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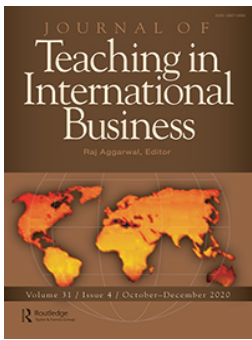


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México, the Americas, and Spain Perspectives and IB Education Innovations: ¿Hacia Dónde Vamos?

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KEYWORDS Mexico, the Americas, and Spain (MAS); IB education perspectives and innovations; international experiential learning

1. Concept and importance of México, the Americas, and Spain (MAS) in IB education

The Latin American and Spanish landscapes are increasingly important for international business education. As globalization settles into its 21st century equilibrium, international business transactions are most commonly conducted in a handful of languages, including Spanish (Tenzer, Terjesen, and Harzing 2017). International trade and foreign direct investment are growing across the Americas, with negotiations and transactions that commonly take place in Spanish. Given the particular cultural, geographical, and migratory patterns of the Latin American region, Spanish has earned a spot as the most commonly studied second language in North America (Doyle 2019). The intersection between International Education, International Business and the study of Spanish and Latin American issues has therefore added relevance in colleges and universities around the world, particularly in the context of a growing Hispanic population, as well as increased enrollment of Latin American and Spanish-speaking American students in universities in the United States. Furthermore, geographical proximity provides increasing opportunities to establish interdisciplinary programs that take advantage of this confluence of elements, allowing institutions of higher education to establish programs that involve travel to Latin America and Spain, dual-language degrees, and instruction of unrelated subjects in Spanish.

Despite its outsized significance, the literature on international business education focused on México, the Americas, and Spain (MAS) is arguably not as developed as it could be, particularly in North American universities. We argue in this special issue that there needs to be added emphasis on the scholarly study of this important topic, because its relevance will only grow in the coming decades, both academically as well as professionally. Academically speaking, those involved with this special issue believe that travel to the region, study abroad opportunities there, as well as growing and deeper

links with Latin American and Spanish Universities will continue to represent some of the most important pillars of our universities' internationalization efforts. Professionally speaking, this special issue is published amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which we contend will forever change the world that our graduates are inheriting, with a labor market that will increasingly prize a broadened critical thinking toolset, and the ability to work in international teams composed of a culturally diverse and a geographically distributed workforce.

Given obvious cultural links, there is no universally accepted way in which to refer to this important region. If one does a simple internet search and puts together México and the Americas with Spain, the results are principally concerned with the Spanish conquest of the continent. Similarly, terms such as the "Hispanic World" or even "Latin America" itself are troublesome, because they carry the colonialism stigma. The latter term is also arguably inappropriate because it refers to the Spanish-speaking population of the Americas as Latino, which in principle would apply to all who speak romance languages, such as Portuguese, French, Italian, and Romanian, and this is certainly not the intension. More recently, the term *LatinX* has been developed in the United States to refer to this population in a gender-neutral manner, but the term has not fully caught on outside the niche groups who developed the term, and certainly not outside the United States (Salinas 2020).

For these reasons, we propose to extend the use of the term México, the Americas and Spain (MAS) to refer to the broadly defined world of Spanish and Portuguese speaking peoples of the continent of the Americas. Referring to the continent by this name brings to light that the term "America" represents the whole western hemisphere, considered one contiguous continent to most who inhabit it, and thus not just the United States of America. Spain certainly plays a role here, and the historical and cultural links that bind it to Latin America are perhaps stronger than those that bind the Iberian Peninsula to the European continent. But including Spain at the end of the MAS concept sets the record straight that in the 21st century, the ethos of this cultural block is certainly not exclusively emanating from *La Madre Patria* – a term used by Latin Americans to reference their Spanish heritage that has now become obsolete and imperialistic sounding. Rather, we include Spain in this group of Latin American countries because it represents an important destination for study abroad, and because of its essential role in linking the European Union to the Americas. We also postulate that México deserves a special role here, not only because of its proximity to the USA, but because the internationalization efforts that we address in this special issue go beyond simple study abroad opportunities, and more broadly address the way in which international education enriches our campuses, and serves as a glue that binds together

our cultural links to the region, as well as the melting pot of an America that is becoming increasingly bilingual.

The articles in this issue intend to bring to light state-of-the-art pedagogies in the field, as well as a growing consensus on the best practices in international business education, particularly as it applies to the MAS region. Several articles here stress the way in which international experiences are by their nature interdisciplinary, and that this synthetic element of study abroad represents an essential aspect of a well-rounded college education, particularly if it fuses liberal arts breath of knowledge with professional applications.

