Overview of IB studies & program development

Lee Radebaugh

Academic understanding of IB environments and operations has changed in the past 15-35 years, said Lee Radebaugh in his address to the CIBER faculty development conference.

Radebaugh is the KPMG professor at Brigham Young University. He previously taught at Penn State University and was a visiting professor at Escuela de Administracion de Negocios para Graduados, Lima, Peru, and Glasgow University, Scotland. He is the coauthor of several books including International Business Environments and Operations (10th edition), Globalization and Business, and International Accounting and Multinational Enterprises (5th edition). He has published several other monographs and articles on international business and international accounting.

As the world has become more complex, universities have been challenged to make international business more relevant to IB students in particular and all students in general.

Radebaugh has been deeply involved in this challenge for decades and, with the 10th edition of his textbook “International Business Environments and Operations,” has taken a forward-looking approach to the development and teaching of international business.

“Thirty-five years ago,” Radebaugh said, “only 4 percent of the schools had a separate IB department and 24 percent put the IB group into another department, usually management. The most popular IB course back in 1969 was international management, but by 1974 the functional courses - international marketing and finance - took over.”

The climate for international business studies today has heated up considerably as it has become clear that we live and work in a global environment. The 10th edition of Radebaugh’s book has special features on ethical dilemmas, security issues, and the rise of China as a global force.

“Covering current events is extremely important to understanding the way the world works and the trade strategies that countries and companies employ,” said Radebaugh, adding that the book does not delve into current events. “This is a rapidly changing subject and trying to include any of it in a textbook would make the textbook dated even before it’s printed.

But what doesn’t work for a book works extremely well in the classroom. “A year-and-a-half ago, outsourcing was not a political issue, today it is. In class, we talk about the theory and the practical side of it.” Whether it’s outsourcing or politics in China and Russia, the newspapers are filled with articles daily. “By discussing these articles with the students, they can see it happening right now.”

Students are more entrepreneurial now than they used to be. “They’re bright and innovative and they want to know how and where they can start being productive,” said Radebaugh. And their needs differ from students of another generation.

Ten, 15 years ago, information technology was in the nascent stage and not a part of any school’s curriculum or thinking. Today, IT is all encompassing and a critical factor in the way a business operates. “Globalization and Business” places a strong focus on electronic commerce and the role of the Internet in facilitating research and business transactions.

Business strategy, cultural and economic issues are also highlighted to accommodate the growing segment of entrepreneurial students.
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Students need to be trained for specific functions and not just in broad subject matter, said Radebaugh. “For somebody to be really effective in the job market, they have to have functional expertise. It’s not enough to be in international business. If they can’t do something really well they’re not going to be effective internationally.

“I don’t care how good a finance faculty member is, if he or she simply teaches a couple of capital market issues in a finance class, they’re not teaching somebody about international finance.

“The problems a company faces in Brazil, which has currency problems and different market conditions from those in the U.S., necessitates doing things very creatively and not by the book. You can’t get that in an international finance course without understanding the whole breadth of international business.”

However, in choosing electives, Radebaugh would recommend the student round out the international finance class with an international business class. “You have to look at your functional area and figure out what students need in order to have a body of knowledge, and then get to the international piece.”

A student in a master of accountancy program would do well to take introduction to international business and international accounting. “But you have to be a good accountant or nobody’s going to hire you,” said Radebaugh.

On the other hand, a student who wants to do an entrepreneurship career is “a different kind of student.” For this student, who’s going to be dealing in the broad international environment, it’s important to understand marketing, finance and a whole gamut of subjects. “But that’s different from somebody who wants a career in international finance or international accounting.

“And that’s where I think our advantage is in teaching IB. We can draw things out for students so they can see where the function fits into the context of the overall firm.”

Asked where a foreign language fits into the IB student’s curriculum, Radebaugh said: I’m a firm believer that you have to speak a second language to really appreciate what’s going on in the rest of the world.”

Speaking about trends for the future, Radebaugh said:

- More faculty will have international interest and expertise;
- There will likely be tension between IB and non-IB faculty for resources and recognition;
- An increasing number of students will have an international experience;
- There will be a greater focus on mainstreaming to complement specialized/required IB courses;
- There will be greater emphasis on international faculty to assist in the globalization process.