

# **Aspects of Intercultural Understanding Through an MBA Study Abroad Program**

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## **Abstract**

Understanding the globalization of business practices is an important area of learning for students studying in MBA programs today. Fitting in yet another course into a core curriculum can be a challenge for any academic program. Administrators of MBA programs across the country realize that their students must be able to interface with both business practices and business people around the world in order to re-enter the competitive work force. This paper discusses how one particular MBA program on the east coast addresses the need to prepare students for the global market place through a summer study tour program. This paper will show that even short-term exposure to learning and living overseas can significantly enhance one's intercultural awareness and appreciation of international business and culture.

## **Introduction**

We are all familiar with the saying that the 'world is shrinking' and that we live in a 'global village.' Advances in technology have made it possible to design, assemble, move, market and sell products across oceans, borders, and time zones. We can do electronically what we used to have to do in person. Advances in technology such as the Internet and telecommunications make it easy to communicate with each other by the press of a button or the touch of a key, and the ease of travel allows us to be transported from one part of the globe to another in just a matter of hours. Who would have thought that when the concept of a global village was envisioned by media expert, Marshall McLuhan, back in the 1960's (Samovar and Porter, 1994) you could stand on the Great Wall in China and take your picture by using a cell phone that was designed by the Japanese, manufactured by the Taiwanese, assembled in China, and sold all over the world.

The world is not just getting smaller, it *is* smaller. Today's reality is that we deal with an international marketplace as we go about our daily lives – whether working or studying. In fact, according to the 2005 annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education (2005, IIE), in 2005 there were approximately 565,000 international students studying in institutions of higher education in the United States with the most popular field of study being business and management (18% of total) followed by engineering (16.5%) and mathematics and computer sciences (9%).

Furthermore, there were over 190,000 U.S. American students who earned credit for study abroad during the 2004-2005 academic year and approximately 17.5% of these students were business majors with the leading field of study being the social sciences (22.6%). Study abroad in non-traditional destinations, such as China and India has increased as students see the potential for emerging economies and how they will affect the global economy. In fact, the

number of students who chose China as their host country for study abroad dramatically rose by 90% in 2004, which makes this the 9<sup>th</sup> leading host country for outward bound U.S. American students (IIE, 2005, p. 2). The traditional spots for study, such as Europe (previously with the interest in the Euro) or Eastern Europe (after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) have given way to emerging economies such as China and India. In fact, China and India have become the two hot spots for U.S. American students to study business because of the focus on economic growth and their increasing importance to the U.S. and the world.

Evidently, both undergraduate and graduate students see the benefit of experiential learning when it comes to interacting in a globally interdependent world. Interestingly, the field of business and management is number one for incoming international students and number two for outgoing U.S. American students (IIE, 2005). The trends of study abroad show that it is not enough to simply engage in class discussions and exercises or read about business development elsewhere. Actually going to another country and learning to adapt while on an academic study program or for work is the best way to begin the long process of awareness of what it means to live and work in a global economy). The bottom line, as purported by numerous international scholars in business, is that “business students [should] emerge better prepared to cope with the forces that govern today’s world economy” (Ortiz, 2004).

This paper will focus specifically on China as the backdrop for an MBA study tour month-long program. It will address both the programmatic aspects and learning outcomes of an academic study program at a university by looking at the design of the program, its course objectives and the learning outcomes of its participants. First, the relevance of the topic will be addressed through a literature review of current thinking on the matter; second, programmatic aspects will be addressed by describing the types of programs offered, how the curricula is focused on intercultural learning, and what types of assignments are used to facilitate a broader intercultural understanding of the global business environment. Third, both quantitative and qualitative data will be examined from the study tour to Greater China that took place in May 2005, as led by the first author of this paper. These data include Pre- and Post Surveys, observation of pre-departure lectures, interaction with the students before, during and after the overseas experience, and student papers. A thorough discussion of students’ expectations before and reflections after the trip will illuminate this particular global learning experience in order to help administrators and educators creatively address the need for more intercultural communication learning within the business school curricula. Finally, based upon these Pre- and Post-Surveys and reflection papers, this paper will show that even a short-term exposure to learning and living overseas can significantly enhance one’s intercultural awareness towards international business practices, business culture and national culture.

### **Literature Review**

This section will illuminate two aspects of importance in the pursuit of understanding business practices and business communication in the field of business studies in higher education. The first aspect is international business education in general and the second is intercultural communication. Both themes are driving forces of why the university in the study promotes the Global Immersion Program as an optional learning experience for study abroad for its MBA students.

## International Business Education

Why provide opportunities for understanding and growth regarding international business practices? The answer is two-fold. First, the goal of an MBA program should be to help foster critical thinking and analytic skills beyond one's "inherent biases" (White, et al., 1998, p. 108). Second, the growth of multinational corporations and their increasing thrust into the international markets has caused both opportunity and challenges for these organizations and institutions of higher learning (Webb, et al., 1999). The internationalization of the business curriculum involves both a growing awareness and acknowledgment of administrators, faculty and students themselves, that they (students) need the skills to be able to manage business interactions competently in the global environment and be specifically trained to do so (Beamer, 1992; Shetty & Ruddel, 2002; Varner, 2000; Varner, 2001). These are the three primary groups of people who have something at stake in terms of international business communication: employers, administrators of academic programs, and students.

The first issue concerns employers. Both foreign and U.S. corporate employers want their newly minted MBA students to have global skills and knowledge preferably learned through their studies; however many companies are willing to pay to have them trained if their new hires do not possess the level of skills needed (Caudron, 1992; Kitsuse, 1992; Neelankavil, 1994, Nowak & Dong, 1997; Slate, 1993). For those companies that are either small or that have not built international training programs into their employee training programs, Hugenberg (Hugenberg et. al. 1996) implores such business leaders to incorporate intercultural training *before* sending their employees to do business in the international marketplace. The point: there *is* a need.

Secondly, administrators of academic programs across the country acknowledge the demand of study abroad programs - that their students must be able to interface with both business practices and business people around the world in order to re-enter the competitive work force; hence the popularity of academic study programs overseas. So, such administrators adjust and or create programs that more closely fit the context and culture of their institutions (Neelankavil, 1994; Sokovitz, 2002). Many institutions are responding to the corporate mandate to create business graduates who have the competitive advantage of being internationally savvy – that it is the obligation of institutions of higher education to turn out well-prepared workers (Shetty & Rudell, 2002). When business schools began revamping their curricula in the early 1990s in order to face the demands of the business world, adding global dimensions to course requirements was part of the overhaul (Andrews & Tyson, 2004; Cavusgil, 1993). Stakes were high because the demands were high.

Years later, it still is not easy to meet the demands of the corporate recruiters. Responding to corporate demands is not easy because of curricular, instructional and organizational constraints on administrators, faculty, and students. For example, academic administrators also find it difficult to navigate such programs with MBA students because of scheduling, departmental needs and institutional mandates (AACSB, 2002). It becomes increasingly complex with MBA programs to engage in traditional semester-long study abroad programs because their academic and recruiting schedules just don't allow for this. MBA students are expected to maintain high academic standards while interviewing for internships and being recruited for post graduation careers.

