Integrating Domestic Field Trips into International Business Education: Exploring Pedagogical Issues Behind a Practical Implementation

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Abstract. Porth (1997) argues that field trips are a useful pedagogical tool in business education for their experiential learning value of linking theory to practice. This study incorporated a qualitative, case study based approach to investigate the implementation of domestic field trips into a penultimate international business subject in an undergraduate course using observation and triangulation for data collection. An industry outreach program that complemented and reinforced pedagogical aims to develop an appreciation of the importance of international business strategies for domestic organisations operating internationally was integrated into the subject using Porth’s (1997) three step process. Supporting activities for a negotiation with an industry outreach program were undertaken before the scheduled negotiation took place in order to ensure a greater likelihood of success. These activities included discussion of negotiations, simulated negotiations and feedback from teaching staff. It is believed that innovative experiential activities such as these will help graduates to meet the challenges of the professional workforce in a more complex and integrated economy.

Keywords: field trips, international business education.

1. Introduction

Increasingly, organisations are recognising the need to have employees with the capacity to successfully engage in the global business environment (Prestwich and Ho-Kim, 2007). New graduates have not escaped from this requirement, with the need to possess job ready “global skills” (Gordon and Smith, 1992; Brokaw, 1996) including problem solving skills, ability to understand and communicate across cultural barriers and manage diverse projects, which are often difficult to develop in classrooms (Bush and Bush, 1998; Korfhage-Smith, 2010). The difficulties in responding to the development of these skills have been highlighted in extant literature (Danford, 2006). Universities have, nevertheless, sought to respond to these dynamics developing innovative curricula to provide the appropriate skills and knowledge for students entering the marketplace (Prestwich and Ho-Kim, 2007; Tal, 2001).
One such method that has found increasing traction to address these global skill sets is the field trip, offering a dynamic learning space, shifting the experiential exercise to a unique practical context, rich in socio-cultural context, allowing the extension of students’ skills and knowledge developed in the classroom (Do, 2006). Extant literature has identified the contribution of field trips in increasing the effectiveness of teaching and accentuating learning (Porth, 1997; Wong and Wong, 2008; Rone, 2008), allowing students to go onsite, and learn the theory through seeing it in action which Do (2006: 3) argues is the best form of teaching to demonstrate direct application of knowledge. Beyond the unique learning opportunity outside of the classroom, field trips also enhanced good faculty-student relations, team spirit and identity (Stainfield, Fisher, Ford and Solem, 2000).

Field trips have long been utilised across primary, secondary, and higher education (i.e. Millan, 1995; Soto, 2001; Do, 2006). Moreover, within the higher education sector, field trips have been considered an integral element of learning across a number of other disciplines, including geography, anthropology and tourism (Millan, 1995; Rone, 2008; Ap, 2005). Within a business context, Porth (1997) argues that the field trip’s utility as a unique experiential learning opportunity comes from its capacity to not only demonstrate theory in practice, but also the contradiction between the utilisation of that theory in one organisation to another. Within a specific international business context, Porth (1997) argues that field trips allow the greater appreciation of complexities that are faced in management decision making, particularly within different cultural contexts. It is one thing, he argues, to learn about things like culture through reading and studying, it is through experiencing it, however, that students can truly gain a greater understanding and self-awareness of its impact within the organisational context.

A number of scholars share Porth’s enthusiasm for the value of the experiential learning aspect of overseas fieldtrips (see for instance Schuster, 1993 and Gordon and Smith, 1992). Findings of Schuster’s (1993) study indicate that overseas field trips generate value for the students, faculty members, administrators, and members of the business community in terms of professional learning about international business, competition and cultural diversity. Gordon and Smith (1992:49) also agree that exposure to global businesses and executives can be a crucial asset not only for teaching the learning objectives set for a specific unit of study, but also for providing students with a wider and more sophisticated understanding of the mechanisms regulating the global marketplace. Field trips involving travel across several different countries can allow students to compare and contrast culture in action, and provide important insights into the paradoxes of culture as an international manager. Benefits for the faculty members involved in international field trips come from gaining exposure and experience in a different culture. Their increased cultural knowledge has the potential to enhance teaching in internationally focussed subjects. Moreover, faculty members and
students involved in an international field trip often develop a better professor-student relationship resulting in a lifelong relationship because of the increased amount of time spent together (Koernig, 2007). Fieldtrips therefore have the potential to spark intellectual growth and cultural sensitivity, improve student and teacher rapport while developing wiser individuals who are better able to work effectively in a globalised business environment.

