

A STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONALIZING THE  
UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS CURRICULUM

# **EXTENDING THE SCOPE OF THE CONSULTATIVE TEACHING MODEL: A STRATEGY FOR INTERNATIONALIZING THE UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS CURRICULUM**

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## **Abstract**

Much like a business beginning to consider international activity, a business school in the initial stages of internationalizing its curriculum, must determine its goals or deliverables, evaluate its core competencies or strengths and develop a strategy which reflects a realistic marriage between the two. This paper develops one strategy for internationalizing a curriculum based upon Millikin University's Tabor School of Business's core competency, our experience in using the consulting model pedagogy. This model combined with select institutional strengths and opportunities is the base for curriculum internationalization.

## **Introduction**

The globalization of business has provided a challenge to business schools to thoroughly internationalize their curriculum. This challenge is particularly acute for an undergraduate only program located in a small somewhat parochial community in the middle of the United States. The long history of the United States' large, relatively self contained, economy has meant that business was often studied with only passing reference to international endeavors. Business faculty trained in other times often lack sufficient knowledge to easily bridge this gap. Major hurdles in meeting this challenge include; engaging the students, energizing the faculty, and finding effective means to accomplish both. However, in today's global economy meaningful internationalization is imperative if a program is to remain relevant.

The key to engaging students is using an active learning pedagogy rather than lecture or even case study. Our experience has shown that a consulting model approach to teaching satisfies today's students need for the feeling of involvement. They appreciate the learning experience more if that learning takes place in what they perceive to be a real world context.

Using actual business clients as a base provides that validation and engagement. But there are substantial difficulties in applying this model in an internationalized curriculum.

## **Internationalization**

When a business begins to consider international market-entry strategies it evaluates such factors as risk, capabilities, expertise, market opportunities and commitment. Based upon this assessment, several strategic modes of entry are available to a firm; Indirect Exporting, Direct Exporting, Licensing, Joint Ventures and Direct Investment. This framework also seems useful for universities beginning their internationalization process. Each

institution, based upon its unique needs, must decide how it will participate in the international arena. It could choose only to offer traditional international courses or it could pursue a more active international involvement. For instance, assisting our students to attend universities abroad could be viewed as indirect exporting. Rather than producing and exporting the service itself the university, in affect, hires a foreign agent to perform this activity. On the other hand establishing campuses in foreign countries is more analogous with the direct investment approach. Establishing full exchange programs with institutions or developing agreements where an international institution can use your curriculum and grant your degree are strategies comparable to joint ventures and licensing. The value of examining university entry into the international market from this perspective is that it provides a framework to evaluate the organizations best chance for success. In determining which strategic mode to adopt, a school, much like a business beginning to consider international activity, must evaluate its core competencies or strengths, determine its goals or deliverables, and develop a strategy which reflects a realistic marriage between the two.

### Strategy Evaluation and Selection

#### *Core Competency*

Perhaps the Tabor School of Business's most significant core competency is its design and use of the "Student Driven/Student Focused (SD/SF) Consultative Model" as a successful pedagogy (Table 1) This model has been successfully employed at Millikin for over 20 years as a vehicle to link theory and practice.

<b>Table 1 - Student Driven/Student Focused Consultative Learning Program</b>		
	<b>Student Focused</b>	<b>Client Focused</b>
<b>Student Driven</b>	SD/SF	SD/CF
<b>Client Driven</b>	CD/SF	CD/CF

Focus - On Whom the Outcome is Focused

Driven -Who Provides the Impetus and Direction to the Study

*Student Driven* - The student determines the problem and project scope and their capabilities and level of the limits of learning

*Student Focus* - Student learning needs and goals are the central focus project outcome

*Client Driven* - Client specifies the scope of the project.

*Client Focus* - Client needs are central to the project's outcomes.

*SD/SF* - Project outcomes are primarily focused on student learning although clients will receive value. Students participate in the problem discovery and drive the scope.

*Primary Teaching Model used at Tabor undergraduate level*

*SD/CF* - Students participate in problem of discovery and drive the project scope. The focus is on producing value for the client rather than structuring the project primarily for learning opportunities.

*Model used for courses where learning goals are secondary perhaps at Masters level*

*CD/SF* - Client defines the problem and project scope but the primary focus is usually narrow to help the student learn.

*Field case experience*

*CD/CF*- Client defines the problem and project scope and the focus of the outcome is the client need.

