Global Viewpoints: The Effect of Geographic Background and Travel Experience on Choice of Study

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Abstract

In any particular class, students rarely have the opportunity to select the topics that they study. So when given a choice, such as on a semester long research project, do students choose something close to home, or a topic that will require a more global perspective? This question is addressed using data from a survey of students in a range of social science and business courses. The analysis finds that if given the choice, students as a whole tend to focus on domestic topics in their research. Business students are more likely to conduct research on international topics than other students. Students that have spent more than a week outside of the United States and visited either Canada or Mexico are more likely to conduct research on an international topic, while students that have visited Asia are less likely to conduct research on an international topic. Additionally, survey results show that Farmingdale students have limited travel experience: 50 percent of the students surveyed have traveled no more than 4 times outside of the Northeastern United States; 66 percent of the students have spent at least one week outside of the U.S., and the top two destinations of these students are either in North America (Canada or Mexico) or the Caribbean Islands.

1. Introduction

In any particular class, students rarely have the opportunity to select the topics that they study. So when given a choice, such as on a semester long research project, what do students choose, something close to home, or a topic that will require a more global perspective? This question is addressed using data from a survey of instructors in a range of social science and business disciplines. In a globalized world where the financial health of a country with approximately 10 million people has the ability to cause the collapse of the entire European banking community which would affect the entire world economy it is important to gauge the world view of our students.

College students are exposed to a wide range of concepts and ideas as they pass from the first year to the final year of their programs. Selecting a major such as business, engineering, or communications sets the student on a prescribed pathway towards completion in which they will be required to take a number of specific courses designed to give them the skills that they will need to work and practice in their chosen professions. Alongside this pre-selected pathway students are also required to take a

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range of liberal arts and science courses to round out their academic experience. Given the scope and scale of the global economy, it is important that students gain some understanding of the world community in which they will eventually live and work.

In this study, I examine students' exposure and interest in the global community through two channels, their backgrounds and their choices. While utility theory would suggest that students' past travel or background reflects their choices, that view would only apply if students fully planned their own travel. Given that, college students typically range in age from 17 to 22, how much travel have they actually planned themselves, and how much travel was planned by others (family trips)? That being said, past travel experience may affect students' choices. Another important factor is the question of whether students in fact do have a choice in what they can focus on in a particular class. If an instructor has preselected a topic/area to study, then the student has little choice but to follow that particular path.

Over the past decade, the question of a student's global perspective has taken on greater importance. Speter (2011) reports that over fifty percent of the nation's college students do have some concern over globalization and globalized economic activity. One of the prime issues for Speter is that college students represent the future leaders of the country – and thus, how they view themselves, the country and world in terms of globalization is an important indicator of the direction the country will move in the future. He does conclude though that over eighty percent of college students believe that "… we should embrace globalization (p.54)."

Shaidul (2011) and Shaidul and Manaloor's (2012) evaluation of introductory economics instruction points out that these courses are taken by a wide range of students – particularly business majors. Instructor approaches and materials must accommodate the diverse backgrounds and educational goals of these various students. While they do not directly address globalization, their analysis does suggest that this issue must be addressed in some way in the economics classroom – and further implies that it should be addressed in a much broader context across a wider range of courses from business to the social sciences.

Weldon et al. (2010) report on faculty members' viewpoints on globalization from a range of educational institutions in and around Los Angeles. Their study finds that globalization has increased the level of diversity both within the classroom and within the respective institutions surveyed. This has resulted in an increase in the diverse viewpoints that are brought into the classroom and the research domain. That being said, faculty at research institutions were concerned with the political ramifications of what they perceived to be the neoliberal policies attached to current globalization trends that affected their research agendas. Faculty at teaching institutions and community colleges on the other hand tended to have a far more positive view of globalization. Overall, their study indicates that globalization has positively influenced the classroom and academic environment.

While globalization does affect higher education at the institutional level (see for example Douglass, 2005), the concern in this study is how it may be influencing education at the classroom level. A number of recent studies have investigated this issue including: An (2009) and Kim (2012). Both of these papers

evaluate how the sociological and cultural backgrounds of students affect learning and student identity. An (2009, p.108) develops a model of international student identity in which a student entering an American institution passes through six stages: pre-exposure, exposure, enclosure, emergence, integration, and internationalization. Within this framework, international students are seen as undergoing a process of self-realization as they integrate themselves into American college or university life. Kim's (2012) analysis of Korean students studying in U.S. high schools found that students' individual migration experiences affected their perspective and interpretation of American history.

