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UTILIZING CULTURAL AND INTERNATIONAL LANDMARK CONSTRUCTS TO ASSESS BUSINESS STUDENTS' INTERNATIONAL AWARENESS

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ABSTRACT

Due to the ever-increasing international dependency of today world's economy, almost every business degree curriculum includes at least one course on international business. The courses tend to accentuate how to expand and market products on an international scale. Little information is disseminated in these classes on how important the success or failure of these endeavors rests on the knowledge of differing countries' culture and other related areas of knowledge. The purpose of this paper is to report the findings of a pilot study conducted to assess the extent that business students' are aware of international culture and landmarks.

INTRODUCTION

In a nationally administered survey on global understanding conducted by the Educational Testing Service, the average college senior answered about 50 percent of the questions on world affairs correctly (Jarchow 1993). Other studies have provided a descriptive comparison of upper-level undergraduate business students from various countries in such areas that are considered critical to managerial success. Nationality, for example, has been linked to the underlying difference in some students' attitudes. In studies of organizational managers, Haire, Ghiselli, and Porter (1966) reported that the percentage of difference in managerial job attitude that can also be attributed to nationality is 28 percent while Hofstede (1980) found that national culture explained 50 percent of the differences in employee attitudes and behaviors.

Cultural awareness, therefore, is a definite means for U.S. managers to increase productivity and to maintain efficiencies in a foreign country and to influence products' marketability in the international environment. Unfortunately, the Japanese, for example, have a greater understanding about American culture than Americans have about Japanese culture. It is this ignorance that may account for the reason the Japanese do not buy American products

and why they have an advantage in the world market (Saltz and Foster; 1994). This phenomenon can obviously be generalized to other major countries that interact with the U.S.

Understanding the background, culture, and the values of peoples implies studying a foreign country from its own perspective and understanding how its history has influenced its development. Many companies are turning to programs being offered by leading U.S. business schools (Miller 1994) in order to familiarize their global managers with cultural awareness.

Unfortunately, U.S. business schools are not currently prepared to provide the cultural pedagogy necessary. Learning about international culture from an international business textbook is not only insufficient, but also inadequate. Educators, therefore, find great difficulties in teaching students international culture with the current resources available to them. In addition, the fact that educators themselves lack a high level of international cultural cognizance, it is of little surprise that students are ill prepared for the global business environment.

A 1989 survey revealed that only 17 per cent of that year's business doctoral candidates had taken any graduate course with significant international content (Laidlaw 1989). The American Assembly of collegiate Schools of Business and the Association of American Colleges started to emphasize an international curriculum in 1988. However, to properly prepare the U.S. student to prosper and survive in an international environment, international courses must add a major emphasis on international culture and customs.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The Samples

Data were collected from students of all majors in the College of Business at a medium-sized, south-

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eastern university during the Fall semester of 1994 and the spring semester of 1995. One hundred and eighteen students responded to The International Culture Quiz and sixty-seven students responded to the Where in the World Quiz. The majority of students were either juniors or seniors. Because of the nature of the quizzes, demand bias was deemed to be negligible.

The Quizzes

The International Culture Quiz consists of 10 questions that depicts various scenarios or factual questions from a variety of countries. The student chooses the correct response from five possible responses. The Where in the World quiz contains a listing of twelve infamous landmarks and a possible Country selection bank of twenty countries. The student is to match the landmarks with the country containing the landmark.

Findings

The results of this assessment study are consistent with other related studies dealing with the level of U.S. student's awareness of their international environment. The average correct responses for both quizzes was approximately 40 percent. The actual frequencies of responses are depicted in brackets right next to each possible response. The average number of correct responses for The International Culture Quiz was 3.9 out of a possible 10. The average number of correct responses for the Where in the World Quiz was 4.8 out of a possible 12.

DISCUSSION

As with any assessment study, this study revealed as many expected findings as it did surprises. On The International Culture Quiz it was expected that the majority of students would know Futbol or soccer would be the most popular international sport and that touching is not acceptable in Japan. Somewhat of a surprise was that not more students were aware of the cast system in India and that the religious root of Saudi Arabia forbids the acceptance of interest payments. The big surprises were the number of students who did not that the official language of Brazil is Portuguese and that the capital of Canada is Ottawa. The lack of knowledge of other more lessor known aspects of international cultural was expected.

Correct responses on the Where in the World Quiz that were expected included the locations of the Sphinx, the Eiffel Tower, and Big Ben. The only less than expected correct responses was the location of the Taj Mahal. It was also felt that more students would have sufficient knowledge to locate Lake Maracaibo, one of the largest reserve of oil in the world. The Monument to Independence, which is in Mexico, was probably with confused American monuments of independence. Their knowledge of the locations of other famous international landmarks was very disappointing but came as no surprise.

CONCLUSION

Reich (1990) asserts that a nation's most important competitive asset is the skills and learning of its work force. Since the global business environment offers the American workforce many opportunities to develop skills with foreign counterparts, international perceptions can either facilitate or obscure the learning experience. Furthermore, international cultural awareness can determine the success or failure of foreign operations.

Training executives exemplifies educators' short-term goals in promoting international awareness. Accommodating the curriculum of undergraduate and graduate business students, on the other hand, has been identified as a means of addressing the long-term goals. In developing the appropriate approach, business schools need to first understand their students' current attitudes and perceptions of foreign cultures. Assessing students' current knowledge of international culture and awareness hopefully will lead to an enhanced international pedagogy.

REFERENCES

References available upon request.