*Traditional Consulting Model*

In this model, Millikin's undergraduate students make key decisions about the identification of problems and direction of projects. Faculty choose projects according to the learning needs of the student, not simply client needs. Clients are chosen carefully to include only those willing to enter into a partnership of learning with the students. The client is benefited by low cost research and the knowledge that each student team is guided by experienced faculty and business people who also lend their expertise. The student is benefited by hands-on involvement with real-world clients and participation in seeking practical solutions to real-world problems.

*SBI/SCORE*

The success of this model as an effective pedagogical tool is grounded in the Tabor School's unique and long-term relationship with the Small Business Institute (SBI) and the Service Corp of Retired Executives (SCORE) as well as a supportive institutional and local culture. The Tabor School has specialized in work with small and medium sized business for over 20 years. Through these 20 years we have come to understand the value undergraduate students bring to businesses of this size. Large corporations have the resources to hire professional expertise but the small/medium businesses who do not have these resources benefit greatly from the work done by these undergraduate students.

This heritage and the unique partnership with SBI and SCORE has served as the foundation for our core competency. This core competency is a culmination of efforts to effectively serve small and medium businesses while supporting institutional learning goals that began over 20 years ago when Millikin University began participating in SBI programs. The SBI program contains 2 significant parts, a small business consulting client-based case program and SCORE. The Tabor School of Business, in large part because of its institutional culture of wedding theory and practice, became the first university to identify the rich educational advantage of housing the SCORE chapter within the school of business. Having retired executives in the same physical proximity with the faculty and students has led to a much more extensive infusion of SCORE knowledge and perspective into our learning culture.

SCORE is fully integrated into the Millikin's SBI program and has an office within the Tabor School of Business. SCORE members screen SBI cases and integrate students into their consulting efforts. Students are also exposed to entrepreneurial efforts in part through junior/senior level courses in which they develop comprehensive business plans and present them in a professional setting to SCORE members and an independent board of business executives. Although highly successful, these courses and entrepreneurial consulting opportunities have historically been domestic in nature. If this core competency is to be fully utilized the Student Driven/Student Focused model should be expanded to incorporate an international experience.

### *Goals and Deliverables*

The SD/SF model works well not only because of the Tabor School's tradition but also because it fits well into the University's mission. The first principle of Millikin University's "Program of Student Learning" states: The program should emphasize integration; it should foster students' ability to integrate theory and practice, it should intentionally develop knowledge, values, and skills in a sequential and interconnected fashion; it should heighten awareness of the links between their college experience and the world beyond. Consistent with this principle, an important Tabor School of Business goal is to create increased global awareness and experience for its students through active learning pedagogy, focused on the integration of international education with existing Tabor strengths.

In addition to the normal consulting model outcomes it is expected that the internationalization of the curriculum will:

- Connect students in a meaningful way to an international client,
- Excite the business school about international opportunities through the work of the faculty and the student teams,
- Provide rich new experiences for faculty through working in an international setting that would be translated and infused throughout their teaching and scholarship.

### *Unique Institutional Strengths and Opportunities*

An analysis of our strengths and opportunities led to the realization that we had an ideal venue in which to develop our international experience. Beginning in the early 1990's, Millikin University recruited internationally for a short period of time. As a result of these efforts several Malaysian students had attended and graduated from the Tabor School. In 1996, there were 8 graduates working in either Penang or Kuala Lumpur. They were employed in banks, construction companies, and technology firms. We recognized that the strong relationships between these former students and our faculty and the commitment of these alumni to helping Millikin internationalize was a strength on which we might build. Moreover, we knew that the Malaysian government's development strategy privileged small business and that English was widely spoken in Malaysia.

In short, our support from Malaysian alumni, our competency in working with small business, and our native language all pointed to opportunities in Malaysia. The epiphany however, occurred when one of our Malaysian students approached the faculty about a summer project. One of our clients, a small wholesaler/processor of specialty soy beans, was interested in Asia as a market. He developed a summer project in which our student would investigate the market and export feasibility to Malaysia and Singapore. The project's success both in terms of the client's needs and the richness of the student's learning experience led us to appreciate how valuable providing similar expertise for small Malaysian businesses who needed information about U.S. markets could be for them. Just as a Malaysian student could be exceptionally valuable to a U.S. firm interested in Malaysia, U.S. students could be equally valuable to Malaysian firms interested in the U.S. As a result we decided to "internationalize" our

core competency. Each educational institution will have differing sets of strengths, competencies and limitations. However, this model for international entry should be applicable across institutions and countries.