Janavara et al. (2008) surveyed students from business and the liberal arts to evaluate potential differences in views on globalization. They found that as a whole, business students had a more positive view of concepts of globalization than liberal arts students. The analysis did not find significant differences between business student's views though. The authors attributed the difference in viewpoints to the skill sets that business students were learning that helped prepare them for competitive careers within the global economy.

Akcam et al. (2012) follow up on Janavara et al. and evaluate factors that may account for business students' more positive views on globalization. They conclude that business students realize that they will be entering into a world where they do have to compete on a global level, organizations benefit from globalization, and that individually, they would have to master the requisite skills to be competitive.

How interested are students in the greater world, and how does their background affect their choices in what they study? This is the underlying question that is addressed in this study. To answer this question, a range of students in social science and business courses were surveyed. The rest of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the survey and the classes surveyed. The results of the survey are reported in Section 3. Section 4 is a logit analysis to evaluate how student backgrounds and exposure to globalization (in the form of travel abroad) affect what they choose to conduct research on. The conclusions of the study are presented in Section 5.

2. Survey and Population

Surveys were sent out to faculty members in Business, Economics, Politics, Criminal Justice, History, and Technology Studies. While no specific classes in particular were targeted, department chairs and the administrative personnel who distributed the surveys to the faculty in each department were asked to select instructors who required students to complete independent research projects as part of their courses. Thus surveys come from a range of introductory to upper level courses in these various disciplines. Following campus IRB protocols and approvals for this particular survey, with the exception of the course name and number, all survey responses from both instructors and students are anonymous. Out of the 40 packets (each packet contained 40 surveys and an instructor survey) of surveys that were sent out, 27 completed classroom surveys were returned which ultimately yielded data for 506 students.

The instructor survey asked the faculty member 4 questions – the course name and number; if students were required to complete a independent research for the course; if students could select their

own topics; and how many students selected international topics (Table 1). The results are shown in Table 2. The first 4 questions of the 12 question student survey asked essentially the same questions as the instructor survey. Students were asked 8 additional questions regarding their past travel experiences. The survey is shown in Table 3.

Table1: Instructor Survey

<u>Instructor Survey</u>: **Your participation and completion of this survey is purely voluntary. Place an "x" in the space provided to indicate your response to the question.**
1. Course name/number
2. Are students required to complete or conduct research (such as for a presentation, paper, project, or class assignment) for this course?
   Yes ___   No ___
3. Can students select their own research topic/area related to the field of study?
   Yes ___   No ___
4. In your estimation, what percentage of students in your class selected topics that are international in scope?

Table 2: Instructor Survey Results

Course Area	Q2	Q3	Q4
ECO	1	1	20%
BUS	1	1	100%
CRJ	1	0	N/A
BUS	1	1	N/A
BUS	1	1	N/A
BUS	1	1	100%
BUS	1	1	100%
BUS	1	1	100%
TST	1	1	40%
CRJ	1	1	10%
POL	0	0	100%
ECO	1	1	20%
ECO	0	0	N/A
CRJ	1	0	over 50%
ECO	N/A	N/A	N/A
ECO	1	1	40%
ECO	0	N/A	N/A
HIS	1	1	50%
CRJ	1	0	30%
ECO	N/A	N/A	N/A
BUS	N/A	N/A	N/A
BUS	1	1	50%
HIS	1	1	N/A
BUS	1	1	30%
BUS	N/A	N/A	N/A
BUS	1	0	50%
BUS	N/A	N/A	N/A

The bulk of the course surveys were conducted during the last three weeks of the spring semester. Several instructors in the Business Management department held on to their packets at the end of the

spring semester and conducted additional class surveys in the Summer A semester. Surveys returned for tabulation came back from all of the respective departments over a two month period. There was no specific coding for spring or summer semesters, and thus it is not possible to differentiate the surveys conducted by business faculty during the summer from the rest of the surveys conducted during the spring.

Table 3: Student Survey

Student Survey: Your participation and completion of this survey is purely voluntary. <u>If you are under the age of 18, please do not complete this survey.</u> Place an 'x' in the box to indicate your response to the question.