Wong and Wong (2009) make note, however, that no systematic reviews or formal studies have been implemented to develop more comprehensive guidelines for the organisation of field trips. This study builds on their initial work, offering a practical overview of the process of implementing field trips into the international business curriculum. This can arguably serve to better develop ‘global skills’ in undergraduate students, bridging the gap between theory and practice, and developing appropriate skills to be successful following the completion of their studies. In doing so, this article first outlines the extant literature that has sought to capture the effective implementation of field trips into education curriculum. This article then focuses on the process of reviewing the actual implementation of a field trip to a local company that operates internationally into an undergraduate international business subject, drawing out some guidelines for ensuring its successful implementation.

2. Theoretical Background

A number of studies have sought to further articulate and understand the effective pedagogical processes behind implementing experiential exercises through field trips. Before beginning our examination of these studies, it is useful to first begin with scoping what exactly a field trip is. Rone (2008: p. 238) provides a basic description detailing a field trip as a group trip that affords lived social experiences in a social context for the purpose of first hand observation and learning. Rone further differentiates between the types of field trips based on the overall trip duration with a field trip lasting less than a day and an immersion field trip taking place over a period of days (238). With this in mind, an examination of extant literature that looks at the pedagogical processes behind implementing a field trip into curriculum is provided.

Previous studies have tended to conform within two broad approaches when studying the pedagogy behind field trips, that is, either generic guidelines to successful implementation, or more staggered and progressive processes to implementation. Looking first at literature that has developed some general guidelines, several particularly useful frameworks including the work of Rone (2008), Koernig (2007), Ap (2005), Brokaw (1996), Schuster (1993), and Gordon and Smith (1992) have been identified. Partially mirroring Gordon and Smith findings and recommendation about international field trips for U.S.
marketing and business students,\(^1\) Schuster (1993), in particular developed recommendations that contributed to the successful implementation of field trips when drawing on her experiences of planning, organising and conducting a 10 day intensive overseas fieldtrip for executive MBA students. These included the following points: (1) examine the kind of people who would be participating in the class and determine objectives for the subject; (2) selection of suitable locations for the fieldtrip based on the set objectives for the subject; (3) provide activities for students to help them develop common fundamental knowledge – these would be activities held before and after the fieldtrip including information about the requirements of the subject, business briefings and cultural briefings; (4) organise companies in the specified locations that would provide a tour of the facilities and time to talk with various executives in order to foster in-depth, interactive investigation of the issues and ensure achieving student engagement on-sites; (5) arrange an informal dinner or after five event in order to provide an opportunity to thank the companies for participating.

In implementing immersion field trips, Rone (2008), on the other hand, developed eight key recommendations. These are as follows: 1) draw on local community at the site of the intended field trip in planning and coordinating activities; 2) utilise a wide continuum of activities to supplement the field trip experience, including course material, guest lectures and readings or films; 3) implement rigorous planning to ensure successful off-campus activity; 4) build partnerships with institutions at the field trip site to not only facilitate planning and coordination of the trip, but also allow partnering of the burden for coordinating the overall field trip; 5) ensure activities are structured, and that students also have sufficient freedom for self-exploration during the field trip; 6) aim for a four to six day trip to allow greater immersion, 7) allow students multiple methods for feeding back their experience to teaching staff, and for drawing out relevance of the field trip to the course material; and 8) apply for institutional funding to support the field trip.

In a review of the practical implementation of field trips, Ap (2005) identified 17 key guidelines for organising a successful field trip. As part of this process, he also initiated the delineation of four key stages in the timeframe of organising a field trip including, 1) well before the trip; 2) shortly before the trip; 3) during the trip; and 4) after the trip. Looking more closely, Ap (2005) suggests that the first stage – “well before the trip” – should be focused around scheduling, ensuring that the concomitant implementation of the field trip is in line with other commitments the students have. This would include coordinating with colleagues, developing “catch-up” options for students, and conducting

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\(^1\) Note that Brokaw’s (1996) is a variation on the models proposed by Gordon and Smith (1992) and Schuster (1993) in which the author examines the benefits of a short-term international field trip focussing on a single international destination rather than an itinerary through multiple foreign countries.
preliminary visits to the site. As a final element, it is important to conduct a risk assessment and ensure that all departmental or university regulations are met.