Finally, students of business and management realize the need for a broader global perspective keenly because the intensive recruiting process demonstrates the general corporate demand on international knowledge and language skills. While many students may be culturally savvy and thoughtfully inclined to seek understanding of other cultural perspectives rather than be ethnocentric, many may not be entirely knowledgeable about cultural complexities – the present generation has not necessarily been attuned to matters international. Interculturalists, Edward Stewart and Milton Bennett (1991), caution us to think about the typical challenges of not only doing business abroad, but interacting with people from different world views in general:

Cross-cultural problems arise from differences in behavior, thinking, assumptions, and values between U.S. people and those from other countries and cultures with whom they associate. These cultural differences often produce misunderstandings and lead to ineffectiveness in face-to-face communication. A deeper understanding of the nature of cultural differences would increase the effectiveness of U.S. people in cross-cultural situations. But to reach this goal, Americans must first become more conscious and knowledgeable about how their own culture has conditioned their ways of thinking and planted within them the values and assumptions that govern their behavior. (p., ix)

The point is that it is not just about the learning of *other* cultural differences, but becoming aware of your *own* cultural norms – to realize that there is a broader world out there but that there is also a rich opportunity for learning about one’s own world as well - and then to be able to take what you know about yourself and compare and contrast to what you learn about others in order to begin the understanding process.

When students are able to take part in study abroad programs, the goal should not just be to focus on other cultures but to include one’s own and understand how the two work together. The “back stage/front stage” analogy is appropriate here (Varner, 2001). All too often, we glorify only the actor who is front and center only to forget about the crew behind the scenes who make it possible for the actor to do his or her job. We do this with culture as well – we focus on the apparent trappings of culture such as customs, food, and the do’s and don’ts of behavior to the neglect of all of the intricacies of the rules and norms that guide and lead such behavior from behind. While we can enjoy what we view from the vantage point of our seats, when we overlook all that must go on backstage in order to support the actor, we miss out on the beauty of understanding the many complexities that go into making a production worthwhile.

So it is with this type of study abroad program that allows business students to actively “go back stage” to see how things actually work behind the scenes. By not only *learning about* business and cultural practices but rather *engaging in* what actually happens to business practices and cultural practices in another cultural context), students get the full perspective of stagecraft. The internationalization of the business curriculum in the U.S. has been evolving over the last two decades to afford future business leaders that vantage point of understanding and doing something about better business and communication practices across cultures.

This leads us to the second topic of discussion – issues of culture and communication. While actors memorize a script, we all know that in any given script the playwright has included what is called the subtext. It is not enough for the audience to listen to the actual words being said, but they must pay attention to all of the symbolic cues and subtle nuances (both in vocal variety and non-verbal behaviors) that transpire as the actor attempts to communicate the many important

aspects of the thought and feeling and meaning behind those words. In any “backstage” cross-cultural experience, students are experiencing firsthand what culture is and how people from that culture use communication to express their cultural norms.

### **Intercultural Communication**

Interestingly, the word, “communication,” comes from the Latin verb, “communicare,” which means to “share or make common to many” (Grice & Skinner, 1991). The theatrical metaphor notwithstanding, let us look at yet one more metaphor as we try to understand the notion of international business practices and the importance of intercultural communication in the process of doing business across cultures. Metaphors prove useful as we try to wrap our minds around abstract concepts – they help us to be in the same frame of reference and share in similar meanings.

In our age of technology, probably one of the best metaphors of culture has been offered by Dutch social philosopher, Geert Hofstede (1997), who has described culture as the ‘software of the mind’ or the way we are programmed to do things based upon what we learn over a life-time. One’s culture dictates the unstated norms of any given group – it encompasses all of the beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors that are generally accepted and expected within that group but that are not necessarily talked about. We act out the cultural traits of our society daily but the only time we really notice them is when accepted behavior has been violated – something happens that deviates from our expectations of how we are ‘programmed’ to behave. Anthropologist, Edward T. Hall (1976) describes intercultural communication by how we use language – that what we communicate is governed by hidden rules that he calls the “silent language’ or hidden dimension that are reflected in both language and behavior. Additionally, Jandt (2000) defines culture in a most comprehensive manner,

To fully understand a culture, you need to understand all the experiences that guide its individual members through life, such things as language and gestures; personal appearance and social relationships, religion, philosophy, and values; courtship, marriage, and family customs; food and recreation; work and government; education and communication systems; health, transportation, and government systems; and economic systems. Think of culture as everything you would need to know and do so as not to stand out as a ‘stranger’ in a foreign land (p. 10).

Intercultural communication, therefore, is the communication among people who ascribe to different values, beliefs and attitudes as framed by the norms of that culture. While we often use generalizations to describe a culture (individualistic/collectivistic; high power distance/low power distance, etc.) we always want to keep in the fore front of our minds that within any culture there are many sub-cultures and that *individuals* make up those sub-cultures. We may ascribe certain generalities to “a people” or “a culture” or a “language group”; however, we need to remember that situations will vary because people vary. Business practices will be different and perhaps unpredictable not only because of national culture, but because organizational culture will be different – and individuals within the national and organizational cultures will have a variety of behaviors, attitudes, values and beliefs. We must therefore be aware that communication context, situation, and personality traits come into play in any communication act (Lovitt, 1999). And, it is important for students to realize that just because emerging

economies such as China and India may be exposed to Western ways of doing business it does not necessarily mean that such cultures will adopt the values of the other culture/s (Ralston, et al., 1993). These matters of international business practices and intercultural communication are so complex and interconnected and are the very reason why a study abroad program can be extremely beneficial to its participants.

While there is no substitute for an extended period of time to work or to study in a culture foreign to one's own, even short-term experiences abroad can help to foster a new awareness and the beginning of a deeper understanding of the complex issues of culture – this includes 'other' culture and one's own culture (Davis & Redmann, 1991). Understanding the globalization of business practices is an important area of learning for students in business programs today regardless of how short or how long a study abroad program may be. A growing number of MBA programs are adapting to the traditional 'semester abroad' and creating two to four week intensive study tours instead. "The length of the program must be balanced against intended results...Short-term programs, when well structured and value-added, are quite useful and may stimulate students to undertake longer programs subsequently" (AACSB, 2002, p. 6) and that "different kinds of programs allow for different kinds of learning" (p. 11).

Study abroad programs help students get beyond the theories of cases and simulations and out into a "lab" experience, testing and seeing first-hand if what they learn in the classroom and through the course readings plays out the way they imagine. And hopefully such experiences will encourage critical thinking about one's "inherent biases" (White, et al., 1998, p. 108) as hypotheses are tested and situations occur where there may be cognitive dissonance because what students may have read and heard doesn't match what they see and experience. Varner (2001) says of international experiences, "Students need to realize that culture is not something that is in the past. Culture lives and changes. It expresses itself in politics, government policies, business regulations, educational systems, and business practices. One cannot separate culture from these issues and study culture in isolation" (p. 104).

By combining the needs of the organization, the academy and the student, there can be strong synergy here to accomplish the task of learning what it means to be competent intercultural communicators and international business leaders in the global economy. It would be like braiding a rope with three cords – the student, the institution of higher education and the corporation – where all three of these strands contribute to strengthen global business practices as business expands and the world shrinks. Developing programs to foster the development of skills that will, in turn, make for more competent workers is what internationalizing the business school curriculum is about. Now it is time to move towards our description of the program.