1. Course name/number:
2. Were you required to complete research for this course (such as for a presentation, paper, project, or class assignment)?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
3. If you answered yes to question 2, were you allowed to select your own research topic/area related to the course?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
4. If you answered yes to question 3, what was your topic on, a domestic (U.S. or local) issue or global/ international (pertaining to a country/firm outside of the U.S.)?
   Domestic ☐
   International ☐
5. Are you an international student? Yes/No
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
6. If you answered yes to question 5, was your research related to your home country? Yes/No
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
7. How much have you traveled outside of the Northeastern U.S.?
   Never or infrequently (0 to 4 times in your life) ☐
   Occasionally (once or twice a year) ☐
   Frequently (3 or more times a year) ☐
8. Have you spent more than 1 week outside of the United States?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
9. If you answered yes to question 8, what part of the world did you visit?
   Canada or Mexico ☐
   Western Europe ☐
   Eastern Europe ☐
   Asia ☐
   South or Central America ☐
   Australia ☐
   Caribbean Islands ☐
   Africa ☐
   Other ☐
10. If you answered yes to question 8, approximately how much time have you spent outside of the U.S.?
    3 days or less ☐
    4 to 7 days (1 week) ☐
    8 to 21 days (2-3 weeks) ☐
    Approximately 1 month ☐

Over 1 month to 3 months ☐
Over 3 months to 6 months ☐
Over 6 months ☐

If you answered over 6 months, please provide an approximation of time spent outside of the U.S. in years and months: _____

11. Did you serve in the U.S. military?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐
12. If you answered yes to question 11, was your international travel related to military service?
   Yes ☐
   No ☐

3. Survey results

The results of the survey for those 27 courses reporting are presented in Table 4 and include 12 business courses, 7 economics courses, 4 criminal justice courses, 2 history courses, 1 politics course, and 1 course from the technology studies program (an interdisciplinary social sciences program). Instructor survey results (Table 2) indicate that at least 70 percent of the courses surveyed did require students to conduct independent research (Q2). Over 55 percent of the students were able to select their own topics (Q3). Additionally, 9 courses reported that 50 percent or more of the student research was on an international topic. A few instructors (18.5 percent) did not complete the survey, and 22 percent of those reporting did not provide estimates of the percentage of students conducting research on an international topic (Q4).

Table 4: Student survey summary statistics

Survey Question	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Q2. Research required (REQRES)	0.867327	0.339558	505
Q3. Select topic (SELTOP)	0.673289	0.469529	453
Q4. Domestic/International (DOMINT)	0.549575	0.498242	353
Q5. International Student (INTSTU)	0.049603	0.217339	504
Q6. Research on home country (INTHOME)	0.280488	0.478537	82
Q7. Travel frequency (TRAVFREQ)	0.596421	0.657585	503
Q8. Travel outside of U.S. (OUTSIDE)	0.662675	0.477477	501
Q9. Travel location (CANMEX)	0.314851	0.464917	505
Q9. Travel location (WEEU)	0.19802	0.398902	505
Q9. Travel location (EAEU)	0.132673	0.339558	505
Q9. Travel location (ASIA)	0.10297	0.304221	505
Q9. Travel location (SCAM)	0.110891	0.314309	505
Q9. Travel location (AUS)	0.029703	0.169935	505
Q9. Travel location (CAB)	0.340594	0.474379	505
Q9. Travel location (AFRICA)	0.031683	0.175329	505
Q9. Travel location (OTHER)	0.124752	0.330766	505
Q10. Time outside U.S. (TIMEOUT)	2.227064	1.883089	436
Q11. Military service (MILI)	0.038627	0.19291	466
Q12. Travel related to military service (MILTRAV)	0.191781	0.396426	73

Summary student survey results are reported in Table 4. For questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 11, and 12, all student responses are recorded as a dichotomous variable (0, 1) where "1" represents "yes" and "0" represents "no". For question 4, "domestic" was recorded as "0" and "international" was recorded as "1". In the case of question 7, responses were recorded from "0" to "2" (0 – infrequent, 1 – occasional, 2 – frequent). Student responses for question 9 are recorded as a dichotomous variable with "1" representing that a student had visited a particular region, and "0" that a student had not visited that region. Question number 10 was recorded on a scale from "0" to "6" (0 – 3 days or less, 1 – 1 week, 2 – 3 weeks, 3 – 1 month, 4 – 1 to 3 months, 5 – 3 to 6 months, 6 – over 6 months).