The second stage, shortly before the trip, should focus on briefing students with appropriate information in preparation for going on the trip (Ap, 2005). This may involve the utilisation of a guest speaker to brief students, detailing the practical arrangement for the trip including the travel arrangements and overall trip objectives, and ensuring that students notify teachers from other classes that will be missed. The emphasis at this stage is to prepare students with all practical information required.

In relation to Ap’s first and second stages, Koernig (2007) emphasises the importance of providing multiple pre-trip class sessions in order to increase the potential of building rapport among all participants. He asserts that research demonstrates that there are three main factors that are important for building rapport. These involve the following: 1) approach factors which refer to the physical and psychological approachability of the faculty members; 2) personality factors which refer to respect, caring and empathy toward the students; 3) homophily which refers to building trust between the students and between students and faculty members. Koernig (2007) argues that pretrip class sessions enable the faculty member to assess student interest, providing an opportunity to adjust the fieldtrip based on the needs and wants of the particular group of students.

During the trip, which is Ap’s (2005) third stage, he highlights the importance of ensuring not only task focus for students with the reflection on learning objectives and ongoing observation, but also the maintenance of their health and safety. As part of the student focus, Ap emphasizes the need for instructors to highlight key points students need to observe, encourage ongoing reflection on experiences, and continuous documentation so as to ensure a record for further reflection.

As a final stage, Ap (2005) focuses on the post-trip evaluation and reflection. At this stage, he encourages that debriefing sessions be utilised at the earliest possible point to draw on the “fresh” experiences of the students. Moreover, it is at this point that explicit links should be established between the background class material and the field trip observations. He also suggests the possibility of feeding back student experiences to the industry partner, which may strengthen that relationship. While these are not comprehensively developed and demonstrated through empirical application, they do nevertheless identify some important considerations in implementing field trips and are useful in setting a broader context.

With regards to the studies utilising a more staggered and progressive approach to implementing field trips, previous research has largely developed around the work of Porth (1997), who introduced a basic three stage model. In his 1997 study, Porth focused on the effective implementation of an international study tour which was classified as an immersion field trip and was part of a
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management course. His study was driven by the perceived need to provide a better link between theory and practice in management education, and the utilisation of experiential learning opportunities in doing so. As part of his model development, he identifies three distinct phases from which an immersion field trip, or study tour can be developed – pre-departure/classroom, on-site, and post-return phases. In the first stage, Porth (1997) suggests that it is critical to orientate students for the experiential exercise, including the utilisation of case analysis, reading assignments, lectures, discussions and guest speakers. This phase sets the scene for the upcoming immersion field trip, and builds student expectations about what they can anticipate. Porth recommends developing a detailed course syllabus to support the implementation, including outlining key objectives and expected outcomes, and the assessable elements. Moreover, he suggests that it is important to screen sights with the overall objectives of the course in mind (Porth, 1997).

The second stage extends into the on-site processes, where students are travelling to countries and visiting organisations. Seminars should be provided to support these visits and interactions, so as to allow comprehensive learning to occur at each site. The information provided to students at this stage should clearly establish the student roles and responsibilities during the tour, as well as those of the faculty members. Porth (1997) also emphasises the need to assign group leaders for each site being visited, and the importance of pre-visit preparation meetings. The final stage is after students have returned to campus when the immersion field trip experiences can be re-examined and analysed in order to support student learning. This may also include completing and submitting reports on the experiences, receiving feedback from students, and providing evaluation and feedback on student performance. In sum, this stage should clearly link the first and second stages of the tour, where theory and practice have been conducted.

Recent research has developed from the model proposed by Porth (1997) in extending the applicability of the field trip methodology to other contexts. For example, Do (2006) explores the teaching, learning and assessment issues associated with the implementation of an undergraduate immersion field trip for architecture students. He emphasises the importance of experiential education in the galvanising of theory and practice, allowing theories learnt in the classroom to be translated into a practical context (p. 1). In doing so, he implements Porth’s model for the design and implementation of an immersion field trip, as well as considering the different type of learning that can occur, and how assessment can be integrated to support this process.