We contend that students who learn the generalizability of their knowledge will be more likely to engage issues that lie in cross-disciplinary boundaries and demand diverse skills and perspectives. Real-world phenomena are often messier and fuzzier than those studied from contained academic views (Bammer et al. 2013; Nelson 2017). Our students may graduate without an understanding of how their knowledge, whether theoretical or practical, fits into the general toolset that is needed in an applied career and contemporary and dynamically evolving employment setting (Elahee and Norbis 2009). In particular, such a graduate may not possess the instructions describing how their knowledge, methodologies, and techniques can be best accommodated in an interdisciplinary study, international team, or diverse work environment.

Our institutions of higher learning each have their own special combinations of needs, opportunities, and realities. Our student bodies are different, but the labor market our graduates share is the same for all, and may be quite unforgiving for years to come, implicitly penalizing those who have not had the opportunity to broaden their horizons, or those who have not had an opportunity to apply their gained knowledge through experiential learning and develop a global mind-set (Chan et al. 2018).

Before the Corona virus so dramatically disrupted the course of the 21st century, the higher education industry was arguably already in turmoil. The COVID-19 pandemic has simply brought to the forefront, and accelerated the crisis of legitimacy that the field is facing, particularly after many years of tuition rising above the rate of inflation. Years after the pandemic is long gone, its effects will linger on, perhaps permanently. These effects may be most pronounced in the pedagogical models and means of instruction we use in the university system.

The labor market will be forever changed, as well. While it may feel convenient for many of us to work from home during these times of social distancing, the reshuffling of industries, work environments, and corporate organizational structures has just begun. Distanced conferencing, travel-less business meetings, and multinationally dispersed departments have become, and will foreseeably continue to be the norm across the corporate world. The one industry that had arguably avoided outsourcing was the service industry,

but that may change soon. In this new reality, the marketing department of a mid-size company, for example, will be staffed across time zones and continents. In this context, our students need to learn to deal with *the other*, and get used to working in diverse and permanently distanced teams.

Geopolitically, the world may be unrecognizable to our pre-pandemic eyes in just a few years, with several plausible paths going forward that are only now coming to light. While the pandemic's ferocious expansion laid bare the degree to which our world is fully globalized, some believe that one of the effects of the pandemic will be a renouncement of the core principles of globalization: free trade and travel. The strife between the West and China may be more than a passing affair, creating a new type of multipolar cold war that leaves the world in a balkanized state, with multinational regions that focus inwardly while isolating themselves outwardly. In any case, however, North America stands to land in a block where Spanish is one of the main languages of commerce, with a Hispanic population that is increasingly assertive, culturally dominant, and politically powerful. Thus, we have chosen to focus on international business education specifically in the MAS countries.

2. Introduction to the issue

In this issue we feature five articles that capture the richness of MAS through a variety of experiential approaches. The programs described by the authors present both conceptual frameworks to support their programs as well as details that allow readers to adapt these academically-based courses to their own institutional and curricular realities and resource parameters. An important aspect of each program is that they provide qualitative or quantitative data-driven assessments to support their effectiveness as pedagogical tools for international business education. Below we offer a brief introduction to each of the five articles published in this issue.

In the current issue, all of the articles address study abroad in diverse formats, short-term and long-term, and include innovative components. Moreover, all of the programs have a commonality through emphasis on the importance of language and cultural acuity as key competencies in acquiring knowledge, skills, and abilities in international business in the MAS countries. Programs discussed in this issue touch on all parts of MAS including México, Spain, United States, and South America. Wight, Blevins, and Ramírez discuss their course that engages their students in working with indigenous people. Suárez and Michalska-Haduch demonstrate the effectiveness of collaborative online international learning (COIL) by building student teams from two countries working together on an international trade project. Zwerg-Villegas and Hiller identify the challenges involved with multi-country project logistics, language, culture, and institutional diversity. Gil Robles and Reyes provide support for short-term study abroad trips encouraging the development

of a global mind-set for business students and the importance of networking and professional aspirations. Suárez, Nishikawa Chávez and Ruíz discuss a summer study abroad program that is based on collaboration between liberal arts and professional programs. Highlighted in each article are the best practices and personal perspectives on how these programs can be implemented on other campuses.

Finally, we acknowledge the contributions to this issue of the *Journal of Teaching in International Business* by our editors and reviewers. Executive Editor Raj Agarwal and Managing Editor Yinglu Wu provided valuable guidance in the process of designing this issue and supported the project from inception through publication. We also offer our sincere gratitude to our manuscript reviewers whose time, energy, and expertise enhanced the articles included in this issue: Timothy Wilkinson, Whitworth University, James, Brodzinski, Valparaiso University, Kevin Pon, ESDES Lyon Business School, Michael Bryant, ESC Clermont, and Ángel Losada Vásquez, Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca.

¡Que tengas un buen viaje!

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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