### **Program Structure and Objectives**

The university was one of the first MBA programs to develop a study tour program with a pilot in 1992 and then for credit thereafter. Known as the GIP (Global Immersion Program), this program provides a unique and custom-fit experience for its students, allowing them to have in-depth exposure to the business environment of a significant global market outside the U.S. Since its inception, programs have run in Europe, Greater China, Southeast Asia, and South America.

The Global Immersion Program is a half-credit elective course, designed to provide MBA students with an in-depth exposure to the business environment of a significant global market to foster greater awareness of a certain area in the world economy. Each year the destinations include Greater China (Taipei, Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong), Southeast Asia (Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore) and South America (Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Salvador and Rio de Janeiro). The backdrop of this paper will focus specifically on a trip taken to Greater China (in May of 2005) as a demonstration of one particular program design that helps foster understanding by creating opportunities for students to engage in genuine learning about intercultural issues in global business practices.

Each of these four regional groups makes up one section of the course, with 45 students being the maximum enrollment for each section. The overall objectives of each program are:

- to provide an understanding of the region's business, cultural and political environments
- to achieve a working knowledge of regional business practices through direct interaction with managers, employees and government officials
- to explore the value of different economic models as benchmarks for global business practices
- to promote intercultural awareness and communication skills

### **Greater China Program**

The China Global Immersion Program offers a comprehensive tour of Greater China, including Taiwan, Hong Kong and the mainland's two most important cities, Shanghai and Beijing. Through alumni and institutional contacts, students are provided the opportunity to develop a solid understanding of the business environment and an appreciation for the ancient Chinese culture. Particular themes that are usually addressed during the immersion experience in Greater China most often include: government regulation of commercial activity; joint ventures; market-entry strategies; capital development structures; privatization; special economic zones; import/export issues; Cross-Strait relations; and the future of Hong Kong. So that the program content is geared toward the interest of students who register for the course, each year the themes are developed once students complete a survey that details their specific interests and concerns.

And, as the Peoples' Republic of China (PRC) opens itself up to foreign investment and liberalizes its economic policies, it is positioning itself as an emerging world economic power. Equally important is its relationship with the Republic of China (ROC) of Taiwan, which has also emerged as a world leader – especially in high technology and heavy manufacturing. How these two economic powerhouses sort out their complicated relationship will determine in large part the state of global business in the 21st century.

### **Site Visits**

In Taipei, the capital of the Republic of China of Taiwan, students have the opportunity to meet with leaders in some of the high technology industries for which the country is famous, such as semiconductors and telecommunications. Students can observe firsthand the organization of

Taiwanese heavy industry, and learn how the large family businesses are managed. Time is also set aside to discuss how the new political party is affecting the commercial environment and the future of relations with the mainland. Gaining a foundation of the history of the political contexts of ROC and PRC is crucial before the group can head to the mainland.

On the mainland, the group travels to the political and cultural capital of China, Beijing. Here the focus will be on how the country's economic & political policies affect the domestic & foreign business community. Time is set aside for visiting key government agencies charged with regulating commercial activity, including the Ministry of Finance and the Bank of China. Students also participate in meetings with representatives from foreign joint ventures, a large state-run industrial enterprise and international organizations. Time is set aside (a three-day weekend ) to provide plenty of opportunity to explore such famous sites as Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Great Wall and the Summer Palace – all important to the historical makeup of this great country.

Another important city is Shanghai, the commercial center of modern China. Participants meet with educators at key institutions of higher education, such as the China-European International Business School, have the opportunity to experience the Pudong New Economic Zone and other local manufacturing enterprises. As a financial center, Shanghai boasts the country's most active stock exchange and will be included as part of a focus on capital formation in China. Past programs have included visits to successful joint ventures and a traditional Chinese hospital.

And yet another major aspect of China is Hong Kong. Long known as a center of finance and trade, Hong Kong underwent a major change in 1997. The program explores the future of this territory as a business center in light of its handover to the PRC. To examine the financial industry, the group meets with the leaders of some of the most famous financial institutions in the world. In addition, participants are introduced to some of the more important family-owned businesses for which Hong Kong is famous. Cross-border visits to manufacturing enterprises in Shenzhen. Plenty of opportunities to meet with Wharton alumni working in Hong Kong are another important feature of this segment.

While the time abroad is short, each daily agenda is packed tightly with high level appointments in government, education and industry that provide students with a fantastic overview of key issues that relate to Greater China's debut as an emerging world economic power. The students are immersed in an intensive 24/7 learning opportunity. The following explains how we prepare them for the trip.

### **Program Structure**

Students have the opportunity to take courses in International Accounting, International Business, International Finance, International Management, International Marketing, etc. An MBA program would not be complete without such courses as they are important for any business school curriculum. They are also crucial for students who plan to work in multinational corporations; however, how much better if students can take the theories and the case examples discussed in classes such as these and have the opportunity to sit down with and learn from a business professional in Hong Kong who tells them about global supply chain management

before they head out to a factory and meet the workers and see first-hand what is happening. If students are at all widening their global perspective, then the GIP has succeeded.

The Global Immersion Program consists of three main components: on-campus sessions; a four-week immersion experience; and a written assignment due at the beginning of the second-year fall semester. Since the GIP is offered for academic credit, students are evaluated on attendance at on-campus lectures, active participation during the four-week immersion experience and the quality of written work. Grades are given on a credit/no-credit basis. At the head of each group is a program director who is a member of the Wharton staff and whose primary role is official representative of the school. The program director is intimately involved in planning the immersion experience itinerary in cooperation with the faculty area specialists, and ensures that program arrangements are realized en route. The program director also facilitates group decisions, and serves as a formal link between the group and the university in case of emergencies.

During the second half of the spring semester, each on-campus lecture meets weekly for a total of five sessions. Led by faculty area specialists, the lecture series covers the history, political systems and social structures of the chosen region of study. Assigned readings and videos serve to augment classroom discussion. During this period, students participate in additional co-curricular sessions to minimize the culture shock that is inevitable when traveling in an unfamiliar environment. The student coordinators who are hired to assist in each major city visited provide the information on business etiquette, language, and cultural expectations. These individuals have extensive living experience in the countries visited. In addition to being an interpreter of the local culture, student coordinators serve as liaisons between the group and the GIP staff to help deal with any problems that might arise. Students also receive information on social and recreational opportunities to help plan any free time. Prior to departure, briefings on necessary immunizations and other health issues are conducted by professionals from the University's Health Services staff. Special meetings also are scheduled to discuss personal security and safety while traveling abroad, utilizing the experiences of fellow students who have recently returned from these areas.

### **Lectures and Activities**

The centerpiece of the GIP is the four-week immersion experience that begins immediately following spring final exams in May, and concludes during the first week of June. Each immersion experience consists of several basic features. The first is the academic overview. Wharton arranges for experts at a partner school of management to provide an overview of key issues facing the region's business community. The purpose of these lectures is to provide participants with up-to-date information and to prepare them for subsequent meetings with senior executives. One of the highlights of the immersion experience is testing this information against real-life situations encountered during the program.