In the pre-tour stage of preparation for the immersion field trip, Do (2006) utilised a pre-departure meeting and research workshop to introduce students to the overall aims and objectives of the immersion field trip. The pre-departure meeting focused on the provision of a journal, outlining detailed information on the location (Malaysia), travel advice and research background. Pre-tour tasks
were also developed and assigned to students, encouraging student familiarisation of the location, determining a research focus, and the development of a research paper from which to empirically investigate during the trip. The research workshop focused on the further development and refinement of student research projects, including the scope, with presentations allowing the formal critique of their suggested research.

In the second stage of his study, the on-tour stage, Do (2006: p. 4) extends from Porth’s (1997) approach, and emphasises the importance of both processes and broad structure in ensuring the standard of student learning from the on-site experience. As part of this process, Do (2006) focused on the student-staff relationship, underlining the importance of approachable staff in facilitating student learning. Moreover, free-time during the field trip was seen as important in allowing students to maintain focus and further their own learning experience, and as such, Do (2006) worked around structuring this into the program. Throughout this stage of the program, students were encouraged to maintain their journals so as to allow academic reflection and learning. These journal entries and recordings were utilised to form the basis from which student research papers were produced. The process of learning was reinforced through students linking the observations they made with the theoretical framework they had developed prior to the actual beginning of the tour.

At the final stage of the tour, the post-tour stage, Do (2006) sought to reinforce the experiences during the second stage, and integrate these back into the learning context. He utilised a series of informal student presentations to draw on the experiences from the study tour, and allow questions from staff and other students. This allowed for both the recollection and re-evaluation of knowledge garnered during the tour, and the reinforcement of the learning that had taken place (Do, 2006). Following the application and assessment of the immersion field trip, Do (2006) emphasises the importance of setting a context for the experiential exercise within domain specific knowledge throughout the three stages of the experience. This is particularly the case when linking the learning outcomes with the assessment pieces and teaching approach adopted.

Most recently, Wong and Wong (2008) have utilised Porth’s model in examining how learning can be enhanced through utilising immersion field trips for hospitality and tourism students. Wong and Wong examine the implementation of immersion field trips for tourism and hospitality students. They extend Porth’s model, offering 14 practices across the three stages of field trip organisation. At the first stage of pre-trip planning and research, they suggest, 1) careful planning of trip activities to align with course learning objectives; 2) careful communication of learning objectives and assessments to students; 3) encouragement of student participation in research for relevant information related to the field trip; 4) provision of a briefing session for both trip itinerary and review of learning objectives; and 5) liaison with both internal and external partners.
On-trip, the second stage of a field trip, Wong and Wong (2008) recommend, 1) reinforcing safety; 2) ensuring quality of the tour with the tour leader or guide; 3) reminding students to observe and actively participate in activities to reinforce learning objectives; 4) scheduling student free time to explore local attractions and sights; 5) building rapport with students through regular interaction; and 6) maintaining flexibility in dealing with unexpected issues or crises. Finally, at the post-trip stage, they encourage, 1) utilising debriefing sessions to reinforce what has been learned during the field trip and in class; 2) giving feedback to students on material submitted relating to the field trip; and 3) obtaining feedback from students on the field trip to feed into future activities.

This study seeks to also utilise Porth’s model, which has yet to be applied to an international business education context, and to extend the pedagogical examination of how to implement field trips, as opposed to immersion field trips. Extant literature (i.e. Gordon & Smith, 1992; Schuster, 1993; Brocaw, 1996; Porth, 1997; Do, 2006; Koernig, 2007; Wong and Wong, 2008) has largely focused on either international study tours as a type of immersion field trip, or primary education (Millan, 1995), when examining how to implement field trips into the curriculum. This study thus provides a basis for understanding how to integrate a more limited field trip to a local internationalising firm into the higher education context of an undergraduate international business subject, so as to provide an engaging experiential exercise connecting theory with practice. This also moves beyond the existing focus on anthropology, social sciences, or tourism studies (Wong and Wong, 2008; Wright, 2000; Rone, 2008).

