

Rethinking International Management Education: The North American Summer School for Advanced Management

Victor L. Heller and Consuelo M. Ramirez

victor.heller@utsa.edu

College of Business, University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, Texas 78249-1644
(210) 458 – 4874

consuelo.ramirez@utsa.edu

College of Business, University of Texas at San Antonio
One UTSA Circle, San Antonio, Texas 78249-1644
(210) 458 – 4781

Abstract

With an increasing global economy, university graduate business student exchange programs are becoming more prevalent and necessary around the world. Exchange programs expand the academic, cultural, and educational horizons of the participating students. These traditional programs are normally structured on the university's semester calendar. Business schools often seek mature students with working experience or who are currently employed in the workforce. As a result, many graduate business students in traditional master of business, or Master of Science programs, are not in a position to have a comprehensive, in-depth study abroad experience. Personal and professional considerations override international exchange program opportunities. The North American Summer School for Advanced Management addresses this concern by offering a comprehensive, in-depth international exchange experience.

Introduction

With an increasing global economy, university graduate business student exchange programs are becoming more prevalent and necessary around the world. Exchange programs expand the academic, cultural, and educational horizons of the participating students. These traditional programs are normally structured on the university's semester calendar. Business schools often seek mature students with working experience or who are currently employed in the workforce. As a result, many graduate business students in traditional master of business, or Master of Science programs, are not in a position to have a comprehensive, in-depth study abroad experience. Personal and professional considerations override international exchange program opportunities. The North American Summer School for Advanced Management addresses this concern by offering a comprehensive, in-depth international exchange experience.

The North American Summer School for Advanced Management (NASSAM) was conceptualized in the summer of 1993 as a two-week Master of Business student exchange program between the University of Calgary (UC), in Calgary, Alberta and The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), in San Antonio, Texas. Two years later a Mexican university began participating in the program, expanding the exchange program to three weeks. This institution was replaced by, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey in Mexico City (ITESM) in 2000. The original focus of the program was to create an innovative graduate exchange program to study the North American Free Trade Agreement, international trade and related issues. The host cities of the three universities share common economic activities such as agriculture, energy, medical and tourism. This economic commonality provided the academic laboratory for student projects.

NASSAM's Innovative Learning Experience

Today there is an abundance of academic and trade literature that is rethinking management education (Alverson, 1992; Conner, 1998; Drucker, 1999; Dunn, 1995; Gibbs, 1992; Grey, 1995; Handy, 1995; Hassard, 1993; Parker 1992; Peters, 1992; Purser, 1998; Willmott, 1994). Historically, faculty has instructed their students with a combination of written material, lectures, and hands-on training. Modern research (Beck, 1998; Dunn and Dunn, 1993; Dunn et.al., 1995; and McCarthy, 1987) demonstrates that while these faculty members were addressing the learning needs of their students' varied learning styles, more was needed

The educational underpinning of the NASSAM exchange experience is that learning styles are defined within each culture. Each student concentrates, processes, internalizes, and remembers new and difficult academic information or skills based on their cultural foundations. To capitalize on these cross-cultural learning styles, the NASSAM process enables students to develop an awareness and appreciation of the cross-cultural learning activities of their peers based on the Dunn and Dunn learning model (1993). These learning activities are:

1. Students react to the immediate instructional environment. The NASSAM exchange moves students immediately into a foreign environment and out of their comfort zone. International air travel, passing through customs, currency exchange, and hosting international visitors immediately set the learning tone. Classroom lectures at another university, different classroom technology, site visits to various corporations, foreign language complications, etc., reinforce the students need to adapt to a different learning environment.
2. Students are emotionally motivated, persistent, and responsible and have predetermined preferences for structure versus choices. The NASSAM exchange provides a structure and process for student learning. Students must negotiate their own person preferences with the program structure, as well as with the preferences of their 'international learning team' members.
3. Students have sociological preferences for learning- alone, with peers, with either a collegial or authoritative adult, or in a variety of ways as opened to patterns or routines. The NASSAM exchange provides multiple opportunities for students to

work alone, in teams, with faculty members and with outside authority sources.

4. Students have physiological characteristics- perceptual strengths, time-of-day energy levels, intake, and mobility needs. The NASSAM exchange enables students to explore, define and redefine their physiological characteristics. “International learning teams’ establish their own expectations of performance, time schedules and responsibilities.
5. Students have global versus analytical processing capabilities as determined through correlations among sound, light, design, persistence, sociological preference, and intake environments, methods, and resources effective for some learners and ineffective for others. The NASSAM exchange process enables students to self-define and motivates oneself. It enables each student to capitalize on his/her individual talents, skills and abilities with in the ‘international learning group’ setting.