The next feature of the program is are the company and government meetings, which is designed to get students out of the classroom and into the "real world." Through face-to-face meetings with company executives, they observe how managers run their companies, how market forces influence their decisions, and what they perceive as current and future problems. By visiting both

production facilities and corporate headquarters, they see how management decisions directly affect operations and personnel.

Finally, throughout the immersion experience, there are numerous opportunities to learn about culture and its influence on society. These might take the form of planned group events such as a city tour or an excursion to a significant historical area. Receptions with Wharton alumni and students allow participants to interact with their counterparts on a less formal basis and develop a valuable network of contacts. The importance of unplanned, informal cultural activities cannot be overemphasized, since they provide exposure to social norms without the constraints of prescribed expectations.

Upon returning to campus in the fall, student participants meet in a final wrap-up session to evaluate their experiences. The program concludes with a 10-page paper on conclusions from the immersion experience that is turned in at this time. The Global Immersion Program is more than just a trip; it is intended to be a comprehensive learning experience. Sessions prior to departure, the four-week immersion experience and the written assignment upon return are designed to fulfill the academic and programmatic requirements of students, faculty, and staff. The following section will examine the three forms of data that were collected – Pre-Surveys, Post-Surveys and student papers – to assess student learnings from attending the 2005 China Global Immersion Program.

### **Methodology**

Part of any research study must meet the rigorous demands of data analysis. Methodologies used for this paper were of a qualitative nature, which included participant-observation (As the primary researcher, I served as program director and accompanied the students on the trip as well as helped prepare them for it.), surveys and document collection (final papers). Pre- and Post-Surveys served the purpose of recording students' perceptions of their cross-cultural knowledge before and then their reflections on culture and business practices after. The formal written "term" papers served as the summary of each student's interests and learning throughout the pre-sessions, lab experience abroad, and post-sessions. Student coordinators were also required to write a paper if they wanted to receive the 1 C.U. equivalent for a course. Out of the 45 students who participated in the program and the 4 student coordinators, I collected 41 papers in total. This does not mean that 8 out of the 49 students did not submit their final papers, simply that I did not receive all of them after they were submitted. Papers are evaluated on a Pass-Fail basis. Both of the surveys and the papers, as well as my notes were put through an analytic process of coding and determining themes. From these themes come the summaries which are included in this paper.

### **Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis requires the researcher to go through a process of sifting through documents, field notes and other materials in order to increase one's own understanding in order to present them in a coherent manner to others (Bogden & Biklen, 1990). The first step to analyzing qualitative data is to read all of the collected documents and begin to write notes, or analytic memos, which basically are notes to your self about hunches or insights that seem to be

apparent (Maxwell, 1996). After examining these memos, you begin to develop categories, which is the coding process. In qualitative research, coding is the primary manner in which data is organized and includes breaking down large chunks of information into smaller yet similar categories to which you assign more specific categories (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995; Maxwell, 1996). As specific categories emerge, they may begin to repeat themselves, so it is necessary to combine those that overlap. This is what I did in order to narrow the scope of student papers and comments and come up with appropriate themes of the students' learnings within their final papers.

I am always fascinated at just how many categories can emerge when doing a qualitative analysis; therefore, it is important to remember that making one choice over another is all a part of the qualitative research process (Bodgen & Biklen, 1990). Analysis is a series of choices, which can be broken down in many ways so the important thing is to narrow one's focus and remain dedicated to it. This is where the aspect of triangulation comes into practice. Triangulation is a method of analysis that allows the researcher to put various documents, interviews and sundry information through the test of looking for broader perspectives rather than simply relying on single inferences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1993). Collecting data from a variety of people and sources, as well as examining what the literature says on a particular topic can help keep one's biases in check even when the data appears to support one's hunches.

This is why I chose to design a Pre-Survey, a Post-Survey and collect the Final Papers as my primary documents. In any type of research there is a validity threat in terms of bias, but especially so concerning the subjective nature of qualitative research. Qualitative researchers are challenged by constantly having to uphold their potential biases and try to look beyond what they already know or think about an issue in order to achieve broader perspectives (Maxwell, 1996). Triangulation of data helps achieve this broader perspective regarding qualitative data analysis. The following discussion examines the "findings" of the Pre- and Post-Surveys as well as the Final Papers.

### **Pre-Surveys**

The purpose of the Pre-Survey was to determine student demographics including who had lived or worked abroad to gauge previous experience and understanding of cross-cultural issue and set up the Post-Survey to examine what students had learned in terms of two things: cross-cultural learning and business learning. The goal was to eventually triangulate the Pre-Surveys with Post-Surveys and then the Final Papers in order to get an idea of student learning about global issues of business and culture.

There were 15 total questions in the Pre-Survey (see Appendix A) that asked a variety of questions. For the 2005 China GIP program, 45 students attended along with 4 student coordinators. This section examines the responses of the 49 students which were almost equally split between females (43.5%) and males (56.5%). The average age was between 25-27 years of age (56.5) with 32.6% being in the 28-30 year range and 10.8% being in the 30+ age bracket. Students who matriculate into the Wharton MBA program must have at least 3-5 years of professional work experience. Over half of the students were U.S. citizens (54.3%), with the next largest percentage being from a variety of Asian locations (17.4%). When asked if they had

worked in a country other than their country of origin, 59.6% responded yes with 71.4% of those respondents having done so as an adult. When asked about simply living in another country, 83% responded yes with 73.7% having done so during college years. In terms of second language proficiency, 58% of the respondents claimed to be fluent in a second language with 42% being conversant.

When asked about their perceived ability to be comfortable with the ambiguity that interacting specifically with a business contact in another culture entails, 45.7% felt that they were above average and 28.3% felt that they were strong. When asked the same question regarding communication, 39.1% said that they were above average and 32.6% said that they were strong. When asked to select from a list of the most common aspects of culture, students found the most challenging to be: dealing with communication contexts, language, and identity, with the broad category of “customs” coming in fourth. One could argue that self-referenced criterion are not measures of accurate behavior and that asking such questions are superficial; however, the goal was to identify significant overseas living and working experience and to give students the ability to at least superficially begin to think about communication and cross-cultural competencies. A further study would need to address whether this self-referenced criteria was accurate or not. Judging by the overwhelming response of students who lived overseas, it is safe to assume that there was a baseline for eliciting answers from participants who had knowledge and experience of the world around them.

The final question on the survey was designed as an open-ended question prompting students to identify what they wanted to gain from their overseas experience regarding business and/or cross-cultural understanding. Thirty-one of the forty-nine students chose to answer the final open-ended question that asked about what they hoped their learning outcomes to be. This will be discussed below.

### **Discussion of Survey Findings**

What does this say about the Class of 2006 MBA students who participated in the Global Immersion Program? Several trends are evident. First, these students were rather savvy about cross-cultural issues in terms of having lived and worked abroad, which the majority had done. More than half self-reported that they were fluent in a language other than their native language and most thought that they were above average to strong when it came to dealing with the ambiguity that comes with trying to interact with norms that differ from one’s own. This group was clearly made up of many individuals who had substantial overseas work experience, about 60%, and were rather confident about their abilities dealing with the ambiguities of intercultural interactions - about 74% felt that they were either above average or strong. What is particularly encouraging is that while the majority of students did have that overseas working and living experience, which clearly would have presented them with long-term opportunities to learn about interacting in an intercultural business setting via trial and error, they chose to spend an intense month studying and learning in a lab-type experience in order to learn *more*. Linked to this was that, while such students may have had substantial experience, it may have been in a different region of the world. There was definitely the acknowledgment that continuing to learn about world markets and how to do business in China was crucial.