The focus on a more limited field trip, which can still contribute to students’ understanding of how to link theory with practice, is appealing for a number of reasons in this context. First, given the geographic isolation of Australia, the utilisation of an immersion field trip would require significant cost to students, particularly when travelling to neighbouring countries. Secondly, given the size of the student cohort (with approximately 80 students), the implementation of such a trip would create significant logistic implications, which aside from complicating the overall planning and implementation, would also likely limit the overall exposure and use of such a trip for each student. This responds to Wong and Wong’s (2008) comments about both the problems of increasing financial constraints within the higher education context, and the ability for such immersion field trips to be comprehensively implemented for large student cohorts.

3. Methodology

Before turning to the examination of the case, we will first briefly overview the methodology behind this research project. This study utilises a qualitative, case study based approach to exploring the implementation of domestic field trips into
an undergraduate international business subject. Merriam (2009: p. 40) describes a case study as an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system. It is bounded to the particular case under examination, which is the implementation of a field trip into a penultimate international business subject. Moreover, this study can be described as an intrinsic case study, with the majority of the data collected through researcher observation of the implementation of the field trip (Burns, 1995; Merriam, 2009). Moreover, it is intrinsic due to the lead researcher’s interest in the implementation of that particular field trip program, an element of the lead researcher’s broader supervised program.

This study meets the three characteristics of a qualitative case study, being that it is particularistic, descriptive and heuristic (Merriam, 2009). This study is particularistic, in that it is focused on a particular program where field trips were implemented. Moreover, the end product of this case study is descriptive, offering a rich overview of the actual field trip. It is heuristic in that it illuminates the researchers’ understanding of the studied phenomenon, extending beyond what has been originally known (Merriam, 2009; Silverman, 2005). Finally, the case study also utilised a process of triangulation for data collection, drawing not only on the lead researcher’s direct observations of the implementation of the field trip into the curriculum (collated throughout the process in a journal), but also drawing on the documentation of the communication between teaching staff involved within the unit, and two intensive discussions with the unit convenor and teaching staff following the conclusion of the semester. This utilisation of multiple sources allowed for improving the observational data collected by the lead researcher throughout the process of implementation (Burns, 1995).

4. Case Study

The subject in which this research is focused is a third year international business subject, which undergraduate students would normally complete at the end of their degree. There were three members of the faculty teaching into the unit, with approximately 80 students. There are twelve weeks of classes for the entire duration of the unit. It was chosen due to its position within the broader degree structure, with students expected to complete this subject, graduate and subsequently enter the job market for an entry level position. It was within this context the lead researcher believed it was particularly critical to ensure students had recent experience linking theoretical frameworks to practical situations. The field trip was implemented as part of a broader industry outreach program which sought to support its implementation, and provide greater meaning to the overall context of the field trip.

This study follows Porth’s three step process to the implementation of field trips, although adjustments to this approach were made in order to reflect the position of this field trip within a broader industry outreach program which
sought to support the inclusion of the field trip into the curriculum. In doing so, the process is delineated into three stages, 1) planning for implementation; 2) implementation of program, and 3) outcome and conclusion of program.

4.1. Planning for Implementation

In this section of the study a detailed summary of the actions taken during the planning stage is presented. The initial stage of planning revolved around preparing the unit, the staff and students for the practical implementation of field trips into the curriculum. As part of this process, it was important to establish how this was to be integrated into the unit, and particularly within the broader structure of what was to be delivered. The intent was to provide students with the ability to progressively work through the unit with an ongoing element of the curriculum linked with the industry outreach program.

Concomitantly, it was also important to have the overall unit content and objectives in the forefront of the planning process. The industry outreach program needed to complement and reinforce the broader aim of what the unit sought to deliver. The key outcome that the unit sought to deliver to students was an appreciation of the importance of international business strategies for organisations operating internationally. This is reflected in the broader aims and objectives stated below:

Table 1: Unit aims and objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>As organisations are increasingly faced with a globalised economy the importance of an appreciation and understanding of international business strategy theories and principles has become critical. At the completion of this unit, students will be able to:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Critically review developments in the globalization of business in recent decades;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrate how increases in international business result in intense competition and greater complexity in conducting business;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Examine trends emerging from globalisation and their implications for international business strategy;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Describe global strategic intent and mission and explain their value in responding to international business;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Consolidate knowledge of international business and of strategic management processes.</td>
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In doing so, the first step was to review how exactly an industry outreach program could be integrated with this broader aim. Following panelled discussion within the unit teaching team, it was decided that students be allowed to choose an organisation within a specified industry and analyse potential expansion opportunities within a foreign market. Students would be required to present a
detailed business plan at the completion of the unit, outlining key strategic considerations for the international expansion, consolidation or retraction of international business operations of their chosen organisation.