Summary data indicates that 86 percent of the students reported that some type of independent research was required in the courses surveyed, and that for most of these courses, students were allowed to select their own research topic (67 percent). In reporting these survey results, it should be noted that there are some discrepancies between what some instructors reported as requirements for their courses and what some students reported regarding these requirements. In some instances, an instructor may have indicated that the course included a research component, but some of the students in the course responded with an opposite response to that question, and vice versa. Thus, while 86 percent of the 505 students reported that their course required a research component which should imply that there should be 434 responding to Question 3 on the survey, 453 students responded. These discrepancies arise from several potential sources including the possibility that some students may have misunderstood the question or that they may not have fully understood the requirements of the course that they were taking.

Approximately 54 percent of the students that were required to conduct independent research completed that research on an international topic. In reporting that figure, it should be noted that there were several international business and operations research courses included in the survey, with a focus on international sourcing issues but all of these courses allowed students to select their own research topic. Out of the 506 students surveyed, just under 5 percent were international students.

In terms of questions related to travel and international travel, the reported median of "0" for question 7 indicates that 50 percent of the surveyed students had traveled no more than 4 times outside of the Northeastern United States. As far as international travel is concerned, 66 percent of the students had spent at least 1 week outside of the U.S. The top travel destinations in order are the Caribbean, Canada/Mexico, and Western Europe. These locations are followed by Eastern Europe (14 percent), Other (12.5 percent), South and Central America (11 percent) and Asia (10 percent). Destinations below 10 percent include Africa (3 percent), and Australia (2.9 percent). The mean time spent outside of the U.S. TIMEOUT) based upon the categorical breakdown was between 2 to 3 weeks. Approximately 3.8 percent of the students reported serving in the military and 19 percent of those students reported that their international travel was related to their military service.

Four additional dummy variables are included in the analysis (Table 5). "Business" is a dichotomous variable taking on the value of "1" if the course is a business course and "0" otherwise. Out of the 27 courses surveyed, 41 percent of the students were in business courses. The variable "Level400" is also a dichotomous dummy variable taking on the value of "1" if the course is a 400 level course and "0" otherwise. Twelve percent of the students surveyed were taking a 400 level course. "Travel" is a dummy variable generated from Question 7 of the survey taking the value of "1" if a student travels outside of the Northeastern U.S. more than 3 times a year, and "0" otherwise. The fourth variable, "TimeSp" is dichotomous dummy variable generated from "Timeout" taking on the value of "1" if a student has spent more than 1 month outside of the U.S. and "0" otherwise. Out of 506 students, 22 percent had spent more than 1 month outside of the U.S.

Table 5: Additional summary data

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Observations
Business	0.41502	0.493213	506
Level400	0.126482	0.332721	506
Travel	0.095238	0.293835	504
TimeSp	0.225296	0.418191	506

4. Analysis of the Survey Results

Are there identifiable factors that may help to predict or explain the particular topic that a student chooses to conduct their research on? A number of factors influence a student's choice of what to research including course/assignment requirements and student background/interests. The survey data can be analyzed using a logit model. In this particular case, we hypothesize that the topic a student completes their research on (DOMINT) is a function of whether the instructor allowed them to select their own topic (SELTOP), their exposure to international experience (INTSTU, TRAVFREQ, OUTSIDE, TIMEOUT, and MILI), and what type of course a student was taking (Business, Level400). A variant of the basic analysis is also presented using the dummy variable Travel (the dichotomous dummy variable generated from TRAVFREQ) and the destination variables generated from question 9 of the survey as an alternative way in which to capture the affects of travel and international travel on student interests. Regression results are presented in Tables 6 and 7.

The initial analysis (Table 6) does not definitively identify any particular factors from a student's personal experience that can account for whether a student selected an international topic or not. While the estimated coefficients on travel frequency (TRAVFREQ) and time spent outside of the U.S (TIMEOUT) are both found not to be significant, their signs are of interest. More frequent travel appears to have a negative impact on whether a student selects an international topic, while the amount of time spent out of the country leads to the opposite effect. Similarly the coefficient on military service, while not significant, is estimated to be negative.