What makes the NASSAM exchange experience unique is within a cross-cultural environment, NASSAM exchange students learn to; connect the concept under study to personal meaning, receive expert information about the concept, practice applying the information, and extend the information to real world problem solving.

NASSAM Program Design

Today, the ultimate goal of the NASSAM program is to expand the academic, cultural, and educational horizons of the participating students from all three universities by providing an intensive three-week inter-cultural experience in Canada, Mexico and the United States. The program exchange takes place between the end of the spring semester and the beginning of summer school. To achieve the program’s ultimate goal, the organizers arrange a series of social, cultural, and educational activities as well as a group project in which students must develop a business plan in cross-cultural teams. There is a high degree of interaction among students and between students and faculty. The differences in culture, experience, age, and language skills among students suggest a diversity that is unlikely to find any single teaching style effective; for that reason, the program offers a combination of teaching styles.

Each university has one ‘NASSAM faculty’ member responsible for the NASSAM program. Administrative support varies by institution. Each university budgets for;

- a.) air transportation of their students, staff and faculty for the entire trip,
- b.) housing for everyone when at their university,
- c.) two meals per day for everyone when at their university,
- d.) ground transportation for everyone when at their university, and
- e.) gifts, stipends, miscellaneous expenses, printing, etc. at their university.

General expenses shared by the three universities are limited to support materials such as notebooks, name cards, graduation certificates etc.

Selection Criteria

The program is designed to introduce the discipline of international trade, specifically NAFTA to graduate students, primarily MBA students. Selection criteria focus on;

- a.) identifying students who have not had extensive international trade experience,
- b.) having a balance of business disciplines represented,
- c.) requiring minimum grade point averages, and
- d.) having a demographic balance of students.

While the ‘umbrella’ criteria serve as a guideline, the individual institutions select their own students via their individual selection process. Eight participant students and two alternate students are selected to participate for the exchange. Selection of the students is normally completed by the end of the fall semester or early spring semester. All students earn six graduate hours of credit for participating on the program. Alternates who do not participate on the exchange are required to do additional academic research with their professor.

Pre-Exchange Program Orientation

During the spring semester, prior to the NASSAM exchange, each institution creates a ‘learning team’ comprised of the students selected and alternates to undertake an orientation project. The ‘learning team’ is comprised of the students and alternates selected for the program. A comprehensive ‘learning team’ assignment, as well as individual assignments must be completed at their home institution prior to departure. The ‘learning team’ assignment is a comprehensive orientation project. Students research the cultural, economic, environmental, historical, political, social and technological issues that are impacting NAFTA and the development of free trade between Canada, Mexico, and the United States and present a PowerPoint presentation. Students are also required to prepare to write an individual research paper.

The ‘learning team’ project establishes a body of common knowledge for the students and creates an academic foundation for future student assignments. It provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the various realities of each country and how these issues affect NAFTA and free trade. Additionally, the orientation ‘learning team’ project is also the first team interaction among the group members. It serves as an introduction to what the program will bring.

The individual assignment is an analysis on selected reading compiled by the faculty leaders. For example one school uses Michael Porter’s book Competitive Strategy and supplemental readings. This assignment requires a considerable amount of time, given that the book is very comprehensive. Students are asked to report the contents of the book on a 4 to 5 page paper, and reflect on how the competitive strategies theory could help them develop an international business plan.

The NASSAM Exchange

The NASSAM exchange begins the second Monday in May is completed on the last Saturday of the month. The twenty-four students begin the trip in Mexico City where they stay for seven days. They stay in San Antonio for six days, and then travel to Calgary where they spend the third and final week of the program. In each country, the students attend a series of lectures, site visits and work in 'international teams' to design a business plan which incorporates all three countries. Local site visits to businesses, corporations, government offices, etc., are organized giving students an opportunity to interact not only with the academicians at each university they visited, but also with practitioners who have hands-on experiences involved in international trade. Students also meet regularly with their home university NASSAM faculty member to discuss the process, policies, procedures and personal issues.

During the first two days at ITESM in Mexico City, NASSAM faculty members assess the talents, skills and abilities of the students. Based on a consensus of the above assessment and the original student selection criteria, the students are assigned to 'international learning teams.' Each 'international learning team' is comprised of two students from each university. Students are instructed by the 'NASSAM faculty' of two deliverables each 'international learning team' will need to complete by the end of the third week; an international business plan of a product or service that incorporates all three countries and a process paper which describes and analyzes the NASSAM experience. Students also receive instruction on the NASSAM past experiences and what to expect relating to process. Students are also instructed on NASSAM exchange program protocol and governance. At this time, students often expand self-governance.

Students' have the responsibility for self-organizing their 'international learning teams' responsibilities, as well as guidelines of behavior and expectations for their teams' performance.