The decision to enable students to directly select an industry and organisation based on their broad career objectives was emphasised by the panel members and investigators due primarily to the assumption that this would reinforce motivation and interest. Students could select an organisation that they were interested in joining after graduation (given the fact that this is a final year unit, it was assumed that students were beginning to examine employment opportunities), and comprehensively examine internationalisation opportunities for this organisation. It was thought that this would empower students to investigate an organisation that they want to work for, inform them about the potential strategy that the organisation was utilising internationally, and provide some further information regarding what opportunities that organisation could further exploit.

The progressive implementation of the program was to be based on a three step process, reflecting unit assessment criteria and staggered throughout the 12 week semester – case-study evaluation (due week 4, worth 25%), field trip report (week 8, 15%), and, business plan (week 11, 35%). The program was reinforced by assessable outcomes, ensuring that students’ participation and engagement were supported by unit structure and evaluation. The staggered implementation throughout the semester aimed to allow points at which reflection and feedback could be given to the students. The aim, particularly in terms of the first assessment, was to force students to be prepared for the actual field trip whereby they would be expected to engage with industry partners.

As mentioned above, the first step of the industry outreach program was the case-study evaluation. At this stage students would be expected to evaluate the industry that they hope to enter upon leaving university, with the intent of establishing an understanding of that organisation, its current international operations, and exploration of potential international opportunities. This step was to provide the platform from which students could further explore that organisation, and engage with an industry partner. It was thought that this, particularly with feedback from staff, would be a good gauge of student understanding and comprehension of that organisation’s aims and objectives, and broader strategy. The teaching staff also thought that giving feedback early would better allow students to be prepared to discuss opportunities with the industry partner, and thereby reinforce the learning opportunities from the external engagement.

The second stage of the industry outreach program was to be the key step in which students were to be actively engaged in discussions with an external partner, and get their “feet on the ground” and develop an appreciation of what it would really be like to be involved in negotiations on behalf of an organisation.

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2. The other 25% of assessment was dedicated to a mid-semester test, which sought to reinforce students’ ongoing study and review of key strategy theory within the unit.
looking to expand internationally. This was to be where the field trip would be implemented as part of the curriculum. It was decided by the teaching staff that rather than allow students to visit individual organisations, which would create issues in terms of coordination and control of the interaction between the external party and students, that one key industry partner be sought and utilised. In light of this, the teaching staff quickly negotiated the options for how this could be achieved, and decided it would be best to select a trade organisation representing an international market. The decision was based on the fact that these trade organisations often have comprehensive information on both industry scope and international opportunities, be it in their own market, or overseas. The teaching staff wanted to select a trade organisation that was relevant to potential opportunities that organisations operating from Australia might pursue, so that it would be particularly relevant for students’ future career opportunities. Three large trading partners were immediately considered.

Following a series of negotiations with potential partners, three partners were selected for the field trip. This was an iterative process, requiring flexibility in the negotiations with industry partners, allowing for some adaptation from what was initially planned. The type of field trip and extent of engagement would be directly related to what the proposed industry partners were willing to offer. This fact was inescapable, and should be recognised, as negotiations with the industry partners were shaped by what they were willing to offer, and also directly impacted upon the ability to integrate any industry outreach into the subject. Staffing limitations and geographic location of the head office limited further collaboration with two of the potential partners, effectively focusing the choice. The industry partner selected was also the most willing to be engaged, which was aided by existing networks established by the teaching staff, and specifically the unit convenor.

This is perhaps the most critical element of planning the field trip as explicit cooperation was required from the external partner to ensure the success of the program. It therefore necessitates careful deliberation in terms of both the potential partner and type of industry engagement that is sought. The teaching staff entered negotiations with a scale of potential options that the industry partner may be willing to provide, and indeed, the partner also entered the meeting with a range of possibilities including industry placements. In the end, the industry partner agreed to a field trip scenario to their offices, with an additional guest lecture by the deputy trade commissioner to take place approximately a week before this, to allow students the opportunity to ask questions in preparation for the field trip.

