

# U.S. Business Needs for International Expertise by Functional Business Discipline

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**Abstract.** The workplace is changing rapidly, and there is a need for a better understanding of employer needs for international business skills, particularly knowledge required at the entry level as well as at the managerial level for various functional disciplines. Often business school disciplines with high levels of technical content, such as information management, operations management, accounting and finance, argue that they do not have room in their curriculum to focus on international or cross-cultural skills. Furthermore, many business schools no longer require a foreign language for majors other than international business. This study provides information about the importance of international knowledge and skills in the workplace as measured by a survey of over 600 U.S. managers from a variety of industries and disciplines. Our results indicate that international skills, in-country experiences and foreign language skills are important to employers for virtually all business school majors/functional areas. This indicates that U.S. business schools may be well-served to enhance the international content of their curriculum to better prepare all students for their future careers.

**Keywords:** employer needs, functional disciplines, international business skills and knowledge.

## 1. Introduction

Globalization of business continues to expand as more firms are selling products, sourcing materials and outsourcing production to foreign locations. Even employees who do not work abroad are frequently asked to anticipate the needs of foreign customers, or to manage supply chain relationships with partners abroad. Employees of multinational services firms as well as manufacturers may need to collaborate in “global work” teams, in which collaborators are “not only

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culturally diverse but geographically distant and imbedded in different national cultures and contexts” (Hinds, Liu, & Lyon 2011, p. 136). It might be expected that employees in U.S. firms now need to have a deeper understanding of the global environment and the ability to communicate with partners abroad. Research on cross-national teams has grown due to the prevalence of multicultural workplaces resulting from globalization, communication technology, and immigration (Wengcang 2011). However better integration between the cross-cultural and mainstream psychology and management literatures is needed to adequately address the complex contexts that cross-national work teams encounter (Feitosa, Grossman, & Salazar 2018). Academic publications that have empirically studied the issue of cross-national work teams, and traditional treatments of culture in the academic literature often seem overly simplistic and inadequate to meet the needs of the modern workplace (Hinds, *et al.* 2011). As a result, many business school faculty are unclear about the international knowledge and skills graduates are expected to know as they enter the workforce.

Faculty and students may assume that most entry-level employees will have relatively little international exposure in their first few years of employment. However, the workplace is changing rapidly, and there is a need for a better understanding of employer needs for international business skills and knowledge at both the entry level and at the managerial level. Furthermore, little is known about whether students from different functional majors may need differing levels of exposure to international business concepts as well as foreign language skills. Often departments with high levels of technical content, such as information technology management, operations management, accounting and finance argue that they do not have room in their curriculum to focus on international or cross-cultural skills. Many business schools do not require a foreign language for majors other than international business. This study aims to fill this gap by providing insights from over 600 U.S. managers from a variety of industries and disciplines about the importance of the specific international business skills that are most important in their functional field at the entry and managerial levels. This information can help guide the development of business school curriculum to better prepare students in various majors to develop the international skills and knowledge needed to succeed in their careers.

## **2. Literature Review**

Over the past thirty years, academic institutions have sought to incorporate international business skills, including cross-cultural understanding and foreign language into their curriculum. Acknowledging that study abroad may be the most effective way for students to learn these skills, many programs to facilitate student mobility have also been implemented. However, closing the gap between