Secondly, and not surprisingly, one of the typical themes that emerged from their responses was that students acknowledged China's increasing importance as an emerging global economic power and wanted to know how to explore the major challenges that come with the territory. Another was that they wanted to gain an understanding of "how business is done," "how to do business," or, "how business works." Yet another theme was to explore the major challenges presented to companies breaking into China's rapidly growing economy.

Probably the most interesting theme comes as the third point of discussion. As the final survey question indicated, students not only had a desire to analyze China as an emerging superpower, learn how to do business in this country, and discover what challenges lie ahead, but they seemed intrigued by the notion that culture is inextricably linked to business practices. In essence students identified that there was the need for better cultural understanding as a precursor to "doing business" successfully. With this theme was the idea of needing to understand the drivers of big business as implicit in the cultural practices and norms of the people. Linked to this was a concern for learning reciprocal values and developing an appreciation of those values of others in the hopes that they would appreciate theirs. This is an exciting finding because this type of inquisitiveness goes beyond mere surface learning and implies digging deeper into how to become *competent* with actually "doing business interculturally." Comments about the values theme were, "What parts of my culture do they value?" or "...not just understanding the cultural aspects of the Chinese, but what they value..." and "...a different perspective about how the Chinese view life...gain a greater appreciation of [it]...".

The idea here is that they wanted to develop competency at interacting and communicating as a global business. Figuring out how to do that would be a challenge – perhaps what underlies this theme is the very detailed and subjective nature of "doing business from a global perspective." Perhaps taking this general concept and breaking it down into the more mundane, nitty-gritty details and complexities will be a future question for consideration. It is easy to say that we want to "gain a global perspective" but what does that *really* mean? Perhaps we will discover this as we move to discussing the findings in the student papers.

### **Student Papers**

A total of 41/49 papers were collected and sorted based upon topic of paper. The nature of the papers varied greatly by student, since they were given very broad requirements with the purpose of eliciting from each student what interested them the most. The general assignment was as follows (for a more descriptive assignment, see Appendix C):

"This paper should be based on your observations during the immersion experience. It can take the form of an evaluation of a specific institution or industry, or overall impressions gained during the immersion experience related to a particular topic with specific examples used to back them up."

Based upon the methodology of coding as previously explained, topics of student papers were eventually grouped into six broad categories:

- Social/Political;
- Business Practices ('doing business');

- Growth (including infrastructure, emerging economies, environmental issues);
- Financial (real estate, private equity, currency);
- Branding (including retailing, advertising and marketing); and
- Other (manufacturing, multinational corporations).

For the purposes of this proceedings paper the first two categories (the largest) will be examined for student learnings.

### **Social/Political Aspects**

One of the most popular topics of the Final Paper and probably the most interesting was the intrigue around China's single party authoritarian government and the view that it represents a major threat to country's long term stability. Another concern of the students addressed the cross-strait relations of the People's Republic of China's (PRC) claim of control on Taiwan and Taiwan's refusal to concede their stance as a sovereign nation. Eight students wrote about the imbalance of political power and social reform in relation to the massive economic reforms. One theme that came up over and over again was that China had the 'potential for growth' in the midst of the economic advancements. There was great concern about the advances of economic change before social and political reform and how this is creating a huge imbalance for both the people and the country.

Probably the most notable aspect of these student papers is that they compare Western-centric views to those of a more authoritarian nature. As extrapolated from the excerpts of student papers written on the socio-political aspects, authoritarian policies of the Chinese one-party political system were compared to the western multiple party systems that ultimately lead to freedom and prosperity. There was concern over the government's control of the people, the media, and the infrastructure. Much discussion centered around the disconnect between rapidly expanding businesses yet the lack of appropriate marketing; the building boom in all of the cities but the lack of proper infrastructure; the explosion of global mass media access yet the single party's authoritarian hold on what media outlets its people can consume. It is not surprising that students would compare this emerging economy with all its promises to the free market economies of the world that are thriving because of democracy. What makes this even more interesting is that students, regardless of whether they were U.S. born or not, made such comparisons. The total number of U.S. born students who completed the Pre-Survey numbered 54.3% and 45.7% were citizens of other countries.

It is also noteworthy that students grappled with the systematic nature of "doing business" in an emerging economy and how all of the pieces of the puzzle must fit together: manufacturing, advertising, infrastructure, currency, private equity and on and on. One male student (Taiwanese national whose father was part of the Taiwanese citizens involved in the earlier uprisings and was forced to flee to the U.S.) concluded that "Turning from authoritarianism and dictatorship, Taiwan has embraced freedom and become one of the World's democratic countries as a sovereign, independent country. Taiwan takes its places in the global political, cultural, and financial economy as an economically prosperous, democratically, free, pluralistic, open, and modern nation."

It is quite appropriate to examine the inextricable links between economic growth and social and political freedom, yet from the comments that students made it seemed apparent that they were able to step away from their Western-centric views and ponder the differences in cultural norms as this one student put it, “Regime change and a more democratic system is not an inevitable outcome for China, as many pundits in the West would like to have people believe...” One student began his paper with the opening statement, “The instinctive first impression that most westerners have about the Chinese political system is that China should be democratic...”

A paper on the role of women in society was written by one of the female student coordinators who was originally born in Beijing and then moved to Hong Kong. She writes, “The issues that matter deeply to me...are human rights, gender inequality, social injustice, the prevalence of kickbacks and corruption...of all these issues, the one that stands out the most to me is gender inequality...in order for China to prosper, its culture would have to fundamentally change.” She reasoned back and forth about the issues and ended on a hopeful note, expressing that there appear to be “seeds of change” as more and more women are entering the workforce in higher level positions and that more multinational corporations were springing up rather than merely state owned companies. She found it ironic that it was Mao Tse-tung who claimed that “half of the sky in China is held up by women.”

Another student acknowledged the limitations of the trip as he wrote about the history of Taiwan and its relationship to Mainland China, “On our trip, we saw the developed, urban side of China, but the reality is that a full two-thirds of the Chinese economy is still agrarian...” One female American-Taiwanese student grappled with the delicate tensions surrounding Taiwan and China’s clash over independence and although she still clung to the nationalism that her parents supported, she reasoned, “...After being in Taiwan and China, having met top political representatives, now...I am more inclined to support the status quo where China and Taiwan have an uneasy peace rather than risk unleashing China’s military might...” While students may reason that the democratic government of Taiwan has led to their successful economic growth and relatively enviable freedoms compared to other authoritarian nations these students ultimately questioned their assumptions of “other” in the attempt to not only exert their viewpoints, but acknowledged that there are others.