Table 6: Dependent Variable: DOMINT

Variable	Coefficient	z-Statistic	Odds Ratio
C	-0.2067	-0.51	
SELTOP	-0.1866	-0.49	0.8296
TRAVFREQ	-0.0548	-0.22	0.9466
TIMEOUT	0.02055	0.22	1.0207
INTSTU	-0.0783	-0.16	0.9246
MILI	-1.0406	-1.34	0.3532
BUSINESS	1.62396	5.82***	5.0731
LEVEL400	-0.0498	-0.12	0.9513
Pseudo R^2	0.1153		
# of Observations	286		

Levels of significance: *0.10, **0.05, ***0.01: Logit/Logistic function

Table 7: Alternate specification: DOMINT (dep. var.)

Variable	Coefficient	z-Statistic	Odds Ratio
C	-0.1411	-0.45	
SELTOP	-0.5460	-1.71*	0.5792
TRAVEL	-0.1128	-0.24	0.8932
ASIA	-0.7215	-1.92*	0.4859
CANMEX	0.47356	1.78*	1.6057
BUSINESS	1.51647	6.35***	4.5561
Level400	-0.0061	-0.02	0.9939
Pseudo R^2	0.1107		
# of Observations	350		

Levels of significance: *0.10, **0.05, ***0.01: Logit/Logistic regression

Two dummy variables are used to ascertain differences across business and social science disciplines. BUSINESS is found to be positive and significant. Estimates of the odds ratio indicate that business students are 5 times (Table 6) more likely to have conducted their research on an international topic than other students. The level of the class that a student was enrolled in, LEVEL400, was not found to be significant.

Using the dichotomous dummy variable "TRAVEL" and including travel destination variables in the analysis to evaluate how travel frequency affects student research choices changes the analysis significantly. The coefficient on SELTOP was estimated to be negative and significant. As a whole, when given the choice, students were less likely to select an international topic than a domestic one. Business students and students that had visited Canada or Mexico were more likely to select an international topic. In this case, the odds of a student selecting an international topic were 4.5 (BUSINESS) and 1.6 (CANMEX) respectively. The odds that a student that had visited a destination in Asia was less likely to write about an international topic are 0.48. It should be noted that all of the other destination variables were evaluated as a group and individually. However, the only destination variables found to be statistically significant in both group and individual regressions were ASIA and CANMEX.

5. Conclusions

The analysis does identify some travel experiences leading students towards conducting research on international issues. Given that the destination variables required conditional responses on the survey, students that visited Canada or Mexico and had spent at least one week outside of the U.S. were more likely to select an international topic to research. Students that had visited destinations in Asia were less likely to research an international topic.

As a whole, if students were given the choice, they were less likely to conduct research on an international topic than a domestic one. On the other hand, business students are approximately five times more likely to conduct research on international issues than their peers in other disciplines. This result is consistent with other studies such as Janavara et al. (2008) and Speter (2011) which finds that business students appear to have a more positive outlook on international issues than other students.

As a whole, the survey results suggest that Farmingdale students have limited travel experience and 50 percent of the students surveyed have traveled no more than 4 times outside of the Northeastern U.S. in their lives. That being said, 66 percent of the students have spent at least one week outside of the U.S., although it should be noted that the top two destinations of these students are either in North America (Canada or Mexico) or the Caribbean Islands.

The world-view of our students is an important concern as the pace of global interconnectedness continues to expand. The results support the view that travel experience and discipline of study affect student research choices. That does not imply though that this is necessarily a causal relationship. It is possible that these choices reflect various aspects of the characteristics and attitudes of the students as well as the fact that students must work within the framework and structure of the particular courses that they are enrolled in. The inclusion of more specific course detail in future work would help to disentangle some of these relationships. Additionally, the inclusion of demographic and socioeconomic data especially regarding gender, ethnic, and cultural heritage may shed greater light on U.S. college students' research interests in global and international issues. Both An's (2009) and Kim's (2012) papers work point to the importance of these factors in student learning outcomes. The incorporation of academic performance and student characteristics information such as choice of major, the academic level of the respondents (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), and academic standing (e.g. GPA) may also provide valuable insights into this issue. These factors will certainly be incorporated into future research.

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