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3. These negotiations were based on first establishing the willingness of these organisations to be involved in this process, and then trying to match what they were capable and willing to offer with the broader objectives of our program. This was an iterative process, which reinforced the initial planning taken into how a field trip could be integrated into this unit.
The negotiations took place over a series of communications between the unit convenor and industry partner, ranging from initial exploratory email and telephone communications, to formal meetings at the trade office and lunch venues to finalise arrangements. The process was greatly facilitated by relationship building and development, beginning from the initial communication to the finalisation of planning and incorporation of general principles of action for student meetings. The teaching staff established general guidelines for the industry partner of what the students were expected to be asking, and also the supporting role of teaching staff in facilitating the interaction. Finally, a general timeline was established with the industry partner, including approximate dates and scheduling issues.

On the curriculum side, the teaching staff decided to develop a tutorial workshop to discuss the type of questions that students could potentially ask, and also establish an opportunity for the questions to be vetted (through a process of negotiation with students) before entering the formal consultation with the industry partner. It was also expected that teaching staff would establish a basic code of conduct (including safety guidelines and clarifying liability in travelling to the industry partner) through student consultation in class to allow the clarification of what was expected from students when representing not only themselves, but also the university. Moreover, students would be expected to provide an assessable report on their interaction with the industry partner, and its value and contribution towards assessing international opportunities for their selected organisation. This was to be due in the week following the field trip (week 8 out of 12 weeks in a semester).

The final stage of this industry outreach program was the business plan, which was established with the intent of drawing together the case study evaluation and field trip, and feeding this into a business plan for creating a new business or expanding of existing business. Students would be expected to integrate this into the broader assessment of international business strategy when recommending the most appropriate action forward for their selected organisation. This business plan allowed students to collate student-industry interaction with specific strategy recommendations for an organisation, making more informed decisions than would have been possible through secondary research. It would effectively enable students that ability to draw on wider environmental forces, industry expertise and their own research in putting together a comprehensive and informed strategy report for an organisation operating internationally. This was to be the most comprehensive element of student assessment and largest contributor in terms of assessable material (at 35%).

It was also decided by the teaching staff that this element of the industry outreach program should be supported by an industry practitioner who is involved in putting together similar international strategy reports. A workshop based lecture, where students had the opportunity to learn how a professional produced
such reports, was to be developed. This was to be conducted approximately 1 week (week 10) before the report was due. The teaching staff believed that this would allow students the opportunity to develop their own report first, based on what was taught throughout the course, and then adjust according to the presentation content and questioning opportunities with an industry practitioner.

In this entire process of planning and development, both teaching staff and the industry partner believed that students should be treated as real business persons with actual business enquiries. This was driven by the intent of bridging the gap between classrooms and the business world, which is often viewed as a key area of division in students’ experiences during their higher education and preparation for the work force. This is also an important aspect of the unit, as the unit is one of the penultimate courses for undergraduates studying International Business, with pre-industry or business engagement learning elements considered important for those students nearing graduation and launching into their formal careers.

The planning and preparation for the implementation of the field trip and broader industry outreach program spans 4 weeks prior to the beginning of the semester, and the first week of the semester. The following timeline outlines the practical steps taken during the planning and preparation of this industry outreach program:

Table 2: Planning for implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 weeks to the beginning of semester:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Teaching staff began discussions regarding the practical implementation of industry outreach program, including potential industry partners, for unit.</td>
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<tr>
<th>3 weeks remaining:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Curriculum development, adjustments to tutorial program, support materials and unit outline (including the development of assessment rubrics);</td>
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<td>• Industry partners were selected, communication initiated, and visited by teaching staff.</td>
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<th>2-1 week(s) remaining:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Ongoing curriculum development and adjustment;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Teaching staff discussions of changes, including review of assessment outlines and rubrics;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ongoing communication with industry partner and clarification of requirements for interaction.</td>
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<th>1 week remaining:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Blackboard made available;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Unit outline made available.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st week of semester:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Unit outline reviewed in lecture and tutorial;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Content and assessment reviewed;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Industry outreach program communicated to students, including requirements, assessable elements, and student requirements (including safety);</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Case study evaluation requirements reviewed in depth.</td>
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</table>
4.2. Implementation of the Program

The implementation of the industry outreach program was concentrated around supporting activities, scheduling, and practical implementation of the three phases, including the actual field trip. The majority of this stage took place from weeks 4-11. The support activities for the industry outreach program – including tutorial activities, guest lectures, and feedback on progress – were particularly important in ensuring its successful implementation. These activities provided students with the opportunity to be better prepared and more deeply engaged with the outreach program, draw relevance from the field trip, as well as an opportunity for the teaching staff to monitor and assist in the development of the student projects.

