Chapter 6

Undergraduate Global IT Education — An Experiential Approach Using the Concept of Fit

Joan Mann
Old Dominion University, USA

There are special considerations which are important when developing and teaching a course on information systems for international business, especially when the course is designed for undergraduates. This chapter demonstrates how to position and organize a global information systems course for undergraduates which will 1) be appropriate to the way undergraduates learn, 2) include the skills they need at this stage in their career and 3) create an affective change in their perspective. The primary approach used to produce these results is to demonstrate the importance of alignment between global strategies, organizational structures, the configuration of IS departmental areas, organizational information infrastructures, and national/organizational culture, as well as, alignment between national concerns, national information infrastructures and national information policy.

INTRODUCTION

Business schools and their accrediting bodies have long recognized the need to internationalize the curriculum. For example, in the United States the primary business school accrediting body created a standard in 1974 that called for all business curriculums to include an international perspective. Moreover, the federal government has put into place funding initiatives to support the internationalization of business education. For instance, it has designated several universities to be Centers for International Business Education and Research (CIBERS).
primary mission of any CIBER school is to assist other universities in internationalizing their curriculums.

Information systems (IS) departments within colleges of business have started to internationalize but few universities, however, have a course at the undergraduate level. The primary objective of this paper is to present a course plan for an undergraduate global IS course that emphasizes the importance of IS-organizational context alignment. The first step, however, is to make an argument that a global IS course is needed and that it must be designed with undergraduates in mind.

IMPORTANCE OF GLOBAL IS EDUCATION FOR UNDERGRADUATES

Undergraduates from most IS programs expect to become programmers and/or systems analysts. Curriculums therefore, tend to emphasize useful technical knowledge and analysis skills. Coursework in other business fields are incorporated so students will be able to design systems for businesses. Using this same logic, a case can be made for the importance of undergraduate global education.

The globalization of business will have a large impact on how the IS function operates. Global organizational information infrastructures are built upon national information infrastructures and therefore, the number of vendors and standards increases substantially. IS staff will find the array of technological choices both more diverse and more constrained. At the development project level, undergraduate IS majors need to be aware of this complex technological environment and given tools for making sense of it.

Our students are more likely to be relocated outside their home country. Users, technicians and executives will come from a variety of national backgrounds. Undergraduate IS majors need to learn how to function well in this complex social environment, especially when teams will increasingly communicate electronically.

Not only that, the turbulent global environment means IS functional areas must adjust people and technology to constantly changing organizational strategies and structures. Even though undergraduate IS majors will be primarily working on individual projects, a long term perspective is needed. One that connects systems being built today to future organizational needs. For example, implementation is a traditional topic covered IS curriculums. In a multinational enterprise (MNE), diffusion and technology transfer issues become just as important because systems will rarely be used in one geographic location.

So, if undergraduates need a global IS course, then how should we adjust the curriculum accordingly and how should it be taught?
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