One student, after completing his global immersion experience, identified what he believed to be four major perceptions of U.S. Americans regarding China and refuted each of them (skepticism around non-democratic nations; loss of jobs for Americans due to large labor supply; image of low-cost manufacturing and quality; and that China is dependent on the U.S. for its economic survival). He also grappled with the notion of economic and national growth under a communist state and looked at the unpopular side of it, concluding that, “While I hope that the level of knowledge regarding China amongst the American people continues to increase...it is difficult for me to imagine that the American people will fully appreciate the subtleties of Chinese culture without taking a month-long immersion trip themselves...”

These “ah-hah!” moments are what the administration and faculty hope will happen through the immersion experience. *This* is what cross-cultural understanding is all about – to have one’s opinions yet be able to reason with differing ones by looking at the big picture while analyzing the issues.

## Business Practices

Another popular theme emerged, “doing business” and ten students explicitly chose to address issues related to this topic, such as the challenges and/or differences of doing business between other countries (e.g., India, South America, Iran). Again, the perspectives of these papers were not necessarily those of U.S. born nationals. For example, one of the papers dealt with Japan-China relations as written by a Russian student who lived in Japan and who was engaged to a Japanese woman. He wrote a fascinating paper that outlined his reflections and observations of the people in general and business people from each city we visited (Taipei, Hong Kong, Beijing and Shanghai) and what their thoughts were on China’s (and Taiwan’s) relationship with Japan.

Another student talked about China as a land of paradoxes where on the one hand they were ready to take a central role in current world affairs, but on the other hand, he observed “...a certain humility...and a communal connection to the greater whole that makes [its] presence a much less threatening player on the world stage.” One of his themes was the value of collectivism and the understanding of “guanxi” or relationships in networking. He wrote, “We have a sense of networking in the West, and no one is more attune to that sense than the fresh MBA student, but guanxi goes many degrees further. It is so much more about *who* you know than *what* you know or can do. This same student did a triangulation of his sources. He writes,

“During my time in China, I made a point to meet as many local Chinese as I could. I’m very glad I did as it afforded me the unique opportunity to take a look inside the local culture. During our GIP sessions with businesses, we learned time and again about the censorship that exists in China and how Western news web sites were off limits through the Chinese Internet. So I asked one of my new friends if she was concerned at all about not being able to get Western news sources. She was shocked and told me that should could certainly get to the Wall Street Journal or New York Times on-line without difficulty. What she *couldn’t* get to was any of the other pages past the home page, but she never checked into it further. From her perspective, there was no censorship problem at all. As I thought about it, I realized what an effective and insipid way to control the flow of information and at the same time keep the bulk of the population ignorant to the fact that you are doing it.”

Having sat and talked at length with this very energetic and outgoing student as well as having observed him in action, wherever he went, he had his Mandarin phrase book in hand, ready to talk to anyone he met. He showed promise for picking up the language fluently, but more importantly, understanding the “locals” as he put it. While many students wrote about the lack of freedom of the press, this seemed to echo the previous student’s thoughts,

“Although the Caijing business magazine has attracted substantial following and has succeeded in exposing the need for economic reform, the continued threat of Government interference and a lack of media protection laws have prevented Caijing from publicizing the need for political reform.”

Doing business with China also meant making comparisons to other emerging economies. Differences between India and China came under scrutiny for a number of students (Indian) as they viewed India as a rising super power. One of the observations noted that while China has

been a leader in terms of a low-cost manufacturing, it could also have potential in developing high-quality manufacturing. Another train of thought is that India is emerging as a “star” in the areas of software, design and services industry. Several students concluded that language skills, with the lack of English language skills (Chinese) versus the advantage of having such skills (India) seemed to be a barrier for service industry jobs with regard to China taking center stage. This would imply that English would be the lingua franca of business. This student concluded,

India...has the benefit of a large English speaking population which can create connections with several cultures abroad. With over 300 languages and dozens of cultural backgrounds, it has a history of assimilating the new and [the] foreign. This mindset could make it easier for Indians and expats to develop an open exchange of ideas in both the business and social forums.

Another popular theme was infrastructure. Almost every single student, whether talking about China’s growth, financial capacities, or socio-political issues, gave their opinions regarding infrastructure. One of the Indian students pondered,

“Infrastructure sees China’s most obvious and greatest ‘edge’ over India. Beijing’s impressive roadways and Shanghai’s high-rises and skyline made it apparent that China was years ahead of India in its physical infrastructure development. As I compared the two countries, I realized the benefits of communism in getting a developing region off the ground and on its way to economic prosperity. Centralized decision-making resulted in rapid execution. In India, democracy means gaining consensus among several political and economic stakeholders about the next areas of investment. While this is the norm in most developed countries, some would argue it is not the most efficient system in a developing economy.”

This was not the first time a student ventured to extol the benefits of a non-democratic governmental system.

India was not the only country to be compared to China. One Ecuadorian student sought “...to understand why development [has] occurred in China and not in Latin America from the perspective of an Ecuadorian national exposed to Chinese business for the first time.” This student presented a very persuasive argument of China’s competitive advantage but also its model. He reasons that on the one hand people from Andean Pact nations (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia) see China as “the efficient and powerful Chinese steamroller [that] has become a formidable competitor almost too powerful to overcome,” while on the other hand, “China has become a model for Andean Pact development experts.” He writes of his enthusiasm about participating in the China GIP,

“My motivation for obtaining a business school education was to learn valuable business practices that I can hopefully apply in the long-term when I return to Ecuador and start my own export-oriented business. China GIP allowed me to experience first-hand the successes and obstacles Chinese firms have to overcome. This [paper] is my attempt to compare the four most challenging issues present both in China and the Andean Pact (political stability, corruption, special economic zones, size of labor force) and try to gain insights into how China has managed these obstacles while Ecuadorian political and business leaders are still searching for answers.”

## Discussion of Student Papers

All in all, common themes emerged concerning: manufacturing, service, infrastructure, cultural/social/political openness, freedom of press, company performance, market economy competition, growth, advertising and branding, currency and private equity. While student papers encompassed such a wide range of topics, with some explicitly stating in their titles or thesis statements that they were focusing on “doing business” in China or Greater China, each paper, in its own way was about doing business in China. Throughout the summer as the adventure progressed, students began to make connections between the many forces that drive culture – the government, the economy, and the social policies. It became clear to the students that the important aspects of “doing business” in China were all interrelated – understanding culture and business practices were inextricably bound to national culture. The very reason that the Global Immersion Program begins in Taiwan is to subtly yet powerfully make an impression of such interrelationships. The fact that students engage in governmental and educational appointments as well as corporate appointments also supports this function. One female student summed it up quite well. She writes,

Having spent four weeks in Greater China, my observations of doing business in the region are best encapsulated by the phrase, ‘anything is possible, nothing is easy.’ The apt phrase was first articulated by a speaker from BBDO advertising in Hong Kong. After visiting more than forty companies, government and educational institutions throughout Greater China, I believe the phrase accurately captures the contradictions which inevitably arise in a rapidly developing economy that remains a socialist state.”

“This paper examines both sides of the story. Under the heading, ‘Anything is Possible,’ it explores China’s astounding record of economic growth; its entrepreneurial culture; successes by local and foreign businesses; progress towards reform; and future growth opportunities. ‘Nothing is Easy’ outlines the difficulties of doing business in China. These include restrictions imposed by the communist government; the poor performance of the Chinese stock market difficulties enforcing intellectual property rights; and the struggle to establish brand recognition for Chinese goods.”