The topics of the first week's lectures evolve around the differences of the three countries focusing mainly on Mexico. To help students understand Mexico, academicians and practitioners share their knowledge about Mexican economic, environmental, historical, political, social and technological issues in a classroom style setting. Site visits are made to banking institutions, corporate offices, import-export and manufacturing businesses. Additionally, students are introduced to the Mexican culture through visits to governmental facilities, historical sites, museums, art galleries, opera, and natural attractions.

During the first week, students begin working in their 'international learning teams.' They are required to identify what product or service they are developing a business plan on and how each county will be integrated into the plan. Time is allotted for the students to work in teams, as well as collectively. On the last class day, students make a formal presentation to the NASSAM faculty and their peers for feedback about their proposed business plan and process analysis. Feedback is provided by all.

During the second week at UTSA in San Antonio, the lectures and site visits focus on NAFTA and international trade issues from a US-Global perspective. Students attend lectures by academicians, government officials and international trade practitioners. Site visits are made to

businesses, government agencies and corporations, which are engaged in international trade. Examples include but are not limited to; advertising agency, city international trade office and grocery store headquarters.

This week requires students to actively engage their 'international learning team' on researching their business plan topic. Time is allocated for student to conduct internet research and to do independent visits to academicians, government officials and practitioners who may be of assistance. Teams begin to make decisions and individuals learn of cross-cultural differences within the team. On the last class day, students make a formal presentation to the NASSAM faculty and their peers for feedback about their proposed business plan and process analysis. All provide feedback.

During the third week at UC, in Calgary, the lectures and site visits focus on NAFTA and international trade issues from a Canadian-Global perspective. Students attend lectures by academicians, investment bankers, and international trade practitioners. Site visits are made to businesses, and corporations, which are engaged in international trade. Examples include but are not limited to; law office, energy transport headquarters and international investors.

At this time during the exchange, a shift occurs as students focus towards the practical application of theories and knowledge to their business plan. A roundtable dinner is scheduled by the UC to match successful entrepreneurs in the students' areas of interest. This provides students with a one-on-one opportunity to freely discuss and receive practitioner feedback on their business plans prior to completion of their work. On the final workday, each 'international learning team' presents a one-hour PowerPoint presentation on their business plans to an outside panel of UC faculty and expert industry practitioners. The business plans are published in formal NASSAM preceding publications which each student and faculty member receive.

Summary

In the three-week period, the twenty-four students from the three universities were;

- 1.) organized into 'international learning teams,
- 2.) conceptualized a business idea,
- 3.) commissioned to develop a viable business plan that spanned the three countries,
- 4.) present their business to a panel of outside reviewers.

To encourage students to be aware of the learning process they were experiencing, they were also assigned a process paper. This paper would include reflections from the learning experience and interaction of group members.

The final assignment for each student was a feedback paper to be turned in three weeks after his or her return. This paper would include an assessment of the program and sincere feedback and suggestions for improvements in future years.

The NASSAM model currently serves as a template for international graduate student exchange programs at The University of Texas at San Antonio. Others are to follow.

References

- Alvesson, M. and Willmott, H. (1992). Creating the Corporate Future. New York: John Wiley
- Beck, C. (1998). Matching teaching Strategies to Learning Style Preferences. The Teacher Educator. (37: 2-4
- Conner, D. (1998) Leading at the Edge of Chaos New York: John Wiley
- Drucker, P. (1999) Management Challenges for the Twenty First Century. New York: Harper Business
- Dunn, R. and Dunn, K. (1993) Teaching Secondary Students Through Their Individual Learning Styles. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Dunn, R., et. Al., (1995) A Meta Analytic Validation of the Dunn and Dunn Learning Styles Model. Journal of Educational Research
- Gibbs, G. (1992). Improving the Quality of Student Learning. Bristol: Technical and Educational Services
- Grey, C. and Mitev, N. (1995). Management Education: a Polemic. Management Learning, 25 (1): 73-90.
- Handy, C. (1995). The Gods of Management. New York: Oxford University Press
- Hassard, J. and Parker, M. (1993). Postmodernism and Organizations. London: Sage
- McCarthy, B. (1987). The 4MAT System. Teaching to Learning Styles with Right/Left Mode Techniques. Barrington, Ill.: EXCEL.
- Parker, M. (1992) Post Modern Organizations or Postmodern Organization Theory. Organization Studies, 13 (1): 1-17
- Peters, T. (1992). Liberation Management. London: Macmillan
- Purser, R. and Cabana, S. (1998) The Self Managing Organization. New York: The Free Press
- Willmott, H. (1994) Management Education. Management Learning, 25 (1): 105-136.