PUERTO RICO IS READY TO ENTER THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ARENA

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The project of the transshipment port in the south of Puerto Rico will offer distribution, transshipment, logistics and consequently economic development to the region. This poses the question: Are Puerto Rican universities ready to prepare the right people to work in this environment? Yes, we are.

International business offers new opportunities for governments, firms, individuals and universities. The challenge is to compete successfully in the global marketplace as it exists today and develops tomorrow. The Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ponce campus (Inter-Ponce) created in 1998 a Bachelor degree in Business Administration with a major in International Business (BBA–IB). The BBA-IB Program is designed to offer students the necessary knowledge to perform the basic managerial functions within a conceptual framework of international dimensions. The theoretical and practical academic activities aim to prepare students in the search for alternatives to promote international business within a global perspective.

BBA-IB's concentration courses offer students an overview of different aspects of international business. A review of the key subject matter included in courses such as introduction to international business, basic concepts of imports and exports, licenses and regulations, marketing, finance, economics, distribution, human resources, information systems and other, will give the reader a grasp of how well prepared are the BBA-IB Program graduates to face the challenges of today's markets.

The course, "Introduction to International Business," studies and analyses the impact of financial markets, international markets and the operation of multinational corporations (MNC). This course introduces the students to basic concepts about the effects of international business and demonstrate the need to participate in international activities.
Some textbooks have defined international business as, "Multiple transactions that are devised and carried out across national borders to satisfy the objectives of individuals and organizations." The phrase "across national borders" implicates that the international executive is subject to a new set of macro environmental factors resulting from different laws and regulations, technologies and cultures. This requires an understanding of cultural differences in languages, religion, values, customs, and education, so that the executive can develop cross-cultural competence. We offer a course "Cultural awareness in international business" that provides an overview of international business situations in different countries and how these situations affect business relationships.

Operating internationally requires managers to be aware of their highly complex environment. One extremely important factor for the companies is the international financial markets. "International Finance" is a course that provides a guide to the structure and functions of foreign currency, the international monetary markets, the international securities markets, and more.

The impact of international marketing today is larger than ever because the volume of international marketing activities has increased substantially.

Participation in the international marketing process can bring about a range of opportunities, this means that:

- Market saturation can be avoided.
- Strategic alliances between competitors can be formed to share products, services, research, and new ideas.
- Market share can be increased.
- Profits earned in some countries can offset the losses incurred in the other countries.

The study of the marketing process, marketing identification, strategy planning, modifications and adaptations needed for operation of marketing in different environments are discussed in the "International Marketing" course. Also the students learn more about marketing concepts and practices used in and among different countries.

A professional approach to exporting and importing provides the safest way for companies to manage the risks inherent to international transactions. An introduction to import-export practices, the functions of Federal Customs, Customs Brokers, Export-Import Legal Framework, International Contracts of Sale and general conditions and international payment options are topics discussed in, "Principles of Imports and Exports."

No managers can afford to ignore the rules and regulations of the country from which he or she conducts international business transactions. Analysis of the requirements of the Federal and State Customs, the Commodity Control List (CCL), and the Export Control Commodity Numbering (ECCN) with regard to licensing and the necessary regulations for imports and exports are also studied in one of the courses named "Licenses and Regulations for Imports and Exports."

Transport in international transactions has a direct impact on sale contract elements such as price, speed of delivery and the risk of loss or damage. The choice of sea, air or ground transport may appear to be dictated by the type of product, destination or buyer. In the course "International Distribution Systems" we discuss crucial tools for competitiveness: international logistics management, supply chain management, freight forwarders, shipping documents, sea transport, containerized and multimodal transport, air transport, road and rail transport, cargo insurance, and the INCOTERMS (internationally accepted standard definitions for terms of sale by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)).

1 International Business, Czinkota, Ronkainen and Moffett, Dryden Press (1999)
The “Management Information Systems in International Business (MISIB)” course systematically studies existing software to obtain information through computerized technology in international business. Its objectives are:

- To expose the student to the basic concepts, principles and procedures of the MISIB.
- Describe the function of MISIB in multinational enterprises.
- Identify the factors that affect MISIB.
- Develop different management strategies in MISIB.

