Developing an international Business Program; Internationalization at Large and Small Schools; Curriculum Development

James McCullough

Calling international business a “hot topic,” James McCullough shared both his academic expertise and hands-on global experience with faculty participants from around the nation. McCullough is the George Frederick Jewett Chair in International Business and the director of the School of Business and Leadership at the University of Puget Sound. He was the founding chair of the department of marketing and the founding director of the International Business Institute at Washington State University. Dr. McCullough has professional experience in more than 80 countries and conducts research on international marketing and management issues in emerging and transitional economies.

In the course of his career, McCullough has traveled across continents, from Africa to Asia to Eastern Europe and the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union.

“I've taught in Singapore, the People’s Republic of Congo and Thailand,” he said. No matter what the country, I find that businesses want people who can speak effectively, who can write effectively and who can think critically.

The international business program, with its emphasis on diversity and foreign cultures, “allows us to help our students communicate effectively and think critically.”

However, it’s the diversity piece that’s often overlooked. “Many schools are pressed to have more diversity but many of us don’t know exactly what that means. Most people are uncomfortable with simple race and gender body counts, but we should recognize that we want our students exposed to a diversity of ideas, personalities, cultures, experiences and so forth. What better way to get that than from internationalization.

The key is to bring in more international students, many of whom think differently and have different kinds of problems than American students have. “Working with international students helps us to recognize the difficulty of doing business internationally, but also recognizes the contributions that can come from this.”

According to McCullough, Washington State University has 11 percent international students; the University of Puget has 1 percent. “We're working on that.”

McCullough acknowledged that building and running an IB program costs money. But looking beyond the expense, IB should also be viewed as a source of revenue, which can be generated through tuition, grants and sales. “International students may be willing to pay a higher tuition, grants and other kinds of funding can be tapped for IB projects, and educational programs and short courses can be packaged and sold to various clientele.”

First and foremost in developing an IB program is to build faculty interest. “It’s very difficult to build an international program without it.” Money is one way to motivate faculty interest, the ability to provide funding for international travel and meetings. But answering concerns on the curricula side is a more difficult challenge.

“Most of our institutions are faced with financial constraints. When you put in more international, what do you take out? It may be a negative gain. If a faculty member has always taught basic managerial accounting, for example, he’ll have fears about being put in international accounting or being fired.
“If you set up an IBiz unit, whose resources are you going to take away? For most institutions, that is a very, very difficult issue. Those of us who are proponents of international have to talk about benefits. We have to convince people they can be retrained.

“If we’re going to have faculty who are actively involved in international business, the reality is that many of them are going to be gone for some period of time. And when they’re gone, what do you do about that? Policies are needed that allow you to juggle schedules.

“Unfortunately, many people do not view international work as being of high academic quality. It may not be as theoretical; much of the early work was largely descriptive. Should a faculty member who joins you with an international interest be told, as I was told at the University of Arizona, ‘Wait until you get tenure to do the international stuff. It will not count.’

“Many of us who are here are passionate about international; we believe it ought to be a bigger thing. Foreign language people recognize that this is an area they can link to. But you have to have a school that supports you from the dean on down. We cannot run an international business program today without strong support staff. Some of the regulations are overwhelming.

“If you’re looking to recruit international students, you must be willing to have somebody go around the world, talking to prospective students. You have to make sure that you have materials that are available overseas, available on the Web and available in different languages.”

McCullough described the roller-coaster ride the IB program took at Washington State.

- Faculty interest led to a course in international management;
- Additional interest led to international courses in marketing, finance and accounting;
- Funding led to increased faculty support for a major and minor in IB;
- Study abroad and language were added to requirements.

And then . . .

- Budget cuts led to a loss of interest and programs.

IB has fared better at the University of Puget Sound, where there are 300 business students and 100 international business majors in a student population of 2800. At UPS . . .

- Liberal arts support language and study abroad programs;
- Administrative links stimulate faculty interest;
- Academic restructuring eliminated business majors and reduced courses.

The result? International business remains strong.
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Curriculum development

The classroom can’t provide students with everything they need to know and some kind of international experience is necessary, McCullough said. The study abroad program is one way to achieve this. Information is easily obtained from catalogs and sales reps.

“There are other ways students can get international experience, such as international internships and short courses where the student might go abroad.

“Foreign language programs in particular are good ways to get more experience. If we require foreign language in the IB program, then the student can study foreign language overseas and we kill two birds with one stone. But you’ve got to have all of these pieces in place in order for it to work.”

At the University of Puget Sound, the international experience is augmented with evening seminars conducted by people engaged in international business. That might include a trade representative from the Department of Commerce or someone from industry. Chances are that students are not going to get a job that takes them overseas, said McCullough. “But I strongly encourage my students to do something exotic, like join the Peace Corps or teach English in China.”

In developing the curriculum, “We go out to businesses and try to find out the things they would like, and we try to get our students to do internships.

“Students need to have a solid understanding of business functions. They need to know about marketing, accounting, finance and so forth.”

On the non-business side, other issues must be built into the program:

- **Cultural sensitivity**: “That comes from exposure to people from different cultures and a myriad of activities.”
- **Political understanding**: What does that mean and how do we get it? We have programs in international relations and international affairs and policies and government. But looking at the theories and looking at the structures, I’m not sure that’s what a business person needs. What the student needs to understand, not just from an American perspective, is that governments all over the world are in fact sovereign. We can look around the campus and see who teaches that or we can send students to places that are politically different and let them experience the differences firsthand.”
- **Economic analysis**: “This goes beyond knowing how to do exchange rates. We have to look for meaning in the facts and figures and how they translate on the human level. What does it mean to live in a country where people are struggling economically on 30 bucks a month? And what does it mean to live in West Africa on $300 a year? People don’t die, they just live differently and they spend their money differently. How do you live with hyperinflation, like in Brazil? What does that mean?

“An international business program has to have a lot of different pieces that work together. The non-business courses give students a broader understanding of the world.”
In response to a question, McCullough described the structure of an MBA program Washington State ran in Vietnam.

“We offered five courses in Vietnam and five courses in the United States, which were taught by a mix of faculty. An American faculty member from Washington State taught 30 hours out of the 45 required hours in Vietnam. He or she worked with a tutor from National Economics University who taught 15 hours after our professor left. We accepted those classes as transferred credits.

“The student then came to Washington State, and took four classes with us during one semester and in the summer did a research project and wrote a case study.

“Prior to anybody enrolling in the courses taught in Vietnam by our professor, we had a combination program at home that was taught in English by Vietnamese professors that came from National Economics University.”