By getting out of the classroom, away from theory and into an active lab setting, students experienced first-hand China’s potential for growth economically, politically and socially. China’s potential is like a little known actor who has recently been discovered for her talent and is poised for taking center stage in the global economy. In sum, students see this powerful nation as “China in transition.” While paper after paper attested to the feeling that nothing in China is easy at present and so many of the issues are deeply complex, students have revealed their enthusiasm and optimism for a future where anything is possible.

## Post-Surveys

The term papers were not the only telling aspects of documentation of the GIP trip. Students filled out a more lengthy Post-Survey once they returned to campus in September after their summer internships. There were a total of 16 questions with 8 of them being open-ended short answer and the other half being Likert-type questions (1-5 scale). This particular survey was administered to all of the students of the four GIP programs (Greater China, South East Asia,

South America and India), which totaled about 170 students and there were a total number of 76 respondents. Surveys were then filtered for the Greater China trip for a total of 26 respondents (of 49), which makes for a return rate of 53%.

Once again, based upon the methodology of coding, a variety of themes occurred based upon the types of questions. When asked why they chose the China GIP program in particular, the responses revealed three themes: a) to learn about business and cultural practices of China; b) the uniqueness of the experience that the students wouldn't be able to replicate outside of the Program; and c) not one of the easiest regions to travel to/use the language. When asked how valuable a trip such as this was, 46.2% said "very valuable" and 26.9% said "extremely valuable" for a total of 73.1%. When asked if it was realistic that they will put these experiences and insights to use at work, 38.5% said that they were likely to do so and 30.8% were very likely for a total of 69.3% expecting to use this knowledge in the future. When asked "How will you put this knowledge into practice, the responses were fascinating, given their specific nature:

- This was important to me for analyzing companies that have ventures in China or compete with Chinese companies.
- Either within the U.S. interacting with Chinese colleagues, interacting with Chinese clients or visiting China for business reasons (more likely in the distant future).
- Within private equity, if I were to invest in China or emerging markets, I feel that I would be much more sensitive to certain of the complexities involved
- I believe this experience would be very useful if I end up working in Asia or in the US but interfacing with Asia companies (both of which are very likely in my future career path).
- I intend to work in China at some point. Even for those who do not work in China, most all will work with Chinese companies
- Be open-minded to different work style
- Over the summer, I helped launch a quality of life product in China. Understanding the patent laws and the importance of full employment allowed me to change my marketing strategy
- Hopefully I will get an opportunity to work in China.
- I will put it to work as it is an experience I now have with me. Whenever I read a story or engage in a conversation about China (which is often) I will always think back to my time there. I don't think I will work in China so there won't be a direct implementation
- I think just understanding that as hot as China is and there is this desire to outsource manufacturing to the region there are limitations and risks that many companies do not take into account. In general, gives me perspective
- I already talked about our factory tours when visiting a distribution center during my summer job

When asked about key takeaways concerning *cultural* practices, specific comments were:

- "Guanxi" -- relationships are key across culture
- The importance of the relationship between China and Taiwan. - The new emerging consumer trends in China mainland. - Rising competition among Chinese mainland cities
- I learned that it is not easy to do business in China as a foreigner. One needs to be exceptionally committed to conforming to cultural norms, learning the language and adapting to values such as lack of freedom of speech, etc.
- Americans do not get China. It is an ambiguous place, with an ambiguous mindset. Things are not as black and white as westerners would like to see them.
- East needs to meet the west!!

When asked about key takeaways concerning *business* practices, specific comments were as follows:

- Business is relationship-based. Capital markets [in China] are still far behind the west
- Business ethics seem different, more tenuous than in the U.S., meaning there is more grey area. This is reflected in their lax Intellectual Property laws, etc.
- Learned that China should be approached as a country with several distinct regions vs. as one conglomerate
- We saw that political stability was a major issue for businesses in China.
- The growth of China will not last forever. Cheap labor is only a temporary competitive advantage.
- Business is complicated by the governmental authority.
- I learned a great deal about doing business in China - legal system, intellectual property, areas to invest in, differences between regions, entrepreneurial nature of people
- Market is developing, but culture still informs business practices to a very large extent

When asked to contribute any other helpful comments or thoughts regarding their learning, students said:

- Should perhaps put the situation in perspective by spending 1 or 2 days in an inland area that doesn't have the outward appearance of the west. China's advancements were evident her challenges and limitations were not
- Spending time in China is the ONLY way to really understand what is going on there, what the risks and opportunities are. Thanks.
- It was one of the deepest and most valuable experiences while at the university
- There is no substitute for visiting a region and getting a three-dimensional experience. Also, I would not have been able to setup meetings had I traveled there alone.
- Although many students said that we had too many meetings each week I believe the number of meetings we had with business professional and government leaders was perfect. it gave me a good background on the economic and social issues and hearing the information repeated through different sources just reiterated and confirmed the facts and how people think
- It is an entirely different experience to read about a country. Visiting with people in their home country, walking factory floors, and witnessing first-hand the blossoming of the Chinese economy cannot be replicated

### **Discussion of Post-Surveys**

Once again it was clear that there was an interconnectedness of social, cultural, political and governmental issues that essentially defined “culture.” Students took their individual experiences, compared them to the collective group experience and responded accordingly. It was apparent that students responded to the survey questions honestly as well as approached their papers with transparency. One might argue that they were earning a grade for their paper and would respond as they thought the faculty and administration would like, but since the grade was pass/fail and since they were prompted to write on open-ended topics, it is likely that we elicited honest responses to the issues that mattered the most to them.

## Implications

How realistic is a program such as this in terms of cross-cultural learning? What can students honestly take away from it? Asking tough questions is vital when dealing with course development and pedagogical concerns in any academic program. Checks of balance must be in place as Woolf contends, “There is a tendency to assume that the rhetoric or globalization [of curriculum] matches the reality” (Woolf, 2002, p. 5). The caution here is that while it may appear to be good that one’s institution has internationalized the curriculum, the focus may only be giving lip service to what internationalization really is. Measuring student outcomes are very important. To answer this challenge I would posit that the proof is in the pudding as evidenced from the thoughtful reflection pieces students wrote that are excerpted in this paper.

The other question is can intercultural communication be taught? A more accurate question should be can intercultural communication be *learned*? Chick (1990) would argue that while you can’t teach intercultural communication as a body of knowledge (i.e., being prescriptive and making sweeping generalizations about “people from ‘x’ culture will do this and that”), you *can* learn how to deal effectively in communicating across various cultures. If culture means that any composite beliefs, values, attitudes and behaviors make up or program any given group’s identity (granted that within our cultures we are all individuals and will not ascribe to all norms), then living among, interacting with and learning from nationals can present opportunities for students to experience first-hand for themselves if what they read and see and hear is accurate.

Measuring outcome of such an experience is very subjective and not necessarily generalizable. However, as evidenced by the individualized and very personal connections made in each student’s papers, there is deep learning occurring. Arpan (1993) identifies 3 primary goals when considering an international component for learning. They include awareness, understanding and competency. Awareness obviously begins with expanding one’s knowledge base about how the various economies of the world markets and how they work. Understanding follows basic awareness as students build upon their learning – this is where students make connections between how these world markets and economies interact, connect and are thus vital for productivity and survival. Competency requires that students build skills so that they can handle diverse situations with competence – this would mean the “transformation of understanding into action” (p. 17).