As part of the practical academic activities, Inter-Ponce coordinated the first Congress of International Business on April 26 – 27, 1999 with the topic ‘Ponce: Gate to International Business.’ At that time the panelists: Ponce’s Port Director, Mercedita’s Airport Director, President’s DEMACO Corp., President’s South Chamber of Commerce, discussed the possibility of increase in international activities in the southern area of the island, due to the availability of multimodal transport (air, sea and land transport). The international business students prepared an exhibit of papers related to different economic integrations such as NAFTA, MERCOSUR, LAIA, CACM, ANCOM. Other students devised and presented as an exhibit a business plan to start their own international company, rehearsing what actually form part of their future plans as entrepreneurs. As a result of the congress, prestigious companies in the export and import field such as Luis Ayala & Sucosores Inc. and Demeaco Corporation recruited students to work with them with the commitment to continue strengthening the relationship between our university and the respective companies. The second Congress of International Business was held on April 26, 2000 with the title, “Technology: Essential Tool for International Business.” Prestigious international companies such as United Parcel Service (UPS), Destilería Serralles, Hanes Menswear Inc., CSX Line of Puerto Rico, Triangle Cargo Services Inc., Storagetek Inc., Luis Ayala & Sucosores Inc., and Air Mar of Puerto Rico Inc. participated in this magna event. Those companies presented the need for information systems in order to be competitive in international business especially with the emergence of the World Wide Web (WWW); but, more importantly, the need for people with knowledge of the international environment such as customs brokers, freight forwarders, distributors, importer/exporter, logistics managers, bankers, financiers, consultants, transporters, operational managers, human resource managers, traffic managers, etc.

As part of the academic activities for the students, the BBA-IB program in Inter-Ponce provides the opportunities for students to participate in field trips. Recently, a group visited Storagetek Inc.’s facilities where they learned first-hand the different tasks of the Traffic Manager position. The traffic manager coordinates all the necessary arrangements and documentation to ship products internationally.

The international business environment is changing and presents new challenges everyday.

A person pursuing a career in a international environment should have particular characteristics and skills such as the following in addition to the bachelor's degree:

- Flexibility to work extra hours
- Familiarity with export and import documents
- Strong communications skills, especially in English
- Ability to work with new technologies
- Self starter
- Team worker
- Human relation skills
- Leadership
- Independence and self-reliance
- Previous field experiences
- Willingness to travel

According to Frank Casaine, Vice-President & General Manager of Triangle Cargo Services, Inc. “Today Puerto Rico suffers from the lack of specialized people in international business even though it is an island. Some people who work in the international environment are persons who don't have an international business academic degree, but have learned through their experiences for many years in their demanding positions.” Mr. Casaine stated that, "It doesn't mean that they don't know how to do the work, it really means that there was not a bachelor degree in International Business twenty years ago." He recalls his experience recruiting a person for the position of Director of Logistic Management. After having advertised the position in a local newspaper, 100 resumes were received and no one had a bachelor degree in international business, and only one candidate had experience in the field.
This is a real example of the needs of many local companies searching for those people who specialize in international business. Imagine what would happen if foreign companies interested in doing business in Puerto Rico could not find the right people for their operations?

Inter-Ponce is aware of its responsibility to prepare the professionals necessary to fill this gap and the class of 2001 will be the first to enter the market.

The International Business program capacitates its graduates with the skills, knowledge and practice to enter as potentially key players in a diversity of fields.

Career opportunities are available for these candidates in fields such as:

- Creating your own business (consulting)
- Human Resources Management
- Sales and Marketing
- Planning and Control
- Tourism
- Customs brokers
- Logistics management
- Telecommunications
- Security
- Banking and finance
- Insurance companies
- Carriers
- Translators
- Law
- Operations managers
- Distribution
- Packaging
- Maritime experts
- Mechanics
- Information systems
- Research and development
- Tax specialists
- Freight forwarder agents
- Air freight agents
- Loading brokers
- Port agents

In revising the question posed at the beginning of this article, Are Puerto Rican universities ready to prepare the right people to work in this environment? Yes, we are.

As you have seen, the Inter American University - Ponce Campus offers our young working force the knowledge to be competitive in a global market, thus helping the industry and the government to identify new opportunities for the development of our economy and the prosperity of our people.

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