### **Implementing the Internationalized Consulting Model**

During the 1996-97 academic year three Tabor faculty members traveled to Malaysia with the idea of pilot testing the consulting model. As previously indicated, Malaysia represented an ideal venue for expanding our international efforts.

The faculty team realized the need to identify and establish contacts prior to arrival and this was made easier by the student alumni and parents who were eager to help facilitate the kind of contacts needed. Stateside, both the U.S. Export Trade and Assistance Center and MIDA (Malaysian Industrial Development Association) in Chicago, Illinois helped arrange meetings with MATRADE (Malaysian External Trade and Development Corporation). MATRADE is a corporation under the Ministry of Trade in Malaysia and their primary purpose is to promote Malaysia and the products of Malaysia. A study done by them in 1993 indicated that there were 11,300 SME's (Small and Medium Enterprises) in Malaysia and that 20% of these were in the export business. Once rapport was established, MATRADE officials were very willing to assist us in identifying businesses that we might work with. Eventually two snack food producers were selected and factory tours arranged. These firms were identified as needing assistance in evaluating international barriers to exporting to the United States and were agreeable to working with the university utilizing the SD/SF consulting model.

The faculty team knew from their work with student consulting for U.S. companies that successful implementation of the consulting model in an international setting is dependent upon first establishing a rapport and trusting relationship with the client. It was also acknowledged by the faculty team that the SD/SF concept of consulting as a vehicle for providing assistance to Malaysian business would need to be carefully explained and continually reinforced. The successful implementation of the model depended upon: 1) the client understanding that he/she would be working and communicating with the student team, not the faculty, 2) key decision makers in the business needed to be involved in the process, 3) the expected outcome of the consulting was a report on the feasibility of exporting to the U.S. not penetration of the market, 4) client agreement on the timeframe for the work, 5) agreement by the clients that they would bear the costs of communication such as fax and phone and that, 6) information about the company which was requested by the students would be available.

### *Establishing the Course*

Integration of the consulting model into the curriculum was accomplished by offering a course in the business management and international business major in the fall of 1997. The course was open to all junior and senior business students during both the Fall and Spring semesters.

Students were selected into this course based upon academic strength and project interest. Teams were formed for each client project. Each team developed a needs assessment and a statement of work. This statement directed the team's semester work. Work was conducted in two major areas; trade regulations and entry barriers, market research and product evaluation. The student teams communicated with the client mostly by fax and the timeliness of the communication was most difficult to control. Communication by telephone was infrequent but useful in the introductory phase of the course and at the conclusion of the project.

Telephone was also the most expensive form of communication. Establishing e-mail communication was the ideal, but at the time, none of the Malaysian clients utilized this technology. As part of the background research the faculty developed a set of materials including selected readings from and about Malaysia and its economy, and a slide presentation to help the students understand the uniqueness of the culture.

The proposed clients for each semester remained the same. Although many field courses have different clients for each semester, the difficulty in establishing a communication network, the timeframe for communication to occur, and exposing students to foreign research avenues greatly increased the time needed for students to begin to understand what needed to be done. For this reason the client in the Fall semester was the same as the Spring semester. This posed some problems that one would not have if a new client were able to work with a new group of consulting students each semester. Maintaining the momentum of the class is problematic. There is anticipation as well as anxiety generated in a consulting class when both client and students are new. The "act of discovery," learning about each other and establishing a client relationship, is a priority in the first semester of working together. In the second semester, when students are new but the client is the same, clients exhibited little patience with working with new students in setting up communication channels and answering questions that the client felt had already been answered.

The second year this course was taught clients were developed during the faculty's summer visit to Malaysia for both fall and spring semesters. While the elapsed time between the summer visit and the beginning of work on the spring case was not ideal the problems were less with this scenario than trying to run one case across a full year. A common problem noted in both the first and the second year of teaching the course, was the lack of personal interaction between the client and the student consulting team. The student teams in international consulting never developed the same kind of rapport and relationship that the U.S. student consulting teams developed with their clients. SCORE members were recruited and served as an audience for the student team by reviewing the students' progress and although they were helpful in their comments and feedback, their function as a surrogate client did not replace the experience that face-to-face encounters provide. This lack of a personal relationship created a distance between the student team and the client that was never bridged. In both years, establishing a client relationship, setting up communication channels, and the orientation of students to cultural differences took much longer than anticipated. In the U.S., the students would have met with the client several times during a week and received feedback on their progress and suggestions about what needed to happen next. With the international consulting class and communication by fax, the time it took for the students to pose written questions to the client and to receive answers was long, often two to four weeks. This meant that the students needed to establish assumptions based on secondary research data and work ahead of the information received from the client.