Tutorial activities related to the outreach program were progressively implemented from week 4, including focused discussions on negotiations that were to take place with the industry partner, simulations of these negotiations, and feedback from teaching staff on the type and extent of questions developed. This allowed for monitoring of student progress, and ongoing development of student work in preparation for the industry outreach program.

Two guest lectures were also strategically located during the semester to first support the field trip, and then assist in the development of the student business plans. The first guest lecture in week 6 was conducted by the Deputy Trade Commission of the industry partner. This provided students with a ‘scene setting’ scenario of what to expect when they entered into their industry meetings. It also allowed students the opportunity to ask preparatory questions, should they be unclear about what was expected. The second guest lecture was conducted by a strategy practitioner, and was aimed at supporting the development of student business plans. This lecture involved a discussion on what is usually included in business/strategy plans, what clients are looking for, and basic “do’s” and “don’ts” of putting these reports together. This was conducted in week 10.

As part of the practical implementation of the industry outreach program students were provided opportunities during the semester to respond with actionable feedback on their progress. This was done both through allocated tutorial time where students were expected to present progress on their work, but also through regular consultation time provided outside of class time by the convenor and teaching staff. Moreover, students were able to garner feedback from their interaction prior to the field trip and business plan submission through guest lectures, provided open question and answer time. This was obviously important to allow students the ability to develop the quality of their work, and also to ensure that any engagement externally was appropriate and on topic.

Scheduling was largely conducted in weeks 5 and 6, with some negotiation with the industry partner prior to and also subsequent to time allocation, depending on both student and industry partner availability.
4.3. Outcome and Conclusion of the Program

The final stage of the industry outreach program was focused on wrapping up the industry engagement, and appropriating as much feedback on the practical implementation as possible. This involved unit panel reviews and discussions on the experience, as well as garnering feedback from students and the industry partners. Finalising the industry outreach program also involved an informal social meeting over dinner, token gifts of appreciation, and follow up emails in order to draw the semester’s collaborative work with the industry partner to an end.

This stage was seen as important as solidifying the industry relationship, as well as identifying opportunities to further develop the program for implementation in semester two. While this semester was largely an experimental period for the program, it was determined that more solid measures need to be put
into place as industry outreach programs become more regular and formalised within units.

The teaching staff also identified a range of adjustments and modifications necessary for the following semester. These included more thorough preparation (timetabling, readings, lecture notes, bibliography, websites, industry potentials and assessment and reflection format), record keeping and readiness for contingencies, which are important items on such improvement agenda.

Further room for refinement of the model proposed in this study can be offered by the incorporation of feedback received by all stakeholders involved in the industry outreach program, including the industry partner and the students who engaged in the above described domestic field trip. This measure would offer valuable insights on the benefits and further adjustments needed to ensure the optimisation of the model proposed here.

**Table 4**: Outcome and conclusion of the program

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Week 12:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• The panel conducted a semester review including the incorporation of the industry outreach program in the course;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Preliminary discussions began regarding potential industry partners for second semester.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13 (post-semester):</td>
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<td>• Post-trip social occasion with industry partner dining at a restaurant, and token gift presented.</td>
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5. Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the process of effectively implementing field trips into an international business education context. The intention of the study is to demonstrate one innovative teaching approach to address the current demands being placed on graduates entering a workforce that has been profoundly affected by the processes of globalisation. The implementation of field trips has particular relevance for the higher education system in countries throughout the world to actively address challenges placed on it to produce graduates that are better prepared to enter the professional workforce in an increasingly complex and integrated economic environment.

Changing political, legal, economic, socio-cultural and technological environments are exerting pressure on the curriculum for international business to produce graduates who have developed the practical knowledge required to be more effective problem-solvers. This study extends on previous research detailing not only more comprehensively the individual pedagogical processes behind this implementation, but it also demonstrates the value of supporting activities to ensure that the field trip is well integrated into the broader curriculum for its experiential learning value.
Integrating Domestic Field Trips into International Business Education

References:


