating in this study were all students who attended one institution. Thus, it is possible that different results might be obtained from a different population.

Another limitation of this study relates to the amount of time that has elapsed from the time some of the respondents participated in the travel experience. For some of these students, it may have been over ten years, which could have resulted in a student's inability to recall the details of his or her trip, thus biasing the findings.

A third limitation might be that the "demand characteristics" of the research situation could have biased the self reports. That is, the students may have responded more positively to the questions to please the researchers. While it is acknowledged that this bias could have been an issue, it is unlikely given that neither researcher taught a section of the international travel course during the semester the data were collected. Additionally, given that a large number of the respondents were alumni at the time of data collection, there should no longer have been any perceived gain in pleasing the researchers.

A fourth limitation relates specifically to the manner in which the survey questions were generated. Since all twenty questions were framed in a positive direction, participant acquiescence might have occurred.

A fifth limitation is the absence of demographic information. Unfortunately, when the survey was designed, demographic questions were not included. This omission made it impossible to analyze and report findings related to age, gender, race/ethnicity, etc. Any future study should include demographic information.

Finally, the inability to report on and evaluate the perceptions of the educators involved in and/or leading the international study abroad course could be considered a limitation. This information would have been a nice addition to the study. Unfortunately, for most of the trips, too much time had elapsed to gather this information from the faculty involved. Any future study should include some type of mechanism whereby educators report after the trip, making note of any problems and/or recommendations for changes and adjustments to the international travel course design.

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