### *Assessment/Evaluation*

The proposed goals for this course were to heighten awareness of the links between the business of the United States and a foreign country as well as enhance the international business major and provide a model that would be useful for faculty to use in integrating international business theory and practice into the entire business curriculum. An evaluation of students who participated in the course indicates that they have increased understanding and knowledge about how the United States works with foreign companies and the many factors involved in entering a foreign market, both on the export and import side. The students learned to use business and professional contacts from government to private sources that they would never have had the opportunity to contact prior to this course. They learned how to negotiate with and get through to a variety of people in both public and private sectors. Many of these students developed ongoing, credible contacts for future team use and for the client to use. They also learned how to represent and qualify information sources. These students also stated they gained an appreciation of the cultural nuances that are at work in the international business arena. Students in the course had the unique opportunity to interact with Malaysian students from the same cities as the clients.

For many of these students, it was their first experience with using a problem based learning model. They were forced to determine what information they needed and to figure out where they would find the information. They were forced to evaluate the information they received, to integrate it into recommendations for the client and to prioritize the recommendations.

Faculty working with this pilot course developed an appreciation for the need to develop resources outside of the traditional research area. Faculty were called upon to develop relationships outside of the academic area and to function as coaches and facilitators. Faculty became intimately involved with the student teams while exploring strategies and resources necessary to provide relevant and meaningful information to the client. More so than in most teaching situations, the search for good, relevant and timely information was a priority. This priority was shared equally between student and teacher. The transfer of conceptual knowledge to an applied situation was accomplished by using the SD/SF model for internationalizing the curriculum.

In addition to the direct educational value to students, our experience indicated that in working directly with the clients and the Malaysian government offices many other opportunities arose for faculty research and consulting, for student internships, and in some cases long term relationships with clients who were successful in exporting or wanted to continue the exploration. In addition we met with Malaysian Universities that had 2 year American transfer programs to encourage their students to matriculate to Millikin for their last two years. Through this work we were able to identify a University with whom we had mutual goals and began negotiations to establish a study abroad program tailored specifically for the needs of our sophomore business majors. It is obvious how important this could be to increasing our students' opportunities for international experience, not to mention the reciprocal value of recruiting additional international students into our program. The presence of such international students on our home campus is also a critical part of internationalizing the curriculum. As faculty continue to work in a particular country, learn to recognize needs and opportunities, and develop an international sophistication, many creative ideas and programs which will be of great potential educational value to the institution will occur. It will just be a matter of selecting those which best fit the institution's needs and capabilities.

## **Conclusions**

The use of the student driven/student focused consultative teaching model as a strategy for internationalizing the curriculum is an excellent option. It provides good value while minimizing organizational risk and serves as a platform for further internationalization within the university.

Specifically the students profited through heightened engagement made possible through the compelling nature of the personal client contact and the faculty's increased ability to give meaningful context to the project. However, a weakness in the model was in our inability to provide the students an opportunity to meet directly with the client. If this barrier can be overcome the value of the model will be considerably enhanced.

The University received excellent publicity about both the work of the student and the faculty which has resulted in additional international opportunities for the Tabor School of Business in the form of potential partnerships with local firms and other foreign universities that have contacted us.

The professional development of the participating faculty was greatly enhanced by the nature of the project. The project required extensive face to face contact with both Malaysian business and government officials in order to sell and develop the program. This opportunity to truly "work" in an international environment was invaluable to the development of faculty with limited or no international experience. Certainly in the case of those directly participating, both consciousness and enthusiasm about the value of the international experience was raised. At this stage this may be the greatest value to the institution.

For the Tabor School of Business using the curriculum and this model as a point of departure for internationalizing the curriculum worked well. It allowed us to use our core competencies, rely on unique strengths and opportunities, and gave us the measure against which all pursuits of the nature should be gauged. Did it support the educational mission of the organization and enhance the value to students? We believe it did.

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