The GIP program clearly emphasizes the first two goals of Arpan’s tenets: awareness and understanding. Competency would be the natural outgrowth for those students who might choose to continue to seek opportunities to interact with and/or manage in an international setting. Perhaps competency would follow as Ulijn (2000) believes competency means the ability to understand the correlation between national culture, corporate culture and professional culture. Woolf believes that the natural outflow of international exchange experiences is that it can produce a clearer appreciation for and understanding of cultural diversity. He says, “One measure of the efficacy of international education must, therefore, be the degree to which it brings tolerance, respect, and an appreciation of diversity” (2002, p. 6). Jandt (2003, p. 4) says that being a successful intercultural communicator means two things – that you are able to use your knowledge about culture and its effect on people and that by doing so you learn things about yourself.

Part of the outgrowth of this immersion experience is to expand a student's world view so that he or she will add to his or her repertoire of experiences (and as we have seen, many students have had significant cross-cultural experiences in the business world) and think twice before acting or reacting with someone else who shares a cultural value that may differ from them. Also, having a substantial overseas experience such as this helps students to become aware of themselves in relation to others (Cheney, 2001). Yet another aspect is to get them out of the theory based classroom and into a lab experience that allows them to see, first-hand, how business operates – making valuable connections between what they learn in class as opposed to what they experience first-hand allows them to make conclusions for themselves. One student wrote of her experience while at Taiwan's TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor) in the famous Hsinchu Science Park, and envisioned how she and her classmates would want to act based upon their growing knowledge as business students:

“It was not the list of TSMC's accomplishments that stunned our group, but [our host's] declaration that TSMC was content continuing to compete in the same part of the market in the future that it occupies today. She explained to us that TSMC occupies the middle of the value chain in the semiconductor industry. Specifically, TSMC's suppliers provide the vast majority of its raw materials while TSMC's customers focus on the design, marketing and sales. Therefore, TSMC is dependent upon customers to provide a market for its products. This strategy runs counter to general management theory. At Wharton, our professors speak about the need to “own” the end customer.

[Our host's] statement shocked our group. Very few students on the China GIP had heard of TSMC before our visit, but after seeing the fancy headquarters, meeting our polished host and hearing the impressive statistics of this company, our group expected that TSMC would want to expand its control in the semiconductor industry, most likely moving to control the end customer and increase its presence worldwide. The bankers in the crowd were anxious to give TSMC any financing necessary to add the required capabilities. The consultants were already dreaming the growth strategy business plans and identifying potential acquisition targets...”

Such connections of classroom theory and the reality of business practice is what the Global Immersion Program is all about. Its purpose is to serve the MBA students by exposing them to market economies outside of the U.S. and perhaps outside of traditional student experience, as well as social, cultural and political environments. Such a program provides simply a snapshot that will hopefully be added to a repertoire of many pictures in each student's global awareness album. Our purpose is to implant more awareness and to begin to foster understanding. When students make significant connections like these, teachers, administrators and employers alike will cheer.

## **Conclusion**

This paper discussed how one particular MBA program prepared students for the global market place through a summer study tour program by showing that even short-term exposure to learning and living overseas can significantly enhance one's intercultural awareness and appreciation of international business and culture. The discussion was grounded by relevant literature on the issues surrounding internationalizing the business school curriculum in order to

look at programmatic aspects of the study abroad program and curricula that is focused on intercultural learning. Both quantitative and qualitative data were examined from the study tour that took place in May 2005 to greater China by examining students' Pre-Surveys, Post-Surveys and Final Papers that reflected on their experiences and insights. As was evidenced in the reflection papers, students believed that even a short-term exposure to learning and living overseas significantly enhanced their intercultural awareness towards international business practices, business culture and national culture.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

#### GIP Program Overview

<b>Pre-Departure</b>	<b>Four-Week Experience</b>	<b>Post Trip</b>
Lectures (4)	-Site visits: government, corporate, educational	-Papers
Dinner out at local restaurant	-Mid-session evaluation	-Wrap up meeting
Cultural issues/language session	Free time	-End-session evaluations
Free time session		
Pre-departure/health info		
Course pack - current readings		

### APPENDIX B

<b>Pre-Survey Questions</b>
<i>Sample of the total 15 questions in actual survey</i>
What is your gender?
What is your age?
Nationality
Work/living experience in country other than U.S.
Ability to converse in languages other than English.
Ranking of comfort level regarding ambiguity in cross-cultural settings?
Ranking of self-perceived ability to communication with someone from another culture.
Choosing 3 most challenging aspects of learning to interact in a culture other than one's own. [language, communication contexts, identity, authority, religion, ambiguity, time, customs, food, bribes, other]
Prompting to write about what students hoped to gain concerning business and cross-cultural understandings while on study tour.

### APPENDIX C

#### **Final Paper Assignment**

Upon your return to campus in the fall, you will present your final conclusions regarding the business environment you studied in the form of a written paper. This paper should be based on your observations during the immersion experience. It can take the form of an evaluation of a specific institution or industry, or overall impressions gained during the immersion experience related to a particular topic with specific examples used to back them up. You are welcome to augment your direct observations with research. To ensure a thorough discussion of your conclusions, the paper cannot be less than eight pages in length (double-spaced). You should include a list of references (books, articles, etc.) used, and cite them in the text as you make arguments or document facts or trends.

To assist you in organizing your thoughts on this assignment, two synthesis sessions have been scheduled during the study tour. These sessions will take the form of seminar-type discussions moderated by the GIP program staff.

The following is a list of guideline questions that can be used to help you craft your work:

- What are the region/country's cultural characteristics and how do they manifest themselves within the business environment?
- What are the two or three most important issues facing the region/country's business enterprises in the next ten years and what are local managers doing to address them?
- How would you characterize the relationships within the region/country's business community, either within a corporation or between corporations and other entities (competitors, government agencies, etc.)?
- What recommendations would you make to companies considering entering this market?

#### **APPENDIX D**

<b>Post-Survey Questions</b>
<i>Sample of the total 12 questions in survey – some were open response and others on a Likert-type scale.</i>
Why did you choose to go on a GIP study tour?
Please give specific comments on the insights you gained regarding CULTURAL practices/issues of the region.
Please respond to the following question: The overall GIP experience helped me to gain valuable insights into the CULTURAL practices/issues of the region.
What kinds of CULTURAL information would have been most helpful for you to prepare for the GIP experience? Please make specific recommendations
Please give specific comments on the insights you gained regarding BUSINESS practices/issues of the region.
Please respond to the following question: The overall GIP experience helped me to gain valuable insights into the BUSINESS practices/issues of the region.
What kinds of BUSINESS information would have been most helpful for you to prepare for the GIP experience? Please make specific recommendations.
How realistic is it that you will put these experiences and insights to work?
If realistic, HOW might you put this knowledge to work?
Participating in an academic study program helped me gain insights into business and cultural issues/practices that I could not have gained through reading cases, books and discussing issues in an MBA course.
Please contribute any other helpful comments or thoughts regarding your cultural and global business learning while on GIP.