

# INTEGRATING INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND LANGUAGE TRAINING

THE University of South Carolina's Master in International Business Studies (MIBS) program, now in its sixth year, is a prototype for the much discussed interdisciplinary approach to multinational managerial education. This paper describes the philosophy and goals of the MIBS program and examines the administrative and academic aspects of its language-training component. It is important that both the concept and the operation of such a program be reviewed, since the major obstacle to the achievement of a truly interdisciplinary educational approach has been the failure of the disciplines to mobilize resources, energies, and talents toward the common goal.

MIBS is a two-year program designed for individuals seeking careers in firms currently or prospectively engaged in international business. Its educational objectives are threefold: first, to develop the functional skills appropriate to the international environment but rarely considered in traditional business courses; second, to cultivate the skills needed to perceive, and adapt to, environmental variables; third, to provide the language skills needed in positions that call for extended communication in the host country. Overall, international managers must learn about their managerial tasks in relation to the geography, the social structure, the politics, the economy, and the people of a particular country. The ultimate goal of MIBS, then, is to provide a realistic managerial approach to worldwide business problems. To accomplish this goal, MIBS was carefully designed to train students in business skills, environmental variables, and a foreign language.

## Curriculum

The curriculum of the MIBS program is divided into six segments:

1. *Language Instruction* (June–August). During this segment of the program students receive intensive training in a foreign language appropriate to a particular area of study.

2. *Business Foundation Course* (September–May). In the second phase of the program students acquire the fundamental managerial skills for a career in international business. Students take a single unified course, "The Manager of the International Enterprise," that includes segments dealing with financial and managerial accounting, export-

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import operations, international economics, financial management, international marketing, techniques of international trade, international personnel and labor relations, quantitative methods, and operations management. Previous business education is not required, and English is the language of instruction.

On several occasions during the year special topics are analyzed in depth in a short-course format. An international-business faculty member gives an introductory analysis of the topic, and specialists drawn from international organizations provide follow-up lectures. Regularly scheduled short courses cover such subjects as joint-venture analysis, foreign-exchange risk management, long-term planning, political-risk management, licensing, and development banking. In addition, the "Business-Conditions Seminar" exposes students to the reality of international business through frequent guest lectures by presidents and vice-presidents of domestic and foreign multinational corporations.

3. *Environmental-Variables Course* (June–July). This course familiarizes students with the culture, political background, social structure, and economic geography of the area they have selected for study. Currently three sections of this course are offered: one for Latin America, one for Europe, and one for the United States.

4. *Additional Language Study* (July–August). This second segment of the language training, which takes place overseas, expands the students' business vocabulary and sharpens their conversational and writing skills.

5. *Internship* (September–February). An integral part of the students' international business training, the internship provides an opportunity to test the students' capacity to apply their knowledge and to adapt effectively to work in a foreign country. For this six-month period, September through February, students from the United States are as-

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signed to firms overseas and the foreign students to companies in the United States. During this period the students receive a nominal allowance to help cover the cost of living expenses.

6. *Integration of Concepts and Skills Development* (March-May). After the six-month internship all students return to the university for the final phase of the program. This segment includes a course in the overall strategy of the multinational firm, with strong emphasis on policy formulation and corporate planning; through directed study courses, the students specialize in a particular area of business. By discussing what they learned during their internships, the students share a vast amount of collective experience. A final report on a selected area or problem is required.

### Applications to the Program

With limited resources, the program faces a major challenge in recruiting a large pool of qualified applicants from all over the globe. A big problem is that students do not expect the University of South Carolina to have an international business program. Therefore, few students write to inquire whether such a program is available. Several techniques have been used to increase awareness of the program among potential applicants.

Before the program began operating, promotion was limited to advertising in about eighty college newspapers all over the United States and to sending letters to selected faculty members at other universities. This approach yielded forty-two successful applicants for the first MIBS class, and it was used for three more years, resulting in incoming class sizes of eighty-eight, fifty, and eighty-five.

The answers to a questionnaire sent to MIBS students in the class of 1979, however, revealed that over sixty percent of that class wrote the university as a result, not of the advertisements, but of a recommendation by a faculty member. These responses led to a decision to stop advertising in the college newspapers and to increase promotional efforts to faculty at other institutions.

The promotion campaign involved the mailing of information packets to approximately 5,500 department heads at about 550 universities and colleges. Information was sent to the chairpersons of the departments of economics, management, marketing, finance, Spanish, German, French, and political science and to the main libraries and placement offices. In addition, materials were sent to all members of the Academy of International Business. About four hundred requests for further information were received within three months.

With the quantity of applications considerably

up, the next step is increasing the quality of the applicants. With applications coming from all over the world, it is impractical to interview personally each applicant, and thus acceptance decisions must be made on the basis of transcripts, the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), and letters of recommendation.

### The Internship

The six-month-long internships are secured by two faculty members, one of whom deals with Europe and the other with Latin America. This responsibility requires that each spend approximately five to six weeks a year in the host nations. Local representatives do the follow-up work and make the administrative arrangements.

The major reason companies participate in the internship program is to test and observe potential employees for six months at little cost. About forty percent of the MIBS graduates have received offers from their internship company.

Although internships were found for all students in the first five MIBS classes, the task was not always easy. The weak economic position of most countries made it difficult to locate willing companies and to obtain fellowships and visas.

In West Germany, however, companies and government have been most receptive to the MIBS program; the number of requests for interns exceeds the number of students to be placed, partially because of the large German investments in South Carolina and other parts of the United States. The internships in France and Belgium are harder to secure. In France it has been almost impossible to obtain the proper visa, and French managers show little interest in accommodating interns from the United States. In contrast, the managers in Belgium favor the internship idea, but their options are limited by a Belgian law requiring that two percent of a company's work force consist of Belgian interns accepted for a year's employment. No major difficulties in planning internships are encountered in Latin America.

The problems of placing foreign students with domestic companies are directly related to the nationalities of the students involved. The demand for Latin American students exceeds the supply, but the opposite is true of students from the Far East.

Because of the good performance of the students both as interns and later as employees, most participating companies offer internships repeatedly.

The administration of the internship segment of MIBS has not caused many problems. The University of South Carolina has contracted local agents or language institutions to administer the program

in each area. These representatives maintain day-to-day contact with the internship companies.

### Coordination of the Segments

The director and the associate director of the MIBS program are responsible for the administrative part of the MIBS program, including supervising and evaluating the overseas internships, recruiting, advising, promoting, securing visas, managing public and alumni relations, and handling other administrative duties.

The program director for international business is responsible for the academic content of MIBS, including scheduling classes and planning the curriculum in cooperation with the MIBS teaching faculty in business, language, government and international studies, and geography. Each department involved in MIBS has its own representative.

### Foreign Language Instruction

MIBS students come from all parts of the country and have a variety of undergraduate majors: English, history, biology, and so on. Few majored in business or economics. They select the language they want to pursue on the basis of the geographical area in which they plan to do their internship: French or German for Western Europe, Portuguese or Spanish for Latin America. Although previous knowledge of their chosen language is not required, some earlier exposure to foreign language study is usually an advantage. Students with four or more semesters of previous training in the language of their choice can elect to take a placement test, the result of which may exempt them from part or all of the first segment of the foreign language instruction.

Unless they are exempted, students begin their two-year MIBS study in the summer with the first segment of the foreign language course, which is divided into two five-week sessions coinciding with the two summer sessions at the University of South Carolina. The first session is devoted to the rudiments of grammar, extensive vocabulary building, pronunciation practice, simple speaking and writing, listening and reading, and an introduction to the culture of the area whose language the student has chosen. Classes are held five days a week, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with one hour allowed for lunch. During the first five-week session the equivalent of two elementary foreign language semesters is covered; the second five-week session, roughly equivalent to two intermediate foreign language semesters, deepens and expands the basic skills. Business vocabulary is introduced in small doses. Throughout the intensive ten-week program each student is

carefully watched by all instructors. At the end of every week the instructors assign grades in the following areas: oral comprehension, speaking, reading comprehension, ability to translate, understanding and application of grammatical principles, writing. The students are kept informed of their progress. At the slightest indication of retrogress a student receives individual help.

At the end of this first segment of foreign language instruction the students' grasp of the language far exceeds that of students who took the four basic courses on a regular semester schedule. Because MIBS students actively use the language every day and all day long (in addition to attending class they need to prepare the next day's assignment in the evening), they are immersed in the language, and they acquire the following skills:

- They can make themselves understood in the language with simple sentences on any nontechnical topic.
- They can follow a conversation spoken at normal speed on any topic.
- They can read, with the aid of a dictionary, any text in the language.
- They can write what they can say.
- They are well enough acquainted with the culture of the target country to prevent "culture shock."

Although during the following fall and spring semesters the major emphasis is on business studies, the students take a foreign language course to practice and improve the skills they acquired so quickly in the summer session. No one is exempt from this course, which meets for an hour three times a week. Its goal is to have students retain and strengthen their skills and their business vocabulary. Materials used are undoctored—newspapers and periodicals in the target language—and the assignments are to retell articles, orally and in writing, and to compose memos, business letters, and advertising. At the end of the spring semester the students have added considerably to their skills—no small feat since the business course is, according to student reports, "the most demanding" course they have ever taken.

The third segment of foreign language instruction takes place in a country of the student's chosen language, for six weeks in July and August of the second year of the program. The framework of the language course varies from language to language because the courses are arranged by institutions in the host country, and the University of South Carolina relinquishes authority over the instructional process. For each of the four languages the university engaged an institution to accommodate MIBS students in appropriate programs: students of French attend l'Université Catholique de Louvain

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in Belgium; of German, the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft in Cologne, Germany; of Portuguese, the Escola Superior de Administração de Negócios in São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil; of Spanish, the Escuela de Administración y Finanzas y Tecnologías Universidad in Medellín, Colombia. The kinds of programs in which the MIBS students participate can best be illustrated by the Carl Duisberg Gesellschaft, an institution geared to teach German to specialized groups. Its staff tailor-made a six-week course of study that prepares the students for their next step in the MIBS program, the internship with a firm in the foreign country. Not only are students drilled in the German language and in business vocabulary, but they are also introduced to business practices in carefully planned afternoon field trips to firms. Students emerging from this last formal foreign language instruction are ready to embark on their internships, which will require them to use both the language and the business skills they have acquired in the program.

Students who are naturally gifted in business as well as in foreign language skills are rare. Foreign language instructors must therefore make the instruction as efficient and enjoyable as possible. The intensive first segment is the key to all subsequent foreign language and business segments (a student who fails this course is not allowed to continue in the program); it was designed after thorough study of other intensive programs. Although it undergoes careful scrutiny every year, relatively little has been changed in the structure of the program since its beginning. The first MIBS class, in the summer of 1974, enrolled only in German and Spanish, so that these two sections were the pacesetters for the French and Portuguese sections, added in 1975.

A number of special features make the program attractive and, in spite of the fast pace, successful: short class periods, a variety of classroom activities, emphasis on conversation (which not only

gives students a sense of accomplishment but also creates an informal classroom atmosphere), the viewing of cultural films or slides (to instruct and at the same time relieve the strain), and unusually close relationships between instructors and students because of the small class size. What makes the teaching in this program enjoyable is the maturity and motivation of the students and their delight in being able to manipulate the language after only a few weeks. The same textbooks are used for the intensive course as for the regular semester courses provided the books are adaptable to the fast pace; supplementary materials emphasize conversation and business situations. The French track has incorporated into its program an independent-study plan in which students read graded and ungraded material and listen to radio plays on their own.

The first segment of the foreign language study for MIBS students is now open for non-MIBS students who want to learn a foreign language in the shortest possible time. This course has great value to undergraduates in all majors who want to fulfill a language requirement, to prospective language majors who can then proceed to literature courses more quickly, to teachers who want to add another foreign language to their instructional repertoire, to students of comparative literature, and to business executives and travelers.

Naturally not all students can stand the strain of such an intense two-year program, and some drop out. The reasons vary. Some students change their minds about their career goals, some take jobs, others realize that being harnessed into a two-year program is distasteful to them. Few have dropped out because they could not master the language. The entire program demands hard work; nevertheless, the most frequent comment from those who received their degrees is, "If I had to do it over again, knowing how hard it is, I would." Their reward is a well-paying job.

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### Freud Conference and Exhibition

From 15 April to 15 June, Stanford University and the Goethe Institute, San Francisco, will show an exhibition on the life and work of Sigmund Freud consisting of 110 photo panels as well as original materials from the Stanford University collections. In conjunction with the exhibition, a conference on the topic Freud and His Influence will

be held 25-26 April. Speakers will include Bruno Bettelheim and Peter Gay. A showing of psychoanalytically influenced films of the 1920s and 1930s, followed by a panel discussion, is scheduled for the next week. Information is available from Walter F. W. Lohnes, Dept. of German Studies, Stanford Univ., Stanford, CA 94305.