

Julie Davies, Pamela Decker, and Diane-Gabrielle Tremblay discuss how the world comes to IESE School of Management for an international week every January

An 'at home' study abroad experience





As Edeltraud Hanappi-Egger noted in January's *Global Focus*, internationalisation and the mindset of internationality are key for business school accreditations and rankings and valuable for individual students.

Yet the pendulum has swung towards anti-globalisation in a Trump era. In this article, we reflect on the multiple benefits of organising an annual international week on campus as a solution to reaching students for whom a study abroad experience is not an option.

Recreating studying abroad while staying put

Nitin Nohria, Dean at Harvard Business School, has invested significantly this decade in requiring MBA students at the end of the spring term to participate in its FIELD (Field Immersion Experiences for Leadership Development) Global Immersion Programme (FGI). Student teams are sent into global markets for a week to develop a new product or service concept for global partner organisations. The FGI method is intended to complement Harvard's signature case method.

Clearly, though, few business schools can afford this level of investment. Indeed, not all business school students have the financial wherewithal, inclination, or personal circumstances to enable them to study abroad.

So, while some students relish study abroad opportunities and add multiple international internships to their CVs, others have little or nothing to illustrate the international mindset that business school accreditations and many employers require.

Beyond evidence amassed in business schools to showcase international orientations such as overseas faculty members, visiting faculty, international partnerships and cross-country research projects, how can business school leaders address the blind spots of those students at risk of graduating without exposure to any international study / work experience?

This was the challenge facing Jérôme Rive at iaelyon School of Management in France over a decade ago before he became Dean of the school. Although 23% of students did study abroad (10% higher than the average in similar business schools), he was concerned about the other 77%.

Thinking large in Lyon

The motto of iaelyon School of Management is "think large". This reflects adaptable and open mindsets. Its mission is to be a "socially sensitive" enterprise as one of the largest full-service university-based business schools in the French public sector. The international week exemplifies "thinking large" in practice.

Background and purpose

IAE's international week was created by Jérôme Rive in 2006 to address his ongoing concern regarding the vast majority of students who did not benefit from an international study abroad experience. How would these individuals face the multiple facets of globalisation after they graduate and enter the workplace?

Dean Rive felt strongly that some of IAE's students needed a different type of internationalisation programme to replace the lack of a study abroad experience on their CV.

In line with the School's values, such a programme would also be centred around its

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ethos of social responsibility and sharing worldly knowledge. The answer was to bring the world to Lyon—a whole group of workshop facilitators from all corners of the world—and to require all master's students to participate.

The programme consists of intimate classroom settings of 25-30 students per seminar, who typically work in small groups. In January 2018, the international week comprised 68 academics from 29 countries facilitating 91 seminars covering 10 themes in the areas of business, leadership, and management.

In the beginning, 12 years ago, the international week included fewer than 10 academics and there was a strong focus on improving students' standard of English.

Over the years, there has been greater emphasis on international perspectives, diversity, and thinking from non-Anglo-Saxon regions. Many of the seminars stress the importance of corporate social responsibility in organisations. Another aspect of the evolution of the international week has been the inclusion of local businesses and an invitation for them to send their employees to participate.

The international week also includes research seminar presentations from international doctoral students, sessions on pedagogical innovation, a CSR Network and TEL (Technology Enhanced Learning) workshops.

Students say they appreciate the diversity of pedagogical perspectives, including role plays, oral presentations, case studies, and active discussions in class. One Mexican professor brings a huge case of Lego Serious Play for a strategy workshop. The students ask many questions beyond the course content about how we see things in different parts of the world.

Another important aspect of international week is the fact that classes are taught in different



25+

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68

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languages other than French, with most taught in English. While this creates some angst among students who do not feel they can speak or understand the language well enough to converse properly, their confidence increases over the 18 hours for each series of seminars.

Many students are well aware that English is the language of business and they appreciate this aspect of the programme in preparing for the business environment. Students say they would like to spend more time with foreign professors and to get to know their new team members a little better.

It is not only professors and students who benefit from programmes such as this, but also the university's administrative staff. During iaelyon's international week, there are a number of individuals who play instrumental roles in the selection of courses, logistics, the social programme, as well as the day-to-day running of the schedule.

Like the professors and students, these individuals have learned the importance of cross-cultural experiences. People from all over the world overcome their language barriers, share stories, and enjoy the *bonhomie* of this programme. Some participants even say that when faculty start arriving for international week each January, it's like a family home coming.

As Jérôme Rive steps down after his decade as Dean of iaelyon in 2018, after a maximum of two terms, academics as well as students, hope the international week initiative will continue to flourish. We are also keen to re-create this programme in other parts of the world to encourage multiculturalism and intercultural communications especially for the hard-to-reach students who do not study abroad.

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About the Authors

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